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Co-Constructing Identity During Stressful Processes: How Identity is Co-Constructed During Tenure

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CST-475A: Senior Project

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April 30, 2020

Abstract

This study uses narrative inquiry and semi-structured interviews to discuss the nature of tenure's influence on identity. The location used for this project was a private institution in the pacific northwest of the United States and follows six professor's experience gaining tenure, the barriers and boundaries they faced, and how that shaped their identities and relationships. The body of theory that grounds this paper comes from critical/postmodern-paradigm Organizational Communication Theory and Identity Negotiation Theory. This study expands the knowledge of boundary work, uses Identity Negotiation Theory in organizational contexts, and co-construction of identity. The findings indicate that there are three main platforms tenure takes place in: teaching, research, and service. All of these aspects have boundaries co-created by other stakeholders in the university that create a trend of concertive control over the expected behavior and identities of the candidates. The professors explain their agency and adaptation to both fit in and push the mold on the expected performance of tenure, and how it achieving it was a stressful, but authentic process.

Keywords: Identity, boundaries, co-construction, Identity Negotiation Theory, Organizational Communication, concertive control tenure, relationships, stress

I.   Introduction

"Publish or Perish," is the life of tenure candidate faculty at any University in the United States. Tenure is an emotionally heavy, identity-defining gauntlet for educators, and this paper looks to further understand that process. There is extreme uncertainty and much of it is out of the professor's hands, making it an extremely vulnerable process. Although there is a clear emphasis on their own works, there is high value placed on peer evaluations and student evaluations. Cumulatively, these all have an impact on how professors interpret and perform their own identities.

Guiding this study, this paper seeks to answer the question: how is identity during tenure co-constructed by self-image, peers, and student relationships? The researcher found that while tenure is a stressful process, it is ultimately an identity affirming process as being a teacher, researcher, and community member are all important to the fit of tenured professors at this university. These are the "Four buckets to fill," (Alex) and discussion during interviews centered around teaching, research, and service. These qualities are all co-constructed and have assumptions about the correct way to be performed, which play into the fourth bucket: fit. While all of these aspects are necessary parts of the tenure package, candidates must negotiate how to perform these roles while staying authentic to their own identity and achieving their own goals for becoming a professor.

My project is an ethnographic, qualitative research project using primarily narrative inquiry and semi-structured interviews to study the tenure system at a private higher education institution. To provide a theoretical framework to this study, I will be drawing on Organizational Culture and Identity Negotiation Theory—two theories that examine how the organization and its members communicate what an acceptable professional identity looks like, especially in

regards to the boundaries created for tenure/promotion tack faculty. As professors, students, peers, and the administration are all stakeholders, all of these people influence each other and how they perform their roles. Of course, each professor makes their own decision on how to perform teaching, service, and research, but there is always the possibility of tension between stakeholders that constitute the assumptions of how these roles should be performed. Sometimes these assumptions are shared and that becomes part of the performance. Other times, there is resistance, and professors need to tread their own path to stay authentic while working towards tenure. Combined, these interactions co-create the standards for achieving tenure, and this paper works to understand how these roles are constructed.

This study is significant not just to try and understand the systems of tenure and identity better, but to evaluate how they communicate with each other, and examine what boundaries are created and navigated through their intersection. This will add to the critical conversation surrounding how promotion/tenure is communicated and how organizational identity is established. This research discusses power structures in place within the tenure system, how they are socially co-constructed through performance and communication, and how these structures influence identity. The relationship between identity and organization is known as boundaries and understanding these boundaries will contribute to research through learning more about organizational identity in academia.

II.   Rationale

The topic of tenure needs to be addressed because students who affect it largely don't know about it how they influence it through co-creating barriers, nor the implications of a teacher not getting tenure. The topic only enters conversation at the end of the term when it is time for teacher evaluations. Although students are told to complete these evaluations, widely,

they do not understand what these evaluations are used for beyond the practical knowledge of how the class can be improved. In reality, if professors do not get tenure, they do not just miss a promotion—they are removed from the institution. These are compelling stories of people who have worked and dedicated their lives to the study of a field and now have to prove themselves worthy of staying at their organization, and worthy of growing in it. This is a relevant field of study because other fields of work do not generally require such a stressful process (Peyton & Michael).

