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*University of New Hampshire, Durham*

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“Speaking of Dignity”: Interviews with Non-unionized Adjunct Faculty Teaching in an English  
Department at a Catholic Church-affiliated University

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

May, 2020

## Committee

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On April 9, 2020

Approval signatures are on file with the University of New Hampshire Graduate School.

## Dedication

*You know what work is—if you're  
old enough to read this you know what  
work is....*

- Philip Levine, "What Work Is"

*Someone hit the big score  
They figured it out  
That we're gonna do it anyway  
Even if doesn't pay*

- Gillian Welch, "Everything Is Free"

Above all others, I dedicate this dissertation to the dearest loves of my life, for whom all my labors proceed: Charlotte, Eloise, Ruby, and Little Baby Girl due September, 2020. (And our little dog, Carl, too!)

And I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Paul and Daryl, whose working and spiritual lives gave me early and ample opportunity to consider these distinct but by no means separate realms of experience.

And I dedicate this dissertation to my wife's parents, Mary and Oliver, the Drs. Ford, whose generosity gave our little family a place to call home during my studies.

And I dedicate this dissertation to the individuals who gave their time and labor to the work described herein, and who did so for far less than their worth in time, effort, and insight. I am forever grateful to "May," "June," and "July" (JOO-lee) for their invaluable contributions, here and in their own places of work.

And I dedicate this dissertation to the faculty and administrators who served on my exams and doctoral committees: Dr. Andrew Coppens; Dr. Todd DeMitchell; Dr. Kathryn Dodge; Dr. Adrianna Kezar (University of Southern California); Dean Cari Moorhead, Ph.D.; Mark Paige, J.D. (University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth); and John Wallin, J.D. As my advisor for the

duration of my studies at UNH, Todd deserves special recognition: he always pushed me to think a little longer, dig a little deeper, and clarify a whole lot more—he never denied me the adventure of running down an idea that caught my fancy, but neither did he ever let me wander down a dead-end path along the way. I will miss our TODD Talks most of all.

## **Acknowledgements**

I prepared a paper including elements from various chapters of this dissertation, to be presented at the annual conference of the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions. That conference, originally scheduled for March 29-31, 2020, was postponed two weeks before its planned date and one month before this dissertation's defense. The panel that had been convened to discuss and respond to the paper met and prepared a description of the event prior to postponement, and we hope to hold that discussion and conference later this year or next.

Some sections of this dissertation appeared in earlier forms as graded papers in courses taught by Assistant Professor of Education Dr. Andrew Coppens; former Affiliate Assistant Professor of Education Dr. Kathryn Dodge; Professor Emeritus of Education Dr. Bruce Mallory; Professor of Education and current Chair of the Education Department Dr. Paula Salvio; and of course, Todd.

## Abstract

This study considers the phenomenon of “dignity” as experienced by non-unionized, part-time, English Department faculty at a Catholic Church-affiliated campus in the Northeast region of the United States; I refer to the institution as Urban Catholic University. This focus is motivated by the apparent tension between Catholic social traditions regarding labor rights and worker dignity, on the one hand, and working conditions for adjuncts as described in the literature on higher education faculty employment. To wit, the labor-positive and union-affirmative tradition in Catholic Social Teaching (CST) has been unequivocally supportive of the rights of workers to unionize since the 1890s, but Catholic institutions tend to block enforcement of labor laws on their campuses on the basis of First Amendment protections against perceived government intrusion into religious matters. The literature review 1) clarifies the norms of faculty contingency in higher education (i.e., low wages, no benefits, part-time, temporary employment); 2) explores theories of organizational culture and learning and describes corporate influences on higher education; and 3) explicates the central role of dignity to CST. The conceptual framework of this study combines the social constructionist theory of knowledge and reality with a hermeneutic phenomenology that assumes experience and interpretation are inextricably intertwined. Both theories serve in this study to encourage adjunct faculty, who are often marginalized in governance and policy matters that affect their employment, to speak about their experience of working conditions in their own words. The hermeneutic design of the study includes semi-structured interviews and document/artifact analysis. The research question asks: *How do non-unionized adjunct faculty employed by an English Department in a Catholic Church-affiliated university describe their experiences of “dignity” and how do those faculty reflect on the meanings of those experiences?*

*Keywords:* adjuncts, contingency, dignity, Catholic Social Teaching, phenomenology

## Table of Contents

<b>Committee .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Dedication .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>CHAPTER I. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Key Assumptions and the Research Question.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Positionality Statement.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>An Outline .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>CHAPTER II. A Review of Three Literatures .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Introduction to Three Literatures.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Contingency in Higher Education .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>Trying to Define “Contingency” .....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Student Learning Environment.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Same Old Thing? .....</i>	<i>18</i>
<b>Corporate Organization in Higher Education .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<i>Defining “Organization” .....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Higher Education Organization.....</i>	<i>28</i>
<b>Shared Governance.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Corporatization.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Commercialization.....</b>	<b>33</b>



<b>Responses to Corporatization and Commercialization.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Catholic Social Teachings on Dignity and Labor .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<i>Rerum Novarum (1891).....</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Gaudium et Spes (1965).....</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Laborem Exercens (1986).....</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Centesimus Annus (1991).....</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Laudato Si' (2015) .....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction (1919).....</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Economic Justice for All (1986).....</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship (2015).....</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>The Land O'Lakes Statement (1967) .....</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Ex Corde Ecclesiae (1990).....</i>	<i>52</i>
<b>Synthesis of Literatures.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>CHAPTER III. Theorizing Dignity.....</b>	<b>57</b>
<i>A Catholic Sense of Workplace Dignity.....</i>	<i>59</i>
<i>A Secular Sense of Workplace Dignity .....</i>	<i>62</i>
<b>A Theory of Workplace Dignity .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<i>Autonomy .....</i>	<i>72</i>
<i>Citizenship .....</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Resistance.....</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>Sociability.....</i>	<i>75</i>
<b>CHAPTER IV. Methodology of the Study .....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Conceptual Framework.....</b>	<b>77</b>

<b>Data Sources .....</b>	<b>80</b>
<i>Interview Design and Participant Selection.....</i>	<i>80</i>
<i>A Note on Risks to Interview Participants .....</i>	<i>91</i>
<i>Institutional Documents .....</i>	<i>91</i>
<b>Data Management.....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>CHAPTER V. Findings .....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Policies Governing Adjuncts at Urban Catholic University .....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>“May” .....</b>	<b>96</b>
<i>Demographics, longevity, &amp; motivations .....</i>	<i>97</i>
<i>Relevant development toward the adjunct position at Urban Catholic.....</i>	<i>97</i>
<b>Home life.....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Educational experiences.....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Employment experiences.....</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>“June” .....</b>	<b>102</b>
<i>Demographics, longevity, &amp; motivations .....</i>	<i>102</i>
<i>Relevant development toward the adjunct position at Urban Catholic.....</i>	<i>103</i>
<b>Home life.....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>Educational experiences.....</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Employment experiences.....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>“July” .....</b>	<b>107</b>
<i>Demographics, longevity, &amp; motivations .....</i>	<i>107</i>
<i>Relevant development toward the adjunct position at Urban Catholic.....</i>	<i>108</i>
<b>Home life.....</b>	<b>108</b>

Educational experiences.....	109
Employment experiences.....	110
Participants' Experiences of Workplace Dignity.....	111
<i>Autonomy</i> .....	112
<i>Citizenship</i> .....	115
<i>Resistance</i> .....	116
<i>Sociability</i> .....	118
Emerging Themes in Adjunct Faculty Experiences of Dignity .....	120
<i>Vulnerability</i> .....	120
<i>Marginality</i> .....	121
<i>Boundaries</i> .....	122
<i>Community</i> .....	125
Summary of Findings .....	126
<b>CHAPTER VI. Findings, Recommendations, and Considerations for Future</b>	
<b>Research.....</b>	<b>128</b>
Review of Findings.....	128
The Pursuit of Workplace Dignity .....	129
<i>Autonomy</i> .....	129
<i>Citizenship</i> .....	130
<i>Resistance</i> .....	131
<i>Sociability</i> .....	132
<i>Challenges to the Pursuit of Workplace Dignity</i> .....	132
Recommendations: Designing for Contingency.....	134

<i>Governance Opportunities for Adjuncts</i> .....	136
<i>Enhance Hiring, Orientation, and Development Processes</i> .....	137
<b>Hiring</b> .....	137
<b>Orientation</b> .....	140
<b>Development</b> .....	141
<i>Unionization</i> .....	144
<b>Considerations for Future Research</b> .....	146
<b>Conclusion: Dignity Denied in the Religiously-Affiliated Gig Academy</b> .....	150
<b>References</b> .....	154
<b>Appendices</b> .....	173
<b>Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval</b> .....	174
<b>Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Letter</b> .....	176
<b>Appendix C: Participant Recruitment Questionnaire</b> .....	179
<b>Appendix D: Phenomenological Interviewing Protocol</b> .....	180
<b>Appendix E: Post-Interview Feedback Form</b> .....	183

## CHAPTER I. Introduction

### Key Assumptions and the Research Question

My purpose in this study is to reconstruct experiences of a small group of part-time English faculty working at one American Catholic university, “Urban Catholic University,” and to interpret those experiences in terms of workplace dignity. I focus on this particular phenomenon for two major reasons: First, dignity is at the center of the Catholic Church’s labor teachings going back to Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical “on capital and labor,” *Rerum Novarum*, in which he writes that it is the duty of “the wealthy owner and the employer[] not to look upon their work people as their bondsmen, but to respect in every man his dignity as a person ennobled by Christian character” (par. 20).<sup>1</sup> Second, dignity is central to secular conceptions of work, including sociological studies of the role of dignity in the workplace (Barber, 2007; Bolton, 2007; Budd, 2004; Hodson, 2001), and also including a much broader set of texts that may not explicitly claim dignity as a focus but which focus on closely related issues like the experiences of underrepresented minorities in higher education (Zambrana, 2018; Wright II & Calhoun, 2016), the community-based approach of “bargaining for the greater good” (McCartin, 2018, 2019; Sneiderman & McCartin, 2018), and the working conditions and experiences of part-time faculty overall (Berry, 2005; Dubson, 2001; Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007; Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Lyons, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the literature of Catholic Social Teaching centers the experiences of “man” or “men.” I replicate quotations without revision to these gendered terms, but intend them in the more general sense of “human” experience.

One assumption underlying this study is that there is a “new faculty majority” (Maisto, 2009). across all campuses in America, represented by full- and part-time faculty hired off the tenure-track, which seems to be confirmed as fact in the data and texts cited throughout.

Another assumption, again based on empirical research from the 1970s to the present, is that part-timers in particular are being hired in such great numbers in order to achieve cost-savings, and that this pattern transcends institutional type and control or affiliation. Even at Urban Catholic University, where per-course wages are roughly 2.5 times greater than the reported national average of \$2,700 (Democratic Staff, 2014), the relatively “high” pay with limited access to benefits still amounts to a savings over full-time faculty salary and benefits.

While I assume some element of exploitation is inherent in the widespread increase of part-time faculty employment, even if only in the first, tamest of senses, “to make productive use of,” as in “utilize” (Merriam-Webster, 2019), a mild taking of advantage in a market economy—still I also assume that dignity inheres in each individual and that it accrues in their work life despite exploitation.

A final set of assumptions is that the concept of dignity is central to both secular and Catholic conceptions of work, and in both contexts is viewed as inseparable from the experiences of workers. Whether looking to documents from the Vatican going back to the 1890s, or to this century’s sociological studies of the workplace, dignity has been described as both inherent in each individual but also as something that may be enhanced or hindered by conditions at work.

With these assumptions in mind, I find it a compelling question to ask: *How do non-unionized adjunct faculty employed by an English Department in a Catholic Church-affiliated university describe their experiences of “dignity” and how do those faculty reflect on the meanings of those experiences?*

## **Positionality Statement**

The impulse of this dissertation, and the subsequent research I believe it suggests must be conducted, is informed by my acutely critical sense of existing standards, policies, and practices relevant to contingent and especially part-time adjunct faculty conditions on American higher education campuses, and so I want to start with a few words about positionality. As with my assumptions, I strive for transparency regarding my positionality, and provide here an explication of my interest in the question of adjunct faculty working experiences, with reference to my identity and my experience in relevant contexts (Byars-Winston, 2012). My experience in higher education instruction has seen me mostly in the role of contingent faculty member on a Catholic campus; most of my 8 years of teaching has occurred in that context. I have felt marginalized in my roles as a part-time and as a full-time contingent faculty member in the context of a religiously-affiliated, four-year institution, but also in the contexts of community colleges and a commuter campus that fed into a flagship public system. And I have also seen concern for faculty working conditions dismissed by all three sides of the Iron Triangle as a human resources concern or union crusade, as somebody else's problem.

In the fall of 2015, I addressed myself to the Faculty Senate at La Salle University, where I taught in the English Department for a year as a part-timer and then for five more years as a full-time non-tenure-track contingent faculty member. It was a turbulent time, with a new president on campus, a \$12 million budget shortfall, a reaccreditation process underway, and a university-wide programmatic review making waves and spreading anxieties. The statement I delivered relied on data collected through the periodic Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS), data reported in a self-study conducted as part of the re-accreditation process, descriptions and definitions contained in the *University Handbook* (La Salle University, 2015), reports on the

precarity of contingent faculty labor (U.S. House Committee, 2014; Faculty Forward, 2015), and the foundational document in the labor-positive tradition of Social Catholic Teaching, Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891). My goal was to inspire more intentional and more integrated employment of part-time faculty, and to argue for common standards across the university for hiring, orienting, and developing those faculty. I restate the context of my address here because La Salle's reliance on contingent faculty was and remains so typical, so indicative of a general trend that transcends institutional affiliation; but I also mention all of this to indicate my own stance in the ongoing debate, which is to advocate for equitable policy and for the practice and principle of shared governance to reach across all faculty types.

I have used the term "policy violence" to describe the marginalizing I experienced and perceived in the experiences and narratives of many friends and colleagues and strangers, too, who collectively make up the nearly one million contingent faculty across the country, the clear majority of all faculty today. I do not mean by this phrase to indicate that I believe any ill will or malign intention on the parts of those whose jobs it is to hire and develop faculty within a given institution's budgetary constraints; but I do mean that the reality of this marginalization, borne of policy decisions devised with the dollar in mind and measured by the statistic, is so commonplace that its banality masks the destructive effect it wreaks. And that distortion has never seemed to me to be more a betrayal than when the stated mission or the admissions strategy of an institution relies on a tradition of uplifting those marginalized in our society, as is true of most if not all Catholic institutions, while the institution goes about its business in part by disregarding, devaluing, and diminishing the role of the majority of its faculty. Just as important as this recognition of positionality, though, is that while it is my personal experience that motivates my research, the literature is vast that reinforces my contention that there is a problem in the treatment



of contingent faculty in American postsecondary education, including within Catholic institutions where the highest ideals of social justice run counter to day-to-day practices.

Lastly, despite all the preceding paragraphs, I would not say that my admitted sympathy for the adjuncts interviewed for this dissertation means that I have none for their administrators. Much to the contrary, I have tremendous sympathy for administrators who have taken jobs, made careers, in higher education and whose mandate to support academic success almost always comes with an unspoken second mandate to make do with less: less than what was requested, less than what is desirable, less than what is necessary. I do not diminish that experience, but I also recognize that such experience is beyond the scope of this dissertation's research question, something to be considered for future research (see p. 141).

### **An Outline**

Following this introduction, Chapter II provides a review of three areas of literature that are pertinent to the development and purpose of this study, those areas being contingency in higher education, corporate culture and organization in higher education, and Catholic Social Teaching on labor and questions of Catholic identity in higher education. In the first place, I seek to establish the contingent and uncertain status of the new faculty majority hired to teach off the tenure track. More than merely a tally of credit-hours taught on a semester-by-semester basis, contingency is more rightly viewed as a set of interlocking working conditions that affect the ways a classroom runs and the ways faculty can effectively engage with students outside the class, conditions with bearing on the ability of part-time faculty to exercise academic freedom in the absence of due process, and conditions that dilute the strength of shared governance. Especially in an environment where business strategy permeates all aspects of higher education, the Chapter II section on corporate culture in higher education goes a long way to clarifying some of the organizational

issues raised earlier in relation to contingency. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the ways mission, institutional identity, and locus of control loom large as questions in the modern Catholic Church-affiliated university, questions that inevitably involve the contingency and corporatization issues.

Chapter III describes the methodology behind the study, including a conceptual framework that combines the theory that meaning is socially constructed with a hermeneutical phenomenology that seeks the interpretive experience of a few individuals of a common phenomenon, that is their experience of dignity working for the same academic department of a Catholic Church-affiliated university. After describing the framework, I discuss the data sources for this study, primarily interviews but including institutional documents. After a brief word on data management, I provide a lengthier description of the methods of analysis, with an explanation of the development and implementation of a theory of workplace dignity as both a Catholic and secular concept. It is this theory of workplace dignity, and the four themes associated with its pursuit and defense (citizenship, resistance, autonomy, sociability), that provides an analytical tool for the purpose of interpreting interview participants' experiences as they described them.

In Chapter IV I present my findings in the form of extended quotations from the three interview participants, categorized according to the themes of dignity discussed in Chapter III, and concluding with some recommendations from the participants. The question never was "do they experience dignity?" but rather "how do they describe that experience?" So, even though all three participants had all been prompted to speak about dignity it was not until the third interview that I provided any sense of definition, which I did finally offer when describing the four categories I had in mind (citizenship, resistance, autonomy, sociability). My description of those categories in the same language for all three participants just before the third interview was meant to do two

things: ensure that any interpretive work the participants did was done using the same thematic terminology, and to reassure each participant that I too would be using the same terminology. This chapter is mostly in the words of the participants themselves.

In Chapter V, I discuss the interview findings and participant recommendations by comparing them with each other but also with examples and recommendations drawn from the literature on adjunct faculty labor. I conclude, in part, that the experiences of workplace dignity as described by this small group of participants offers some useful insights for those who study or conduct policy related to part-time faculty, or who are themselves (as so many are) part-time faculty: that dignity is possible and even inevitable, but that intentional policy goes a long way to enhance dignity under the precarious conditions of adjunct faculty employment.

## **CHAPTER II. A Review of Three Literatures**

### **Introduction to Three Literatures**

The literatures supporting this dissertation represent three disentangled strands of the cord that binds together the working conditions of adjunct faculty, the corporate model of higher education organization, and Catholic Social Teachings (CST) on dignity and labor. This chapter addresses those three areas, beginning with a review of the history and effects of increased contingency among higher education faculty, especially focused on the period running from the 1970s into the present moment. Following that is a review of literature describing the corporate shift in higher education organization, with attention paid to institutional culture and risks to shared governance posed by corporatization and commercialization. Last is a review of CST and the Catholic Church's long-standing defense of human dignity and the rights of individuals to join together to better their working conditions. In a brief concluding synthesis, I point out how CST has been undermined by Catholic institutions' embrace of contingent staffing, corporate organization, and an American legal framework that prioritizes institutional rights over the labor rights of individuals.

### **Contingency in Higher Education**

Adjunct. Casual. Contingent. Contract. Temporary. Unbundled. Seasonal. Just-in-time. Many descriptors, such as those above, have been applied to part-time faculty in American higher education, constituting a typology that confounds comprehensive study (Kezar and Sam, 2010). The study of faculty types and their employment conditions, as noted in the introduction to this dissertation, fills out a robust literature going back as far as the founding of the 1915 founding of the AAUP (2014) and Veblen's (1918) classic criticism of corporate and political influence in

higher education. There are even indications (Cain, 2015) that various forms of instability have troubled academic staffing since Harvard opened in 1636, when the university master beat an assistant teacher with a cudgel for two hours while he was held down by two other men (p. 24). The current trend toward a part-time faculty majority has been apparent since the 1970s, first in community colleges but by now eclipsing all stratifications among institutions (ibid.). Whether discussing two- or four-year, public or private, non- or for-profit, online or brick-and-mortar, secular or religious institutions, up and down the Carnegie Classification system there is evidence of the transformation of the professoriate from a predominantly tenure-holding or -eligible population to one marked by tenuous job security, poverty-level wages, benefits ineligibility, decreased access to governance structures, denial of due process, diminished academic freedom, and detachment from the communities into which they have been hired (Gappa and Leslie, 1993; Hollenshead, C., et al., 2007; Kezar and Sam, 2010; Schneider, 2003).

### ***Trying to Define “Contingency”***

As early as the 1970s (Ladd and Lipset, 1973; Berlow and Collos, 1974; Tuckman, 1978; Van Arsdale, 1978), there was already a good sense that American higher education institutions were relying on a more and more destabilized instructional workforce (Gappa, 1984; Gappa and Leslie, 1993; Kezar and Sam, 2010; Morphew, et al., 2016, 2018). Since that time many terms and typologies have been used to conceptualize the meaning and purpose of “contingent” faculty in higher education. I tend to use the term to mean all non-tenure-track faculty who lack job stability and the promise of academic freedom from political, corporate, and ideological pressures. The term can also include graduate student Teaching Assistants, but that cohort are outside the scope of this paper. Though preferring “non-tenure-track faculty” (NTTF), Kezar and Sam (2010) describe the variety of typology, titles, and institutional use of those who now constitute the

majority of faculty, noting that such inconsistency presents significant impediments to the study of NTTF. The inconsistency exists across institutions of all kinds, and sometimes even between schools or departments of the same campus or system.

While some statements urge efforts to reverse the trend of contingency in higher education (ADE, 1999; MLA, 2011; Committee on Contingent Faculty, 2014), Kezar, et al. (2014) concede “a reversal, and return to a largely tenure-track faculty that is engaged simultaneously in teaching, research, and service activities seems unlikely” (p. 3). The years between 1997-2007 saw a decrease in tenured and tenure-track positions among private comprehensive institutions (40.4% to 29.5%), as well as a concurrent increase in NTTF hiring (59.6% to 70.5%) (ibid., p. 5). Regarding disciplinary differences, “the highest increases in part-time faculty occurred in the humanities, social sciences, and agriculture, and the greatest increase from 1987 to 2003 was in education” (ibid.). In terms of racial and gender representation, a report from the Higher Education Program and Policy Council of the American Federation of Teachers shows that while the overall proportion of tenure-track positions in higher education has dropped, there have been some gains in the overall representation of racial and ethnic minorities in the faculty ranks (HEPPC, 2010). However, those gains are concentrated in the two-thirds of new faculty who are hired off the tenure-track into positions with much lower pay and frequently without any benefits, and no job security. The trend toward eliminating full-time tenure-track positions “greatly complicates the process of offering stable, well-paid careers to faculty and instructors from underrepresented ethnic and racial groups” (ibid., p. 13). To be more specific:

Of the 10.4 percent of faculty positions held by underrepresented racial and ethnic groups in 2007, 7.6 percent are contingent positions—which means that 73 percent of

underrepresented faculty hold positions that do not give them adequate wages or benefits, job security, or meaningful academic freedom. (ibid.)

Indeed, “data from a number of sources indicate that full-time non-tenure-track positions in disproportionate numbers are being filled by women” (Harper, et al., 2001, p. 238).

Recent reports from the Democratic Staff of the US House Committee on Education and the Workforce (2015) and the nonpartisan United States General Accountability Office (2017) show that there is some federal attention focused on the adjunct crisis in higher education. I say this knowing that we have a U.S. Department of Education, and that it puts out a report each year, *The Condition of Education*; but I also know that the DOE report relies on the National Center for Education Statistics’ Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS) to populate that report. The problem with IPEDS, which is a periodic survey required of all Title IV federal fund recipients, is that the data about part-time faculty is as superficial as can be – mere headcounts across entire institutions, without any departmental- or college- or discipline-level data, minimal demographic analysis, and no salary data. So, it is no surprise that this GAO report relies, in addition to IPEDS data, on Department of Labor and American Academy of Arts & Sciences survey data, as well as on new data from three states (GA, ND, OH) garnered for the study itself. It is notable that the DOL Current Population Survey “does not differentiate faculty by type of institution or by tenure status” (GAO, p. 8), so does not add any granularity to IPEDS.

Despite the lack of data, what is available makes clear that the shift from a majority of tenured or tenure-eligible faculty to a majority of tenure-ineligible, contingent faculty has been achieved. As of 2014 (IPEDS), there are more than 1,000,000 faculty working off the tenure track across the country, and nearly 70,000 teaching at Catholic institutions. More recent data show that Roman Catholic Church-affiliated colleges and universities make up 5.5% of all degree-granting

Title IV fund recipients and more than 26% of the 880 institutions claiming a religious affiliation, by far the largest grouping of any single denomination (IPEDS, 2018). Of all instructional staff excluding graduate teaching assistants, roughly 30% are tenured/tenure-track, 18% are full-time non-tenure-track, and 52% are hired part-time or on a temporary basis (IPEDS, 2014). The faculty ratios at Catholic colleges and universities are most similar in terms of part-time faculty, with 51% of faculty reported as part-time, though tenure/tenure-track faculty make up a larger proportion at 34%, and full-time non-tenure-track make up a smaller proportion at 15% (ibid.). Urban Catholic University reports (IPEDS, 2018) a lesser reliance on the most exploited ranks, with a part-time faculty ratio of 37%. Taking into account all full- and part-time non-tenured faculty that ratio jumps to 55%; if we include the graduate teaching assistants, that ratio is fully two-thirds of all instructional staff at 67%.

In terms of union activity on campuses, while “more than 430,000 college and university instructors operating under collectively bargained contracts and many more otherwise affiliated” (Cain, 2017, p. 132), Catholic institutions of higher education oppose organization by academic staff at a rate of 37.93%, 11 of 29 cases between 2012-2018 in which faculty and graduate student unionization efforts were met “with jurisdictional objections” at Catholic colleges and universities (Herbert and van der Naald, 2018). The same study found *only one case* when non-academic unionization encountered such objections at an institution of any religious affiliation, and that was at a Catholic university (ibid.). Urban Catholic, for its part, has demonstrated opposition to recognition of academic staff unionization (ibid.) even as it has kept pace with higher education staffing norms for part-timers and graduate teaching assistants. Those ratios, noted in the preceding paragraph, are right in line with the decades-long rise in the proportion of faculty hired and working off the tenure track, a trend transcending institutional type and with significance including



but not limited to faculty wages, hours, working conditions (Gappa and Leslie, 1993; Hollenshead, C., et al., 2007; Kezar and Sam, 2010; Rhoades, 1998). These trends are just as apparent and of as much concern to scholars working at or studying Catholic institutions of higher education as among the broader field (Clark, et al., 2018). On one hand, all institutions are facing similar challenges in terms of funding and enrollments, since they are all in the same general market, and so it is to be expected that staffing practices will look fairly similar across institutional types. On the other hand, as Prusak (2018) puts it:

Being committed to “keeping the institution Catholic” means little if the basic commitments of the Catholic faith do not ground and shape a board’s deliberations, whether about how to distribute increased health insurance costs, or about labor practices[...]. (p. 7)

### ***Student Learning Environment***

In this section, I address concerns about contingency as they relate to student learning and outcomes. Kezar (2013) notes that “[w]hile some studies suggest negative outcomes as a result of students taking courses with NTTF, none of the studies examine the working conditions of the NTTFs” (p. 571). The focus on “NTTFs in teaching roles” reflects the findings that some adjunct faculty “may also have administrative or research roles, but most NTTFs are in instructional positions, outside medical schools where many are in research positions” (p. 573), and also recalls other findings that more than two-thirds of FTNTTF reported teaching as a primary activity, and more than 70% of tenured or on-track faculty reporting the same (Gansneder, et al., 2001, p. 86). The research question guiding Kezar’s (2013) study is: “Do NTTF perceive departmental policies and practices shape their performance and their ability to create a positive learning environment for students? If so, in what ways?” (p. 573). There are rich and extensive quotations and analyses

of interviewee responses, as well as thematically-grouped tables covering responses, and categorization of five clusters of negative policy. There is more time spent describing negative policy than positive, but “the positive policies mostly mirrored the negative policies being the inverse” (p. 582). The categories of negative policy include scheduling classes, lack of curriculum input, learning resources, feedback, and lack of learning infrastructure. One comment that covers resources, feedback, and infrastructure, really struck a chord with me, given my own experience trying to use the accreditation process as a way to gain leverage for NTTF issues:

One [part-time] NTTF described the type of feedback that might be helpful: 'The accreditation team was recently here and asked us about ways that institution could better support our teaching. We brought up that we need better mentoring for first time lecturers teaching a course. It's one thing for them to borrow the notes and they should certainly do that, but they also need to sit down with the faculty members who taught the course and perhaps get some mentoring from them. (p. 586)

Overall, results suggested several negative impacts of poor or absent policy, including “ability to perform, ranging from preparation, lack of needed information, misinformation, wasted time, not drawing on their strengths, advising possibilities, poor curricular designs, missing key materials, and the psychic burden of learning multiple norms and values at differing institutions” (p. 589).

Hollenshead, et al. (2007) explore “the ranks of non-tenure track faculty from many institutional-level angles; to learn more about their numbers, qualifications, duties, working conditions, benefits and resources; and to understand more about the impact administrators perceive NTTF have on their campuses” (p. 1). They present findings from a national survey asking “administrators, including human resource officers, provosts and deans, to provide information and offer their perceptions about the non-tenure track faculty on their campuses”

(*ibid.*). The authors cite recent studies that paint a negative picture, suggesting that NTTF “are associated with decreases in such desirable student outcomes as integration, retention, and graduation” (p. 2, citing numerous sources listed in Endnote 6, p. 66), that high rates of NTTF turnover “contribute to a lack of continuity within departments” (p. 2, citing Spalter-Roth, R. & Erskine, W., 2004). In contrast to these negative impressions, the authors note “a much more positive picture emerges” (p. 2), with “over 80 percent of our survey respondents answered, giving strikingly positive opinions” (*ibid.*), including the observation that “many department chairs actually think that these faculty provide more high-quality instruction than do tenured and tenure-track faculty” (p. 3). It is notable, too, that the disciplines in which administrators identify “specialized expertise and professional perspectives” and “non-tenure track faculty [who] work in the fields related to what they teach” are Social Work and Business, specifically. These findings should be considered with the caveat that the survey did not include faculty of any type, let alone the NTTF who are its focus. Nevertheless, it is necessary to note other studies, including a quantitative assessment by Bettinger and Long (2010), in which disciplinary differences seemed to account for some variation in student outcomes where part-time NTTF are teaching introductory level courses.

In the realm of external review of academic institutions and programs, Henry’s (2008) report from the AAUP’s Committee on Contingent Faculty and the Profession suggests that the six regional accrediting commissions are failing to address the by-now well-established trend in higher education of majority part-time faculty ratios across all institutional types. Through review and analysis of language specific to faculty, the report shows that many of the commissions either leave definitions of faculty types to the institutions, or provide their own definitions, some of which are fairly broad or vague, or even based on a normative perspective about faculty roles that is

decades out of date. Henry echoes a dissatisfaction common among education labor advocates and scholars: “Most accreditors take no position on faculty who, whether full or part time, are off the tenure track—and the term 'contingent faculty' appears nowhere in any of the standards documents” (p. 103). Among the issues reviewed among accrediting agency guidelines and standards, the first Henry considers are definitions of part-time faculty; one of the difficulties in the field of higher education contingency research, noted above, is that there are no hard-and-fast terms to use, since phrasing differs across and even within institutions (Kezar and Sam, 2010). This problem is not helped (and may even be exacerbated) by the lack of consistency, or even apparent concern, in accrediting standards. If one were to recommend reforms to the accrediting process, Henry writes that a congealing of terminology across all regions might be a priority. Not only the way part-time NTTF are named, but also the way accrediting standards are phrased: “A standard requiring that institutions comment on their use of part-time faculty, for example, is much weaker than one stating that part-time faculty should generally teach 'one or two courses.’ Likewise, when agencies mandate that part-time faculty must be evaluated without specifying which institutional constituencies are involved in the evaluation process, the requirement means little” (Henry, 2008, p. 109).

A more recent study from Pham and Paton (2018) looks at institutional responses to one specific section of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges accrediting standards, Core Requirement 2.8: *Adequacy of Full-Time Faculty and related requirements*: “The number of full-time faculty members is adequate to support the mission of the institution and ensure the quality and integrity of each of its academic programs.” Among the methods for determining an “adequate” number of faculty, most common seemed to be student-to-faculty ratios, and percentage of credit hours taught by part- and full-time faculty (p. 47).

Additional measures included headcount, course/section size, and peer reviews from accreditation procedures or internal assessments of graduate programs (ibid.). The authors recommend that institutions should “consider including multiple measures to provide reliable assessment results” (p. 51) in response to the accreditors standard noted above, including: institutional and department- or program-wide student-to-faculty ratios for both part- and full-time faculty; credit hour percentages for both faculty types; various headcounts (full-time faculty, part-time faculty, undergraduate and graduate students); estimates of full-time overload, part-time workload; other resources such as policy documents defining workload and responsibilities for faculty types (pp. 51-53). Pham and Paton claim that the use of full-time equivalents as a measure “obscures the proportions of full- and part-time faculty” (ibid.), suggesting that this alternative to a headcount is not to be encouraged as a standalone measure. Pham and Paton agree that “while institutions focused on student-to-faculty ratios, they provided only superficial evidence related to the growing population of contingent and part-time faculty” (p. 54).

In my own experience, I argued successfully for inclusion in a re-accreditation self-study at La Salle University in 2015-2016 (Hanycz, 2016) of some honest reflection about the institution’s failure to meet the standard for faculty development; the final report from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE, 2016) made no mention of the majority of NTTF by headcount, the nearly 50% rate of sections taught by part-time faculty, or the total lack of institutional policy regarding hiring and development, despite then-current standards requiring that “[f]or institutions relying on part-time, adjunct, temporary, or other faculty on time-limited contracts, employment policies and practices should be as carefully developed and communicated as those for full-time faculty” (MSCHE, 2011, p. 38). I suspect that the failure to mention the self-study reflections on Standard 10 was due to the fact that revised standards would go into effect

after the start of the self-study (MSCHE, 2015), in which clear language about contingent faculty was defanged and moved from the section concerned with faculty into the section concerned with student experience. The new language was less direct and less demanding regarding the responsibility of the institution to ensure equitable treatment of its non-tenure-track faculty, especially part-timers, and refocused MSCHE interest from labor conditions to user experience (2015, p. 7). The change in language and the shift in the location of language about faculty development indicates a kind of forsaking of labor standards in the accreditor's assessment of contingent faculty, and declares a diminishment of its own oversight responsibilities in that context. Kezar et al. (2014) also see a deficiency in the current focus of accrediting bodies:

Accreditation leaders communicated that there is currently only a limited, if any, sense of a standard or a need to address the issue of faculty support. Still, there was general agreement that campuses, working with accreditors, can and should be doing more to support the entire faculty [...] to ensure educational quality. (p. 9)

Two useful recommendations for revising the accreditation process are to include more specific language about non-tenure-track faculty, and to include this new faculty majority in the accreditation process by providing for their voice(s) to add to the self-study and campus visits (pp. 14-16). Caution about drawing conclusions is insisted on by the authors, who write that "it is important to acknowledge that findings do not –or should not– implicate non-tenure-track faculty, as individuals, as being responsible for negative [student learning] outcomes" (Kezar, et al., 2014, p. 7).

### ***Same Old Thing?***

"Contingency and casualization are among the most pressing challenges facing American higher education," writes Cain (2015, p. 33), "but they are not new." Indeed, Cain's article reveals

that there seem to have been very few periods in the centuries of American higher education in which all faculty have thrived in terms economic, intellectual, or otherwise. Reviewing documents from four eras – colonial, early national, post-Civil War, and Inter-War – Cain shows how “each points to contestations over faculty roles, rights, and status while arguing that the antecedents to current struggles appear throughout” (p. 24). In a less sustained but no less rigorous manner, Cain’s comparison of times past with the current situation reminds me of the report by Ladd and Lipset (1973); and that sense of familiarity is also noted by Cain, who sees analogies between the 1860s and 1960s: “Cornell University was a prime example of the larger trend: in 1868, 64 percent of its faculty were full professors and 20 percent were assistants but by 1910, the proportion of full professors to temporary instructors was reversed. Nineteen percent were full professors while 35 percent were assistants and 28 percent were instructors” (p. 30), mirroring composition of the professoriate a century later. While the piece is very useful for placing the current situation in a proper and long-view historical perspective, there isn’t much said along the lines of what to do to improve NTTF conditions: “As stakeholders in higher education consider, and hopefully address, the current version of this condition, it’s important to remember its long history. Temporary surges in funds, short-term efforts around an immediate crisis, or locally based solutions are unlikely to change the fundamental and longstanding problems of academic staffing. Rather, something more systemic, and perhaps more radical, is needed” (p. 34).

Cain (2015) makes a convincing case that contingency has always been a part of the higher education faculty hiring context, but there may be no historical precedent for the sweeping proportion of faculty currently working under part-time, temporary, or short-term conditions. And neither is there much hope apparent among scholars and researchers that the trend will reverse.

Drawing partly on personal experience over a decade as an Associate Faculty member (i.e., part-time faculty), but with recognition of the “70-odd part-time departmental colleagues, of the hundreds of Associate Faculty in other departments here, of the few thousand teaching part-time in the system as a whole, and of the huge number of people teaching part-time throughout the nation” (p. 196), Van Arsdale (1978) investigates the undermining of personal dignity as “a de-professionalizing of university teaching” (p. 195) and describes a “sense of wasted and yet exploited human potential” (p. 196). The exploitation is apparent in “gestures both overt and covert” (p. 196), including form contract language that makes no distinction between a truly “new” hire and long-term part-time Associates like Van Arsdale; crowded, shared office space and materials storage; limited access to departmental staff support; limitations on academic freedom in the sense of text selection and curriculum development; limitations on institutional support (conferences, etc.); and limited access to career ladders. These conditions should be familiar to anyone studying faculty employment patterns anytime in the past four or five decades, and Van Arsdale presents a concise and heartfelt version of a complaint all too common, still.

## **Corporate Organization in Higher Education**

### ***Defining “Organization”***

Initially, the labor-supportive import of CST suggested to me that a review of labor relations literature would be necessary for this dissertation, with particular focus on the interactions between labor law and First Amendment protections of freedom of religion. However, the site I have in mind has no faculty unions, though some non-academic staff have been organized in the past and at the time I was conducting the study there was an organization drive underway by graduate student employees. The non-academic staff union was not objected to by the administration, but the graduate student union has not been recognized to this date (Herbert and



van der Naald, 2018).<sup>2</sup> In the end, in any case, the study's focus on adjuncts who are not unionized or actively organizing toward unionization requires a different perspective than that provided by a review of labor relations literature. Organizational theory, then, offers an appropriate set of concerns and concepts that enable investigation of the behaviors, beliefs, and assumptions of an organization and its members.

Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978, 1996) lend some examples and terminology that begin to help defining what we might expect an “organization” to be or do. There is the perhaps obvious recognition that “organizations are not merely collections of individuals, yet there is no organization without such collections” (1996, p. 8<sup>3</sup>). Because the organization is constituted of individual human beings, then, it follows that what the individuals of an organization do and learn may eventuate in action or learning at the level of the organization; however, due to the fact that most individual actions and learning do not rise to that level, there is the question of how to determine when an act is “organizational.” In some sense, the answer is that individual action becomes organizational when acted by members of a collectivity that has enabled certain members to “function as agents” (Argyris and Schön, 1996, p. 11) on behalf of the whole organization. And, Argyris and Schön continue, “when individual and organizational inquiry do intersect, individual

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<sup>2</sup> That drive is being blocked by the administration on two fronts: on the basis of an understanding that the primary relationship between university and graduate student employees is educational and not employment-based, and on the basis of an understanding that the First Amendment precludes National Labor Relations Board “intrusion” into any religiously-affiliated institution.

<sup>3</sup> Many of the definitions and even larger chunks of text that appear first in Argyris and Schön's volume titled *Organizational learning* (1978) then appear in verbatim fashion in the second volume, *Organizational learning II* (1996). In these cases, I will cite the latter publication without further disclaimer.

inquiry feeds into and helps shape organizational inquiry, which then feeds back to shape the further inquiry carried out by individuals” (ibid.). In this way, the individual moves the organization.

According to Argyris and Schön (1996, p. 8), it is possible to distinguish an organization from a mob of people by observing three conditions, namely that the individual members must “devise agreed-upon procedures for making decisions in the name of the collectivity,” “delegate to individuals the authority to act for the collectivity,” and “set boundaries between the collectivity and the rest of the world.” It is possible that these rules remain tacit, but they will be observable nonetheless, even in some instances when the nature of the collective is so temporary and informal that it may be most accurately described as “ephemeral,” as in the case of a “cooperative system” arising in response to a crisis, “springing up overnight and disappearing just as quickly” (ibid, pp. 9-10, citing Lanzara, 1985). Hallmarks of a cooperative system include a “task system” with a “pattern of interconnected roles” and “division of labor” coordinated toward a common operation (Argyris and Schön, 1996, p. 10). Such a system may be planned in advance, designed in the midst of operation, and in either case may be revised or redesigned along the way. On the other end of the spectrum of organizational duration, “an agency is a collection of people that makes decisions, delegates authority for action, and monitors membership, all on a continuing basis” (Argyris and Schön, 1996, p. 10).

Argyris and Schön (1996) offer the possibility that an organization can be construed as a “holding environment for knowledge” (p. 12) in the same way a file cabinet stores information, which allows individual contributions to the organization (memos, notes, reports, communications) to extend into other areas through archiving and referencing, and which allow all those contributions, archives, and references to outlive the employment of the original authors.

Especially in contexts of high turnover, these knowledge-storing and -sharing capacities inform the sense of continuous organizational identity. Argyris and Schön further suggest that, given that a strategy or action is embedded with knowledge, often implicit, organizations “directly represent knowledge” (p. 13) in their behaviors. For this reason, they claim that *theories of action* “have the advantage of including strategies of action, the values that govern the choice of strategies, and the assumptions on which they are based” (ibid.).

To describe this process, Argyris and Schön (1996) explain that a theory of action may take the form of either an “espoused theory” or a “theory-in-use” (p. 13). An espoused theory is a “theory of action which is advanced to explain or justify a given pattern of activity” (ibid.), such as the frequent reliance on a supposed institutional need (or desire) for *flexibility* as an explanation for the high ratio of part-time faculty (e.g., Nelson, 2017), a theory that may have explained 1970s increases in part-time hires but which falls short of explaining why a majority of faculty must be so “disposable” (Burgan, 2006), suggesting that espoused theories of flexibility lag behind conditions (Goldstene, 2012). A theory-in-use, on the other hand, is a “theory of action which is implicit in the performance of that pattern of activity” (ibid.), and must be “constructed from observation of the pattern of action in question” (ibid.): “from the evidence gained by observing any pattern of action, one might construct alternative theories-in-use which are, in effect, hypotheses to be tested against the data of observation” (ibid.).<sup>4</sup> Discrepancies between espousals and theories-in-use, which Argyris and Schön agree are to be expected, to some extent, can help

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<sup>4</sup> My study will not explicitly test hypotheses, but the literature on contingency and Catholic mission and identity, described in brief above, suggest there will be differences between the espousals to be found in organizational documents (e.g., mission statement) and the theories-in-use that may be derived from interviews conducted with adjunct faculty.

reveal tensions between the ideal and the reality of the organization, and can bring to light theories-in-use that “remain tacit because [they are] indescribable or undiscussable” (p. 14). An issue “may be undiscussable because any attempt to reveal its incongruity with the organization’s espoused theory would be perceived as threatening or embarrassing” (ibid.), and that “undiscussability” may therefore remain tacit, too. Rather than a bug or anomaly, undiscussability, and the layered problems of avoidance that are built into it, might be viewed as a cherished feature of executive or board discretion.

Avoiding open discussion of undiscussable issues means knowledge cannot be shared or learned from, since “organizational learning occurs when individuals within an organization experience a problematic situation and inquire into it on the organization’s behalf” (Argyris and Schön, 1996, p. 16). More than simple inquiry, “in order to become organizational, the learning that results from the organizational inquiry must become embedded in the images of organization held in its members’ minds and/or in the epistemological artifacts (the maps, memories, and programs) embedded in the organizational environment” (ibid.). What this suggests is that there may be superficial or deeper learning, what Argyris and Schön call “single-loop learning” or “double-loop learning” (pp. 20-25). The clearest description of these two processes is provided by Argyris (1980):

A thermostat that detects and corrects the temperature in a room without questioning its program is single-loop learning. If the thermostat were to ask why it was set at 65 degrees, or why it should be measuring heat, that would be double-loop learning. (p. 207)

In the realm of higher education faculty employment trends, the rise in part-time positions as a portion of the total workforce is a single-loop response to diminishing funds and increased costs –

but hiring cheaper faculty, and more of them, does nothing to address the deeper source of the financial issues.

While Argyris and Schön have been focused on organizational learning, which construes organizations as sources of knowledge or sites of learning, Ott (1989) and Tierney (2008) investigate organizational behavior as a cultural process. Ott (1989) provides an explication of the theory of organizational culture, in part by contrasting the organizational culture perspective against structural and systems perspectives. A major difference according to Ott (1989, p. 2) is that structural or systems-focused theories of organization would fail to comprehend or resolve conflicts between “espoused values and values-in-use” (p. 44) because they do not inquire into the values embedded in a routine or process; these values are discoverable (and therefore discussable) only through the cultural perspective. This means that a definition or understanding of organization is inseparable from a definition or understanding of culture. In other words, “a culture is not something an organization has; a culture is something an organization is” (p. 49, citing Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983, p. 126). Rather than compare organizations to culture, or saying that organizations have or are like culture, Tierney (2008) agrees that “an organization *is* a culture” (p. 48).

Like Tierney (2008) will later do, Ott (1989) claims that “organizational culture is a socially constructed concept” (p. 52, citing Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Holzner & Marx, 1979, chs. 4 and 5; Mead, 1934). Much like the intertwined and mutually-reinforcing organizational learning described by Argyris and Schön above, Ott argues that organizational culture may be defined “as a social force that controls patterns of organizational behavior by shaping members’ cognitions and perceptions of meanings and realities, providing affective energy for mobilization, and identifying who belongs and who does not” (p. 69). Because of the focus on culture, above

and beyond feedback loops and other structures or systems, organizational research is “inherently a social and cultural process with deeply rooted moral, political, and personal outcomes” (p. 101, quoting Van Maanen, 1982a, p. 14).

Tierney (2008) picks up on the ethical strand of the cultural perspective of organizational research, claiming for researchers of higher education organizations that their goal should be “to try to figure out not only what holds the campus together, but how to strengthen the social glue so that the fabric of the institution is stronger tomorrow than it was yesterday” (p. 2). Rather than rely on what might be considered objective truths about an organization – “facts and figures, bottom lines, or chains of command” (ibid.) – the focus of inquiry into organizational culture must be “to uncover how the organizational participants understand and construct their reality and, within that reality, how they perceive the environment” (p. 14). Concerning epistemology, Tierney explicitly differentiates between “objective” and “enacted” environments, respectively representing adherents of a “rational, objective, ‘real’” perspective (p. 10), and those who argue that “reality is defined through a process of social interchange” (p. 12). Ultimately, Tierney conforms to social constructionist theory of knowledge, namely that “[t]he production of knowledge cannot be separated from the contingencies and continuous reconstruction of culture that individuals experience in their work lives” (p. 49).

Whereas Ott (1989) distinguishes organizational culture from organizational structures or systems, and Tierney (2008) suggests that the cultural research should be understood as related to but distinct from mere interpretation, Weick (1995) argues that the “sensemaking” that occurs in an organizational culture requires more than mere interpretation of stimuli like decisions or actions: “The process of sensemaking is intended to include the construction and bracketing of the textlike cues that are interpreted” (p. 8). Agreement, whether implied or explicit, about what cues

*are* precedes consideration of what they *mean*. While culture can be thought of “as an interpretation that takes place on a daily basis among the members of a particular group” (Tierney, 2008, p. 2), Weick’s (1995) conception of sensemaking is of a recursive process of meaning creation and interpretation, re-creation and re-interpretation, and “revision of those interpretations based on action and its consequences” (p. 8). Among the theories parallel or contributing to Weick’s sensemaking, he discusses the following:

- “problem setting”: “When we set the problem, we select what we will treat as the ‘things’ of the situation, we set the boundaries of our attention to it, and we impose upon it a coherence which allows us to say what is wrong and in what directions the situation needs to be changed (p. 9, quoting Schön, 1983b, p. 40);
- “active agents”: Weick describes “active agents” as those who “construct sensible, sensible events” (p. 4, quoting Huber & Daft, 1987, p. 154), and also notes that much phenomenological research into organizations had focused on so-called “high-discretion roles, such as receptionist, district attorney, police officer,” and laments that “what are usually seen as low-discretion situations (characteristic of the assembly line, for example) tend to be conspicuous by their absence” in the literature at the time (Weick, 1995, p. 176, quoting Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 276); and
- “newcomer socialization”: Pointing to Louis (1980), Weick says that she conceptualizes sensemaking as “grounded in newcomer socialization rather than in strategy” and that, in her view, “[d]iscrepant events, or surprises, trigger a need for explanations, or post-diction, and, correspondingly, for a process through which interpretations of discrepancies are developed” (Weick, 1995, p. 4, quoting Louis, 1980, p. 241).

- “resolution”: Hewing very close to what I propose in this dissertation, Weick quotes Feldman (1989) as “talk[ing] about sensemaking as an interpretive process that is necessary ‘for organizational members to understand and to share understandings about such features of the organization as what it is about, what it does well and poorly, what the problems it faces are, and how it should resolve them” (Weick, 1995, p. 5, quoting Feldman, 1989, p. 19).

### ***Higher Education Organization***

A review of literature regarding higher education organization and administration reveals a fecund field of theory and research, and a clear interest in implementation strategy. Among the titles are hopeful how-to guides (Tierney, 1999; Dickeson, 2010; Bahls, 2014; Massy, 2016), considerations of financial aspects (Williams, 1966; Whalen, 1991; St. John and Parsons, 2004), and critical evaluations (Birnbaum, 2000; Elliott & Steuben, 1984; Rizvi, 2006). There are also entries from the broader field of organizational study (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Mintzberg, 1993; Weick, 1995) that have informed higher education-focused discussions about organizational change (Tierney, 1999; Kezar, 2013b). Implied by many of these texts, and made explicit in some, is a sense that higher education governance structures have been transformed by the importation of business management strategies; namely, that corporatization has taken hold. We even see the term appearing in a decision by the National Labor Relations Board (*Pacific Lutheran*, 2014).

At least in the period beginning in the 1970s, this transfusion of corporate lifeblood into higher education was a response to faltering state appropriations after years of increase and brief stability, the downturn attributable to an economic recession and reactive legislative responses (Archibald and Feldman, 2006, Fig. 1, p. 625). While these appropriations only apply to state-controlled institutions, federal monies supporting student financial aid and faculty research flow



to all types of higher education institutions, and the 1972 amendments to the 1964 Higher Education Act provided financial incentives to all states, and all of their public and private institutions, if they would create so-called 1202 Commissions to coordinate efforts “to address statewide questions that an individual campus was unlikely to consider on its own” (Thelin, 2011, pp. 339). Thereafter, the reach of efficiency measures, funds reallocation processes, program closures or restructuring, and the practice of firing tenured faculty without due process extended across higher education, regardless of institutional type.

Concerning the related concept of commercialization, Dorn (2017, p. 228) notes that academics’ anxiety about the creeping influence of the market on campus decision-making goes back at least as far as Veblen’s (1918) snarky classic, *The Higher Learning in America*. In that book, Veblen warns against reliance on or intrusion of political or business interests as drivers of knowledge creation:

[T]he ideal of efficiency by force of which a large-scale centralized organization commends itself in these premises is that pattern of shrewd management whereby a large business-like presumption accordingly appears to be that learning is a merchantable commodity, to be produced on a piece-rate plan, rated, bought and sold by standard units, measured counted and reduced to staple equivalence by impersonal, mechanical tests [...] and acts to deter both students and teacher from a free pursuit of knowledge, as contrasted with the pursuit of academic credits. (pp. 221-222)

Even granting the “necessary evil” (p. 221) of bureaucracy, Veblen’s position is that pursuits of knowledge and profits (or revenues, as is common parlance in the non-profit sector) are divergent from each other.

As was the case of the 1970s economic milieu, more recent post-recession recoveries have not always meant a return to former models or funding levels, as has been observed in the aftermath of the most recent economic crisis, our Great Recession (SHEEO, 2019a). Instead, the cost of higher education has largely been transferred to students and their families (NCES, 2018), and in 2018 the State Higher Education Executive Officers' annual State Higher Education Finance report showed that, for the first time, more than half of American states relied more heavily on individual tuition payments than on appropriations from the states themselves (SHEEO, 2018; Seltzer, 2018).<sup>5</sup> As tuition has continued its seemingly inexorable upward climb, and even before the post-recession tuition hikes (Hiltonsmith and Draut, 2014, p. 2), evidence accrues of a shifting ideology when it comes to higher education, whereby what was once considered a public good is now broadly construed as a private benefit available for purchase (Whitney, 2006). While there is a lot more to say about this ideological shift, and a lot more to say about the ways this shift has affected students taking on more and more debt (NCES, 2018, p. 5), I will focus below on defining the distinct but overlapping challenges of corporatization and commercialization in higher education, and examining what researchers and scholars believe the effect these economically-based issues may have on shared governance.

### **Shared Governance.**

The overwhelming majority of institutions surveyed by Tierney and Minor (2003) reported the existence of a faculty senate or some otherwise-named body with similar function, with “93

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that some states' public higher education systems have received more funding from student tuition payments than state appropriations for many years, as in New Hampshire, where the lowest recorded “student share” since 1980 was 54%, and where the current proportion is just below 80% (SHEEO, 2019b).

percent of doctoral institutions, 90 percent of master's institutions, and 82 percent of baccalaureate institutions hav[ing] such senates” (p. 12). There is some debate and difference among the institutional types about the effectiveness of those senates (ibid.), but the clear consensus is that some mechanism for effective input (if not control) by faculty into decision-making processes exists on most campuses. There is also disagreement about what topics are fair game for this kind of shared governance, as opposed to administrative fiat; areas that seem to fall under shared governance include development of undergraduate curriculum, tenure and promotion standards (if not decisions), development graduate curriculum where it exists, and some influence over post-tenure review. Evaluations of high-level administrators and prioritizing via budget were areas where faculty and administrators agree the academic side of the house had the least amount of say (p. 14).

As with a great many aspects of the American system of higher education, current conceptions and practices of institutional governance vary greatly between institutions and over time. Jones (2012) notes that “colonial colleges were run almost exclusively by governing boards and institutional presidents” (p. 119), with one of the first examples of shared governance coming into existence at Harvard in 1826, when faculty gained control over decisions related to student admission, student discipline, and instructor conduct (ibid). Not until 1966 would the governance roles and responsibilities be clearly delineated in a joint statement by the American Association of University Professors, the American Council on Education, and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (ibid.), though that apparent *détente* between divergent interests has not meant an end to territorial bickering and claims to the supremacy of boards in matters of institutional governance (AGB, 2010). Regardless of the specific parameters, which are

different at every institution, shared governance describes a process by which faculty participate with boards and administrators in the decision-making at the institutional level.

### **Corporatization.**

Developed in a context that takes for granted that bottom-lines require prioritizing of profit, or at least net-positive revenue streams, various business management and strategy “fads” have come in and gone out of favor in higher education over the years. In just a few sentences, Angulo (2018) rehearses the “alphabet soup of acronyms” (p. 9) that represented economizing strategies that had their start in the business world but would see their day on campuses across the country starting in the 1970s and continuing to this day:

HCT, PPBS, MBO, ZBB, TQM, CQI, BPR—which stood for one ‘breakthrough’ business strategy after another. These workplace reforms almost always privileged efficiency and flexibility over employee stability and institutional loyalty. Human capital theory (HCT) encouraged viewing employees as resources, rather than as members of the ‘family’ business. Planning, programming, and budgeting system (PPBS) rationalized cost-benefit decision-making in boardrooms that stood far removed from those on the ground floor. Management by objectives (MBO), zero-based budgeting (ZBB), total quality management (TQM), continuous quality improvement (CQI), and business process reengineering (BPR) all pointed in the same direction: increase productivity, decrease costs, minimize personnel expenditures. (pp. 9-10)

While the term “fad” often connotes negative comment, Birnbaum (2000) notes that such strategies as those just listed “make important contributions to higher education” (pp. xiii-xiv). However, “they can be disruptive when they are applied as formulas and implemented without the support of organizational participants” (p. xiv). Among the elements of the “corporate ethos” that are now

apparent across higher education, Gould (2003) lists management and productivity development systems, budget controls, marketing strategies, redistribution of labor, development of research and ancillary enterprises, and customer service orientation (pp. 80-81). Allowing that these “styles and controls” have increased efficiency in a sector with a reputation for myopic anticipation of and sluggish responses to shifts in the broader culture and economy, Gould admits that “the problem, however, lies not in efficiency” (p. 82), but in the “clearly perceived threats to faculty autonomy and liberal education from the relentlessness of the market logic” (ibid.). While the educative function has not disappeared with the increased employment this kind of logic, the corporatization of higher education has seen greater shares of attention and resources given over to the packaging, marketing, and selling of an educational product to students (and their families) who more and more resemble customers with money to spend.

### **Commercialization.**

Following quickly on the heels of corporatization is commercialization. Bok (2003) opens his discussion of the costs and benefits of commercialization in higher education by noting that the process begins and ends with the consideration of monetary gain, the primary end of commercial activity: “Commercialization typically begins when someone in the university finds an opportunity to make money” (p. 99). Whether the opportunity involves a research grant, the selling of course credits through distance or online education models, or a deal with an apparel manufacturer, “university officials naturally welcome the prospect of new resources that can help them fund a promising program or close a looming deficit” (ibid.). Once the likelihood of incoming revenue has been determined, “the dominant urge is to figure out how to organize the venture so as to contain the dangers, allow it to go forward and start the money flowing” (ibid.) This resembles nothing more than a retroactive rehabilitation of an opportunity that, in some ways, is ill-suited to

the educative mission, and exposes the pecuniary motive down to its bare bone: when more money is needed, more money is welcomed. The costs of commercialization, as it happens, are far less clear, being “more speculative and intangible than the rewards [...]. More often, they have to do with the elusive world of values, and specifically, with the principles that ought to guide academic pursuits” (pp. 105-106). Bok’s account leads to a functional definition of commercialization in higher education, a process by which financial gains, seen as concrete and necessary, take precedence over abstract values that cannot be tied to monetary concerns.

### **Responses to Corporatization and Commercialization.**

Introducing readers to a book considering the governance of higher education institutions, Tierney (2006) identifies privatization as a major trend, one which shares some core aspects with commercialization. Noting that “individuals increasingly have to shoulder the burden for paying for a college education” (p. 4), Tierney is describing a shift that is not a recent development (Hines, et al., 1989). Nor has the trend abated, a fact reflected in the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association’s 2017 report which shows that a majority of states now rely on tuition dollars more than any other source of funding. In 2016, the share of net tuition was 47.3% (p. 26), down from an all-time high of 48.5% in 2013, but still higher than the 36% share just before the economic collapse in 2008. Despite increases in appropriations in the decade-long recovery since the Great Recession (Table 2, p. 20), the national average on a per-FTE basis is still below pre-recession levels, with some of the lowest figures reported in New Hampshire. Indeed, as an indication of the strategic response to the state’s abysmal funding of public higher education, the University of New Hampshire touts recent record numbers of international, master’s, and professional credential-seeking students, all of whom tend to be full-pay “customers” (Graduate School, 2018). One result of this shift of the cost to individuals and their families is the widening of socioeconomic “schisms

within and between colleges” (Thelin, 2011, p. 392). While the social mobility of graduating students is not the focus here, the search for greater prestige as a function of a concern for commercial viability in a competitive market has drastic implications underscored by the observation that 60% of students at an institution with a \$50,000 annual tuition were not recipients of financial aid because their parents could afford to pay in full (ibid.).