This project is theoretically meaningful through extending the use of Identity Negotiation theory in the context of an organization's culture. Extending the theory into this setting may help reveal differences about an organizational culture and an ethnic culture. This study is useful to Organizational Culture theory because it examines the agent's sense of self throughout a transformative process within an organization, as well as a greater community of scholars. This research pertains to scholars themselves and might also reflect trends in greater tenure/college related issues. This study will continue research in a differentiation/fragmentation approach and seeks to understand different boundaries that affect faculty based on their identity, and how that interacts as a factor included in the biased tenure process. Finally, this is significant because this will be a record of faculty discussing what their experience is like and will be on record in the university's systems. Future tenure-track faculty can look back and see what other professors struggled with and know ways past professors prepared or coped.

III.   Conceptualization of Communication

This study is rooted in the critical and post-modern paradigms. These schools of thought prioritize meaning and knowledge being established through communication. Post-modern and critical theorists believe there is a dominant set of cultural norms that are created through

performance. When rituals are performed and the meanings of the dominant groups are upheld, these power structures become part of the culture. These paradigms prioritize metainformation revolving around power, so theorists are looking for how communication creates these power dynamics that influence later performances.

The theories I'm using support these paradigms because they acknowledge a dominant culture that has power to enforce its norms. This is significant because professors at an academic institution are measured by numerous qualities to determine how they fit in. Because of this, I'm applying an Organizational Culture lens to address how information is conveyed to tenure candidates. Organizational Culture evaluates power, relationships, and how meaning is created, all of which thematically agrees with my Critical/postmodern paradigm. This theory will be used to evaluate how roles are negotiated, rules and norms are established by stakeholders, and what backgrounds are advantaged throughout the tenure process.

Because tenure has a meaningful impact on candidate's self-identity, this study also uses Identity Negotiation Theory. The theory analyzes identity from a more internal perspective, as opposed to building off a critical paradigm. However, I think getting an additional, more introspective point of view from tenured/tenure track professor is an important aspect of this project. Identity Negotiation Theory gives me tools to use during my interviews to guide my questions and better understand the organization's influence on the self, and how a professor performs their identity and fits into the greater university culture. How identity is formed is not entirely from other's perceptions or one person's self identity. Because it is a combination of many factors and performances, it is important that two theories are used that evaluate different aspects of identity within an organization. This paper specifically focuses and builds on the works of Tracy and Ganesh in the Org Comms postmodern paradigm, as well as Ting-Toomey.

IV.   Literature Review

The key theoretical framework of this paper broadly includes organizational culture, identity, and boundaries. Combined, all of these aspects help create areas of understanding for how the tenure process can be interpreted. Because tenure is both a title provided by an organization and an internalized identity, this paper will use two theories from different paradigms. While Organizational Culture is critical and postmodern in nature, evaluating the nature of power and its effect on the members of an organization, Identity Negotiation Theory examines the internal impact of the organization's effect, beyond just how tenure candidates perform their roles. The intersection between organizational identity and self-identity is boundary work, and this study aims to understand how these boundaries create and enforce norms in the organization, established by its stakeholders.

Starting with the tenets of Organizational culture, it is an interpretive theory, which analyzes "the shared assumptions, values, beliefs, language, symbols, and meanings systems in an organization" (Tracy, 2009, p. 2). All of these elements of culture are performed, an idea based on the metaphor of a stage, where everyone communicating in a culture are actors, "taking up a role that also includes a set of expectations as to how to perform it, and implicit in this, [is] a relationship with either an actual or perceived audience" (Krøløkke, 2009, p. 4). Essentially, when a value, ritual, or symbol is performed and interpreted, that is when communication happens. This metaphorical stage is where norms are set in place and power is established for certain groups.