Building on the previous work of Slaughter and Leslie (1997), and anticipating Rhoades (1998), Rhoades and Slaughter (1997) present findings from four cases in order to explicate several phenomena exemplifying a shift in higher education organization, among them being the importation of supply-side economic thinking in higher education. In describing academic capitalism, the authors note a decline in public block grant support starting in the aftermath of the 1973 recession (p. 12), a decline made up through tuition increases but also through increased reliance on private investment and pushes for more entrepreneurial and commercial research and production (pp. 12-13). By the 1990s, corporate methods of cutting personnel costs were already obvious: replacing full-time faculty with part-time, temporary faculty without long-term security (or even short-term security), and the increased use of technology to perform a variety of academic and administrative functions (ibid.). Increased administrative power, in the form of greater flexibility, is evidenced by more prevalent inclusion of retrenchment clauses in contracts, and the increased use of part-time faculty, hired on temporary terms, and given fewer protections (pp.19-20). Accompanying the downturn in the economics, higher education organizations shifted toward funding wealth-producing fields and disciplines: “Indeed, federal funding patterns for university research reflect a supply-side approach, which directs monies to wealth producers, or at least to those fields and units that are perceived as wealth producers” (p. 25). What was once considered “basic” or even “fundamental” research would come to be regarded as “curiosity-driven” – that is,

the rhetoric around core pursuits moved non-revenue-generating knowledge-creation to the margins, a mere curiosity among the more serious, profitable enterprises. The curricular changes attending the financial anxieties effectively place decisions about course offerings, traditionally an element of faculty control (Tierney and Minor, 2003), into the hands of administrators and boards, and also suggest a transformed view of students from seekers of knowledge into future workers, who must be well-trained and, above all, standardized and interchangeable: they must meet the managerial need for flexibility, in other words (Rhoades, 1998).

Gerber's (2014) book provides a thorough historical review of the development of shared governance in American higher education, though my focus is on a chapter covering years from the mid-1970s to the present. One of the trends that plays out during those years is the transformation of the professoriate from a 70% tenured or tenure-track ratio to merely 30%, fundamentally undermining the concept of shared governance: most campuses have no provision for including part-time faculty in governance, least of all at the level of the institution. Even more relevant are the connections Gerber makes between governance institutional response to financial crisis. The opportunity to exploit economic distress leads to various shifts in academic priorities or organization for some campuses or systems, such that faculty access and impact in governance were reduced: "Although it is possible to develop new interdisciplinary structures in which faculty authority is maintained, current attacks on the institution of the academic department threaten to weaken the one administrative unit in which faculty over the last century have come to exercise the greatest degree of control" (p. 9). Gerber also indicates the use of graduate assistants as further risking an erosion of shared governance:

When the increased use of graduate assistants for classroom instruction is also taken into consideration, more than three-quarters of all instructional staff members in 2011 had



appointments off the tenure track and hence fewer protections of their academic freedom and, in most cases, less of a long-term identification with the institution at which they taught. This dramatic change in the nature of the academic profession would have major consequences for faculty involvement in governance. (Gerber, 2014, p. 119)

With a series of “management fads” (Birnbaum, 2000) sweeping into higher education from the world of corporate management, budgeting practices became another way to reorganize and diminish faculty roles in governance: “An AAUP investigating committee found that the SUNY administration ‘clearly administered the retrenchments with a view to reorganization as well as to economy’” (p. 129). One increasingly common response by faculty, most heavily though not exclusively in the community college sector, is to pursue collective bargaining (pp. 131-132), a trend I mention here only as a means to address concerns about shared governance:

AAUP president Fritz Ringer [...] later wrote that professors at BU supported unionization not only to protest the low salaries for non-star faculty members but also ‘to compensate for an unequal balance of power, to reestablish traditional faculty rights of participation in academic governance, and to reassert principles of academic collegiality and peer review that were being ignored by the Silber administration’ (pp. 131-132).

This assertion rebuts a common criticism of faculty unionization as a detriment to professional autonomy and shared governance, and frames the move toward unionizing, especially by those off the tenure track, as a means to recapture some of their professional authority and their sway in governance (p. 124).

The synthesis of commercial interest and corporate structure arrives in its purest form in the for-profit sector, which is growing (NCSL, 2013) amid a see-saw of criticisms (GAO, 2010) and support (Fain, 2018) from the federal government. In that sector, shared governance is not

even pretended, most obviously because the faculty there are almost entirely part-time or at least working without tenure or its possibility, and where curricular offerings lean toward vocational subjects that require less disciplinary review and can be created “by consulting closely with industry representatives” (Bok, 2013, p. 55). Even partnerships between non-profit and for-profit entities, such as Purdue University Global (Reichman, 2018), a result of the public institution’s purchase and assimilation of for-profit behemoth Kaplan, can give at least the impression of a stark move away from principles of shared governance that have been at the core of decision-making in the non-profit sector.

According to recent media release by the American Association of University Professors, it appears that the public non-profit Purdue, at least in part, has been assimilated (or consumed) by the profit engine and its attendant machinery. In the release, Greg Scholtz, AAUP’s Director of the Department of Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Governance, is quoted as saying that Purdue Global’s nondisclosure agreement is “breathtakingly inappropriate in higher education,” and that he’d “never seen anything like it” (AAUP, 2018). The report also quotes David Nalbone, psychology professor at Purdue University Northwest and Vice President of the AAUP’s Indiana chapter: “[I]n just one semester,” he says, “Purdue Global has abandoned transparency, shared governance, and academic freedom, which are foundational tenets of American higher education” (ibid.). Putting a finer point on things, Nalbone noted that “Purdue Global does not consult its own faculty about curriculum and academic standards; tenure and tenure-track appointments are nonexistent; and board of trustees meetings are closed to the public” (ibid.). In this brave new global-facing future, it’s no wonder there’s such hand-wringing over the loss of faculty roles in shared governance, swallowed up as the practice seems to be by those voracious twins, corporatization and commercialization.

## **Catholic Social Teachings on Dignity and Labor**

Catholic Social Teaching (CST), which describes the official teachings of the Church as regards the truth and value of human dignity, clearly calls for the process of faculty unionization to occur without obstruction (Beyer, 2015; Gregory and Russo, 1990), a position the Church has held ever since Pope Leo XIII (1891) justified unions through scripture:

It is better that two should be together than one; for they have the advantage of their society.

If one fall he shall be supported by the other. Woe to him that is alone, for when he falleth he hath none to lift him up. (§50, quoting from *Ecclesiastes*, 4:9-10)

The official, explicit, and unequivocal position pronounced by the Vatican on issues of labor and its collective action has remained unchanged for nearly 130 years; if anything, the position becomes even more crystallized during subsequent papacies (Matheny, 2014). Despite that clear tradition, a recent study found more than a third of Catholic institutions opposed outright recognition of unions when their academic staff attempted to organize (Herbert and van der Naald, 2018), a rate that doesn't account for less overt forms of non-neutral engagement by administrations seeking to dissuade eligible voters. When confronted with the possibility of unionization leaders of religiously-affiliated institutions (e.g., Holtschneider, 2016) have often preferred by secular administrations in the private sector (Elejalde-Ruiz, 2015) and the public sector (Neils, 2017). Catholic colleges and universities that deny organizing rights do so on First Amendment grounds, claiming that any legal requirement to recognize unions is a violation of religious freedom. This interpretation demands that we conclude a university is no different than a church, and that mandatory subjects of bargaining — wages, hours, and working conditions — are fundamentally religious topics beyond the reach of statutory labor protections. From another perspective, it may appear that the similarity in tactic and rhetoric also suggests a core shared

attribute among institutions regardless of affiliation. Milan and Rizk (2018) suggest that, when it comes to marketing and other corporate functions, Catholic institutions of higher education function in a manner largely indistinguishable from their secular counterparts in either the private or public sectors.

Debate over what it means to be a “Catholic” college or university is as old as the idea of the university, iterated most notably by Cardinal Henry Newman in a series of lectures in the middle of the 19th century (as reprinted in Turner, 1996), but continuing to this day in the pages of *Commonweal* (Faggioli, 2017) and *Trusteeship* (Byron, 2011), among other places. The debate over identity has not ebbed over time, as a small selection of articles by Savaterra (1991), Gallin (2000), and Beyer (2015), and Winters (2017) suggest. And as far as identity is mission-driven, it can be said that mission drift or misalignment is also a problem in the public sphere of higher education (Jaquette, et al., 2016). With opinions ranging from distress over secularization, to ambivalence or indecision about the risk or benefits of secularization, to satisfaction over continued operation of religiously-affiliated institutions that accept the benefit of state funding, there is no one perspective that dominates, even 50 years after the important Land O’Lakes statement. O’Brien (1998) observes, though, that “debate about Land O’Lakes has persisted, centering on three issues: academic freedom, institutional autonomy and Catholic presence” (n.p.). I will tend to focus on the latter two here; while not the focus of this particular review, it is worth noting some of the entries in the discourse around academic freedom in a religious higher education context.

“Academic freedom” can be understood as an ideal that guides and protects individual researchers in higher education, but courts have given legal definition to the term as an institutional and not an individual right (*Urofsky v. Gilmore*, 2000; DeMitchell, 2002). In a secular setting, the

argument for the institutional right has to do with effective and efficient operations, a justification not limited to higher education (*Garcetti v. Ceballos*, 2006). Looking specifically at the Catholic setting, Gallin (2000) notes, as does Garcia (2012; 2014), that academic freedom must redound to the institution in order to maintain connections between religious belief and the pursuit of knowledge. A particularly salient distillation of this rationale relies in part on the legacy of a neo-scholastic sense that “there could be no conflict between faith and reason” (Gallin, 2000, p. 196, n. 6), no distinction between religious and scientific truth. Ringenberg (2016a, 2016b) assumes the same kind of academic freedom for religious institutions of higher education in a Protestant context. Even the AAUP, under its 1940 conception of academic freedom allowed for “limitations of academic freedom because of religious or other aims of the institution” so long as the limitations were “clearly stated in writing at the time of the appointment” (AAUP, 1990, p. 3). The effect of this theological primacy and the AAUP carve-out meant that, at least through the 1960s, policy at the institution could and often did place individual rights and disciplinary expertise in a position subservient to Church doctrine.

Brady (2004) also conducts an examination of Catholic teachings on collective bargaining, and makes an argument that “[w]hile the NLRA presumes and perpetuates an adversarial relationship between workers and management, Catholic teaching encourages relations that are more cooperative and collaborative and, indeed, reflect ideals of love and mutual concern rather than distrust and self-interest” (p. 80). Echoing the commonly stated preference by Catholic institutions that negotiation occur between administration and faculty who are all part of the same “community of faith” (see also Nelson, 2017), what this argument seems to overlook is that the very purpose of the NLRA is to offer a mechanism to balance the existing collective power of the

corporate body of an employer with the possibility of a collective body of employees, whose power and leverage are insignificant compared with that corporate body.

Gleason (1992) provides a useful history of Catholic higher education between 1940-1990, noting in the 60s and 70s an accelerated de-emphasis on “Catholic identity” due to Vatican directives and market share concerns in an ever more competitive field of colleges and universities of all different types and missions. Gleason identifies as key factors the Vatican urging closer ties with the broader world, on the one hand, and on the other hand the declines in the number of Catholics as a percent of total student enrollment (pp. 247-248). What is odd is that Gleason makes no specific mention of the Land O’Lakes Statement that seems to loom so large in most other accounts. Marsden (1996), writing about the issue of Catholic higher education laments the transformation of the idea of the university from a place in which “universal” religious truths held the center of knowledge together into a place in which disciplines applied fragmented perspectives to narrowing scopes of expertise – and often without regard or apparent need for the connective (“universal”) influence or direction of theology or even philosophy.

Gallin (2000) notes the impact of the Vatican II focus on *aggiornamento* on the laicization that would occur across boards of trustees, ranks in the administration, and faculty. Though making a distinction between laicization and secularization (a derogatory term in some circles), Gallin writes: “the predominance of lay men and women in the college’s internal constituency meant that the relationship of the college to the church no longer had a clear canonical character as an apostolic work of a religious community” (p. 112). Gallin claims that “after 1967 almost all institutions had a significant number, often a majority, of lay trustees” (p. 111), and that by 1979 77% of Catholic colleges and universities had adopted independent boards (p. 119). In other words, there is a distinct difference between the pastoral mission of the church, previously exercised by

Bishop-controlled and order-dominated boards, and the newly “worldly” colleges and universities under lay control.

Flanagan (2011) construes the impulse and meaning of *aggiornamento*, the idea of “updating” so central to the reforms coming out of the Catholic Church’s Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965, as distinctly self-conscious and almost opportunistic:

In an effort to be relevant in a quickly evolving world, this elderly pontiff summoned bishops and representative leaders of other faiths to engage in an updating process or “aggiornamento,” as it has come to be known, and respond to the “signs of the times” (p. 210)

Nelson (2017), in a dissertation that considers the perspectives of senior administrators on collective bargaining at their Catholic-affiliated institutions, pinpoints the motivation for many of the deliberations and pronouncements from the Vatican since the 1960s when a policy of *aggiornamento* directed the Church and its teachings toward the world at large: “that the Church’s credibility was at stake if it did not serve as a model for its own teachings on justice” (p. 51). In light of this apparent motive, the purpose of this review of literature is to consider the intersection of three major concerns: labor rights as espoused by CST for more than 125 years; the debate over “Catholic identity” on campuses that function autonomously from the Church; and the status of Catholic higher education in the American legal context. In §II, I consider several papal documents that embody the now quasiquicentennial labor-positive teachings of the Catholic Church from *Rerum Novarum* (1891) through *Laudato Si’* (2015). In §III, I summarize concerns over “Catholic identity” in the context and aftermath of the Second Vatican Council of 1962-65 and subsequent specifically to the Land O’Lakes statement of 1967 that transferred governance into the hands of laypersons at a vast majority of Catholic colleges and universities. In §IV, I consider the ways the

American legal system has approached religious and religiously-affiliated institutions of higher education, and offer thoughts about attempts by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to assert jurisdiction over collective bargaining efforts on religiously-affiliated campuses; in so doing, I continue to address issues of institutional organization and governance raised in the previous section. In §V, I offer a synthesis of the three previous sections and put forth a normative claim about how Catholic institutions of higher education ought to approach faculty labor issues according to Church teachings, in line with Catholic identity, and according to a proper interpretation of the legal status of those institutions.

### ***Rerum Novarum (1891)***

Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), establishes an explicitly labor-positive tradition of Roman Catholic Church, reinforced by Paul VI's *Gaudium et Spes* (1965, no. 68), John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens* (1981, no. 20) and *Centesimus Annus* (1991, no. 7), Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate* (2009, no. 25), and Francis I's *Laudato si'* (2015), as well as reports from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (and previous iterations), including *Bishops' program for social reconstruction* (1919), *Economic Justice for All* (1986) and *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (2007). The tradition of CST (Russo, 2014; Beyer, 2015; Beyer and Carroll, 2016) clearly insists on “a dictate of natural justice more imperious and ancient than any bargain between man and man, namely, that wages ought not to be insufficient to support a frugal and well-behaved wage-earner” (*Rerum Novarum*, no. 45). Even more specifically germane to the issue of collective bargaining and the legal landscape described above, the Vatican sources cited in this subsection follow upon and reiterate the claim made by Leo XIII, that of all the types of “associations and organizations as afford opportune aid to those who are in distress” (no. 48), “the most important of all are workingmen's unions” (no. 49). He adds that such



association is “the natural right of man” (no. 51), and that to forbid such association contradicts the roles and purposes of both the State and the Church. The Vatican’s *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* is very clear about “the fundamental role played by labor unions, whose existence is connected with the right to form associations or unions, to defend the vital interests of workers employed in the various professions (par. 305, as cited in Russo, 2014, p. 19).

This encyclical from Pope Leo XIII establishes what has become a bedrock principle of CST, which is the human right to freely associate, or unionize, for the betterment of the whole and the individuals who compose it. While there is language in the pronouncement that suggest Leo XIII also had a goal of preventing the spread of communism and state atheism, in part through the endorsement of be workers’ associations that centered their communities on religious faith – “It is clear that they must pay special and chief attention to the duties of religion and morality” (para. 57) – the broader point being made is that the faith requires outreach to the working poor and uplift of the entire community through collective action that balances employers’ and employees’ needs. We see this point iterated in various ways, including as a warning about giving too much economic power to the already wealthy and powerful (para. 47), as a word of praise for Catholics who endeavor “to infuse a spirit of equity into the mutual relations of employers and employed” (para. 55), and as “a general and lasting law” that the purpose of labor associations should be “helping each individual member to better his condition to the utmost of body, soul, and property” (para. 57). The argument finds its most complete form in this succinct encapsulation of the complex balancing act required to validate the interests *and* liberties of employers *and* employees:

Let the working man and the employer make free agreements, and in particular let them agree freely as to the wages; nevertheless, there underlies a dictate of natural justice more imperious and ancient than any bargain between man and man, namely, that wages ought

not to be insufficient to support a frugal and well-behaved wage-earner. If through necessity or fear of a worse evil the workman accept harder conditions because an employer or contractor will afford him no better, he is made the victim of force and injustice. (para. 45)

### ***Gaudium et Spes (1965)***

In some respects, this encyclical from Pope Paul VI (1965) represents a continuation of the position on labor expressed in *Rerum Novarum*, which is to say that Paul VI was concerned with problems of exploitation and disparity, and “promoted a more just economically and socially balanced world where every individual had the opportunity to meet his or her full potential” (Nelson, 2017, p. 46). Of particular value to this review of literature is Part II, Chapter III, “Economic and Social Life,” in which Paul VI writes that “[a]mong the basic rights of the human person is to be numbered the right of freely founding unions for working people,” in which “the active sharing of all in the administration and profits of these enterprises in ways to be properly determined is to be promoted” (para. 68). Similar to calls from the 1919 Bishops’ document, Paul VI is arguing not only that rights to organize be recognized, but that labor have some say in the decision-making processes; he even argues for the right to strike, though suggests such action should be a final recourse only:

When, however, socio-economic disputes arise, efforts must be made to come to a peaceful settlement. Although recourse must always be had first to a sincere dialogue between the parties, a strike, nevertheless, can remain even in present-day circumstances a necessary, though ultimate, aid for the defense of the workers’ own rights and fulfillment of their just desires. (para. 68)

### ***Laborem Exercens (1986)***

Pope John Paul II echoes Leo XIII in admitting the right to private property should be defended, and must have had in mind the socio-political realities of the day, when struggles between capitalist and communist countries were at a peak leading up to the fall of the Soviet Union. John Paul II also echoes Paul VI, who declared in *Populorum Progressio* (1967) that “the right to private property is not absolute and unconditional” (para. 23), and also in reiterating the Church stance that “workers should be assured the right to strike, without being subjected to personal penal sanctions for taking part in a strike,” which is “recognized by Catholic social teaching as legitimate in the proper conditions and within just limits” (§ 20). The entire basis of this regard for workers’ rights is the recognition of the link between work and dignity, namely that “life is built up every day from work, from work it derives its specific dignity” (§ 1). John Paul II clarifies, as well, that human dignity does not inhere more or less depending on the class or job of the worker, noting that “history teaches that organizations of this type are an indispensable element of social life, especially in modern industrialized societies [...though...] representatives of every profession can use them to ensure their own rights” (§ 20). The importance of this observation is that it extends teachings on labor and unions to professionals and other white-collar workers, too.

### ***Centesimus Annus (1991)***

Written to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum*, Pope John Paul II’s *Centesimus Annus* holds up the older document as alive and well and just as applicable to the economic situation of the late 20th Century as it was to the end of the 19th when it was written. Among the “old” ideas that hold up, John Paul II identifies

the fruitful activity of many millions of people, who, spurred on by the social Magisterium, have sought to make that teaching the inspiration for their involvement in the world. Acting

either as individuals or joined together in various groups, associations and organizations, these people represent a great movement for the defence of the human person and the safeguarding of human dignity. (§ 3)

And, much closer to the end of the encyclical, John Paul II explains the risk of espousing one principle and failing to enact it, writing that “the Church is aware that her social message will gain credibility more immediately from the witness of actions than as a result of its internal logic and consistency” (§ 57). This bears particular resonance to my research, which suggests that the actions of Catholic institutions of higher education with regard to campus labor speak louder than any mission or marketing statements.

### ***Laudato Si’ (2015)***

As has been noted by others (e.g., Faggioli, 2017), Pope Francis is not *merely* concerned with protecting the natural world in an ecological sense when he writes of the “care for our common home” in *Laudato Si’*: “Any approach to an integral ecology, which by definition does not exclude human beings, needs to take account of the value of labour, as Saint John Paul II wisely noted in his Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*” (Francis, 2015, para. 124). Given the dual responsibilities of keeping (protecting) and tilling (working) the land, humanity inherits duties of stewardship that must be addressed to the land but also to the human labor of its maintenance: “Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment. Helping the poor financially must always be a provisional solution in the face of pressing needs. The broader objective should always be to allow them a dignified life through work” (para. 128).

### ***Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction (1919)***

Following the devastation of World War I, with soldiers returning to America in search of jobs and housing, the National Catholic Welfare Council (NCWC) proposed a series of recommendations (Ryan, 1919) that would transform the wartime economy in ways that would decrease social inequities. Just as Pope Leo XIII was writing in a context of increasing wealth disparities and political movements arguing for greater state control of the economy, the NCWC was straddling a position that both looked to stem the spread of socialism, which it saw in the radical transformations espoused by the British Labor Party, and the unbridled industrialism that was already leading to great poverty in the lower ranks of the working class and unimaginable wealth in the hands of the owners of monopolies. In summary, the NCWC argued for a permanent labor board to continue the National War Labor Board's work of monitoring wages, enforcing the right of individuals to organize unions, and the right not to join; urged that wages be kept at the same levels as during the war, or at least not lowered; championed the development of housing for workers; called for de-inflationary actions by the government as well as co-operative stores to account for and reverse the rapid rise of the cost of living during wartime; called for funding of what we now would call disability insurance or workers compensation; and argued that labor should have greater say in industrial management. Ultimately, Ryan (1919) finds three major flaws in the economic system of the day: "Enormous inefficiency and waste in production and distribution of commodities; insufficient incomes for the great majority of wage-earners; and unnecessarily large incomes for a small minority of privileged capitalists" (p. 19).

### ***Economic Justice for All (1986)***

Describing the purpose of this pastoral letter from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (1986), the authors make clear the links between religious teachings and the working lives

of people: “Like family life, economic life is one of the chief areas where we live out our faith, love our neighbor, confront temptation, fulfill God’s creative design, and achieve our holiness” (pp. vi-vii). The USCCB makes clear that the letter follows in the tradition of the Second Vatican Council, by then two decades in the past, noting the instruction “to preach the message of Christ in such a way that the light of the Gospel will shine on all activities of the faithful” (p. vii, citing *Pastoral Constitution*, no. 43); they also make clear that the tradition of concern and action for the poor is “as old the Hebrew prophets, as compelling as the Sermon on the Mount, and as current as the powerful voice of Pope John Paul II defending the dignity of the human person” (p. vii), and which teaches that “we can best measure our life together by how the poor and the vulnerable are treated” (ibid.). The letter is guided by six explicitly stated principles, all of which spring from the basic understandings that we all share the quality of human dignity, that this quality is multiplied through community, and that no economy can be judged to be good that does not do good for and to the people it serves, and which does not allow those people to participate (p. viii). While positioning the letter as a document of faith, and not as an economic blueprint, the authors frequently comment on the abuses of a free market, and write unequivocally that “labor unions help workers resist exploitation” (p. 2) in that market system. While the authors outline “some of the duties of labor unions and business and financial enterprises” (p. 27), they also urge that “these must be supplemented by initiatives by local community groups, professional associations, educational institutions, churches, and synagogues” (ibid.). Ultimately, the Bishops conclude that “all the groups that give life to this society have important roles to play in the pursuit of economic justice” (ibid.).

### *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship (2015)*

Building on the four basic principles of CST – “the dignity of the human person, . . . the common good; subsidiarity; and solidarity” (USCCB, 2017, p. 20) – this statement from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops “lifts up our dual heritage as both faithful Catholics and American citizens with rights and duties as participants in the civil order” (p. 6). If the 1986 pastoral letter was focused on economic life, this letter is focused on the formation of ethically-founded positions in the context of political elections. The Bishops pose four guiding questions that highlight this focus on civic engagement:

1. Why does the Church teach about issues affecting public policy?
2. Who in the Church should participate in political life?
3. How does the Church help the Catholic faithful to speak about political and social questions?
4. What does the Church say about Catholic social teaching in the public square? (p. 10)

The four principles of human dignity, the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity, when taken together and not in isolation, provide a broad guideline that applies to the field of labor relations, and ties “work” to the greater purposes of the Church:

Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God’s creation. Employers contribute to the common good through the services or products they provide and by creating jobs that uphold the dignity and rights of workers—to productive work, to decent and just wages, to adequate benefits and security in their old age, to the choice of whether to organize and join unions, to the opportunity for legal status for immigrant workers, to private property, and to economic initiative. (p. 23)

The linkage to participation in creation will be familiar to anyone reading the papal documents described above, but most closely follows the faith and reasoning of Pope John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens*.

### ***The Land O'Lakes Statement (1967)***

In the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council's pronouncement regarding *aggiornamento*, President of the University of Notre Dame Theodore M. Heshburgh convened a group of Catholic higher education leaders to debate over the conclusions of the Vatican; in the end they produced the Land O'Lakes Statement. The Statement generated debate over Catholic mission, identity, and control in higher education, and that debate continues to this day—the 50th anniversary of the document saw several appraisals of varied conclusions. Jenkins (2017), summarizes:

Criticism of the Lakes statement has in essence been that, whether for craven motives (such as desire for academic prestige or government funding) or simple naïveté, its authors set Catholic universities on a course toward the diminishment of a robust and distinctive Catholic character. (Jenkins, 2017, p. 30)

It has been argued (Jenkins, 2017, p. 30) that what is at issue in the Statement can be boiled down to one sentence: “To perform its teaching and research functions effectively the Catholic university must have a true autonomy and academic freedom in the face of authority of whatever kind, lay or clerical, external to the academic community itself” (Land O'Lakes Statement, reprinted in Gallin, 2000, p.7).

### ***Ex Corde Ecclesiae (1990)***

In contrast to the focus of *Sapientia Christiana* (John Paul II, 1979), which proposed norms for “the task of preparing with special care students for the priestly ministry, for teaching the sacred



sciences, and for the more arduous tasks of the apostolate” (Foreword, III), the focus of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (John Paul II, 1990) is on the broader segment of Catholic higher education that includes all non-seminary colleges and universities where secular education is the primary function. And it can be seen as a redirection after two decades of *aggiornamento*, pushing back on notions of institutional autonomy and academic freedom as a means of refining the meaning of a “Catholic” identity in higher education. One of the practical outcomes of *Ex Corde* was the implementation of an application process to be recognized by the Holy See, to be confirmed, in a sense, as Catholic. Defining “the Nature of a Catholic University,” John Paul II (1990, § II Article 2) listed five essential elements (paraphrased here for brevity):

1. A Catholic university, like any other, “is dedicated to research, to teaching, and to various kinds of service in accordance with its cultural mission.”
2. A Catholic university carries out the above functions “with Catholic ideals, principle and attitudes” and is tied to the Church in some cases by “formal, constitutive and statutory bond.”
3. A Catholic university will “make known its Catholic identity, either in a mission statement or in some other appropriate public document.”
4. A Catholic university’s activities are to be influenced by Catholic teaching and discipline, and yet the “freedom of conscience of each person is to be fully respected.”
5. A Catholic university “possesses the autonomy necessary to develop its distinctive identity and pursue its proper mission.”

Perhaps intended as a clarification after the “open doors” of *aggiornamento*, *Ex Corde* did garner criticisms for its confusing principles, which seem sometimes at odds with Land O’Lakes and

Vatican II, and sometimes at odds internally, too; some of the flak has been addressed (and dressed down) by Mirus (2011), who summarizes the conservative position thusly:

A number of Catholic colleges and universities which had somewhat gleefully downgraded their Catholic identity during the heyday of secularist euphoria in the 1960's and 1970's have since begun to take seriously their need to restore that identity, especially since the promulgation of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. The Cardinal Newman Society monitors these developments, reports on them, and maintains a slowly growing list of institutions it thinks have gotten their identities back. (n.p.)

In a sense, and in this light, the intended purpose of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* could be said to close the door to the world just enough, to adjourn the *aggiornamento* for the sake of reclaiming a place of primacy for Catholicism in Catholic higher education.

And so, debate about what it means to be a Catholic institution of higher education continues, with some seeing no future as “Catholic” for the secularized and some seeing no future for Catholic higher education without those moves toward the secular world. The first big swing in the Church's modern identity crisis came in the 60s and 70s, when many institutions laicized for reasons linked to funding and enrollment, and for reasons linked to pontifical guidance; the next big swing, which seems not to have outdone or undone the first, came in the late 80s and 90s, when the Vatican attempted to reassert a bit of its authority over an erstwhile independent set of institutions. The question is not whether times have changed, but what the signs mean. As Marsden (1996) suggests, whatever the state of debate over identity, it is probable that Newman either would not recognize or would not approve of the state of Catholic higher education, which has, perhaps inarguably, separated its “universal” knowledge into discrete disciplines that do not allow for full comprehension of the whole. MacIntyre (2001) concurs, seeing the work of Catholic universities

as necessarily integrative, placing all knowledge into universal context through revealed truths of the religious faith: “In Catholic universities this integrative task is understood as having an essential theological dimension” (p. 2). These two visions of Newman suggest that the capitulation to worldly concerns (enrollments, finances) is a surrender of the divine, unifying mission of religious education.

### **Synthesis of Literatures**

What we find in the middle of the intersection of literatures describing contingency in higher education, the industry’s shift toward corporate organization, and the labor focus of CST, are “implicit ambiguities, tensions, and even conflicts” (Ingram, 2003, p. 18). The prevalent conditions for adjunct employment, including low wages, lack of benefits and security, little or no say in governance issues, and administrations’ campaigns against unionization when elections arise, all indicate a shift in higher education toward a corporate style of organization heavily reliant on contingent faculty. That shift includes many Catholic Church-affiliated institutions, despite the clarion call and calling in CST to honor individual dignity and collective action. The discrepancy between Church teachings and behavior is not a new observation; Martin Luther (in)famously affixed his *Ninety-five Theses* to the door of All Saints Church in Wittenberg in 1517 to explain his sense that Rome was not living up to its own high moral bar because of its peddling of indulgences, a pay-to-be-saved scheme he could not square with the Gospel (Wengert, 2015).

Ingram would have readers believe that “officers of our judicial system and those involved in *The Application of Ex Corde Ecclesiae to the United States* understand that canonical precepts must give way to civil laws” (ibid.). This understanding seems not to have reached the benches of the highest US federal courts or the offices of many campus administrations, where the status quo is that faculty at Catholic and otherwise religiously-affiliated colleges and universities cannot

count on the federal government to protect their labor rights (*Duquesne University v. NLRB*, 2020), despite “the [National Labor Relations] Act’s language, its legislative history, and this Court’s precedents” (*Catholic Bishop*, Justice Brennan dissenting, 1979, at 508), not to mention all those Papal pronouncements over the years. Long-held traditions aside, Catholic college and university administrations frequently conduct business during labor organizing drives (e.g., Boston College, 2017; *Duquesne v. NLRB*, 2020; Holtschneider, 2016; McCauley, 2016; *Saint Xavier*, 2016; *Seattle University*, 2016) in ways indistinguishable from secular peers (e.g., Dai, 2015; Neils, 2017). In this, they are behaving as Argyris and Schön (1996) might expect, given that the espousal and the theory-in-use are not aligned.

Despite a very long and unbroken tradition of favoring collective action and supporting unionization for the betterment of labor conditions and doing so for the sake of laborers’ dignity, many Catholic Church-affiliated colleges and universities seem especially ready to hamper faculty efforts to organize, and to do so by prioritizing Constitutional protections above Church teachings.

### **CHAPTER III. Theorizing Dignity**

I was asked during my proposal defense why I was focusing on workplace dignity rather than satisfaction, the latter of which would open up an extensive literature on the topic of job satisfaction going back at least as far as Herzberg (1966/1973). My initial reply was that I thought of my inquiry as grounded in individual experience of a quasi-spiritual phenomenon, and that satisfaction would not provide that grounding. There are enough texts on faculty job satisfaction, and adjunct faculty job satisfaction more specifically, that I could organize a fourth element of the literature reviewed for this dissertation and fashion a survey instrument or interview protocol from the vast array of readily available and already validated iterations. This chapter explains why I have chosen not to do so, and also describes the working theory of dignity behind this dissertation.

I begin with comment on some of what is available regarding faculty job satisfaction in order to differentiate it from dignity and provide a rationale for my chosen focus. One relevant and impressive example in the literature of faculty job satisfaction is the ongoing Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education hosted by Harvard University's Graduate School of Education (COACHE, 2019). The program has administered faculty job satisfaction surveys at two- and four-year institutions for about fifteen years now, producing occasional reports that catalog themes of job satisfaction including the nature of work, resources and support, leadership, governance, and so on (COACHE, 2019). In addition to those reports, dozens of publications have been produced using COACHE data that focus on the impacts of race (Lawrence, et al., 2014; Trower, 2009), gender (Bouvier, 2013; Webber & Rogers, 2018), and institutional type (Webber, 2018) on job satisfaction, offering comparisons between ladder-rank and full-time non-tenure-track faculty satisfaction (Ott & Cisneros, 2015) and between disciplines (Bouvier, 2013) and even generations (McCullough, 2013; Perry, 2013; Trower, 2008). Rich as these sources are, and

informative for the purposes of identifying current practice and recommending change, they are all focused on tenured, tenure-track, and full-time non-tenure-track faculty, one of the stark limitations of the COACHE data being that it has not (yet) included part-time faculty in its survey instruments.

In addition to the COACHE-derived studies, there are also a number of recent peer-reviewed articles, books, and dissertations that center on the topic of adjunct faculty job satisfaction, some of which consider adjunct satisfaction in a community college system (Ferguson, 2015; Nagle, 2016; Pearch & Marutz, 2005; Williams, 2013), in an online environment (Ferguson, 2015; Hensley, 2015; Ruiz Avila, 2015; Satterlee, 2008), in a for-profit context (Barnett, 2017), and others that center administrative priorities such as compliance, loyalty, retention, and strategy as far as they are impacted by adjunct faculty job satisfaction (Baron-Nixon & Hecht, 2007; Couch, 2014; Hoyt, 2012; Hunnicutt, 2018; Nanna, 2018; Pearch & Marutz, 2005; Pete, 2016; Trower, 2012).

My answer to the question about why I am not pursuing a study of adjunct faculty job satisfaction, then, is partly that quantified and aggregated responses would not get down to the level of individual experience the way I thought my study would need to do in order to answer the research question, which asks about individuals' experience of a particular phenomenon. Even asking adjunct faculty to describe their levels of job satisfaction in open-ended interviews would still miss the main purpose of the inquiry, which is to determine the experience of a phenomenon that has more spiritual resonance than I felt mere satisfaction described. While definitions of satisfaction include the emotional senses of contentedness or gratification, they also center the more transactional sense of carrying out an obligation; in other words, meeting a bare minimum. As a comparison, consider the triggering of a chemical reaction, which can only be achieved by

*satisfying* the minimal activation energy required by a formula and putting a transformation in motion; in the labor relations or workplace context, chemicals would be replaced by wages, benefits, and working conditions, a *satisfying* amount of which would transform a dissatisfied worker into something else. However, couched as it often is in terms of management goals, often *as required* by market comparisons or benchmarks (e.g., for wages paid) or even statutes (e.g., for benefits offered or provided), the concept of job satisfaction has not seemed to me to be as relevant to my inquiry as the concept of dignity, which has a firm place in both Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and in the secular sociology of work. With those two sources in mind, I offer in this section a more complete response to the question of why I chose to focus on dignity and not satisfaction, and I rely, first, on CST and that tradition's embedded sense of respect for inherent human dignity and moral concern for the promotion of human dignity at work; I rely, as well, on secular sociology of the workplace, which indicates a clear connection to satisfaction but also assigns a separate and deeper meaning and importance to dignity.

### ***A Catholic Sense of Workplace Dignity***

Sison, et al. (2016), pose a useful question to guide this brief review of the Catholic sense of human dignity: “What specific contributions could CST make to the understanding of human dignity and the dignity of work?” (p. 504). Among other meanings, dignity in the context of CST “refers to the intrinsic worth or value of every human being that distinguishes him from any other creature. This worth or value is often associated with the capacity for reason and autonomy or ‘self-determination’ through free choice” (Sison, et al., 2016, p. 506, paraphrasing Paul VI, 1965, *Gaudium et Spes*, nos. 15-17). In the review of literature in Chapter II, I quoted from the foundational document of the Papal sense of dignity in labor, *Rerum Novarum* (1891), which insists on “a dictate of natural justice more imperious and ancient than any bargain between man

and man” (no. 45). From this point onward the tradition of CST is unequivocal with regard to the centrality of dignity to church teachings and is just as unequivocal about the central spirituality of dignity. In modern times, since the passage in the 1930s of the first federal laws governing collective bargaining in the private sector, through the rise of higher education faculty organizing in the 1970s, not to mention the reimagining by the Catholic Church in the late 1960s of its role in and with the world, the centrality and spirituality of dignity have only been reinforced: “As Huntington (1991) observed, after the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church became one of the strongest champions of human dignity, human rights and democracy worldwide” (Sison, et al., 2016, p. 503). John XXIII, we are reminded, established human dignity as the “one basic principle” of CST: “individual human beings are the foundation, the cause and the end of every social institution” (Sison, et al., 2016, p. 506, quoting *Mater et Magistra*, 1961, nos. 219-220).

Adding to this certainty about the foundational aspect of dignity, the Popes also have a lot to say about its indelibility. John XXIII (1963) suggests that even the starkest ethical lapses cannot separate a person from their dignity:

It is always perfectly justifiable to distinguish between error as such and the person who falls into error—even in the case of men who err regarding the truth or are led astray as a result of their inadequate knowledge, in matters either of religion or of the highest ethical standards. A man who has fallen into error does not cease to be a man. He never forfeits his personal dignity; and that is something that must always be taken into account. (*Pacem in Terris*, no. 158)

Even in the face of inevitable human fallibility, Paul VI (1965) reinforces the difference between moral fault and forfeiture of dignity, writing that “it is necessary to distinguish between error, which always merits repudiation, and the person in error, who never loses the dignity of being a



person” (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 28). However, “[a]lthough basic dignity cannot be lost, nevertheless, it should be developed. And not everyone achieves this nor achieves it to the same degree, because it depends on free choices and actions” (Sison et al., 2016, p. 509, citing Ferrero & Sison, 2014). This development, again according to Paul VI (1965), involves individual responsibility and autonomy: “Hence man’s dignity demands that he act according to a knowing and free choice that is personally motivated and prompted from within, not under blind internal impulse nor by mere external pressure” (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 17). But society also plays a role, in that “[h]uman institutions, both private and public, must labor to minister to the dignity and purpose of man” (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 29).

In a sense, the workplace is one site common across human experience where these social and individual responsibilities join together to *develop* dignity, regardless of the type of work or nature of employment. As Sison, et al. (2016) put it, “early Christian thinkers known as the Church Fathers [...] did not share the belief that work was an ‘*opus servile*’ (servile act); rather, it was as an ‘*opus humanum*’ (human act) worthy of honor” (p. 512, citing Pontifical Council, 2004). John Paul II (1981) agrees that there is something about the nature of work, the toil of it, that is honorable and that enhances the dignity of the worker:

...in spite of all this toil—perhaps, in a sense, because of it—work is a good thing for man. Even though it bears the mark of a *bonum arduum* [arduous good], in the terminology of Saint Thomas, this does not take away the fact that, as such, it is a good thing for man. It is not only good in the sense that it is useful or something to enjoy; it is also good as being something worthy, that is to say, something that corresponds to man’s dignity, that expresses this dignity and increases it. If one wishes to define more clearly the ethical meaning of work, it is this truth that one must particularly keep in mind. Work is a good

thing for man—a good thing for his humanity—because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes “more a human being.” (*Laborem Exercens*, no. 9)

This last point is crucial: that work not only enhances dignity, but also human being-ness. This, I think, helps clarify why, when inquiring into the workplace experiences of adjunct faculty, especially but not only at a Catholic Church-affiliated university, it does not serve to focus on job satisfaction; to approach the values of the CST, satisfaction misses the mark.

### *A Secular Sense of Workplace Dignity*

Springing as it does from the Catholic Church’s own social teachings on labor, my interest in the experiences of adjunct faculty in a Catholic-affiliated setting now seems, in retrospect, to have always been about dignity rather than strictly about labor law, metrics like job satisfaction, or the faculty labor market. Regardless of religious affiliation or its lack, dignity has a foundational place in theories about work and the individuals doing it, as Budd (2004) observes: “Religious views on the sanctity of human life and respect for human dignity often closely resemble secular ethical conceptions of human dignity” (p. 21). And the namesake of the first permanent federal labor relations law, Sen. Robert F. Wagner, had this to say shortly after the Supreme Court validated the law’s constitutionality in *NLRB v. Johnson & Laughlin Steel Corporation* (1937): “Let men [sic] know the dignity of freedom and self-expression in their daily lives, and they will never bow to tyranny in any quarter of their national life” (Millis and Brown, 1950, p. 3, citing *New York Times Magazine*, May 9, 1937, p. 23). If dignity encompasses the dictate of the higher power governing the Church, it is also the animating force behind the democratic processes that were the purpose and mission of labor relations in the wake of the National Labor Relations Act (1935), popularly known as the Wagner Act.

These issues span religious and secular theories of workplace economics and ethics, too, as Budd (2004) notes when discussing the Catholic Church doctrine regarding labor and capital:

[The Catholic Church] roots this doctrine in the belief that labor markets fall short of the theoretical ideal of economics textbooks[...]. Consequently, employers and employees, capital and labor, are not equals, and unregulated market-based outcomes will favor employers at the expense of employees with the potential for abuse. (p. 3)

Given these assumptions about the asymmetry in the relationship between employers and those they employ, the argument Budd (2004) puts forth in his book is that the “traditional industrial relations dyad of ‘efficiency and equity’ should be replaced by the triad of ‘efficiency, equity, and voice’ as the central employment relationship objectives” (pp. 14-15). According to Budd efficiency refers to the “effective use of scarce resources” (p. 15), equity to “a set of fair employment standards covering both material outcomes and personal treatment that respect human dignity and liberty” (p. 18), and voice to “the ability to have *meaningful* input into decisions” (p. 23, emphasis in original).<sup>6</sup> The importance of voice to this expanded sense of labor-management relations is that it encourages self-determination or autonomy such that employees may effectively participate in workplace democracy.

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<sup>6</sup> Compare this sense of “meaningful input” to the standard established in *NLRB v. Bell Aerospace Company* (1974) and applied to faculty in *NLRB v. Yeshiva University* (1980) in order to determine whether or not faculty serve as managerial employees, defined as those who “‘formulate and effectuate management policies by expressing and making operative the decisions of their employer’” (*Bell Aerospace*, 288 (quoting *Palace Laundry Dry Cleaning Corp.*, 75 N.L.R.B. 320, 323, n. 4 (1947))). Following this, managerial employees are those who “effectively control or implement employer policy” (*Yeshiva*, 683); in Budd’s terms this is the *meaningful* participation “voice” describes.

Other than the difficulty of maintaining confidentiality for participants to this study (given the small number of unionized faculties at Catholic-affiliated campuses), one of the reasons I decided to investigate a cohort of non-unionized adjunct faculty, for whom access to workplace democracy is limited or non-existent, is because the literature suggests that the absence of a collective bargaining agreement governing working conditions through due process assurances will likely result in increased violations of dignity:

Unions have played a leading role in helping workers resist abuse (Juravich & Bronfenbrenner, 1999). Along with higher wages and better benefits, protection from arbitrary management actions has been a central concern for trade unions. Unions protect workers from abuse through providing grievance procedures and through acting as ombudsmen for employees. (Hodson, 2001, p. 102)

What has been sought in union contracts may seem to be material, so-called “bread and butter” concerns, but in the absence of union protections, many part-time or temporary faculty employees find themselves facing the same kinds of challenges apparent across industries: “One of the continuing challenges to dignity and well-being for workers in contemporary society is to find full-time, nonmarginal employment. Various forms of contingent, marginal, and part-time employment have become prevalent across many industrialized nations” (Hodson, 2001, p. 103, citing Freeman, 1994).

After helping to answer the question of dignity’s place in CST and as a religious concern, Sison, et al. (2016) pose another useful question that might also guide a review of the secular sense of both human dignity and workplace dignity: “What is their value in a largely secular and democratic society and for people who do not adhere to the Catholic credo?” (p. 504). One of the basic understandings conveyed in the article by Sison, et al., is that one need not be a practicing

Catholic, or even agree with any of the religious tenets of the Catholic Church—“belief in a Transcendent Being” (p. 507) for instance—in order to agree to some of its positions on human dignity. The publication of an article on the CST foundations of workplace dignity in a secular journal of business ethics reinforces the sense that certain “secular warrants,” or “reasons accessible to non-religious persons” (ibid.), may be seen as overlapping with the Catholic assumption that God is divine, that God created humanity in His image, and that, therefore, humanity is inherently dignified. According to Catholic faith-based reasoning, “human beings are capable of entering into a unique personal relationship with God” (p. 508); however, Sison, et al., note that we may also “find ‘secular warrants’ of this relational aspect of dignity and personhood in the Aristotelian account of human nature as a ‘social’ or ‘political animal,’ a ‘rational animal’” (p. 507, citing Aristotle, 1988, 1253a). It is possible, then, to consider the foundational relation of dignity to human life, including workplace experience, without recourse to the concept of *imago Dei*, which holds that “all human beings are made in God’s image and likeness” (p. 505).

Considering the increased reliance on part-time and temporary employees, a transformation of work and the workplace that has been established in higher education context (see Chapter II section on contingency in higher education) and that is also apparent across industries (e.g., House Committee on Small Business, 2018; Weil, 2014), it is important to note the broad consensus about what people want from their workplace, which appears unchanged despite the gig-ification of many forms of employment. Dispelling the notion that all young(er) workers are happy to freelance for their pay, Manjoo (2016) reports on findings that “there’s no difference at all between this new generation of workers and [older generations]” (n.p.). In fact, despite generational shifts in all kinds of cultural expectations, the so-called Millennial Generation wants the same thing their parents and grandparents wanted. Manjoo quotes an executive from

Google, a company “famous for collecting and analyzing data about its work force to empirically back up its management techniques”: “Every single human being wants the same thing in the workplace—we want to be treated with respect, we want to have a sense of meaning and agency and impact, and we want our boss to just leave us alone so we can get our work done” (n.p.). In other words, regardless of the job (or gig) description, we all seek work that recognizes our inherent dignity and offers us opportunities to enhance it.

Offering another view on dignity that looks beyond mere job satisfaction, Santoro (2018) writes instead of teacher demoralization in the K-12 arena, arguing that “the diagnosis of demoralization characterizes the problem as a value conflict experienced as a result of policies, mandates, and school practices” (p. 13). When demoralization occurs, Santoro says it is important to recognize that this is not because the teacher has failed; it is rather the case that “[i]n demoralization, experienced educators understand that they are facing a conflict between their vision of good work and their teaching context. The values that teachers bring to the work (serving students and their communities, upholding the dignity of the profession) are still worthwhile, but are being thwarted by the conditions in which they work” (ibid.). Clearly, the concept of demoralization has a deeper relevancy to dignity than whether or not one is satisfied in or by their work:

The difference in demoralized teachers is that they retain their commitment to engaging in good work and, by all outward measures, are performing very well. It is their frustration of not being able to do good work that is the source of their dissatisfaction. They may feel a sense of complicity in harming students or undermining the profession, which leads to guilt and shame that make the work intolerable. (p. 14)

The risk of focusing on measures of job satisfaction is that one may not notice demoralization because the wrong questions are being asked, missing the mark while validating management practice or goals.

Hodson (2001) reaffirms my sense of the important differences between dignity and satisfaction, in part by recognizing that “[t]he concept of job satisfaction is often used as a placeholder to describe workers’ attitudes in lieu of having more situated and behaviorally relevant concepts to discuss their actual lives at work and their pursuit of dignity” (p. 16). Furthermore, Hodson gets to the heart of the argument against relying on job satisfaction as a means to understand the experience of workplace dignity:

The limitations of job satisfaction as an organizing concept for the study of work life have been well documented (Edwards and Scullion, 1982; Hodson, 1991; Scott, 1985; Van Maanen and Barley, 1984). These limitations include lack of specific behavioral referents, blindness to group dynamics, lack of relationship to measures of organizational productivity, and limited effectiveness in integrating the contradictory mental states that workers may simultaneously hold about their work and their jobs (Fisher, 1980; Mortimer and Lorence, 1989; Organ, 1988). (Hodson, 2001, p. 16)

While Santoro (2018) suggests that a demoralized worker may continue to meet obligations, Hodson (2001) observes the corollary that “[o]ne can be satisfied with one’s job if the work is relatively easy and nondemanding” (p. 238). When it comes to dignity, though, “[f]ulfillment at work requires more than just the experience of being satisfied in this minimal sense” (ibid.), and this is partly due to the fact that so much of our lives are spent working or at work that we come to “rely on the workplace as a primary arena for the realization of meaning and creativity” (ibid.). Taking this logic one step further, Hodson claims a deeper human need than satisfaction can meet:

“Fulfillment at work entails more than having a positive attitude toward a job. Dignity at work also requires a sense of fulfillment, growth and development—a realization of one’s human potential” *ibid.*, citing Bandura, 1995; Marx, 1971).

Eagan, et al. (2015), concur with the conception of job satisfaction as driven mostly by institutional concerns, observing that “[s]cholars have focused so much attention on faculty satisfaction because of its relationship with organizational commitment, intention to remain at the institution, and productivity” (p. 452). The institutional perspective includes dual interests in low turnover and high productivity, but Eagan, et al., suggest a focus that is of more interest to those studying workplace dignity, as “faculty who reported greater levels of satisfaction with their work tended to score higher on measures of organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors” (*ibid.*, citing Lawrence, Ott, and Bell, 2012). To a researcher concerned with workplace dignity, the elements of autonomy and citizenship that have been associated with satisfaction (Hodson, 2001) are of particular interest, and so it is worth noting how much emphasis Eagan, et al. (2015) put on these points: “[...] although Antony and Valadez (2002) show no differences between full-time and part-time faculty in overall satisfaction, the authors note that part-timers express significantly lower levels of satisfaction with regard to autonomy and students compared to their full-time colleagues” (p. 449); Eagan et al. (2015) also report that “Hoyt (2012) found that part-timers were less satisfied with their working conditions, including autonomy[...]” (p. 454). Adding to the sense, described above, that job satisfaction has often served a placeholder role for other concepts, and has been seen as prioritizing managerial concerns, Bolton (2007) writes:

Many people have talked about dignity at work, though there are very few contemporary studies that directly address the issue. The topic tends to be disguised under headings such as citizenship, satisfaction, mutuality, pride in work, responsible autonomy and a secure



sense of self, and the terms tends to be related to a focus on mismanagement, over-long hours or a poor working environment. [...] Apart from isolated texts (see Hodson, 2001), there is nothing that is available or readily accessible that a diverse audience may access and engage with. (p. ix)

Before moving ahead with the theory of workplace dignity that informs this study's methods, it is worth making one more distinction between dignity and satisfaction. While Hodson (2001) notes the overlap between his findings about workplace dignity and Herzberg's (1966/1973) early work on satisfaction, which plays an important role in several of the above-noted studies of adjunct faculty job satisfaction (e.g., Ferguson, 2015; Pearch & Marutz, 2005; Rich, 2015; Ruiz Avila, 2015; Stuhlman, 2016), Herzberg identifies "motivators" and "hygienics" where Hodson focuses more on themes of citizenship and resistance; both conceptual pairs run parallel along lines of positive and negative workplace experience. Toward the end of his book, Hodson writes:

Resistance decreases job satisfaction and citizenship increases it. These are the two strongest direct effects on job satisfaction. This pattern of effects is reminiscent of Herzberg's (1966) two-factor theory of job satisfaction that stresses both positive aspects, or "motivators," and negative aspects, or "hygienics." In the current model, citizenship serves as an important positive motivator of job satisfaction and resistance as an important inhibiting factor. (p. 252)

As I will show in the next section of this chapter, Hodson's theory of dignity goes beyond two factors, and because he is concerned with concepts beyond worker motivations and inhibitions, resistance takes on a role more complex than as a factor inhibiting job satisfaction, joining

citizenship as well as autonomy and sociability as mechanisms for the pursuit and defense of workplace dignity.

### **A Theory of Workplace Dignity**

Hodson (2001, pp. 22-29) develops his theory of dignity with foundations in the writings of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. From Marx, the concepts of alienation and exploitation describe the processes of distancing workers from the products they help produce and of extracting as much labor as possible for the lowest cost possible. From Durkheim, the concepts of social disorganization and anomie describe the state of a modern society that is in a constant, normless flux as capital pushes for more and more efficiency and leverage through expansion and scaling. From Weber, the concepts of rationality and bureaucracy describe the mechanisms for efficiency that depersonalize work but also stall or stultify creativity. These theories map neatly onto the literature of corporate culture in higher education, described in Chapter II.

While Hodson (2001) does not provide a reference book-style definition of dignity, he does offer some clues about how to give meaning to the term, some of which have already come into play in the preceding sections on Catholic and secular conceptions. Early in his book, Hodson describes two meanings that “underlie the idea of dignity” (p. 4, citing Meyer and Parent, 1992, p. 11): “The first is that people have a certain inherent dignity as a consequence of being human. The second is that people earn dignity through their actions” (ibid., citing Castel, 1996). Hodson continues: “The inherent dignity of a worker can be violated by mismanagement or by managerial abuse. Alternatively, dignity can be attained through noble action or through enduring great suffering. Examples include valiant soldiers, moral leaders, victims of injustice, and enduring workers of all kinds” (ibid.). Later in his book, Hodson argues that “[i]t is through active agency that workers realize dignity at work in the face of the many challenges they confront” (Hodson,

2001, p. 50, citing Armstrong, 1989). Indicating the importance of respect and self-respect, which may be observed in workers' insistence on just treatment in the face of actual or possible mismanagement, abuse, and other obstacles, Hodson zeroes in on agency as a key component of dignity. Agency, which may be observed in workers' processes of meaning-making and "self-realization" (p. 4), in the expression of their "creative and purposive activity" (ibid.), might be defined as "the active and creative performance of assigned roles in ways that give meaning and content to those roles beyond what is institutionally scripted" (Hodson, 2001, p. 16).

Defining behaviors or matrices of behavior that help develop or defend dignity, Hodson (2001, pp. 34-41) describes certain "obstacles and opportunities" to achieving and maintaining dignity: *mismanagement, abuse, exploitation, and overwork* on the one hand, and *autonomy and participation* on the other hand. Hicks (2011), writing about dignity in the context of international relations and conflict resolution, also identified essential positive elements and negative violations of dignity in her own book. Hodson (2001) describes "four aspects of workplace behavior through which dignity is realized" (p. 42)—citizenship, resistance, autonomous meaning systems, and coworker relations (pp. 42-49)—each of which occurs despite and, in some sense, *because of* the obstacles identified above. These four aspects, which Hodson derives from a thematic analysis of roughly 100 book-length workplace ethnographies, may be understood as key elements in the experience of individual workplace dignity, and serve as the main interpretative filters for the participant interviews conducted for this dissertation. Hodson also derived themes related to the denials of workplace dignity, including *mismanagement, abuse, overwork*, as well as negative experiences or violations of *autonomy and coworker relations*; however, my design begins with an assumption that dignity is present in the workplace, and that the participants will have experiences to frame that presence. I also sought to avoid seeding the interview process with

negative expectations, in part because of an abundance of concern for my own bias (see Positionality Statement, pp. 3-5; see Interview Design and Participant Selection, p. 80) but also because the focus of the themes of denial is on institutional practice and behavior rather than on the experiences of the faculty I sought to interview. I will follow up on this decision in Chapters V and VI of this dissertation. What follows here is a description of the four themes associated with the positive pursuit of workplace dignity.

### *Autonomy*

Noting that “[m]eaning at work is achieved in some circumstances through activities that are entirely independent of production dynamics” (Hodson, 2001, p. 72), Hodson describes autonomy in a way that centers worker experience rather than workplace goals and suggests that the degree of independence granted workers to meet those goals can enhance or hamper workplace dignity. Opportunities for autonomous sensemaking (Kezar, 2013; Weick, 1995) can serve as enhancements of workplace dignity, whether the process is directly relevant to a workplace process or not. Examples in the non-process category might include decorating shared or private office space with family photos, or other rituals like laying out a picnic-style lunch at one’s desk. Examples of process-related autonomous practices might include setting up a system of grading that includes time for breaks, treats, or other rewards, or pushing the limits of departmental expectations when designing assignments. Experiences of autonomy can also enhance a sense of dignity through means of citizenship or resistance, both described below.

Hodson’s (2001) analysis of workplace autonomy indicates significant differences in worker experiences under distinct organizational schemes, with workplaces organized around professional and craft-worker control exhibiting greater autonomy, bureaucratic systems, and supervisory fiat. It is in settings of direct supervisory control that autonomy is most strained, and

in settings of professional and craft-worker control that it is most likely to occur (Hodson, 2001, Table 3.5, p. 76). As this dissertation is concerned with the workplace experiences of university faculty, it is the professional workplace organization that bears the most apparent relevance to the findings and my interpretations of them. As Hodson notes:

Autonomous work practices and their defense can be expected to be particularly common in professional and craft settings where mastery of work is achieved only through long training and substantial experience. In such workplaces, employees' skills and knowledge are essential if production is to proceed at all. As a result, professional and craft settings typically include at least limited systems of bilateral input into workplace decisions. (p. 76)

In the higher education context, the "systems of bilateral input into workplace decisions" are also known as shared governance, a process by which faculty guide or respond to administrative policy or policymaking. As will be seen in Chapters IV and V, and which has been previewed in Chapter II, the level of input by adjunct faculty into questions of governance are limited, indeed, if in evidence at all. Even given the high level of autonomy afforded to the professionals interviewed here, especially in the management of their courses, their technical classification as professionals is complicated by their functional isolation from questions of governance, a near-total lack of peer observation or supervisory feedback, and their sense that the students they serve perform as a proxy managerial staff by dint of the weight of student evaluations of their classes and work.

### ***Citizenship***

Citizenship describes a set of "cooperative behaviors in which [workers] voluntarily give extra effort" (Hodson, 2001, p. 68). Citizenship behaviors may be seen as attempts to enhance dignity, such as when workers "actively help achieve organizational goals or otherwise help to

improve the environment of the workplace” (ibid.). Some of the more prevalent subcategories of citizenship behavior, occurring across 108 organizational ethnographies include extra effort, extra time, loyalty to particular manager, commitment to organizational goals, and pride in work (Hodson, 2001, Table 3.2, p. 69). Hodson describes pride in one’s work as “one of the core elements of citizenship at work” (p. 69), and defines it as “the emotional ‘consequence of a successful evaluation of a specific action’ or ‘joy over an action ... well done’” (Hodson, 2001, p. 69, quoting Lewis, 1993, p. 570). He adds: “Pride both motivates workers and provides a lens through which they experience their work” (p. 69, citing Biggart, 1989; LeMasters, 1975).

### ***Resistance***

Citing Foucault, Hodson (2001) writes that “wherever there is unjust power, resistance inevitably follows” (p. 42)—because abuse undermines dignity, “resistance to abuse is thus a foundation for the defense and restoration of dignity” (ibid.). In some sense the opposite of citizenship, though similarly motivated by a desire to develop or defend dignity, resistance is the process of pushing back against the overwork and mismanagement that so often occurs in the workplace. This theme should not be understood, though, as diametrically opposite to citizenship:

The statistical correlation between the resistance and citizenship scales is  $-.413$ . Thus, resistance and citizenship are negatively correlated, but they are not polar opposites. They share only about 17 percent common variance (the square of their correlation). In other words, 83 percent of the phenomena the two scales are measuring is unique to one or the other scale and is not shared in common. (Hodson, 2001, p. 72)

As a means of identifying resistance through common examples in the ethnographies Hodson reviewed, some of the more prevalent subcategories of resistance behavior, occurring across 108 organizational ethnographies include absenteeism, procedure sabotage, withholding enthusiasm,

work avoidance, subverting particular managers, and social sabotage (Hodson, 2001, Table 3.1, p. 61).