One aspect of performance within the organization includes socialization, "the process by which new members become assimilated into the organization and how they learn and adapt to the organizational culture" (Spitzburg, 2019, p. 292). This is particularly important for tenure-

track faculty because candidates must follow specific roles to gain tenure and keep their jobs. According to Coggburn, "Traditionally, tenure and promotion decisions have been based on a faculty member's performance across three professional functions: teaching, scholarly research, and professional service." (2015, p. 200). Ultimately, a professor's career at the university depends on their metamorphosis, their ability to perform their identity and combine it with the expectations of the tenure track (Spitzburg, 2019, p. 293). While tenure is framed as a good thing, and comes with stability among many other benefits, it also indicates a way that concertive control exists in the organization, where "individuals and teams can be encouraged to police themselves … overt power is unnecessary as members are encouraged to buy into corporate visions and values, which then work as hegemonic controls on their thoughts and actions" (Eisenberg, 2009, p. 4). The organization has influence over how performances within the workplace exist, but this comes from shaping the identities of their performers.

Identity is the next key theme, which has both internal and external components. Ting-Toomey summarizes the concept "as the cultural, societal, relational, and individual images of self-conception, and this composite identity has group membership, interpersonal, and individual self-reflective implications" (2009, p. 2). This definition establishes that identity is both performative and introspective. While Identity Negotiation theory comes from a different paradigm, this theory also establishes an assumed reason for why Spitzburg's metamorphosis happens: "human beings in all cultures desire both positive group-based and positive person-based identities… individuals in all cultures or ethnic groups have the basic motivation needs for identity security, inclusion, predictability, connection, and continuity" (Ting-Toomey, 2009, pp. 2-3). Cumulatively, the internal motivation to have positive interactions while keeping a consistent identity encourages a shift to be flexible to the norms and power structures involved in

the tenure process. Further verifying this, Swann et al explain "From an epistemic perspective, self-verifying evaluations feel 'right,' diminish anxiety, and foster stability in the identities of targets. Stable identities afford people a sense of psychological coherence, a sense that they know what to do and the consequences of doing it." (2009, pp. 85-86). Additionally, being tenured faculty is a positive motivator in general, especially because of the stability it brings, starkly opposed to "Life as a pretenured professor is stressful, replete with teaching and publishing demands in anticipation of an uncertain outcome. Many tenure-track faculty do not receive tenure and leave academia altogether. Accordingly, those who receive tenure have succeeded where many more have fallen short (Yoon, 2016, p. 428). This "publish-or-perish" lifestyle is enforced through boundaries that are created by the audience that observes the tenure candidates. As there are many co-constructed obstacles to overcome from the tensions created by performing an identity that is both authentic and fills all the necessary buckets, these can be identified as boundaries.

Boundaries are a concept created by critical scholars that emphasize the affects of concertive control over self-identity. Ganesh explains that boundaries are "discursively constructed... between life and work in the context of gender, race, sexuality, and class." (2009, p. 5). In the context of tenure, these boundaries are between the candidate's self-identity and the ascribed identity the organization tries to provide. However, the faculty are not the only stakeholders in the tenure equation. Boundaries are also created by students, who are generally considered to be on the weaker side of the student-teacher power dynamic. However, these boundaries are co-constructed, as "students and teachers negotiate relationships through a series of mutually determined understandings of the language they use, the power each wields, and the behaviors they engage in restructures student–teacher relationships as a collaboratively

constructed cooperative understanding" (McHugh, 2013, p. 14). Additionally, peers evaluate other professors to validate their scholarship, so other academics are prevalent stakeholders as well. Boundaries are co-constructed between the performers and the audience, influencing both their identities, and the culture of the organization.

V.   Research Question

From my combined Identity Negotiation and Org Culture perspective, identity rests in the acceptance and performance of norms and rituals, and the tension created by boundaries. As my research led me in different directions, my project shaped to answer the following research question: One of the questions my research seeks to answer is:

[RQ 1:] How is identity impacted and co-constructed during the tenure process?

Identity is influenced by many different factors, including the boundaries and norms that are created by the communities (both greater academia and at this university's culture) inform the performances expected by tenure track/tenured professors, enforced by stakeholders. These boundaries could exist for multiple reasons, including the tensions from performing an identity despite not perfectly matching the university's expectations for a tenure candidate, or needing to adapt to better fit the mold of the stakeholder's expectations.

The tenure process is also understood differently by the subcultures that influence it and the professors trying to gain it. Tenure candidates, tenured professors, the tenure board, and students will all view this process differently, and all have different roles in creating the boundaries and norms within this process.