### ***Sociability***

Hodson's Chapter 8 title, "Coworkers—For Better or Worse," indicates just how good, or bad, coworker interactions can be for workplace dignity. While last in the list of four major themes framing my interpretations of the participant interviews, sociability is just as crucial a resource for the development and defense of workplace dignity as the others described above. As Hodson (2001) puts it:

Coworkers help provide meaning in work through the sharing of work life experiences and through friendships. Coworkers can also provide a basis for group solidarity and mutual support in the face of denials of dignity at work. Some minimum amount of support from coworkers is essential for the successful defense of dignity in almost any situation—from the smallest encounter with a supervisor to large scale and lengthy strikes. (p. 200)

While sociability can be as variable and random as the groupings of individuals in shared office spaces or their assignments to be in class at certain times on certain days, both of which processes depend more administrative concerns than on common interest among peers, Hodson derives four major areas of coworker relations that pertain to workplace dignity, including socialization to workplace norms, solidarity and mutual defense, resistance to authority, and affirmation of one's identity across demographic categories such as rank, class, gender, and race (p. 203). As will be seen in Chapters IV and V, it can be very difficult to develop and maintain this crucial aspect of workplace dignity in the context of a part-time appointment in a higher education setting, especially if one holds multiple part-time appointments at more than one institution or holds another position outside academia.





## CHAPTER IV. Methodology of the Study

The dissertation addresses the following research question: *How do non-unionized adjunct faculty employed by an English Department in a Catholic Church-affiliated university describe their experiences of “dignity” and how do those faculty reflect on the meanings of those experiences?* At the core of this investigation, then, is the sense individuals make of certain phenomena, and the contexts in which they make that sense. In this chapter I provide:

- a conceptual framework integrating social construction with hermeneutic phenomenology;
- data sources as well as interviewee and document selection criteria;
- and data security measures.

In the end, I believe I designed a study that was useful in discovering the meaning the participants attached to their experiences of a phenomenon—dignity—that has been described in religious and secular literatures.

### Conceptual Framework

In conceptualizing this study, I have relied in the first place on the social constructionist theory articulated by Berger and Luckmann (1967), “that reality is socially constructed” (p. 1). In other words, the social construction theory construes meaning as derived not only from a person’s experience but also as informed by the social world(s) in which that person has had that experience; that meaning is constructed through an ongoing socio-historical process that varies across time and place, and which builds on culturally-received notions. This theory has been applied to organizational inquiry, with Ott (1989) arguing that “organizational culture is a socially constructed concept” (p. 52, citing Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Holzner & Marx, 1979, chs. 4 and 5; Mead, 1934). Similarly, Tierney (2008) differentiates between “objective” and “enacted” environments (pp. 9-13), with the former conception being based in a “rational, objective, ‘real’”

(p. 10) epistemology, and the latter assuming that “reality is defined through a process of social interchange” (p. 12). Ultimately, a study designed to capture the voices and experiences of a particular organization’s members will require that I “enter the field with a theoretical framework based on the assumption that organizations are socially constructed” (p. 15). A good example of the application of social construction theory to the experience faculty have of a particular phenomenon is Kezar’s (2013a) study of non-tenure-track-faculty construction of the concept of a “supportive work environment.” While the framework there combined social construction with symbolic interactionism rather than hermeneutic phenomenology, both these sociological theories attempt an understanding of the ways people make sense or meaning from their work world. As Kezar puts it: “The pivotal argument is that a person’s sense of reality is impacted by his or her social contexts and experiences” (p. 6). My study takes that argument as granted.

In addition to the theory of socially constructed meaning, I also rely on a form of hermeneutic phenomenology for conceptual framing. Creswell (2013) writes that “a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 57); however, I would clarify that I am pursuing not *that* phenomenology that “seeks a correct answer or valid interpretation of texts not dependent on the biographical, social or historical position of the interpreter” (Laverty, 2003, pp. 27-28), but rather have practiced a hermeneutic phenomenology that “focuses on meaning that arises from the interpretive interaction between historically produced texts and the reader” (p. 28). Because the reader is already performing an interpretive task in reading the text of the world, hermeneutic phenomenology does *not* strive for a “correct” interpretation but rather one that has been constructed by the individual within their socio-historical context. Van Manen (1997) writes that “hermeneutic phenomenology is a philosophy of the personal, the individual, which we pursue

against the background of an understanding of the evasive character of the *logos* of *other*, the *whole*, the *communal*, or the *social*” (p. 7). If the call to arms of Husserl’s phenomenology was oriented “to the things themselves” (Crotty, 1998, p. 78) then the rally of hermeneutic phenomenology advocated by van Manen might be oriented “to an interpretation of an experience of the things.” Ontologically, I assume there is a “given” world to be experienced, but that individuals experience that world through filters of meaning that are constructed within the subjective experience of the individual in a particular socio-historical time and place. The world’s existence may be objectively given, but its meaning and therefore importance to individuals are necessarily influenced by where and when a person lives and develops their understanding(s) of the given world.

Because I hold the ontological view that all persons share a world but that each has their individual world-view derived from experience and cultural inheritance, I will not attempt the kind of bracketing that is commonly associated with phenomenology (Crotty, 1998; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004; Kakkori, 2009; Creswell, 2013). The process is meant as a check on bias, but assumes, first, that there is some “essence” or “essential meaning” attached to the given, objective world, and second, that it is possible for a person to put aside or disentangle their socially constructed sense of reality in order to see “the things themselves” from “the natural attitude” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85; Giorgi, 2009, pp. 91-92; Kakkori, 2009, p. 22). I disagree that an object can be reduced to any essential meaning, and further disagree that it is possible to separate oneself from previous experience in order to see an object without any pre-conceptions or interpretive framework. I believe, with Bevan (2014), that “total abstention is impossible” but also believe “that is not the point” (p. 138) of bracketing, for what it’s worth.

Rather than pretend that I can erase my own experience, which I wrote about in my Positionality Statement above (p. 3), I have striven to interpret the participants' reconstructed experiences and their other statements in a way that is consistent with their own interpretations. I provided drafts of the participant profiles to the participants during at two different times during my writing of this dissertation and provided feedback forms (see Appendix E) but received no requests to amend, remove, or otherwise change the text. I was also aware that the interviews, loosely-structured as they were, were also likely to impose into the meaning-making of the participants around the phenomenon of dignity, so I adhered to critical self-consciousness during the interviews, asking questions without reliance on heavy theory and geared toward the participants' experiences and the meaning they made of it all (Bevan, 2014; Seidman, 2013).

### **Data Sources**

Sources for this study include phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2013) with adjunct faculty in the English Department at Urban Catholic University, which is the institutional pseudonym I use throughout the dissertation. I also reviewed institutional documents that constitute the structure of the working environment and conditions and help to clarify a sense of the organization's culture and that culture's values as they pertain to dignity.

### ***Interview Design and Participant Selection***

In a 2017 conference presentation, Irving Seidman stated the issue clearly: "At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth in and of themselves and because they have something to say to your inquiry" (Seidman, 2017, slide 5). The interview protocol under discussion was Seidman's phenomenological interviewing guide, which I have used for this dissertation. The guide calls for the researcher to interview each participant three times, at 90 minutes per session, with the following goals for each session:

1. Interview One: Focused Life History: “In the first interview, the interviewer’s task is to put the participant’s experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic up to the present time.” (Seidman, 2013, p. 21)
2. Interview Two: The Details of Experience: “The purpose of the second interview is to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants’ present lived experience in the topic area of the study. We ask them to reconstruct these details.” (ibid.)
3. Interview Three: Reflection on the Meaning: “In the third interview, we ask participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience.” (ibid., p. 22)

The process of making sense or making meaning has already begun by the time the participant puts experience into words, and likely starts in earnest during the period between recruitment and sitting for the first interview. The final interview helps to clarify the meaning that has been constructed by the participants, but “can be productive only if the foundation for it has been established in the first two [interviews]” (ibid.).

Tierney (2008) identifies the interview as a commonly used primary method in qualitative research, calling for “detailed interviews [...] supplemented by a variety of qualitative methods” (p. 15), as well as follow-up interviews which “allow researchers to recheck the validity of their initial findings and enable the interviewees to add data they may have omitted during the initial interview” (ibid.). I also rely in this regard on King (1994), who writes that “without doubt, the most widely used qualitative method in organizational research is the interview” (p. 14), and who defines a *qualitative* interview as “exploratory” or “semi-structured,” and claims the goal of such interviews is “to see the research topic from the perspective of the interviewee, and to understand how and why he or she comes to have this particular perspective” (ibid.). King also believes that “the qualitative research interview is most appropriate [...] where a study focuses on the meaning

of particular phenomena to the participants” (p. 16). Marshall (1994) defines what she calls “interpretive repertoires” as “recurrent patterns in the organization and content [of interview transcripts]” (p. 96), and explains that “a wide range of interpretive repertoires can emerge from a relatively small number of interviews and produce more valid information than hundreds of questionnaire or survey responses” (p. 96). Moreover, I concur with Seidman (2013) when he writes that

The structure of the three interviews, the passage of time over which the interviews occur, the internal consistency and possible external consistency of the [interview transcripts], the syntax, diction, and even nonverbal aspects of the [transcripts], and the discovery and sense of learning that I get from reading the [transcripts] lead me to have confidence in [their] authenticity. (p. 29)

I sought adjunct faculty as interview participants because of what appears to be a lack in the literature of their perspectives on their working conditions (Kezar, 2013a; Kezar & Sam, 2010). I disagree with Kilfoye’s (2015) claim that “there has been little research to understand what institutional leaders believe about the state of contingent faculty and the challenges posed by this new normal for faculty culture” (p. 13). Beyond this disagreement, I also disagree that the proper investigation of “the state of contingent faculty” should begin or end with the perspectives of administrators who are not in a position to describe the experience of contingency. My focus on adjunct faculty in an English department is derived from studies of similar units. One such study is that described by Schell and Stock (2001), who focus on the instructional staffing of lower-level and especially introductory composition courses, and who argue that “composition studies may well be viewed as a canary in an academic mine in which contingent faculty have worked (at risk,

underground, out of sight) to support others' more visible, more attractive labor" (p. 19). They add:

Composition studies is a particularly fitting vantage point from which to study the academy's turn toward contingent employment as it has long been an instructional area staffed by non-tenure-track faculty. Most colleges and universities require first-year students to take one or two introductory composition courses, which are often staffed by non-tenure-track faculty and graduate teaching assistants. (p. 20)

In setting the foundation and describing the impetus for their study, Schell and Stock (2001) cite studies conducted by Tuckman and Volger (1979), Abel (1984), Gappa and Leslie (1993), showing the longevity and growth of the faculty employment crisis. These studies, including their development of typologies intended to explain motivations to take a part-time adjunct position, suggest that the conditions of an adjunct's employment affect their experience depending in part on whether one is looking at an English instructor aspiring for a full-time offer or a one who works as an author or editor but moonlights to teach a course every now and again.

Among all the typologies describing part-time faculty motivations, I believe the most compelling explanation relies on the distinction between voluntary and involuntary part-time employment. Several studies that pinpoint this binary distinction have been conducted with a view toward "better understand[ing] the nuances in satisfaction among part-time faculty" (Eagan, et al., 2015, p. 450). Such studies

examine differences in satisfaction between voluntary part-time faculty—those part-timers who choose or prefer to work part-time—and involuntary part-time faculty—individuals who teach part-time but would prefer a full-time faculty appointment. These studies have found voluntary part-time faculty to be significantly more satisfied with various aspects of

their academic work compared to their involuntary part-time colleagues. (ibid., citing Antony & Hayden, 2011; Maynard & Joseph, 2008)

While some studies (Antony and Valadez, 2002; Antony and Hayden, 2011; Maynard and Joseph, 2008) report greater satisfaction among part-time faculty than full-time faculty on certain employment elements, they also show a difference in levels of satisfaction among part-timers based on voluntary or involuntary part-time status. Antony and Hayden (2011) observe that “job-fit analysis indicates that satisfaction for voluntary part-time employees will likely be higher than involuntary part-time employees” (p. 704, citing Maynard & Joseph, 2008). Antony and Hayden add that “63 to 75% of those part-time faculty members who report the highest levels of satisfaction also indicate not preferring a full-time job” (p. 705). Ott & Dippold (2018) reinforce the importance of disaggregating part-timers based on their voluntary or involuntary part-time-ness: “[R]ecent studies find between 49% and 60% of part-time community college faculty would rather have a full-time appointment (p. 190, citing Cashwell, 2009, Curtis, Mahabir, & Vitullo, 2016, Jacoby, 2005, Kramer, Gloeckner, & Jacoby, 2014). Citing other studies, Ott & Dippold (2018) add that “researchers have also found part-time faculty who desire a full-time job are less content with compensation, advancement, recognition, and job security, at both two-year (Kramer et al., 2014) and four-year institutions (Maynard & Joseph, 2008)” (p. 191).

Bringing this discussion of motivation back to the cohort of participants I recruited, Gappa, Austin, and Trice (2007) report that “in 1998, only 15 percent of part-timers in the health sciences sought full-time academic jobs, in contrast to 65 percent of part-timers in the fine arts and 61 percent in the humanities, who reported that they were teaching on a part-time basis because full-time jobs were not available, either in academe or elsewhere” (p. 95, citing Leslie, 1998). Lastly,



Gappa, Austin, and Trice (2007) dispel any notion that most part-time faculty are “satisfied” by their employment:

Although the part-time faculty is largely heterogeneous, made up of people with highly varied life circumstances and motivations for teaching, these faculty members' employment conditions are not heterogeneous. Regardless of their performance, the length of their employment, their qualifications for their positions, or the needs of their institutions, part-time faculty in most colleges and universities are employed under exploitative practices. [...] In good circumstances, part-time as become valued and established colleagues despite the informality and insecurity of their employment. In the worst circumstances, part-timers remain marginal and are subject to capricious and arbitrary treatment. (Gappa, Austin, Trice, 2007, p. 96, citing several others)

(Much of the foregoing bears on the job satisfaction of adjunct faculty; I explain in Chapter III why I have focused on faculty experiences of dignity rather than the more common notion of job satisfaction.)

In narrowing my search to adjunct faculty in an English department, I also rely on a study by Trainor and Godley (1998) that recounts a process by which two campuses in a state university responded to a directive that all remedial courses, such as Basic Writing, were “relocated to local community colleges” (p. 153). In one case, the university-level adjuncts who formerly taught those courses were replaced by “part-time instructors hired through the local community college at salaries lower than those the university used to pay” (ibid.). In addition to the lower wages, Trainor and Godley note that “these instructors have virtually no contact with the English department at State U-Oakdale, nor are they enfranchised members of the community college” (ibid), a set of labor conditions that shows just how precarious employment can be for adjuncts teaching in lower-

level courses. And I rely, too, on studies published by Bettinger and Long (2004, 2010), which find that negative effects of adjunct instruction on student success and interest are more likely in the humanities than in professional or occupational studies:

in general, adjunct and graduate assistant instructors reduce subsequent interest in a subject relative to full-time, tenure-track faculty, but this effect is small and differs widely by discipline. We find that adjuncts negatively affect students in the humanities and sciences while positively affecting students in some of the professional fields, particularly in terms of success in subsequent courses. In many cases, adjuncts under the age of 40 account for the estimated negative effects suggesting that recent movements towards hiring young instructors, who are often inexperienced and have not completed doctoral study, is negatively impacting students. (2004, p. 4)

Indeed, there are several studies of student outcomes that suggest variable impacts depending on age and length of career, discipline, and motivation to teach in a part- or full-time role (Kezar and Maxey, 2012).

Part of my rationale for selecting participants from a non-unionized group of faculty had to do with the practical or effective promise of anonymity promised to those who would volunteer to be interviewed. At the time I was developing my dissertation proposal, there were only eight examples of adjunct faculty unions at Catholic-affiliated colleges or universities across the nation (Catholic Labor Network, 2018), with only one in the region where I could reasonably expect to be available for in-person interviewing according to the intensive protocol described below. However, I also suspected, with support from Hodson (2001), that a non-unionized institution would present So, feeling that the shift to non-unionized adjunct faculty would not prevent my inquiry into workplace dignity, but aware that I sought a Catholic Church-affiliated institution of

higher education with a commitment to a Liberal Arts curriculum and an English Department with a significant part-time faculty ratio.

Following from Maxwell (2013), I adhered to “purposive selection” (p. 97, citing Light, et al., 1990, p. 53) of interview participants. In this method of selection, participants “are selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97) to the study’s questions. Among the goals for purposive selection, Maxwell begins with the goal of “achieving representativeness or typicality of the settings, individuals, or activities selected” (p. 98). As the literature suggests, the “typical” adjunct in an English department is likely employed part-time to teach lower-level courses and is more likely than not to be interested in full-time employment with one institution. The names and contact information for current adjuncts in the English Department at Urban Catholic University are all listed on the Department’s Web pages, which simplified the recruitment process and nullified any need for identifying gatekeepers. Marshall (1994) describes 18 participants for a study including interviews as a data source; I strove for 3-5, a number that falls within the range of sufficiency described by Creswell (2013), who determined 3-10 as typical in a phenomenological study (p. 189). Participants for interviews were be selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- Part-time faculty in the English department;
- Primarily teaching introductory or lower-level courses;
- Interested in full-time teaching employment.

To the extent possible, I sought a cohort of participants at different points in their teaching careers and who represent diverse gender and race/ethnicity categories. I was successful in recruiting participants at various stages of their careers, with one participant having taught at Urban Catholic for eight years, another for closer to two years, and one who taught one semester as a

doctoral student and one semester as an adjunct before taking a full-time non-tenure-track position at another institution. I was not as successful in recruiting across gender or race categories, with all three participants identifying as white women.

I delivered a recruitment email (see APPENDIX B) to all possible participants on June 26, 2019, identified through means described above; the email described the nature and purpose of the study, as well as measures taken to secure data and confidentiality (see “Data Management” below). After sending the recruitment email, delivered to 21 individuals, I received two completed Recruitment Questionnaires (see APPENDIX C). I resent the recruitment email, on July 5, 2019, to the 19 individuals who had not yet responded. These second deliveries also included the questionnaire in both .pdf and .docx formats – I failed to include the .docx in the first recruitment email, and wondered if that technical detail deterred or delayed responses (the .pdf file being unwritable). After resending the recruitment email to non-respondents, I received three more messages in response, as of July 8, 2019:

- The first message was a declination, which the respondent succinctly stated: “While this sounds interesting, I can’t afford to spend childcare hours doing uncompensated work.”
- The second message was also a declination on the basis that the respondent is “caught up in a lot of projects this summer and fall semester.”
- The third message was a request for clarification about whether a short and non-continuing term of employment at Urban Catholic University would be a bar to participation as an interviewee. The respondent seemed interested in participating, but only taught very briefly for the English Department there and wanted to clarify that completing the questionnaire wouldn’t be a waste of time.

I responded to each of these three and describe here two of those responses in order to highlight and memorialize some of the methodological questions raised by these relatively brief interactions. In the case of the second message, my response was to offer my best wishes in the completion of those projects; the other two messages raised at least one significant methodological and one significant ethical issue.

The issue raised by the first message involves questions of methodology, but also centers on an ethical question of what it is fair to expect marginal faculty, who are professionals after all, to do without compensation. While I felt inclined to see if there was some way to persuade the respondent to complete the questionnaire, on the basis of the expression that the study “sounds interesting,” I decided to step back and address what I perceived to be another expression – of grievance. The message I wrote said: “I understand and appreciate your response. The economic issues associated with contingent labor and parenthood are burdensome enough on their own, but are especially so in combination and in the Northeast where cost of living and childcare costs are at odds. As a father of two small children, as a spouse sharing in childcare duties (and scheduling interviews around those duties), as a doctoral student doing unfunded work, and as someone whose career in higher education has included both part-time and full-time non-tenure-track employment, I can only say that I am right there with you. I only wish I could offer more by way of incentive or compensation.” The respondent emailed again to ask if written responses to central questions could be of any use, and I took my time considering my response. My feeling was that the study would have benefitted from the perspective of this potential participant in the study, but that the protocol for the phenomenological interview really does call for at least synchronous communication, if not face-to-face in the same room.

To the inquiry about brevity of employment as a consideration when selecting a cohort of interviewees, I suggested that the respondent complete the questionnaire on the basis that a very short and non-continuing employment does not preclude participation: “I don’t think the brevity of your time at Urban Catholic means your experience and input would not be valuable for the study (certainly it is valuable otherwise). Depending on the mix of experiences and backgrounds represented by all completed questionnaires, that brevity may be something that might not show up in other responses. While the study doesn’t call for controls or look for correlations, I am seeking as diverse a set of experiences as possible within the limits of one academic department. The short answer: Go ahead and fill out the questionnaire if you’re interested!” That participant followed-up and became one of the three participants I interviewed.

As of July 19, 2019, I had three signed consent forms, and had sent out individualized scheduling polls to each of the three participants. Implementing the phenomenological interview protocol I developed (see APPENDIX D), I held the first 90-minute interview session the first week of August, 2019, and concluded the last of nine sessions in the final week of the same month. As described in the protocol, I designed the first interview session as a means for the participant to place their current employment as an English Department adjunct faculty member in the context of their home, educational, and work lives; I designed the second interview with a goal of constructing a typical working day in that position, in order to gain insight into participants’ experiences at Urban Catholic; and I designed the third interview with explicit interest in the participants’ understanding of the meaning of those workplace experiences as explained by Hodson’s (2001) four themes related to the pursuit or defense of dignity.

### ***A Note on Risks to Interview Participants***

One risk involved in a study of this kind, in which volunteer participants who self-select are providing the primary data in the form of interviews, is that their motivation to participate may introduce a biased perspective into the study. For instance, in my study of dignity it is possible that willing participants may have a negative view of the ways their employing institution has held their individual dignity, and may choose to participate in order to convey that perspective. The risks of self-selection are well-documented, and I find guidance in studies by Zhao and Kuh (2004), Lindholm (2004), and Zobac et al. (2014). Zobac et al. identify self-selection bias as a risk in the context of learning communities, and quote Zhao and Kuh to define the risk as “the possibility ‘that students who choose to join a learning community are more academically able as reflected by measures of ability, which could account for differences in outcomes that might be associated with learning communities’” (Zobac et al., 2014, p. 1, quoting Zhao and Kuh, 2004, p. 120). Lindholm (2004) provides a more broadly construed definition, “that self-selection bias is a concern in any activity where participation is voluntary” (p. 610). As a researcher seeking volunteers to participate in my study, then, I have been aware of the risk and alert to indications of the presence of bias, which may look like lopsided criticism, for instance. However, what I find in the interview responses is not unmediated grievance against Urban Catholic; some of the comments are critical, to be sure, but the overall sense is not of overwhelming and invalidating bias but of complex interactions with policy and practice that include expectations met and unmet, experiences enriching a sense of dignity and those diminishing it.

### ***Institutional Documents***

While I will make occasional reference to policies, practices, or other statements or documentary artifacts from Urban Catholic University, the institution from which I recruited

interview participants, these references will be intended to clarify and contextualize participant claims about their experiences. Tierney (2008) offers clues about where to look for documents and other cultural artifacts, including: the *environment* and individuals' interaction with it; the *mission* and the ways it is articulated or connected to decision-making; processes for *socialization*, including things individuals need to know to survive or excel in the organization; *information* as a source and as a product to be shaped and disseminated by those with access; *strategy* regarding how decisions are made and implemented, and how bad decisions are penalized; and *leadership* as a set of organizational priorities and expectations held by and for formal and informal leaders (p. 30, Table 3.1).

See Ott (1989) for a much more detailed list of items that can be construed as “elements of organizational culture” (p. 53, Figure 3.1), including familiar material objects like documents but also immaterial interactions, aspects, and emanations like beliefs, habits, rituals, values, and myths. For a more manageable conceptualization, Ott also portrays “three levels of organizational culture and their interaction”: *artifacts and creations* includes characteristics or facets of the organization such as technology, art, and other “visible and audible behavior patterns”; *values and beliefs* includes immaterial elements that may be “testable only by social consensus”; and *basic underlying assumptions* about the natures of meaning and knowledge creation (pp. 54-55, citing Schein, 1981, 1984, 1985).

With the preceding definitions and recommendations in mind, I have reviewed the faculty handbook made available on Urban Catholic University's Web site (UCU, 2019a), statements of institutional mission and tradition (UCU, 2019c), letters of appointment describing the employment relationship (UCU, 2019b), and also artifacts describing departmental policies related to orientation and development (UCU, 2019d). Document analysis might be said to represent a



“realist” view of the organization (Marshall, 1994, p. 95), and offer an institutional context in which to interpret the perspectives and senses of individuals interviewed. Forster (1994) writes:

Organizational documentation comes in many forms: company annual reports; public relations (PR) material and press releases; accounts statements; corporate mission statements; policies on marketing strategy; formal charters and legal documents; policies on rules and procedures; human resource management (HRM) strategies; policy directives on training, career management, job mobility and relocation management; formal memos between different groups and departments; and informal and private correspondence between staff and correspondence between respondents and researchers. (p. 148)

Ott (1989) provides a much more detailed list of items that can be construed as “elements of organizational culture” (p. 53, Figure 3.1), including familiar material objects like documents but also immaterial interactions, aspects, and emanations like beliefs, habits, rituals, values, and myths. For a more manageable conceptualization, Ott also portrays “three levels of organizational culture and their interaction”: *artifacts and creations* includes characteristics or facets of the organization such as technology, art, and other “visible and audible behavior patterns”; *values and beliefs* includes immaterial elements that may be “testable only by social consensus”; and *basic underlying assumptions* about the natures of meaning and knowledge creation (pp. 54-55, citing Schein, 1981, 1984, 1985). While my attention to specific documents (handbooks and other policies) will take primacy, I will be open to adding other “elements of organizational culture” as they arise in the research.

## **Data Management**

All human subject data (interview audio and transcripts) were managed according to the guidelines described by the Institutional Review Board (IRB, 2016) at the University of New

Hampshire: I granted participants confidentiality and will identify individuals by pseudonyms only; I uploaded all audio and transcription files to the secure online storage provided by UNH (“Box”); I deleted all original files after upload to the secure location; I ensured all files were accessible to my advisor, also Dissertation Committee Chair; and will allow all data to remain in storage on Box until three years after collection. All institutional documents and references to the research site have been stored in Box (converted into digital format if necessary), and in this dissertation have been masked by a pseudonym – “Urban Catholic University” – providing an additional layer of confidentiality for the participants.

These measures will mitigate, but cannot completely prevent, risks to participants that could result if their perspectives were matched to their names; in any case, risk associated with this study is relatively low. The benefits of the study may not redound to the specific individuals selected to participate, but my goal and hope is that the focus on marginal faculty voices will serve as a model not only for research but for policy development and implementation.

## **CHAPTER V. Findings**

In order to present findings from my research I have prepared profiles for May, June, and July that describe basic demographics for each participant, their individual longevity of employment as an adjunct in the English Department at Urban Catholic University, and their motivations for faculty employment. I also include relevant details from the participants' home, education, and work histories, which help to clarify those motivations and introduce a sense of each participant's experience of workplace dignity. In order to provide some framing for the participant profiles, I first provide some background regarding adjunct faculty policy and practice at Urban Catholic University.

### **Policies Governing Adjuncts at Urban Catholic University**

In clarifying the meaning of workplace dignity and developing a theory that would provide some sense of how to interpret the participants' experiences (see Chapter III), I focused on two realms contributing to that theory: the religious, faith-based realm of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), and the secular realm of the sociology of work. Notwithstanding Urban Catholic University's mission statement (UCU, 2019c) and references made by the university to the intellectual tradition of the Catholic Church, the function of the institution as it pertains to the employment of its part-time adjunct faculty is essentially indistinguishable from other colleges and universities with no religious affiliation at all, whether public or private. The one area in which UCU stands out is per-course pay: at nearly

The Faculty Handbook (UCU, 2019a) describes adjunct faculty as serving in part-time or full-time roles that may be short-term or long-term. Many of the benefits or considerations afforded to faculty are available only to those on full-time contracts, described as non-tenure-track faculty. For instance, while academic freedom is explicitly protected for non-tenure-track faculty, there is

no such policy describing protection for part-timers. Neither the part-time nor the full-time adjuncts have the right to serve on standing university-wide committees or to vote on matters arising before those committees, but full-time adjuncts may be permitted to vote in certain elections or to serve on non-standing committees, pending allowances by the Provost. While there is a grievance committee to hear cases brought before it by faculty, that committee does not consider cases by adjuncts, and the special committee designed to do so appears to consider only cases brought by adjuncts on full-time appointments. Development opportunities and support are decentralized and left to the discretion of the colleges and departments employing adjuncts.

There are two discernible policies that apply only to part-time adjunct faculty at Urban Catholic: one that grants part-timers access to the university's medical and dental benefits after teaching four courses per academic year for five years, and one that limits part-time faculty working hours to 29 per week, assuming a cap of two 3-credit courses per semester. As May noted in her interviews with me, the health benefits are not automatic and must be sought out by the part-timer. All three participants noted that the two-course cap appears to be incredibly flexible in the sense that the department/college frequently offers a third course to part-timers with a waiver of full-time recognition and attendant benefits. And both May and June have repeatedly been hired as Mentors and Advisors above and beyond their teaching appointments, which suggest that the 29-hour work limit apparently does not apply to duties unbundled from their narrowly defined teaching duties. It is possible to work full-time in some academic function at Urban Catholic, then, without gaining recognition, pay, or benefits commensurate with a full-time position, on or off the tenure track.

**“May”**

### ***Demographics, longevity, & motivations***

May identifies as a white female, holds an undergraduate degree in the social sciences and an MFA in creative writing, and has taught as a part-time English instructor at Urban Catholic for 16 consecutive semesters, not including summers: 8 years, during which time she has sometimes also taught in similar roles at other nearby institutions of higher education. Urban Catholic has repeatedly employed May as a student adviser over the summer months and school-year, and has even offered overload courses. Just these basic contours of May's employment indicate the problematic nomenclature that distinguishes between full- and part-time faculty members: May has been hired into a nominally part-time teaching role, asked to teach more than the standard two-course load on more than one occasion, and also been hired to conduct advising duties. In another scenario, May might be hired to teach on a full-time contract, as is her stated preference. Even without a doctorate, May is still qualified for a non-tenure-track annual contract that would likely include up to four courses per semester and could also include advising or other institutional service responsibilities. Instead, as a means to reduce commitment to a long-time employee, and to avoid providing benefits or paying a regular salary across 9 or 12 months, Urban Catholic offers unbundled portions of the tripartite role of the traditional faculty position: teaching is separated from advising and other service, and research or other scholarly production is not an expected part of the arrangement. Given the apparent holding pattern of her career at Urban Catholic after 8 years, May is in the process of reconsidering her options for the future.