Gaining tenure is an important event in a professor's life. Beyond changing a professor's self-identity after being given it, working up to tenure (and the stress surrounding it) can also

affect a candidate's identity. This process involves stakeholder's expectations being met and performed, which may also influence professors' identities.

VI.   Methods

The research methods for this project primarily involved narrative inquiry, narrative analysis, and semi-structured interviews at a private liberal arts college in the American pacific northwest. A semi-structured interview's primary difference from a normal interview is that questions are designed "with opportunity for additional probing and conversation. If the researcher wants to learn more about a story, theme, or idea mentioned by the participant, he or she may ask the participant to expand" (Cramer, 2009, p. 2). Semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask questions and build off my participants stories and ask relevant questions to gain more insight.

Data gathering consisted of six semi-structured interviews. Interviews lasted around one hour, except one which needed to be half an hour due to time constraints. All were semi-structured and conversational, so participants had a safe and comfortable space to share a vulnerable story. These interviews were recorded, and transcribed, and coded. Unfortunately, one interview was unable to be transcribed and coded, due to a recording mishap that did not capture the professor's responses. As a result, their interview was not able to be transcribed, and only the notes with their general responses to the questions will be used, indicating their responses to align with the themes present in the findings and discussion sections. The transcription totaled to 100 pages of single-spaced dialogue, and transcription took around 16 hours to clean after using a transcription AI. I reached out to a variety of professors over email to request hearing their stories and experience gaining tenure, or ask their current progress within the process. When performing the interview, all participants were allowed to stop the interview at any time, but

none found that necessary. After the interview, I asked if they knew anyone else I should talk to, using the snowball method to collect more interviews. Additionally, I would compile new interview questions based on questions other professors and candidates would want to know.

To analyze my data, I used primary cycle and thematic coding to organize my findings into themes and topics that reappeared throughout the interviews, as seen in the Findings section. As a final note, there have been many precautions to keep the identity of my participants anonymous. Their college and field of study will not be named to provide the most protection possible. Fortunately, many professors' experiences were thematically similar across all colleges, and the breadth of information and experiences helps validate this claim. As a further precaution, because gender was not a prevalent theme in my findings, all the professors will go by gender neutral aliases and pronouns. The six professors have randomly been assigned the aliases "Sam," "Dom," "Alex," "Payton," "Michael," and "Jesse," and will be cited by these aliases during quotations for their corresponding stories—some of which you have already briefly been introduced to in this paper. This is all done to protect the anonymity of the participants in my study.

VII. Findings

Teaching was emphasized during my discussions with the professors. Teaching is the site where much of their work is determined, as it forges their relationships with their students, peers, and their own self-identity. Many expressed feeling unsure of what they were doing at first, or feeling overwhelmed, but overcoming these challenges was also important identity work. One professor shares "I will say in the difference is, especially in a place like [this university]: quantity of teaching. When I was a graduate student I was teaching one class and spending most of my time doing my research project, but as a professor, I'm teaching a lot more, and everything

I do in every part of my daily life is somehow related to teaching" (Alex). Teachers at this university share that it is part of what they have signed up for in terms of what is expected to them and rise to the challenge, "you just keep handling the labor. Figure out a new method of work to navigate that…" (Dom). Likewise, for achieving these challenges, "having to kind of reinvent myself as– making–you know harnessing this craft of being a good professor…has been a really great point of growth for me" (Jesse). Another professor shared how the classroom was also a point of growth for them and their relationship to students, sharing " I'm building different relationships with my students in class so there's some growth and some and some positive experience there because we have more hands on activities. I feel like I really get to know my students a lot better in class than I would have before" (Peyton). Not only is teaching clearly expected, but it is also where relationships are formed. Another professor shares "I just—I love what I do. I love teaching. I love hanging out with students. And you know, it makes me feel good that they, you know, when they email me and say, 'Hey, I saved a life today because I remembered that story you told me lecture,' and I'm just like, 'Ohh!' Haha!" (Sam). All the professors (with varying degrees of warmth) reiterated the value they have for their relationships with their students.