### ***Relevant development toward the adjunct position at Urban Catholic***

#### **Home life.**

Home life and family offered some positive models for May in her childhood, including parents and relatives who had artistic inclinations and skill, though no models who made their art

the focus of their adult work lives. “From the time I was little,” May told me, “I thought I might be a teacher of some kind. I don’t know where that idea came from because I also wanted to be an actress, but I think these things are not dissimilar – I like the performative aspect of teaching.” While there was indication in the first interview of a home life that did not offer much overt support for writing or other artistic endeavors, May mentioned two significant experiences that suggest at least an openness on the part of her parents toward scholarly pursuits. The books on the shelves at home were available to May, and the physical object(s) as well as the permission to peruse served to inform and encourage May’s intellectual growth as a child, and even informed later pedagogical considerations:

And I started thinking like, ‘Oh, maybe I should bring something like this [the binding and sharing of student work] into my college teaching.’ So, there was that, there was also, I’ve alluded to like family troubles. So, that just like home was so rough and the thing that we had were books. So, we couldn’t ask my parents anything, I couldn’t ask them hard questions. If I was suffering, I couldn’t tell them. So, that was happening in school and that was happening at home. But, there were books and there was a library and there were answers in those books. There were feelings in those books. Like I was angry, I was scared, but I couldn’t express them. So, the books were there for me, that’s what I had. (“May,” Interview #1, p. 11)

May also noted that her mother held onto certain artifacts from school, including a book of poetry written and bound in an elementary school class. Each student in class produced their own book, which were placed on a shelf in class and made available to students for check-out:

Because we were just talking about elementary school, it’s in my mind that we had poetry units. We’d write poems and I could illustrate them and then we’d bind them into books.

We had a class library, so you could take out your classmates' book of poems. That's really lovely, imagine if we did that in high school and college. It was kind of hokey, but, really wonderful. [*Intvr: But, what did they do for you?*] It gave me a voice, it gave me legitimacy. Not only that, nobody was getting an award or something. It wasn't like the student with the best poems got their book bound. Everybody had their books and I remember taking out books that my classmates had written and I think that's just as important as having made mine. [*Intvr: Why?*] It's so important. It had a lot to do with my teaching philosophy too, so I should be able to answer that well. I'm just putting a note for myself that I'd like to. I think that most of us can feel really alone and I think in school you can have that feeling like you're just in your own head. You don't know the answer maybe or you do know the answer, but you're not sure and you don't know if you should speak up. You don't know what grades other people are getting, you don't know what their work is like. You're really isolated in school. Who reads your paper? You write a paper, you give it to the teacher, the teacher puts a grade on it and gives it back to you. Nobody else is involved in that process. ("May," Interview #1, p. 10)

In May's retelling of this memory she is not only expressing a foundational experience of the dignity she felt as a student sharing her work and receiving positive feedback, but she is also expressing her ideals as a teacher: that student work deserves attention and praise and that feedback is crucial to teaching and more important than grade-giving. These concerns have driven May toward a certain career but also to a certain way of performing the work of that career.

### **Educational experiences.**

In addition to the school-based memories just discussed in connection to home life, May's formal training to teach at the college level began well before her pursuit of an MFA, a terminal

degree for the purposes of postsecondary credentialing in the field of composition. Prior to entering that graduate program, May also completed shorter-term programs that were focused on curriculum development and inclusive teaching practices, issues that continue to be near and dear to her current teaching and philosophy:

I happened to have a teacher, a poetry teacher who has the spirit I'm talking of, I'm very fortunate that I ran into her. Because, no one else in my life had this kind of spirit of when you're a teacher for example, you are not in authority. You're not someone who's like a pitcher of information, pouring ideas and information, into like the vessels of students. She inspired me to get my MFA and to go for it. That it was valuable and that my voice was worth it and I did that, but I hadn't yet dropped the, like you have to be practical and you'll never get a job as a poet. That's true and I should have been thinking about that. So, I went to grad school for poetry thinking that teaching was always kind of going to be alongside this. ("May," Interview #1, p. 2)

The MFA included a semester-long course focused on teaching composition, a course that included readings in theory but also the history of composition and rhetoric studies, and which required development of lesson plans. After that semester, she was eligible to apply for a graduate teaching position, and in the first year of teaching went to weekly sessions of a practicum focused on pedagogy and curriculum and was also placed in a mentoring group with others who had more extensive experience teaching in the program.

### **Employment experiences.**

May's first teaching employment was two years in a charter high school, which took place after earning her undergraduate degree. Other stints in May's career include time as a writing tutor at a 4-year private liberal arts college, as well as several positions in which she developed and/or



delivered writing curricula for high school students, and a grant-funded program offering free poetry-writing courses to high school students. Of her two years at the charter school, May is very critical:

At the charter school, the whole idea was let's narrow the achievement gap and I was like, yeah. Sign me up for making opportunities more available and more horizontal again, but that whole place was like steeped in a kind of framing around the achievement gap that I didn't really agree with, which meant pretty mainstream. Let's get our test scores up, let's get our college acceptances up. We have to do catch up because our students are behind and let's do eight hours of academics a day. Let's have the worksheets, let's standardize everything. And, it drove me crazy, it was like, what about exercise? What about the heart? What about autonomy, dignity? Speaking of dignity, there was no dignity. There were demerits, there were uniforms, it was like, yeah, not the right place for me and I'm not doubting that it's not the right way to approach the issues that we have in this country. ("May," Interview #1, p. 7)

In this summary of what she disliked about the charter experience, May gets right to the heart of dignity, describing a learning context in which students, and teachers, were limited in their autonomy by a strict and statutorily-required academic agenda, but also by the implementation of a dress code and system of negative reinforcement of student behavior.

May's next teaching employment was the graduate assistant position secured during the MFA, noted above, which entailed working with high school students and developing courses. At Urban Catholic, May describes the students as having certain strengths, generally, and certain areas in which they don't seem as confident:

So, I have 15 students in a classroom, I'd say most of them come from a pretty intact family situation, financial stability. They are well prepared, pretty well prepared for school, not necessarily for my class, but they're well prepared for school. I find my position for them is also to give them autonomy because they have been taking tests and they have been doing what their parents want them to do and they've been like really serious. They're pretty anxious, they're an anxious bunch. It can be very difficult to get liveliness into the classroom. ("May," Interview #, p. 8)

Seeking to provide her students with the sense of autonomy she expressed in some of her school memories, May again identifies student autonomy as necessary for their development as learners, but also highlights the links to dignity in expressing a desire to help students develop their sense of voice in the classroom.

May also noted that parking, or not finding parking, proves to be a major part of the workday routine, with seemingly fewer spots available than there are cars with permits ("May," Interview #2, pp. 1-3). Luckily, May's longevity at Urban Catholic means that she often has some choice in course times and so will arrive in the morning before most others. However, the troublesome nature of parking in a full lot with limited spaces means that she often foregoes coming to campus on days when she is not scheduled to teach. This has implications for her availability to students outside class meetings.

## **"June"**

### ***Demographics, longevity, & motivations***

June identifies as a white female, holds undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees in English Literature and has taught as a part-time English instructor at Urban Catholic for 10 consecutive semesters, not including summers: 8 while writing dissertation; 2 part-time post-doc.

The graduate degrees were also earned at Urban Catholic. During that span of time, including graduate teaching, she has sometimes also taught at other nearby institutions of higher education and directed or co-directed pedagogical trainings and conference proceedings. Urban Catholic has repeatedly employed June as a student adviser over the summer months and school-year, and has even offered overload courses. Just these basic contours of June's employment indicate the problematic nomenclature that distinguishes between full- and part-time faculty members: June has been hired into a nominally part-time teaching role, asked to teach more than the standard two-course load on more than one occasion, and also been hired to conduct advising duties. In another scenario, June might be hired to teach on a full-time contract, as is her stated preference. Instead, as a means to reduce commitment to a long-time employee, and to avoid providing benefits or paying a regular salary across 9 or 12 months, Urban Catholic offers unbundled portions of the tripartite role of the traditional faculty position: teaching is separated from advising and other service, and research or other scholarly production is not an expected part of the arrangement.

***Relevant development toward the adjunct position at Urban Catholic***

**Home life.**

Of the experiences that June recalled during our first interview, the following seems to encapsulate the motivation she felt to become a writer and teacher, but also the ways she was encouraged to do so across many years and despite some setbacks:

When I finished my Master's my mom and dad for Christmas like helped me pay down my student loan and like, that was like, 'We are going to give you this much money to help you pay your student loan.' And my mom had found a letter I wrote to her. I like made her card and I wrote her letter about how when I grew up I was going to be a teacher. So, I guess, just like a kid I was like I want to do this. And then in high school I was not a

particularly good student. [...] I think I just didn't pay attention a lot. I was doing a lot of things in my head, outside my head. And then at some point, like super into like poetry and all that kind of stuff, I decide, I don't know even know why, that I was going to be a professor and I was going to teach literature and I was going to write biographies of females. Like writers and stuff and then I also had time to like write my poetry and all that kind of stuff. ("June," Interview #1, p. 22)

Much of June's discussion of home life while growing up reflected the broad overlap with school life, which is perhaps unsurprising when talking to an adult who was required to be in school from ages 5-18 and who has expressed interest a career in education from an early age. And while June's conveyance of her parents' encouragement does not appear to describe full-throated or enthusiastic boosterism, there is the sense of constant and firm support of her plans, an investment in her voice from early on:

So, my parents are like—'hands off' makes it sound like mean but it's not—'hands off' in that, when I was getting Bs and Cs they were like: 'Cool.' And when I was like, 'I'm going to be a professor so I'm going to get good grades now,' they were like: 'Cool.' Like they were kind of perfectly happy to be like, 'That's what you what you want to do? Awesome. Do that.' And so their like willingness to be like, 'Oh, that's something you want? Yeah, why not. That seems perfectly reasonable.' Even though some adults in my life have been like, 'What?' [*Intvr: Did they ever say, 'This is not a good path or a good career trajectory?'*] No. ("June," Interview #1, p. 23)

### **Educational experiences.**

In addition to those educational experiences described above in connection with home life, June also identifies the influence of two former teachers as keys to her interest in and development toward a career in education:

Then I think along the way, I like deeply fell in love with certain people. So, like my undergraduate advisor for my like undergraduate thesis, honor's thesis or whatever the thing was called, this woman [Stella] and I just, I mean I just thought she hung the moon, she was just so amazing or like I had a poetry professor [Harold], who the day we talked about [a famous American poet] brought in this like, you know, this L-shaped plastic frame. So, through plastic and you're like fun. He brought in one and it had a yellow rose petal and put it on the front table and he was like, 'This is a rose petal from the gravestone of [that famous American poet]. So, I'm putting this here so she can be with us today as we talk about her work.' So, like little moments like that I was just, I don't know. I think I was so enamored by these people that were so invested in this thing that I was also invested in. It's power to shape kind of how we see and live in the world. They were so obvious to me and that it also felt so obvious to them. ("June," Interview #1, pp. 22-23)

Not only was June provided with models of engaged teaching, but through the shared processes of reading and reflecting on poetry and the poets themselves also given a chance to practice the work she now performs as an adjunct at Urban Catholic. And in that work she found more than just steps in a process, but the world-changing power of words, which she now shares as a teacher of writing and literature courses.

### **Employment experiences.**

As was the case with the other interviewees, June worked through various phases of employment at other institutions, and even work outside academia, in processing and clarifying the meaning of workplace dignity. Initially, I was concerned this was beyond the scope of the questions driving the interview and the research more broadly. However, I now interpret this as a necessary element in any discussion of the gig-type work associated with non-tenure-track faculty employment (Kezar, DePaola, and Scott, 2019; Tolley, 2018), especially of the part-time adjunct work centered by the research question.

In clarifying the sense that time is a valued (read: “remunerated”) aspect of full-time employment, but which is often overlooked (read: “unpaid”) as a valuable element in a part-timer’s life, June referred to a previous work experience in the food service industry, and also to other fields where expertise has been devalued and positions have been unbundled as they have been in higher education instruction, and makes some interesting connections between the notion of a “real job” and the necessary separation between home and work life, something which feels more difficult to attain when working several part-time jobs:

It’s hard to kind of be present and be the kind of employee I want to be and be conscious of my time. [...] Like I feel like I need to be like, ‘Oh, I can’t spend the entire day reading these papers like, that’s 12 hours of my day.’ [...] So, like that need to do, to be as efficient as possible, I think comes in part from the recognition that I’m only getting paid to teach this class and not a ton, right? So, like how do I make that make sense? But then also part of me is like, that’s gross. Because I don’t want to be driven purely by like economic gain. But then, it also, you know— Money is also the way that we recognize people’s value. So,

it's hard not to be like, 'Oh, I have so little value.' I have so many years of education.

("June," Interview #2, pp. 16-17)

June's experience as an adjunct faculty member places her between competing impulses to be a good employee ("efficient") and to avoid devaluing herself or, more precisely, buying into the system that has devalued her work and so devalued her and her expertise. As she puts it herself, with an acid tone of sarcasm:

So, right part of me thinks a lot about like the system that I am perpetuating by taking this work. I am saying, "Oh, yeah, this system works, it's a good system. Thumbs up. Yes. Right." Like, "I am worth this money." Like, you're perpetuating, you're saying, "Yes, Urban Catholic, keep employing people at this rate to do this work, et cetera." So, I'm like, "That—that's not cool." ("June," Interview #1, p. 17)

**"July"**

***Demographics, longevity, & motivations***

July (JOO-lee) identifies as a white female, holds undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees in English literature, and taught first-year writing at Urban Catholic University for 3 semesters: 2 as a master's student at Urban Catholic, and 1 as a part-time instructor. In between those two stints, July pursued the doctorate, returning to the same region as Urban Catholic after receiving the degree. Alongside the part-time role at Urban Catholic, July simultaneously held a similar role at another university closer to her residence, and considered her teaching to be her full-time career, desiring a full-time role at one institution. By the time of our interviews, July was just about to begin a new academic year as a full-time non-tenure-track faculty member at that other institution; our discussions concern the prior year when she was working part-time at both institutions.

## *Relevant development toward the adjunct position at Urban Catholic*

### **Home life.**

July described clear and stable support at home when it came to her reading and writing interests:

I definitely remember, I mean my reading was always supported by my parents. They were also readers in different ways. So like, I was encouraged to bring lots of books on vacation and like, our Easter baskets as children would have like candy, but also a new book. That was really exciting for my brother and it's one of those things that you realize as an adult, like, "Oh! That's not necessarily normal." Like that's not what all the kids get. ("July," Interview #1, p. 3)

July also recognizes the extra attention her parents were paying to encouragement of reading and also to her writing:

I enjoyed writing fiction as a kid. So, they would want to read my stuff and like they encouraged me to. There was like a writing competition that the local library that they encouraged me to enter and I ended up placing somewhere in it. [...] So, I definitely have like a good collection of memories. ("July," Interview #1, p. 3)

In an expression of pride in July's work, as a celebration of it, her mother has kept those childhood writings:

They were definitely like there to kind of celebrate when I did something that I liked or they got recognized. [...] My mom then put all of the things I wrote in a little binder and like now has, like, 'Oh! Here are all her writings!' So yeah, she was really supportive in terms of we have these, these are worth keeping, worth remembering. ("July," Interview #1, p. 3)



The early and enthusiastic support at home transferred into an interest in literature at school, where teachers would add their own support and encouragement.

### **Educational experiences.**

Supported at home from an early age, July described herself as an avid reader whose academic interest in literature was further cemented in a high school class:

I remember one of the kind of formative experiences that I had was this teacher that I had in my junior and senior years of high school, who was a doctor herself. She had gone through English grad school, got her PhD, was teaching us high schoolers and was brilliant. And was kind of funny and standoffish, and so we all kind of admired her. I remember we were talking about like romanticism one day, like American romanticism. I think I really loved finding the patterns in books. Like I loved seeing, like how things could connect and kind of identifying these patterns. So, I remember saying something in class, like making the connection and that she was just so pleased that she was like, ‘Oh! That’s just such a great like observation.’ She’s like, ‘Class, give [July] a round of applause.’ Like that was definitely a, like a nice moment where I was like, ‘Oh! This is something I’m good at. This is something I could be successful in.’ That was definitely meaningful as well. (“July,” Interview #1, p. 2)

More than just a compliment paid in front of peers, it was a compliment paid by an adored teacher and a role model. Not only was the experience meaningful and very positive for July at the time when she was a student, but it has also affected the way she conducts her classes as a teacher now:

I definitely look back on that, and I think like, ‘Yes, praising my students in a public setting would be really good[...]. But I also, I think what I would worry about and I don’t know if my classmates at the time felt this way – I don’t really know – I would worry, especially if

that same kind of praise went to the same kind of student over and over again, I would definitely – if I were that teacher – I would be concerned the other students in the class would feel like, ‘Oh! That person is their favorite.’ [...] I think it can be like a double-edged sword. (“July,” Interview #1, p. 4)

### **Employment experiences.**

July’s early teaching took place in a private boarding school, where she worked for two years. Largely due to the nature of boarding school employment, including not only teaching and advising but also overnight or weekend “dorm parent” duties—“You’re just like in your students’ lives” (“July,” Interview #1, p. 5)—she admitted that it was not work suited to her preferences for space and privacy. So she left to pursue a PhD, during which time she gained college teaching experience as a TA and as an adjunct.

July’s path to teaching as a part-time faculty member at Urban Catholic involved re-connecting with a professor she knew from when she’d earned a master’s:

I actually started off as a student there [at Urban Catholic]. So, I got my masters in English at Urban Catholic University [a little less than a decade ago]. I really enjoyed my time there. It was really helpful, informative for me. I had a great experience with the department. Then proceeded on to teach a couple of years at the high school level because I wasn't sure if I wanted to pursue further graduate education after that. Then decided yes, yes, I did want to get my PhD and so I got my PhD elsewhere and then finally moved back to the state. And happened to reconnect with one of my former professors at a kind of professional development event. She knew that I was adjuncting in the state and so she kind of threw out there, ‘Well, we have a class that's just opened up if you ever want to teach here again.’ (“July,” Interview #1, p. 1)

The informal process echoes the experiences described by the other participants, as well; July, as the others did, noted that the employment process began as the result of a connection with a faculty member in the English Department at Urban Catholic.

### **Participants' Experiences of Workplace Dignity**

As described in Chapter IV, I met with each participant for three open-ended 90-minute interviews, 4.5 hours with each participant, a process I began and completed in the month of August 2019. For the first two interviews I provided skeletal preparation, though prior to the third interview sent detailed descriptions of Hodson's (2001) themes discussed above. In all three I only asked one prepared question geared toward the specific focus of each interview (see Appendix D):

- First interview: *How did you come to be employed as an adjunct at Urban Catholic University? Please reconstruct any home, work, or educational experiences you believe led you here.*
- Second interview: *Could you reconstruct your typical work day, or related work routines, as an adjunct in the English Department at Urban Catholic University?*
- Third interview: *Given what you have said about your life before you became an adjunct at Urban Catholic University and given what you have said about your work now, how do you understand your experience of dignity in that role?*

Other relevant factors regarding the research process include my learning early on during the interviewing process that per-course pay for adjuncts at Urban Catholic is about 2.5 times greater than the national average<sup>7</sup> at nearly \$6,700; nevertheless, the participants all expressed

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<sup>7</sup> It is perhaps more accurate to say “what is widely understood to be the national average” because the data around part-time faculty salaries is notoriously incomplete, as indicated earlier. As of 2014 the Democratic staff of the U.S.

frustration in the ways the institution, from the level of the department on up, failed to support them in their pursuits of dignity. According to Nikolova and Cnossen (2020), who report on meaningful work and meaningfulness of work, “autonomy, competence, and relatedness are about 4.6 times more important for meaningfulness at work than compensation, benefits, career advancement, job insecurity, and working hours” (p. 2). Accordingly, even without adequate institutional support, and in the face of obstacles or challenges to dignity, the participants all described ways they felt dignified in their work. At no point did I provide a definition of the word “dignity” to any participant, letting each (re)construct her own sense of the phenomenon in the process of talking about work experiences.

I have organized the following subsections according to the four themes Hodson (2001) derived in his analysis of the ways workers pursue, maintain, and enhance their sense of workplace dignity: *autonomy*, *citizenship*, *resistance*, and *sociability*. I follow those subsections with additional findings, presented as emerging themes in adjunct faculty experiences of dignity: *vulnerability*, *marginality*, *boundaries*, and *community*.

### ***Autonomy***

June’s sense of her autonomy as an adjunct is complicated, as it is for the other interviewees. As described earlier, autonomy can be understood as the ability of an individual to

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House Committee on Education and the Workforce reported average adjunct salaries at \$2,700 per standard three-credit course, and that report relied on what was and still is one of the best sources on adjunct wages, a 2012 survey report produced by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce. To put this issue in context, I had to file a right-to-know request to get access to adjunct salaries for the four public colleges and universities in the University System of New Hampshire for an unrelated study. All other staff and faculty salaries are published in an annual and public salary book (USNH, 2019c).

direct their work independently and to find their own meaning in the work, and is a core element of professional work. By way of showing how compromised her sense of autonomy is, she describes her experience of what could be coined the “proxy management” of adjunct faculty by the students in their courses who complete end-of-term evaluations. June minces no words in describing her feeling that the student evaluation serves as a proxy for proper observation and even for management prerogatives associated with power to offer continued employment, a power which is total even when delegated as in the case of these non-unionized part-time faculty:

[I]t’s weird though because in the regular construction, with production and things like that, it’s like the manager is who you’re resisting. That is, the hierarchical person above you. So, part of what makes teaching unbounded, what you’re pushing against, for example, when you’re like: “No, this is my time. I’m not going to respond to those emails or whatever it is.” Like you’re pushing against students. (“June,” Interview #3, p. 7)

In this, June echoes what has been written of the academy in general, and which may be exacerbated in the adjunct context: “It is the unbounded nature of the academic career that is the heart of the problem” (Gappa, Austin, Trice, 2007, p. 69; quoting Bailyn, 1993, p.51).

While May, June, and July all recognize and find great value in the flexibility and autonomy available to them when it comes to designing assignments, they also recognize that a lack of peer observation and feedback may amount to something other than autonomy in the classroom. In my interpretation, this experience of autonomy in isolation is more akin to oblivion, in the sense of “being forgotten.”

One of the most important ways autonomy allows workers to defend or enhance their workplace dignity is to give them some freedom to imbue on-task functions with their own meanings, meanings that are self-determined and not prescribed in a top-down fashion. As noted

in earlier chapters, Hodson's (2001, p. 76) findings across 108 organizational ethnographies indicate that professionals and craft workers are less likely to experience challenges to their autonomy in the workplace than those working in "rigid and scripted" (p. 77) bureaucratic settings or under "unilateral supervisory fiat" (ibid.). To clarify the expectations of autonomy in a professional workplace, and to highlight again the links between autonomy and worker inclination toward citizenship or resistance behaviors, Hodson writes:

We expect resistance to be increased and citizenship reduced in closely controlled bureaucratic settings and in settings with unilateral supervisory fiat. Professional and craft settings should exhibit the opposite pattern. Settings without professional or craft autonomy and without bureaucratic rules are classified as organized on the basis of supervisory fiat. Such settings are based on unmediated direct personal control. (ibid.)

Given what the participants to this dissertation have said about their worry over student evaluations of their work, it appears that the organizational scheme under which they work is in some sense better described as one of supervisory fiat and not professionalism.

More than that, the supervisory apparatus described by the faculty I interviewed is staffed neither by the adjunct faculty members' professional colleagues nor by superiors within the department, but the work is performed by students who complete end-of-semester evaluations. These student evaluations of teaching ("SETs") are apparently the only review participants to this study have received for their work in the classroom; in May's case that's over 8 years. This practice is quite distinct from the classroom observation by a peer or supervisor explicitly required in order to review full-time non-tenure-track faculty for renewal at Urban Catholic University (2019e). In the absence of a rigorous scheme for promotion or renewal, such as what is provided in the case of tenure-track and even non-tenure-track faculty on one-year or other term appointments, the

rationale for requiring peer observation falls away for adjunct faculty; but the import of the student evaluation remains, ominously. The fallibility of SETs is clear in the literature but their primacy in adjunct and even full-time non-tenure-track evaluation seems just as unshakable. I write more about mounting criticism of SETs (e.g., Esarey & Valdes, 2020) in the Ch. VI section on enhancing adjunct faculty development.

The theme of autonomy also came through in May's discussion of professional vulnerability:

*[Interviewer: Why is vulnerability something that stands out to you as lacking in those infrequent sort of encounters or that helps build in those encounters that are more frequent? What is the, the value is not the right word, but what is the...]* The different, like what is the quality? *[Int.: The quality of that vulnerability that's important?]* I think safety would be one. So, you have some trust that whatever you expose to somebody, you're not going to be rejected. Especially if you're talking about work and you're having a really hard problem and you're in a tenuous position, you're an adjunct. Are you going to get work the next semester? Everybody's fighting for whatever, it's like survival. You're fighting for whatever classes you can get that is not conducive to being honest about what's hard for you as a teacher. So, you would have to feel like people have your back and they're not going to use something that they know about you, against you to their own advantage.

### ***Citizenship***

May spoke of wanting to create programs like those she participated in as a graduate student at another institution:

So, for example, let's start a program where we get undergrads to be involved in an English language learning program with the maintenance workers and staff workers. Let's pull

some of our resources and give our grad students teaching experience and offer free creative writing to high school students because we see that that's a lack for them. That creative expression and self-expression and self-advocacy.

Pursuit of such a program of community engagement and development, May believed, was right in line with CST. The problem: such programming almost certainly requires more time, energy, and funding than a part-timer's employment relationship provides or warrants.

July speaks of an experience of citizenship and also identifies a tension that exists for adjuncts who would like to participate in citizenship behaviors by volunteering for department events:

But I was kind of constantly thinking like, 'You're such a dumb ass, like, why are you here? Spending hours....' And I was working on my dissertation at the time and I was like, 'You should not be here. You should be doing your actual work that you get paid for. Or working on your dissertation or like doing something else for you as a person. Because you need to take care of yourself as person.'

While the example here relates to July's experience of volunteer work while teaching at another institution, it gives tremendous insight into her sense of citizenship as it pertains to her career teaching English at the postsecondary level, and also spotlights the tension that exists between wanting to volunteer service, whether for the sake of students or to fill out a CV for future faculty applications, but also feeling like the "ask" is too much given the part-time role.

### ***Resistance***

Resistance can seem like the opposite of citizenship, as in a refusal to go above and beyond the job description, but many examples of this kind of behavior are responses to basic job requirements or processes. June minces no words in describing her feeling that the student



evaluation of teaching serves as a proxy tool of management in lieu of proper peer observation and even serves management when exercising the power to employ (or not):

I think of myself as notorious for the kind of high standards that I hold students to. I feel like I mentioned this before that like on every course eval, at least one person talks about how I grade too hard. I talked to [students] about it that I do have high standards and they're not—it's because I have seen students meet them. I know that they are possible for them. That it's not some random standard or one time one student got an A or something. Even though sometimes I make them work harder and I ask a lot of them and they don't all like that but I don't do it—I do it very thoughtfully and I asked a lot very thoughtfully. There is something, like it feels at this point like resistance in some way. Because I'm getting feedback that students want something else and I know that they have an impact on me being hard, me being asked back and I'm like, 'No, I'm not fucking budging, I'm not going to tell you that you're awesome if you're not awesome. I'm just, I won't do it.'

What this example calls to mind is the platform-based gig work of Uber or Lyft drivers, where the companies have removed themselves from the typical employer evaluation process, inserting customer reviews instead:

While earning money by using a platform (instead of having a traditional employer) arguably offers freedom and flexibility to workers, at the same time, many platforms monitor and manage their “independent” workers through the opinions of customers. They deputize customers to serve as “middle managers,” evaluating the services they received, which can lead to disciplining or discharging workers. (Maffie and Elias, 2019, p. 19)

Whereas “[p]rofessional and craft organizations lessen the need for close supervision of work” (Hodson, 2001, p. 76, citing Granovetter, 1985), the adjunct situation embeds close supervision

and deputizes students to perform management's role without content expertise, pedagogical training, or proper anti-bias preparation.

July, too, speaks about frustration with constant calls for service that go out to all staff and faculty of the department:

I kept on kind of reminding myself that like, 'Yes, it's great that you're doing this. But these other people are getting paid to like, be here. You, on the other hand, are getting paid'—at the time, it was like \$5,000 per course—'you are getting paid for your time in a course, and this thing that you're doing now is totally outside of that, that realm of what you need to be doing.'

This frustration quickly led to July's absence from future volunteer events and efforts: "I mean, there are lots of volunteer faculty opportunities at that institution and I did not participate."

### ***Sociability***

This theme comes through mostly as an absence rather than a positive or negative experience for all three participants, though there are some notable and important relationships that June identifies. Many of the social interactions, though, occur in passing, as with administrative staff in the department, or with other part-timers in shared spaces. This is largely a function of class scheduling and also the need for other employment on days when June is not teaching at Urban Catholic. July, too, notes the limited role of interaction with colleagues:

I feel like in my work at Urban Catholic University—just because of the really temporary nature of it, that I was just there for one semester that I was only teaching starting very early in the morning and then had to book it and get to back home—I feel like the social aspect of my work life there dropped out of it. Like it didn't play a really important role for me. And obviously that it's not universally true, like I had social interactions, ones that

I valued, the ones that I enjoyed during that semester. But it did make me wonder, seeing [sociability] framed like a core pillar of dignity, it does make me wonder if I would've been more tempted to take on more work there if that had been part of my experience all throughout. Because I certainly had positive, as I mentioned in the past with you, both colleagues and like former professors there, who I really liked or I really valued their opinion or I enjoyed kind of speaking with both via email or in person. I wonder if [the social aspect] had been a part of my kind of daily choice, to say no thank you or take on more work here—I mean my feelings obviously in posing that is like: “Yes.” (“July,” Interview #3, p. 3)

Absent the frequent connection with peers, July's tether to the institution was brittle. In her own interpretation it was the frail connection, or disconnection, that kept her from seeking a more involved role as an adjunct.