> I have come to just love the students so much… I can create those deeper connections because I'm watching and working and meeting each class where they're at, to help fundamentally—if there's one thing I'm hoping everyone will get is just a voice. (Dom)

> "So, I love teaching my first year courses… They are that group of students is kind of often wide-eyed bushy tailed, really excited. They're also not ready or unsure of themselves, and they're not telling you that— they're not telling anyone that. So it's really

fun to develop a relationship with them, and watch them kind of grow, and watch them get to go grow over four years." (Alex)

Research is another key theme, emphasized through these interviews. Many professors said this was a high point of stress, for a variety of reasons. Some reasons that were cited ranged from "A challenge for me was research… We don't have lab space for experiments, or we don't have time, or we don't have graduate students, and we don't have… I would call it 'infrastructure' sometimes?" (Alex). Aside from resources, be it in the form of research assistants or time, another note was that research was not the same for all colleges, or all levels of experience (Dom, Peyton, Jesse). Despite the candidates admitting some limitations on getting the research done, there was not a consensus on the difficulty of this portion of the tenure packet. Some interviewees described it as the hardest part listing additional external life difficulties or classroom duties impacting research time, as well as not knowing what to research or not being certain if their findings count because of the unique nature of their products (Sam, Dom, Peyton). Others described not feeling the "publish or perish" pressure associated with tenure (Michael & Peyton), or that despite its challenges, they could know their work "was good enough to get tenure, and was good enough to show that I'm doing my research, staying engaged in my field. It was not an insurmountable expectation" (Alex). This scholar mentioned that their peers were extremely supportive of their research, and had a slight advantage due to the clearer research expectations in their college (Alex), which was not the same for other participants (Sam & Peyton). An interesting note from discussing this topic—all of my participants cited their background from a high tier research school during this topic, indicating that this has less impact on interpreting the stress of the research aspect of tenure than one may anticipate. Lastly, my

participants unanimously agreed that going up for tenure was more stressful than defending their dissertation.

The final theme discussed in tenure was service. A notable comment on service that seemed to underly my interviews was that "You probably won't get denied tenure for service, right? If you're not getting tenure it's because of your teaching and your research, probably" (Alex). That's not to say it's unimportant though, as this service is sometimes necessary work that saves lives, (Sam & Peyton) or can include personal, important work with the students—which although is not entirely counted as service in all cases, is a cited perk of building relationships with the students (Sam, Dom, & Peyton). One professor confesses

> I am almost addicted to service, haha! And so I kind of went a little bit more overboard in a way that kind of aligns with ours school's mission. But on the other hand, a lot of it is just like, out of passion and need. But it is hard to articulate some of the stuff that I might do that's considered a little bit more underground and unofficial as being very much needed by the students… The work is just so needed. (Jesse)

Service is also a way to make connection with other faculty or staff on campus, and create support structures throughout the tenure process. Alex also shares that "Service is really, really beneficial to me. There's two things about it that I will always cherish: one was that it got me exposure to people on campus and offices on campus that I never would have been exposed to... And then the second thing was I was fortunate enough to be put on a [committee that gave me an appreciation for our college] at a higher level than I had when I was just focused on my own little school." Notably important about these support systems, not only just to have people to cry to and confer with over the stress of tenure, but another underlying theme of service was needing to be protected.

I would say that my peers were supportive. And they did what they could to protect you

from certain things… find ways so that I can focus my energies on getting tenure, and

that's what I meant by protecting me, they protected me, they protected my time.

Basically, when I can put my time and my energy towards getting tenure, I felt like that

has been incredibly, that's incredibly appreciated on my part because it's— it's stressful

that you don't know when it's going to be, if you're going to get tenure… And the fact

that I had colleagues that would try to limit my time on a certain, certain committee, or

try to give me a set of teaching assignments that might suit me better, just so I can make

sure I get tenure, I really appreciate that. (Alex)

This sentiment was agreed on by many professors with statements like their peers "usually

protect you as a junior faculty member from some of these obligations that are a little bit more,

you know, contributions and committees (Jesse). The most beneficial aspect of service (beyond

the act itself and participating in the university/scholarly community) was primarily the peer

relationships that came from it, or fostering them to have greater opportunities later in the tenure

process.