The fundamental features of adjunct work, as all three participants observed and which May addresses here, make basic collegial interactions a difficult prospect:

We all understand that this is not easy work and that we're going to have challenges and we're going to help each other try and sort out those challenges, as simple as that. And that, there has to be some way that the community is kind of deliberately formed, I think in this case. I don't think that's true community generally, but in this case where we're teaching and we're employed and we're at an institution where adjuncts who are there at different days of the week and different times, we're working at other places. We're in and out, that's not going to happen organically. It was very unlikely to happen organically. (“May,” Interview #1, p. 18)

Even if social interactions seem to come naturally in many other workplaces, finding time to engage in that way with colleagues is just another additional and unlisted job-related task that requires work outside the officially delineated bounds of the adjunct position.

### **Emerging Themes in Adjunct Faculty Experiences of Dignity**

In addition to describing experiences that indicate Hodson's (2001) four themes of the pursuit of workplace dignity, the participants also surfaced what seem to be denials or obstacles to that pursuit: *vulnerability*, *marginality*, and *boundaries* emerged as themes of those challenges, with *community* more closely aligned with the positive pursuit of dignity. These four emerging themes suggest that my design ought to have more directly considered the denials of dignity set out by Hodson, including *mismanagement*, *overwork*, and outright *abuse*, as well as *incursions* on autonomy and *contradictions* of participation (pp. 19-20).<sup>8</sup>

#### ***Vulnerability***

The theme of vulnerability has to do with the trust people need to develop with one another before they can truly open up, share ideas, and offer criticism, which is important for the writing instructor in the classroom but also for the employee in the workplace. This seems to be related to sociability and is therefore complicated by the near absence of significant social interaction with other faculty or staff. Asked what the qualities of vulnerability might be, May described a hypothetical in which an adjunct considers whether or not they can trust colleagues or supervisors with their complaints or concerns:

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<sup>8</sup> Hodson (2001) arranges these into four groups, combining *mismanagement and abuse* into one category. I separate them here to distinguish poor management from unethical or illegal treatment. The terms "incursion on *autonomy*" and "contradictions of *participation*" are also Hodson's, but I choose to italicize and draw attention to the terms *incursions* and *contradictions* rather than *autonomy* and *participation*, since the focus is on the action of denial rather than on the goal or ideal.

So, you have some trust that whatever you expose to somebody, you're not going to be rejected. Especially if you're talking about work and you're having a really hard problem and you're in a tenuous position, you're an adjunct. Are you going to get work the next semester? Everybody's fighting for whatever, it's like survival. You're fighting for whatever classes you can get that is not conducive to being honest about what's hard for you as a teacher. So, you would have to feel like people have your back and they're not going to use something that they know about you, against you to their own advantage.

("May," Interview #1, p. 20)

In vulnerability, then, as with the theme of boundaries, there is a tension and a very fine line between competing motivations. In the same breath, May speaks of the positive and empathic urge to be open with colleagues and students, but also of the negative urge to avoid risk where trust is uncertain or unearned. While they did not speak as directly about vulnerability as May, both June and July also described challenges related to the precarious nature of their adjunct employment, and June in particular seemed to identify a lack of trust that she could voice critical opinions about the department or institution.

### ***Marginality***

Related to the trust and safety of May's theme of vulnerability is the theme of marginality, as described most explicitly by July, who described her experience as an adjunct as a continuation of her experience as a graduate student:

I think this feeling for me is coming out of being a grad student. That like, I think there are times as a grad student that you're kind of made to feel like, this isn't real work that you're doing. That you're like—because you're not really getting a salary for it—you're getting a stipend and it's barely livable. ("July," Interview #1, pp. 6-7)

The idea that grad work “wasn’t real professional work because you're not getting paid a real livable salary” (ibid., p. 7) transfers easily onto the experience of an adjunct who is similarly underpaid and who is just as “contingent and uncomfortable” (ibid.) as a doctoral student struggling across the unsupported summer months when stipends are in hiatus and part-time work is hardest to acquire. June, too, described feeling like a bit player as compared to full-time faculty with “real jobs” (“June,” Interview #1, p. 3, 13).

### ***Boundaries***

The theme of autonomy is also complicated by the experience described by participants that students and colleagues expect constant attention to their requests, which June see as a full-time demand on part-timers’ attention:

Even with colleagues, so, like I got a request to take a third class. I think it was sent to me on like a Saturday and I didn't respond. I didn't really even think about it until Monday morning. I was like, no, you're not thinking about this until Monday morning. So, because I was like there's no really way that you should be expected to deal with this over the weekend. I'm like technically not even on contract by the way but anyway. So, by like I think like 10 in the morning on Monday, I had been contacted by two other people in the department. (“June,” Interview #3, p. 7)

The need for boundaries, expressed by all three participants, arises in response to the feeling that an adjunct employed part-time cannot be constantly available to students or colleagues. For May, this means that there should and must be boundaries between students and faculty, work and home life, but also between volunteer work and paid work. It also means reining in some of her grander plans for community literacy or writing programming: “It’s very hard to do something like super radical in any of these places. So, since I can’t kind of go all out of the box [...] I have decided to

make this teaching kind of boundaried” (“May,” Interview #1, p. 26). This cordoning goes against May’s inclination, though, and also appears to prevent full flourishing of the ideals embedded in CST:

[M]y life is the whole project, but if you’re in a place where you can’t really do that because of top-down sorts of values and ways in which you’re pressed by the system, then how you survive that and continue to be a growing person connected to your truth and your spirit and so on—things that a Catholic institution might say you should do but make it hard for you to do. Then I had to put boundaries upon it because otherwise I would be really depressed probably. (“May,” Interview #1, p. 26)

May also recognizes the ways a teacher’s drive or “calling” to do good and to do well by their students can be exploited: “I think this is particularly true in teaching and then you get this idea like you should sacrifice, like it’s for the students. They pull on your heartstrings, the administrators, whoever, they pull on your heart strings” (“May,” Interview #1, p. 27). The boundaries not only confine work to manageable commitments, but also allow May “to think about [her] next career moves,” “talk to people, read books,” “exercise, cook food,” and “maintain [her] partnership, maintain [her] home” (“May,” Interview #1, pp. 26-27).

Boundaries could be considered a form of resistance, a withholding of extra efforts; however, boundaries could also be construed as a recognition that full human dignity requires a life beyond work, and so has little to do with at-work efforts, required or voluntary. Importantly, the pursuit of workplace dignity requires recognition that work cannot become all-encompassing or completely unbounded and that dignity can and should be pursued elsewhere. It is the experience of all three participants that establishing a boundary feels a bit like resistance, but that there is no shame in saying “No.” This is apparent in June’s frustration about the expectation, by students and

colleagues alike, that emails sent after hours or over the weekend should be responded to as though sent during regular business hours on a weekday:

I got a request to take a third class. I think it was sent to me on like a Saturday and I didn't respond. I didn't really even think about it until Monday morning. I was like, 'No, you're not thinking about this until Monday morning.' So—because I was like, there's no really way that you should be expected to deal with this over the weekend, I'm like technically not even on contract by the way but anyway—so, by I think 10 in the morning on Monday, I had been contacted by two other people in the department. (“June,” Interview #3, p. 7)

This stands in tension to June’s understanding that her line of work doesn’t allow time off, especially not “if you’re a really good academic”:

“[W]hat is, I don’t know, sinister about the gig economy is that you are never not at work, and I do feel like there's something weird about that mentality that has always, it seems, also been in the academic world. Like, if you’re a really good academic....” (“June,” Interview #3, p. 6)

It is also apparent in July’s sense of tension between, on the one hand, wanting to perform service above and beyond the specific responsibilities of an adjunct assignment, and on the other hand the need to set boundaries in order to maintain balance with other responsibilities beyond the courses at Urban Catholic University. Sometimes this means distancing herself from the work, even when the work has taken on meaning related to her sense of self:

I mean, it can be and often is like, a pretty high stress job. And it's also, as you had said, and as we kind of talked about earlier, it can also be, it's really personal in a way that a lot of other positions and jobs are not. Like, part of how I organize my syllabus, is related to me like and who I am as a person and who I am as an instructor. When you have you have



that class going poorly. Or when you have, like students who respond really negatively to the material or to you. Like, it can feel really isolating, and really personal. (“July,” Interview #3, p. 16)

In the end, all three participants echoed what May said about that tension between wanting to perform citizenship behaviors and needing to survive on adjunct wages:

And once upon a time [...] I would’ve thought like, ‘Oh yeah, this is my service.’ But I’ve thankfully dropped that and now I respond to those emails saying, ‘Are you paying? Sorry, I do not do work for this college that’s unpaid,’ and I don’t feel bad about it. (“May,” Interview #1, p. 27)

### ***Community***

As a bulwark of workplace dignity, sociability proves to be incredibly challenging for the interviewed adjuncts to achieve. Nevertheless, all three participants described aspirations for deeper sense of connection to a campus community. More than social connection, community represents communion to May, who uses this term in what seem to be two senses:

1. communion between and among individuals (students, faculty) *engaged in a common purpose* such as education and learning;
2. communion by an individual, be they student or teacher, *with a subject or practice*, such as the writing process or the educational process.

This has apparent overlaps with Hodson’s (2001) themes of autonomy and sociability, though might deserve separate consideration. In the first sense noted above, communion could be construed as collaboration toward a common goal. As May put it:

I was always interested in the ground level and the hands-on stuff. I wanted to draw, I wanted to paint, I wanted to like have parties with people, I wanted to be in a group on

stage. I wanted to write plays and perform them. So, I never had this idea that I wanted to like climb a ladder and then manage anything. I wanted collaboration. (“May,” Interview #1, p. 2)

Collaboration is the way July seemed to approach community, as well. But in terms of the second sense, there is an unmistakably spiritual element to communion, as expressed by May:

So, what do I want them to do? I want them to take risks. I want them to figure out things for themselves. I want them to be able to tell me where they’re at and what they understand and what they don’t understand. I want to invite them into communion with the subject with me and that they have every right to be there. I want them to feel like they have every right to be there and I believe they do. (“May,” Interview #2, p. 15)

Her hopes for her students reflect the kind of community all three participants have said they want for themselves, too: one in which they can be vulnerable despite their marginality, and committed even though boundaries on time and effort must be recognized.

### **Summary of Findings**

From the very beginning of the first interview, all four positive elements from Hodson’s (2001) analysis were readily apparent to me; my sense that *autonomy*, *citizenship*, *resistance*, and *sociability* would be useful terms through which to interpret the participants’ experiences persisted throughout the entire interview process with all three participants. This was the case despite the fact that I waited until just before the third interview sessions to identify those themes for the participants. And when I did reveal those themes, the participants were all quick to recognize them in their own constructions of past experiences and workday routines. Even though May, June, and July could all speak readily to obstacles and struggles for dignity in the role as adjunct English faculty, they were all certain that their work in that role was dignified and dignifying—they each

found dignity in that work. While Catholic Social Teaching was not at the forefront of any of their experiences as told to me, May did identify the paradox or gap between what CST suggests and what Urban Catholic does in practice, similar to the “gaps between what workers expect and what they experience” (Kochan, et al., 2018). This also seems to indicate a mismatch between how the university markets itself through its mission and how it employs these part-time faculty (Milian & Rizk, 2018; Morphew & Hartley, 2006).

The emerging themes that I identified fit in with Hodson’s general categories of denials of dignity—as in *vulnerability*, *marginality*, and *boundaries*—and supports for the pursuit of dignity—as in *community*. The participants spoke of the difficulties of overcoming or embracing *vulnerability* in order to develop trust in the workplace, the related challenges posed by adjunct faculty *marginality*, as well as desires for both *boundaries* around work that allow for balance, and for scheduling and other arrangements that encourage the development of *community*. These challenges have everything to do with the nature of the adjunct position, which is separated from other faculty positions by UCU policies and by job function, which is limited to teaching and unbundled from service or research responsibilities.

I would add that the discussions I had with the participants around student evaluations of teaching and their use in adjunct faculty re-employment decisions offer an emerging conceptualization of adjunct faculty labor as being organized and managed the way gig workers are: according to the rankings of user reviews.

## CHAPTER VI. Findings, Recommendations, and Considerations for Future Research

### Review of Findings

Major findings of this study include:

1. The experience of autonomy as described by adjunct faculty participants is severely hampered by the use of student evaluations of teaching, or SETs, as the sole metric guiding decisions to re-hire adjunct faculty.
  - a. The use of SETs for the purposes of deciding to rehire or not imbues student perceptions of good or bad teaching with the force of supervisory fiat, describing a proxy management of adjunct faculty that is akin to the customer satisfaction ratings used by ride-share corporations to determine employment for their drivers.
2. The here-and-then-gone nature of participants' presence on campus makes sociability quite difficult, meaning that social interaction and relationship-building with colleagues is not available to facilitate experiences of workplace dignity.
3. For similar reasons, opportunities for citizenship behavior are difficult for the participants to take on, with all three noting that they have other employment responsibilities which are required for financial reasons and which compete for time with unpaid volunteer activities.
4. Participant recommendations are right in line with empirically-founded best practices described in the literatures around faculty development and adjunct faculty working conditions.
5. Catholic Social Teaching on labor rights and human dignity seem very distant, if not absent, from adjunct faculty employment practices that are indistinguishable from standard practice in secular higher education contexts.

- a. Legal setbacks aside, there is no good theological reason to decline those rights and no legal barricade to voluntary recognition of faculty unions.

What these findings suggest is that the pursuit of workplace dignity in a Catholic Church-affiliated university is possible but that the pursuit is challenged by industry-wide practices that are common across all institutional types and affiliations. Based on findings from Hodson (2001), and Hicks (2018), these challenges were expected. Hodson (2001) describes a set of oppositional themes, behaviors and conditions that prevent or stymie the pursuit of dignity in the workplace, and I believe the emerging themes described in Chapter V correspond with Hodson's themes of denial.

While there are stark challenges to the professional autonomy of adjuncts, and a “proxy management” regime centered on student evaluations of teaching, this study also points to several recommendations to enhance workplace dignity for adjunct faculty, and links those recommendations to a broader empirical literature describing best practices for adjunct employment no matter the institutional type or affiliation.

## **The Pursuit of Workplace Dignity**

### ***Autonomy***

Workplace autonomy is inseparable from the common understanding of professionalism—“Professional and craft organizations lessen the need for close supervision of work based on management imposed coordination, inspection, and evaluation because professional and craft workers are the front-line inspectors of much of their own work” (Hodson, 2001, p. 76, citing Granovetter, 1985)—but that expectation is inverted in the adjunct work described by participants. Given what the participants to this dissertation have said about their worry over student evaluations of their work, it appears that the organizational scheme under which they work is in some sense

better described as one of supervisory fiat and not professionalism. More than that, the supervisory apparatus described by the faculty I interviewed is staffed neither by the adjunct faculty member's professional colleagues nor their actual supervisors, but by students who complete end-of-semester course evaluations, often the only review an adjunct receives for their work in the classroom. This practice is quite distinct from the classroom observation by a peer or supervisor explicitly required in order to review full-time non-tenure-track faculty for renewal at Urban Catholic University (2019d). It is pertinent here to note similarities between the employment of an adjunct and a gig worker:

While earning money by using a platform (instead of having a traditional employer) arguably offers freedom and flexibility to workers, at the same time, many platforms monitor and manage their “independent” workers through the opinions of customers. They deputize customers to serve as “middle managers,” evaluating the services they received, which can lead to disciplining or discharging workers. (Maffie and Elias, 2019, p. 19)

In both employment scenarios, the employee has been hired into a system designed for institutional flexibility and efficiency, is treated as an unbenefited contractor (if not also categorized as such), and whose continued employment relies on accrual of positive feedback from those who have been served by the employee. In the absence of a rigorous scheme for promotion or renewal, such as what is provided in the case of tenure-track and even non-tenure-track faculty on one-year or other term appointments, the rationale for requiring peer observation falls away for adjunct faculty; but the import of the student evaluation remains, ominously.

### ***Citizenship***

Service to the institution is one of the three key elements of tenure-track faculty positions, and is also often attached to full-time non-tenure-track positions, and in both cases is effectively

paid for by 9- or 12-month salaries. Due to the unbundled nature of adjunct employment as experienced by the participants of this study and as described more generally in the literature, the very same service opportunities are more truly volunteer work when performed by adjuncts who are paid for the work done for their classes but not for service contributions. The participants to this study all expressed a desire for one full-time teaching position rather than the patchwork of multiple gigs across campuses—indeed, July took a full-time position at another campus where she'd worked simultaneously to her time as an adjunct at Urban Catholic—but the necessity of working multiple jobs means limited availability outside scheduled classes and office hours. According to the participants, acts of citizenship have proven either difficult or bittersweet.

### ***Resistance***

The level of resistance discussed by the participants does not rise to the level of “sabotage” written about by Hodson (2001), not by a long shot. But there is a strong current of criticism throughout each participant’s complete transcript over three interviews, and descriptions of the kinds of withdrawal of effort or enthusiasm that might be expected when a worker feels overworked and underpaid, not to mention underappreciated or unrecognized. Some of the descriptions of resistance were expressions of an ideal rather than reconstructions of events, as when May expressed deep philosophical misgivings over the value of grading. The kind of focused and personalized feedback she and the other participants would prefer to give in the writing intensive courses they teach is made nearly unachievable by class size. So far, May’s refusal to apply grades remains theoretical and silently held. Other forms of resistance were more in-your-face, so to speak, as in June’s adamant pronouncement against the pressures she feels to inflate grades, which also points out the important finding regarding “proxy management” by students,

akin to the management of gig workers who are reliant on positive reviews from satisfied customers.

### ***Sociability***

The centrality of good co-worker relationships to workplace dignity cannot be overstated: Coworkers help provide meaning in work through the sharing of work life experiences and through friendships. Coworkers can also provide a basis for group solidarity and mutual support in the face of denials of dignity at work. Some minimum amount of support from coworkers is essential for the successful defense of dignity in almost any situation [...]. (Hodson, 2001, p. 200)

While Hodson's work compares situations of supportive coworker relations and toxic coworker relations, it does not consider workplace contexts in which the absence of social connections between workers is the norm, and so leaves a large gap of understanding in the context of part-time adjunct faculty experience. Based on the experiences described by the participants to this study, minimal interaction between them and other adjuncts in the department has left something of a vacuum where Hodson suggests most workplace ethnographies would describe inside jokes, esprit de corps, and other forms of solidarity (Hodson, 2001, Table 8.1, p. 207), or cliques, gossip, ostracism, and other markers of coworker conflict (ibid., Table 8.2, p. 210).

### ***Challenges to the Pursuit of Workplace Dignity***

The four emerging themes of *vulnerability*, *marginality*, *boundaries*, and *community* offer important clues about the ways these participants experienced their pursuits of dignity in the workplace. Put briefly, those pursuits have been stunted by challenges that can be traced back to intentional policies, standard practices, and unintended consequences. I believe this has a lot to do with the peculiar hybridity of adjunct employment, in which professional employees with



advanced degrees are subject to supervisory fiat and proxy management by the very students they are teaching. On the one hand, the participants described significant connections to the work and students, but on the other hand lamented that student evaluations, for instance, are the only formal review of adjunct work despite no pedagogical training or anti-bias measures.

The sense of belonging May said she wanted to create in her classes (“May,” Interview #2, p. 15) is apparent in experiences described by June, too—though maybe in the sense of non-belonging. June jokes about how her partner has a “real job” as opposed to the adjunct position she holds at Urban Catholic (“June,” Interview #1, p. 3, 13). Used ironically, the term subtly challenges the notion that a part-time job, or a part-time employee, is not contributing to the overall function of the university. The reality, of course, is that part-time English faculty teach a significant portion of the first-year writing courses at many institutions, including Urban Catholic. Used in earnest, the term “real job” indicates what might be common expectations about how to get a job, what it means to work that job, and how one can be expected to live on wages from that work.

“Real jobs” comes with a sense of “real people,” who all have what June’s partner did: “He had an office, he had defined duties, he had like stable coworkers and managers. He had a yearly review. Like, he was a recognized component” (ibid., p. 13). That’s what May, June, and July each note with some surprise, just how informal the adjunct faculty employment process has been from hire to orientation to development, without job postings to respond to and without applications to complete, with perhaps a couple optional afternoons for orientation, and with no job description or regular peer observation to gauge performance or improvement. And, without a career ladder to speak of, not much room to grow in the position. What those absences seem to indicate to the participants is a lack of interest by the institution in its adjuncts, a lack of interest in keeping new

hires around for a while, and a lack of concern for their professional development while they are around.

### **Recommendations: Designing for Contingency**

In describing why she thought it was so hard to make changes in adjunct working conditions, June suggested that commonly-held misconceptions have a part to play: “We have not figured out a way to make adjunct jobs *not* the thing you do on the way to something else or the thing you do because you’re not good enough. Those are the two kinds of narrative we tell” (“June,” Interview #1, p. 20). Almost by definition, Urban Catholic and countless other colleges and universities already “design for contingency.” The number of hires is contingent on fluctuation in enrollments and sections of courses often taught by part-timers, such as the introductory courses taught by the faculty I interviewed. The hiring guidelines are nimble and decentralized to departments, a process sped up and under-scrutinized in the name of flexibility, which snap decisions require. There are policies that specifically write part-timers out of governance, development, and grievance procedures, even as it has created those procedures for other faculty types, even creating a separate grievance process for non-tenure-track faculty who do not have access to put their concerns before the faculty’s governing body. The institution’s own bylaws make such an appeal impossible, so a separate process was created. Design for contingency is robust already.

Even at an institution offering the kind of pay Urban Catholic can afford, a 2-2 course-load amounts to a little less than \$27,000. As noted in the introduction, all three of the participants relied on additional part-time employment at other institutions but also, in May’s and June’s cases, additional part-time employment as tutors and mentors at Urban Catholic. All three also were offered third courses in some semesters, for which the university requires signing a waiver to the

rights and benefits afforded full-time faculty. The limits and waivers on extra courses for part-timers are meant as cost-saving measures in the face of requirements to offer benefits to full-timers, and Urban Catholic uses those measures despite an implicit acknowledgement that they need dedicated faculty to perform the bundled role of full-time faculty work. As May expressed it:

So, the other two institutions [where I'd previously taught], like it was, I knew—I left because of the working conditions, a bunch of the working conditions. But I didn't feel as much personal rage toward the people running the programs and the departments or whatever because they were more honest unlike where I work now. ("May," Interview #1, p. 23)

A design for contingency was apparent even if Urban Catholic couldn't see it or wouldn't admit it, and a refusal to confront the conditions is, frankly, angering.

What the participants in my dissertation seek is a different kind of design for contingency that is meant to support them in the work they do, in part by bringing them closer to the campus community and its educative function. Some of the changes suggested here indicate a more inclusive design, a more intentional employment process, and mirror some of the resources described by studies compiled by Kezar and Maxey (2013). It is important to note, too, that the *availability* of resources cannot and should not be understood as *wide use* of resources, as the very existence of resources may be unknown to adjuncts or access to them only possible through individual interest and effort, notwithstanding commitments to family and other employers (Beaton, 2017). May observed this in our final interview:

And when I think about the ways that I find dignity in the work that I do, I think it's largely through my seeking and searching. It doesn't seem like it's really built in, but there are

little places for it. There are little like windows and doors that can be opened into having it. (“May,” Interview #3, p. 20)

Even where those windows and doors of opportunity do exist, May notes, “You have to go looking for them and open them yourself” (ibid.).

### ***Governance Opportunities for Adjuncts***

All three participants made strong recommendations that governance opportunities be opened to part-timers, with specific urgency at the departmental level. May stated the issue very clearly: “I just want to be involved in the governance, to have a voice, to be consulted in decision making.” And July complicates that desire to be involved in departmental governance: “I would make sure that department meetings are open to part time faculty and non-tenure track faculty. I wouldn't require it, unless you're going to pay them to be there. Because like that is part of the thing about part time, is that we are getting paid per course.” Whether by paying for that service through per-meeting stipends or by adjusting course salaries to reflect obligatory service requirements. “I mean, I think in an ideal world,” July mused in our final interview,

if you have to have non-tenure track faculty, that office spaces get commingled, like mixed up between, like tenure track and non-tenure track faculty. [...] I think that would be interesting. And productive for faculty to be able to have conversations across that sort of tenure-track line, so to speak. Yeah, might help create a more cohesive department culture. So, having the commingled office spaces like that might allow for the kind of culture question. Like, do people feel comfortable going to an open meeting? Like maybe if they already knew more faculty, if they had already had informal conversations with tenured faculty about teaching about whatever, about things that were happening.

July's suggestion that uncompensated participation cannot be an expected when adjunct faculty are explicitly and intentionally "unbundled" from the service requirement attached to most full-time faculty positions speaks directly to the complicated position of faculty whose professional status appears to be nominal rather than actual or effective. Merely opening meetings or committees to adjunct participation is only half the struggle, but should be a starting point. A relatively recent review of literature around shared governance, which makes no reference to part-time or adjunct or non-tenure-track faculty or their possible contributions, indicates the uphill battle for adjunct participation in institutional decision-making (Jones, 2012).

### ***Enhance Hiring, Orientation, and Development Processes***

#### **Hiring.**

The argument has been made that the organizing principle of tenure is academic freedom, the concepts having been inextricably paired at least since the AAUP's 1915 "Declaration of principles on academic freedom and academic tenure" (2014), as well as the 1940 and 1970 updates as represented in the AAUP's "Statement of principles on academic freedom and tenure (with 1970 interpretative comments)" (1990). Interview participant May addresses threats to academic freedom inherent to the contingent nature of adjunct work, and adjunct employment decisions border on arbitrary in many accounts already cited, including the interviews given by this study's participants. May tells the story of her initial hire at Urban Catholic as being a case of knowing who to email:

I did an MFA at a college nearby the one that I'm working at now, and so, there was some networking there. And, when a job opened up at the school I'm at now, I emailed the person who drafts the program and didn't have to go through the application process which is really nice, especially for adjunct positions. Like who wants to spend hours putting together

materials for a job that doesn't have any security? So, it was a simple email interview and then I was working at that school. ("May," Interview #1, p. 1)

Even as she noted her enjoyment of the benefits of the casual process—an email sent, no arduous application or materials required—her story also indicates that entry into that process requires knowing people on the inside, which becomes especially necessary when there is no formal job posting to which a candidate without a network may apply. And she later notes the other side of this casual arrangement, which is the semi-permanence of the part-time need:

I was motivated to work there because I had a naïve conception that it was like a fairly elite school and had resources, well established. I also imagined that it's like Catholic sensibility, like all those things would mean that you get your foot in a door and there're some kind of career possibility. You do your job and then people notice you and I learnt how do that. I learned how to be like, "Hey, would you read my grant proposal?" But really I'm like, "Hey, you know my name." Yeah, all of that, like all of that game. So, I thought that would be possible at this place and over the years I discovered that it absolutely isn't. There's almost no chance that I would get any kind of full time work there.

As for July, she also happened into an adjunct position at Urban Catholic just by chance, running into a former professor:

So, I got my masters in English at Urban Catholic University [a little less than a decade ago]. I really enjoyed my time there. It was really helpful, informative for me. I had a great experience with the department. Then proceeded on to teach a couple of years at the high school level because I wasn't sure if I wanted to pursue further graduate education after that. Then decided yes, yes, I did want to get my PhD and so I got my PhD elsewhere and then finally moved back to the state. And happened to reconnect with one of my former

professors at a kind of professional development event. She knew that I was adjuncting in the state and so she kind of threw out there, ‘Well, we have a class that's just opened up if you ever want to teach here again.’

June’s employment as an adjunct at Urban Catholic is similarly casual and indicates the importance of knowing people in the hiring department; the big difference in June’s case, though, is that she was teaching there while also working toward her dissertation, and upon completion of the doctorate was hired to teach the same courses, seamlessly transitioning from one kind of part-time employment into another. In fact, the organizing principle for adjunct faculty employment represents a significant shift away from academic freedom, which provides a defense against political and corporate influences, and toward an institutional concern for flexibility. This means hiring part-time faculty at the last minute or cancelling classes just before the start of a new academic term, if not after the start, depending upon enrollment fluctuations. So, in addition to the lack of academic freedom, adjunct faculty are also outside the full protection of a variety of non-discrimination laws just by dint of the truncated and often very casual hiring process.

Hiring processes for both full-time non-tenure-track and tenure-track faculty must follow strict guidelines around job posting and interview questioning that are meant to ensure equal opportunity in the employment process, providing anti-discrimination protections on the bases of race, color, national origin, citizenship, sex, religion, age, military service, physical or mental disability, or pregnancy (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.); often, though, because of the temporary and “emergency” (USNH, 2019b) nature of adjunct hires, part-time faculty hiring practices may not trigger the same protections (USNH, 2019a). This means that a hiring institution functions in a scenario where it often cannot or does not know total enrollments until after a semester has begun, and so cannot, the logic goes, be held to the same guidelines when

hiring in these “emergency” contexts. To be clear: universities could enforce strict deadlines for enrollment, thereby avoiding such “emergency” needs, but in a financial environment that compels institutions to take last-minute tuition dollars wherever and whenever they appear, there is no urgency to reform admissions or adjunct hiring processes.

### **Orientation.**

As for enhancing orientation processes, there was a sense among interview participants that what is offered is insubstantial even as it feels like another onerous imposition on low-paid adjuncts’ time. In addition to recommending pay for attendance, or adjustment in base salary to account for such time commitments beyond the courses noted in letters of appointment, participants seemed interested in programming that was more substantial than current offerings. A recent agenda for the orientation (UCU, 2019d) to which adjuncts are invited indicates a pace that could only serve to check boxes instead of inculcate common sense of purpose around such complex issues as sexual harassment and discrimination, the CST traditions enshrined in the university mission, demographics and profiles of students, the breadth of both student and faculty life, rights, and responsibilities on campus, and so on. Title IX receives ten minutes less time than the half-hour morning coffee and breakfast, hardly enough time to engage in thoughtful discussion of mandatory reporting guidelines or processes, let alone model strategies one may use to encourage a culture of respect in a class of young adults. As with the call for opening meetings and the governance process up to adjuncts, the recommendation to spread out orientation over more than one day or two morning comes with a plea to recognize that part-timers’ time is just as valuable as their full-time peers whose salaries account for time commitments beyond teaching and grading. Remuneration for attendance would signal such a recognition, and may also increase



participation; but improving culture in a department or among adjunct faculty requires longer-term commitments to orientation topics, institutional goals, and requirements.

### **Development.**

Lastly, the faculty I interviewed called for more and better-funded development opportunities. July recalled a shared drive from her time as a graduate student, into which she and her peers would upload electronic resources for others to use and adapt for their own purposes, and also recommends occasional workshops that might focus attention on different pedagogical issues. Simply offering these resources wouldn't be enough, though, as July notes the possibility that a passive resource may not be well utilized and that without some attempt at shifting culture toward such sharing there may be pushback or avoidance. Especially in a department that is mostly part-timers, many of whom may not have met at all, finding common cause can be challenging no matter how simple the project:

I think all of those things would help to like, build community. And kind of remind everyone that you are practitioners in a field. Like you are experts in the field together, but that you are also all still learning. And trying to get better at this thing that you're doing. [...] I think the first step for me is sending out an, like a sort of email survey on people just in that department. People's experiences with and desires around sharing teaching resources. And then kind of proposing a shared folder from there. ("July," Interview #3, p. 19)

June's call for in-class observation by her supervisor is similarly couched in terms of pedagogical improvement:

So, I feel like one of the weird things about being part time is the kind of like lack of attachment. I think part of it is like a holdover like, oh, it's supposed to be, "Great, we give

you flexibility, you have no, like you're not responsible to us," even as we totally are. So, like I would love for my boss to actually come and observe my class, would be like a little thing. [...] It demonstrates investment, because—I don't know that I need anybody to check in on me, like, I try really hard, I'm doing good work. But it's more about like, "Oh, we want to recognize things but also give you the time to think about what else do you need to know, what else could you be doing that, maybe you haven't even thought of," like that. I guess it's like a sense of development. ("June," Interview #

July had very similar thoughts about the duality of the

I've been observed as a teacher very little, I feel. And so, on the one hand, I feel like that can be a sign that you are trusted as an instructor, that you are not—nobody is breathing down your neck thinking like, "Oh! This person is really not good. We need to make sure that she's not doing anything unorthodox in the classroom or whatever." So I feel like it can be a positive thing and [...] it's led to a lot of freedom and how I can put together classes, which is great. [...] However, I think it can also mean that like, my sense of professional development is not always moving forward in the way that I would like it to. (July, Interview #1, p. 8)

What is understood to be a best practice for faculty development—peer observation—is often totally replaced by student evaluations, especially for part-timers. This seems to be a practice common enough that it warrants discussion in popular trade publications (e.g., Flaherty, 2020) even as SETs are understood to be deeply flawed and seemingly without empirical support as either valid reflections of student learning or fair assessment of faculty quality or effectiveness. The American Sociological Society (2019) published a statement on SETS that 22 other scholarly organizations also endorsed, and which called for questions that "focus on student experiences"

and caution that “the instruments should be framed as an opportunity for student feedback, rather than an opportunity for formal ratings of teaching effectiveness” (p. 1). The statement also urges that SETs “should be part of a holistic assessment that includes peer observations, reviews of teaching materials, and instructor self-reflections” (p. 2).

Martin (2016) found that female faculty teaching large political science courses were at greater risk of gender bias in student evaluations than male counterparts or female faculty teaching smaller groups of students. The implications could be harsh, but “it depends on institutional practice. The worst-case scenario includes exclusive or predominant reliance on SETs for assessment of teaching effectiveness; emphasis on success in teaching larger courses; and a prominent role for teaching evaluations in professional advancement” (pp. 316-317). Mitchell & Martin (2018) reported similar findings. Complicating the knowledge that bias exists, Esarey & Valdes (2020) find that even accounting for biases SETs often fail to accurately determine teacher quality. One of the major findings of a meta-analysis conducted by Uttl, et al. (2018) was that “students do not learn more from professors with higher SETs” (p. 40). The choice Uttl, et al. offer is stark: If interested in student learning, colleges and universities should limit or eliminate the role of SET scores in the assessment of faculty. If interested in student satisfaction, those institutions should “evaluate their faculty’s teaching using primarily or exclusively SET ratings, emphasize to their faculty members the need to obtain as high SET ratings as possible (i.e., preferably the perfect ratings), and systematically terminate those faculty members who do not meet the standards” (p. 40). The ironic suggestion is meant, I believe, as an indication of how obvious the choice seems to the authors to be.

Lastly, Holman, Key, & Kreitzer (2019) have published a publicly-viewable bibliography of studies investigating bias in SETs. At the core of this project is a belief in empirical findings by

social scientists: “Social science research has documented gendered evaluation processes in a variety of institutional settings, including the academic workplace. These processes systematically put women at a disadvantage when their performance is being rated. Most recent exploratory studies of students’ evaluation of college and university teaching suggest that the same processes at work elsewhere in society are present when students evaluate professors” (p. 1). The culture of an institution is going to be unique, but the problems of the larger society will be present across all institutions. How institutions recognize and grapple with those problems, the policies and practices that construe this area of workplace experience, has significant implications for the development, and dignity, of adjunct faculty.

### ***Unionization***

One process by which more and more adjunct faculty are attempting to inform the design of their workplaces is unionization (Cain, 2017; Herbert, 2016). Herbert (2016) explains “growth in private sector unionization among contingent faculty” (p. 5) by quoting Ladd and Lipset (1973) as predicting union activity would be much stronger among faculty at “[t]he lower the tier of academe, in terms of security, income, prestige, and involvement in the graduate scholarly-research culture” (p. 48). With some qualifications regarding feasibility of unionizing, Kezar and Sam (2010) conclude more recently:

Collective bargaining has been demonstrated to improve the working conditions for non-tenure-track faculty. It appears that unionization is a proven strategy for professionalizing non-tenure-track faculty on campuses. This strategy may be successful because unions provide an organized and systematic way for change to occur from the bottom up. Unions also provide a sense of safety found in numbers that lone pockets of change may not have. (p. 109)

This strategy, though, remains beyond legal possibility for those employed as adjuncts by religiously-affiliated colleges and universities. While there are recent examples of successful union drives at such institutions (Donn & Kirby, 2018; Kalmanovitz Initiative, 2015; Wecker, 2018), an even more recent court decision looks to have rolled back such momentum.

*Duquesne v. NLRB* (2020) is a fresh decision as I complete this dissertation, but its logic and legal ramifications have been in effect since 1979 when the decision in *NLRB v. Catholic Bishop* set a broad precedent on a 5-4 split denying the NLRB's assertion of jurisdiction over "teachers at a religious school." It was a 2-1 *en banc* decision in *Universidad Central Bayamon v. NLRB* (1986) that extended the denial of jurisdiction to the higher education context, despite greater college and university independence from churches as compared to the primary and secondary school contexts. And *Great Falls* (2002) created what the unanimous decision calls a "bright-line test" (p. 1347) by describing a three-prong standard of review that relies on institutional assertions that can't be verified through even basic inquiry into employment conditions. *Pacific Lutheran University* (2014) was an attempt by the NLRB to narrowly direct the inquiry into the religious function of faculty members' employment, but the *Duquesne* (2020) decision pushes that back to the level of the institution, essentially back to the *Great Falls* (2002) test: "In applying the Supreme Court's jurisprudence, we inquire whether the institution (a) holds itself out to the public as a religious institution; (b) is nonprofit; and (c) is religiously affiliated" (p. 1347). Even as jurisdiction over charter schools was first asserted by the NLRB as late as 2016, in cases where non-public control can be determined (Bennett, 2020), it might once have seemed that *Pacific Lutheran* could have been the door-opener into religiously-affiliated but lay-governed colleges and universities, a decision that would shift agency and court perspectives on a long-avoided category of institution. That door appears to have been shut again based on standing

precedent and interpretation of the First Amendment’s religious clauses, but as Fahey (2013) reminds us, that closing-off is antithetical to CST:

Support for labor unions in Catholic teaching is based on the natural right to free association and the moral imperative of a living wage that will enable a worker to support her or his family. In addition, Catholic teaching holds that unions benefit the universal common good when they stand up for justice and for the poorest and weakest among us. Indeed, Catholic Social Teaching holds that labor unions are “indispensable” to a just social order. (p. 1)

I did not ask participants directly about unionization, but both May and June expressed active interest in the movements toward a union drive that were apparent in late summer of 2019; although there had been no formal process of signature-gathering in preparation for a vote, participants expressed sympathies for a stalled graduate student union drive at Urban Catholic, and spoke about discussions among faculty about organizing themselves. It was clear to me that the idea of unionizing was appealing because of what it could mean in terms of improved wages, access to governance, and established procedures of grievance, development, and promotion, but it was also apparent that they had realized the stark reality even before *Duquesne*: religiously-affiliated universities have the winds of precedent at their backs, and are already established as collective entities with the power, prestige, and pools of resources to show for it. Any court battles before *Duquesne* were destined for a drawn-out struggle. Any fight since seems destined for swift failure.

### **Considerations for Future Research**

Hodson’s (2001) book served as a kind of Rosetta Stone aiding my interpretation of three individual constructions of workplace dignity, but it was a leap of faith, so to speak, to apply it as

a thematic lens for an industry unconsidered by Hodson's own book. None of the ethnographies that he analyzed were focused on faculty or even higher education work more broadly. But, as noted above, the participants' discussions fit easily into the categories devised by Hodson, both in terms of the pursuit and the denial of dignity, and that gives me some inclination to suggest one or more of the following research projects, preferably in coordination with each other, to be conducted at institutions of all types, not only the religiously-affiliated. It should also be noted that these research projects could and should include faculty of all kinds, including graduate students in instructional roles, staff, and administrators, to capture a more holistic sense of the experiences of workplace dignity in higher education. Here are a few ideas for future research:

- 1. Implementation of the interview protocol at the level of the department, college, or institution, either as tool for self-study or external review.**

Dignity at work should be a priority for every employer. This is especially true for institutions with missions driven by Catholic Social Teachings but should not be underestimated as an issue of import across institutional type and even in the absence of any religious affiliation. After all, worker dignity is already embedded into many regulations that provide for the protection of individuals against discrimination on the bases of disability (Americans with Disabilities Act, 2008), race, color, or national origin (Title VI, 1964), and sex (Title IX, 1972), and others that protect the health and safety of workers (Occupational Safety and Health Act, 1970), and that dictate fair wages and hours (Fair Labor Standards Act, 1938), as a few examples. While I had a particular subset of faculty in mind for this dissertation, I believe the protocol and underlying assumptions about the importance of dignity to workers in the workplace are sound across faculty types and are also likely applicable in a non-academic staff context, too, as indicated by the broad overview of Hodson's (2001) study. Indeed, considering the deeply interconnected responsibilities

of staff and faculty at a college or university, I believe this protocol would be useful as a tool for self-study or external review, and *if needs be* could be quantified along the same lines Hodson followed.

**2. Development and implementation of a survey derived from the interview protocol, in order to conduct statistical analyses into experiences of workplace dignity.**

I did not design my dissertation in a way that warrants claims about statistical or probability-related issues, but it is possible that application of a quantitative design like Hodson's could yield some important findings regarding the broader impact of various factors on faculty workers' senses of workplace dignity. Relevant factors would include institutional size and location, institutional type and religious affiliation, class size, faculty pay, years of employment, full- or part-time status, interest in full-time teaching, access to governance, access to benefits, access to professional development, highest degree attained, discipline, level of courses taught, gender, race, and age. If implemented broadly enough, such a survey could also greatly increase the empirical base of knowledge around certain under-studied elements, such as per-credit or per-course pay for part-time faculty, which is not data reported through IPEDS or other national datasets.

**3. Application of Hodson's analytical process to existing workplace ethnographies that consider higher education and, especially, faculty work contexts, in order to conduct statistical analyses of workplace dignity.**

Hodson's study suggests broad applicability of the same themes that informed my own study and also showed that different types of workplaces aggregate varying levels of worker autonomy or positive coworker relations. For instance, Hodson notes lower average rates of resistance and higher average rates of citizenship behavior in unionized workplaces as compared



to non-unionized workplaces. In the higher education context, it would be useful to compare workers' senses of autonomy or sociability, for instance, as compared across non-profit and for-profit sectors, or 2- and 4-year public institutions, or smaller and larger private colleges or universities, or religious and secular campuses.

The point of all three of these possible future research projects is to center that which is already central to the experience of work—*dignity*—and to give it official and direct attention equal to its importance in both the religious and secular realms of theory and belief. And as a last note, I also recommend that all of the above consider both the themes of the pursuit and denial of workplace dignity. If the results of my dissertation are any guide, it may be impossible to avoid discussion of challenges to dignity while talking about its pursuit.

**4. More focus on design and use of student evaluations of teaching (SETs), with particular focus on the adjunct context.**

Given the overwhelming empirical evidence that SETs cannot escape or be designed to account for societal biases against women, people of color, or those with other so-called differences, it is imperative that these metrics fall away as a primary or even major aspect of adjunct faculty evaluation, development, and re-hire. Research projects that would be useful include basic inquiry into how SETs feature in adjunct employment decisions, and inquiry into alternative or auxiliary measures that could provide holistic review of teaching. Case studies could be conducted into the implementation of successful holistic processes, or those that failed. The goal should be equitable and actualized systems of review that are fair to faculty and from which they can continue to develop as teaching professionals.

## **Conclusion: Dignity Denied in the Religiously-Affiliated Gig Academy**

If I told you about a worker whose part-time, unbenefited, and permanently temporary employment was only continued on the basis of positive customer reviews conducted online at the conclusion of a service transaction, you'd likely say I was describing some version of gig worker. And you'd be right, of course, but what some might not guess is that I'm also describing a university faculty member. From the beginning of this dissertation the question has been neither whether nor where exploitative conditions exist for part-time adjunct faculty—despite some skepticism (Brennan and Magness, 2018), the consensus seems to be that low wages, limited benefits if any, and instability are the hallmarks of part-time faculty employment across all types of degree-granting, Title IV funded institutions. As I wrote at the outset (Ch. I, p. 2):

While I assume some element of exploitation is inherent in the widespread increase of part-time faculty employment, even if only in the first, tamest of senses, “to make productive use of,” as in “utilize” (Merriam-Webster, 2019), a mild taking of advantage in a market economy—still I also assume that dignity inheres in each individual and that it accrues in their work life as much as it does in any other context.

In the midst, or at the bottom, of a system that relies on low-cost faculty labor to aid the production of expensive credentials just like the ones earned by those low-cost faculty, there is in each participant's statement an unmistakable and strong sense of dignity. It calls them to perform above and beyond the letter of the job description, compels them to speak up and push back when necessary, and causes them frustration and regret when such action feels dangerous or negligible.

Though working for the same *organization* (i.e., institution), the adjunct faculty interviewed for this study are employed under a unique workplace *organization* (i.e., set of policies and practices) as compared to their full-time non-tenure-track and tenure-track colleagues. In

making this claim, I stand in opposition to the *Duquesne* (2020) majority (“[T]he dissent errs by asserting that adjuncts are somehow more like non-faculty employees than they are like faculty,” p. 21), and in agreement with the dissent (“[T]he terms of employment of adjuncts make clear that they are not necessarily equivalent to the permanent faculty,” Pillard dissenting, p. 10). May, June, and July are professionals, yes, but professionals organized under both bureaucratic rules and supervisory fiat that may previously have been unexpected outside the context of low-skill work (Hodson, 2001) but which are now increasingly relevant within higher education’s contingent ranks, especially for adjuncts.

Workers like May, June, and July are faculty in a nominal sense, but in many other senses exist separately from the “real” faculty in terms of job description, performing unbundled aspects of the traditional full-time role for a cut-rate wage. And in terms of rights to due process, access to levers of governance, or expectations of academic freedom, they have more in common with the app-based drivers and delivery workers than their full-time colleagues down the hall. It is more than coincidence that descriptions of the gig economy and conditions for gig-platform workers (House Committee on Small Business, 2014; Maffie and Elias, 2019; Manjoo, 2016; Weil, 2014) transfer so effortlessly into the discourse about adjunct faculty (Kezar, DePaola, and Scott, 2019; Tolley, 2018). Gig workers often lack due process or grievance rights by dint of their classification, rightly or wrongly, as contractors or service-providers employed for brief and self-contained projects (Maffie and Elias, 2019), just as adjuncts often lack rights afforded to their full-time colleagues. As Edwards and Tolley note (2018):

[T]he purpose of higher education has been to develop skilled, thoughtful citizens capable of contributing in meaningful ways to society. This purpose will never be realized with a professoriate composed predominantly of instructors who work without the protection of

real academic freedom, and have no role in shared governance, no job security, no benefits, low wages, and no real hope of ever finding a full-time position. (n.p.)

If typical Catholic Church-affiliated institutions are willing to fight court battles for years, as Duquesne University did from 2012 until the recent 2020 decision in their favor, and as Urban Catholic had been doing leading up to the *Duquesne* decision, in order that they can legally deny collective bargaining over better pay, health and other benefits, and basic working conditions, then it is unclear just what their commitment is to their many adjunct faculty. But what is beyond refute and needs to be made crystal clear is that every single college or university with religious affiliation could allow their faculty to organize for collective bargaining purposes *and it would be completely legal*. The only barrier is institutional will, but that will exists in a market context rife with austere economics and rationalized exploitation of tens of thousands of faculty. Whether mission drives action in such a context remains to be seen. As Morpew and Hartley (2006) write: “We cannot extrapolate behaviors from espoused values” (p. 470). We look instead to develop theories-in-use (Argyris and Schön, 1996) based on actual behaviors.

With actual practice in mind, at last I ask: *What is the role of dignity in the religiously-affiliated institution that has gig-ified a large portion of its faculty, and how can elements of sociability and autonomy be cultivated in ways that enhances professional educators’ working lives, drives them toward citizenship and not toward resistance behaviors, and improves the educational experience and success of their students?* The prominent concern in Catholic higher education in the aftermath of the 1967 Land O’Lakes Statement was whether or not the widespread laicization of boards, administrations, faculty, and student bodies would diminish or destroy “Catholic identity” (FitzGerald, 1984; Gallin, 1992, 2000; Heshburgh, 1984; Ingram, 2003; Jenkins, 2017; MacIntyre, 2001; McQuillan, 2018; Salvaterra, 1991); one wonders if and when

the labor crisis, and the moral abdication of institutions neglecting their missions and CST traditions, will garner as much concern over religious identity among leaders in Catholic higher education.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval

### University of New Hampshire

Research Integrity Services, Service Building  
51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585  
Fax: 603-862-3564

21-Jun-2019

Bennett, Jacob  
Education Dept, Morrill Hall  
67 Chester St  
Chester, NH 03036

**IRB #:** 8106

**Study:** A Hermeneutical Phenomenology of "Dignity" as Experienced by Non-Unionized English Department Adjunct Faculty at an Urban Catholic University

**Approval Date:** 21-Jun-2019

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Exempt as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 104(d). Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects*. (This document is also available at <http://unh.edu/research/irb-application-resources>.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

Note: IRB approval is separate from UNH Purchasing approval of any proposed methods of paying study participants. Before making any payments to study participants, researchers should consult with their BSC or UNH Purchasing to ensure they are complying with institutional requirements. If such institutional requirements are not consistent with the confidentiality or anonymity assurances in the IRB-approved protocol and consent documents, the researcher may need to request a modification from the IRB.

Upon completion of your study, please complete the enclosed Exempt Study Final Report form and return it to this office along with a report of your findings.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact Melissa McGee at 603-862-2005 or [melissa.mcgee@unh.edu](mailto:melissa.mcgee@unh.edu). Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,



Julie F. Simpson

Director

cc: File

DeMitchell, Todd

University of New Hampshire  
Research Integrity Services, Service Building  
51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585  
Fax: 603-862-3564

29-Jul-2019

Bennett, Jacob  
Education Dept, Morrill Hall  
67 Chester St  
Chester, NH 03036

**IRB #:** 8106

**Study:** A Hermeneutical Phenomenology of "Dignity" as Experienced by Non-Unionized English Department Adjunct Faculty at an Urban Catholic University

**Study Approval Date:** 21-Jun-2019

**Modification Approval Date:** 29-Jul-2019

**Modification:** Adding Zoom as an interview method

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved your modification to this study, as indicated above. Further changes in your study must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to implementation.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects*. This document is available at <http://unh.edu/research/irb-application-resources> or from me.

Note: IRB approval is separate from UNH Purchasing approval of any proposed methods of paying study participants. Before making any payments to study participants, researchers should consult with their BSC or UNH Purchasing to ensure they are complying with institutional requirements. If such institutional requirements are not consistent with the confidentiality or anonymity assurances in the IRB-approved protocol and consent documents, the researcher may need to request a modification from the IRB.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact Melissa McGee at 603-862-2005 or [melissa.mcgee@unh.edu](mailto:melissa.mcgee@unh.edu). Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study.

For the IRB,



Julie F. Simpson  
Director

cc: File  
DeMitchell, Todd

## Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear Professor «Faculty\_Name»,

My name is Jacob A. Bennett, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at the University of New Hampshire, studying in the higher education strand of the Education Department's Leadership & Policy Studies program. The reason I write to you today is to describe my dissertation and invite you to participate in my investigation of the work experiences of part-time English faculty in a Catholic institution of higher education.

The purpose of my study is to investigate individuals' experiences of the phenomenon of *dignity* in the context of their working conditions, with particular attention paid to how the research may inform departmental or institutional employment policy and practice. The literature around faculty employment in higher education describes a clear half-century trend away from the full-time and tenure-track position that was once the norm. That move toward a majority of part-time faculty began in the 1970s as a response to funding dips, an employment shift apparent first in community colleges but now widespread across all types of higher education, whether two-year or four-year, public or private, for-profit or non-profit, secular or religiously-affiliated. Much of the study of "contingency," as the part-time trend may be described, relies on statistical data, but requirements for data collection on part-timers are not as robust as that collected for full-timers. Even with a more complete statistical description of working conditions, though, it is only possible to *infer* individual experience from aggregated quantitative data. The interviews that are the primary data source for this study will allow individuals to describe their experiences in their own words.

Participating in this study will require a moderate commitment of your time. If you agree to participate, you and I will complete a series of three interviews, each 90 minutes long and separated by 3-7 days. The interviews will be semi-structured, with each session focusing on a different aspect of your experience:

- In the first interview, I will ask how you came to be employed in your position at BC.
- In the second interview, I will ask you to focus on your current experience in that position.
- In the third interview, I will ask you to reflect back on the meaning of your experience in the context of what came before and what is currently happening.

I will also reach out to participants to conduct a member check of my interpretations and analysis, giving participants an opportunity to provide additional input, clarifications, or corrections.

Should you be willing to participate, please fill out the attached questionnaire and return it to me via email. The questions are meant to help me select a group of participants with a variety of professional and educational experiences, as well as diverse identities. Unfortunately, I will be not able to interview everyone who is willing to participate and will have to select a subset of individuals from those who return the questionnaire. In order to ensure confidentiality of all participants, I will mask names of participating individuals as well as the institution itself and will keep these confidential throughout the research process and in any publication or presentation of findings. I will destroy all questionnaires completed by individuals who do not go on to participate, or who later withdraw from participation. This includes keeping identities of participants confidential from other participants. The study has received approval by the University of New Hampshire Institutional Review Board, and all participants will receive contact information for the IRB office.

If there is any other information you would like to help in your decision about participation, please don't hesitate to contact me at (978) 979-8510 or [jacob.bennett@unh.edu](mailto:jacob.bennett@unh.edu). Thank you for your consideration – I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Sincerely,

Jacob A. Bennett [he/him/his]

Ph.D. Candidate/Graduate Assistant, Education Department

External Relations Officer, Graduate Student Senate

University System Student Board Member

UNH Graduate Representative to the USNH Board of Trustees

[jacob.bennett@unh.edu](mailto:jacob.bennett@unh.edu) | University of New Hampshire

## Appendix C: Participant Recruitment Questionnaire

Your responses to this brief Recruitment Questionnaire will help me select a cohort of participants with diverse backgrounds and experiences. As with all other aspects of the study, I will mask participants' identities with pseudonyms if or when I make any reference to questionnaire responses. Participants will also have an opportunity to review my findings in order to confirm accuracy or to request removal or revision of findings that may risk disclosure of participants' identities. Please email this completed form to Jacob A. Bennett at [jacob.bennett@unh.edu](mailto:jacob.bennett@unh.edu).

- How would you describe your gender?
- How would you describe your race/ethnicity?
- How many total semesters have you taught part-time in the English Department at BC?
- How many consecutive semesters have you been in this position, counting back from your most recent or current appointment?
- Have you also taught part-time at any other institutions of higher education while teaching at BC?
- Do you consider higher education teaching to be your full-time career?
- Would you prefer a full-time teaching position at one college or university?
- Please list your undergraduate and graduate degrees, and any other credentials indicative of your educational training.

## Appendix D: Phenomenological Interviewing Protocol

As the phenomenological protocol relies on open-ended interviewing, I do not have a list of questions to ask during the interviews. Instead, I will ask participants to reconstruct stories in order to elicit details of apparent importance in the experiences of the participants. Given that overarching goal and the distinct purposes of each of the three interviews, I will have in mind and will share with participants the following guiding concerns:

### First interview:

- *Purpose:* Rather than investigate *why* participants became adjunct faculty in a Catholic Church-affiliated university, the first interview will focus instead on *how* they came to be employed in such a position. The purpose is for participants to reconstruct home, work, and educational experiences in a way that places their current employment at Urban Catholic University within the context of their own lives up to the present.
- *Guiding question:* “How did you come to be employed as an adjunct at Urban Catholic University? Please reconstruct any home, work, or educational experiences you believe led you here.”

### Second interview:

- *Purpose:* It is in the second interview that the current experience of the phenomenon of dignity begins to come into focus. The purpose is for participants to describe the work they do at Urban Catholic University in terms of their experience of dignity. Rather than seeking opinion or evaluation of the work or working conditions, participants may reconstruct a



whole work day, highlighting details of their relationships or interactions with students, other adjuncts, other faculty types, staff, and administrators.

- *Guiding question:* “Could you reconstruct your typical work day, or related work routines, as an adjunct in the English Department at Urban Catholic University?”

### **Third interview:**

- *Purpose:* In the third interview, participants will reflect back on the meaning of their experiences of dignity and to do so in the context of what came before and what is currently happening. The purpose is for participants to construct their senses of dignity and to describe the ways in which their experiences compare with their expectations.
- *Guiding question:* “Given what you have said about your life before you became an adjunct at Urban Catholic University and given what you have said about your work now, how do you understand your experience of dignity in that role?”

*Prior to each of our three interviews, I have sent a framing email that describes both the purpose and guiding question for each session. In this third email, I'll also include some framing terminology after the purpose/question. You need not prepare in any formal way, but it may be useful to reflect on experiences indicated by the purpose and question below.*

In his 2001 book, *Dignity at Work*, Randy Hodson analyzed around 100 organizational ethnographies in order to identify four major themes related to the pursuit of workplace dignity: *citizenship, resistance, autonomy, and co-worker relationships*. While none of the ethnographies in Hodson's study were concerned with faculty or higher education institutions, his findings ring

true to the experiences you have shared with me in our interviews so far. As to the meanings Hodson ascribes to those four categories, here is what he writes (pp. 17-19):

- “...under better circumstances, and sometimes even simultaneously with abuse and overwork, workers are actively engaged in trying to perform their jobs in a successful and efficient manner. Creative and purposive activities oriented toward helping production successfully take place that are above and beyond organizational requirements have been labeled *citizenship* behaviors[...].”
- “...in safeguarding dignity workers engage in active and passive *resistance* to abuse, overwork, and exploitation. [...] Workplace resistance more typically relies on small-scale actions involving a subtle withdrawal of cooperation or a banking of enthusiasm.”
- “[...] workers engage in a variety of meaningful activities during the workday in addition to resistance and citizenship that may be only tangentially related to management demands and organizational agendas. Such behaviors constitute significant side games at work whose rationale is the [*autonomous*] *attainment of meaning* outside the institutionally scripted flow of organizational activity.”
- “[...] the *social aspects of work life* defined by relations with coworkers must be fully incorporated in any meaningful analysis of working with dignity. Social aspects of work include social diversions, friendships, and other activities whose purpose is to provide meaning in a world too often offering too little of it. Coworkers provide the social fabric that is often crucial for meaning at work. Coworkers also provide a significant line of both formal and informal defense against managerial fiat. As trade unionists have known since the beginning of industrial society, there is power in numbers.”

## **Appendix E: Post-Interview Feedback Form**

Now that we have completed the interview process, the Researcher (Jacob A. Bennett) has provided you, the Participant, with an Interviewee Profile that includes some of the Researcher's initial interpretations and analyses of those interviews. The Researcher would like to give you the opportunity to provide additional feedback on how you prefer to have your data presented.

It is the Researcher's goal and responsibility to use the information provided by the Participant in an ethical manner. In order to mask the Participant's identity, the Researcher has used pseudonyms for the Participant's name, the names of other individuals referred to in any of the three completed interviews, as well as any places or institutions mentioned in the course of those interviews. The Researcher has also masked other potentially identifying details such as undergraduate degree type or field, as well as other job titles or roles beyond the part-time faculty role that is the focus of the Researcher's dissertation. Most of these pseudonyms appear only in the interview transcriptions, which will remain on a secure cloud-based folder and made available to the Researcher's Dissertation Committee members; the original audio recordings are the only documents that include true names as spoken in the interviews, and access to those recordings is limited to the Researcher and the Researcher's Dissertation Committee Chair, named as the Faculty Advisor on relevant Institutional Review Board paperwork.

Please check one of the following statements, sign the form (Participant's signature line on second page), scan and email back to the Researcher ([jacob.bennett@unh.edu](mailto:jacob.bennett@unh.edu)):

\_\_\_ The Researcher may share the Participant's information as described in the Interviewee Profile. No details need to be changed and the Researcher may use the Profile data in publications or presentations.

\_\_\_ The Researcher may share the information provided by the Participant; however, prior to using Profile data in publications or presentations, the Researcher should please change or add details described below (use additional pages as necessary):

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**Participant's signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_