VIII. Discussion

As we've previously talked about teaching, research, and service, these themes have a lot

to do with how boundaries are performed. It may help to think about each of these areas of

tenure as a stage or setting our performers, the stakeholders, to perform on. It is in these areas

that norms are created for constructing the identity of a tenure candidate that fits. Going back to

some of the guiding research, a quote that one of my participants mentioned was "we're almost

trained to go back to those four buckets," (Alex) which is an important detail to note. These

buckets, these settings, are where their professional identities and relationships are forged.

However, this also plays into the idea of concertive control, where "individuals and teams can be encouraged to police themselves … to buy into corporate visions and values, which then work as hegemonic controls on their thoughts and actions" (Eisenberg, 2009, p. 4). Although it is not so simple to say that everyone in the tenure system creates a system of concertive control, it is important to analyze the aspects of tenure that create the foundation of concertive control. Students unknowingly contribute to it in teacher evaluations. Additionally, the professors' peers need to write letters of evaluations for the tenure candidates, which can lead to challenges like Dom had to face:

> I had to sort of defend against [this letter]… the person wasn't wrong for pointing out some of what look like holes, it was actually a way for me to explain something that I didn't realize other people might be reading as a hole. So it drew my attention to something where I was like, 'oh no, that's not what that is…' I had to demonstrate … my rigor and my trajectory of research and, demonstrate that I've more than met the, tenure requirements.

There is a strange kind of prisoner's dilemma involved in this process of determining if a professor's research is being performed well enough. If the peer writing the letter writes positively of a professor who does not get tenure or is determined to be bad later, it reflects badly on them. However, misjudging a candidate's work or not giving a good candidate a chance prevents talented academics from entering the field as tenured professors. This system of having peer evaluation is a co-constructed boundary created by tenure that enforces a specific, prescribed way to perform research. One professor brave enough to share their experience with me noted times they would resist fitting a simple teaching/research/service mold, and shared "You know initially when I didn't know my decision there was a little bit of, um–I can be frank, I

have tenure–a little bit of gaslighting in a way… And so when I did get tenure, it was like it was almost like the narrative changed, "you fight for justice and what's right. We need you here'" (Jesse). This was the harshest example of trying to enforce a specific professional-identity for a tenure candidate, but the unanimous conclusion of my interviewees all agreed that they had heard worse, although not necessarily at the institution of this study. Still, it indicates that there needs to be more research done on the narratives of tenure candidates.

Next, many candidates discussed how their teaching reflected the university's mottos. Dom describes this as a good thing, "a main central factor: social justice/ 'hands, head, heart' whatever you want to use as the reference point, those were ways that I felt I was in the right space and I was a cultural fit for the university." This professor found this motto compatible with their teaching while in an environment that allowed them to cultivate a relationship with their students and gear the classroom towards addressing those needs. Alternatively, however, another professor explained that they liked the sentiment of the motto, but it wasn't always an easy or perfect fit, "it was pretty authentic and organic but it did require a little bit of reshaping to maybe align with the [our university's] mission, in a way. But the benefit I feel like I have is that not only do I research it, and do it in my service, but I also teach about the hands, head, heart…" (Jesse). Both of these examples indicate they self-identify with the motto, and indicates how tenure candidates still take part in the organizational metamorphosis process "by which new members become assimilated into the organization and how they learn and adapt to the organizational culture" (Spitzburg, 2019, p. 292). Focusing on the organization's mantra is a way to navigate the boundaries of tenure; it allows candidates to attach to something that they authentically agree and identify with. However, the barriers that define teaching, research, and service still exist outside of this; professors do not have a choice necessarily, but having a

mission they identify with may make it easier to cope, as "human beings in all cultures desire both positive group-based and positive person-based identities… individuals in all cultures or ethnic groups have the basic motivation needs for identity security, inclusion, predictability, connection, and continuity" (Ting-Toomey, 2009, pp. 2-3). It is also notable that themes of community are discussed in both professors' teaching and service supports that that is a stage where this identity is co-constructed, especially since all these professors celebrate the relationship they have with their students.

However, the comparisons to saying the boundaries are unavoidable or create dilemmas should not allude that the professors do not have agency. The professors who shared their stories with me were clearly resilient, based on their narratives. Additionally, one of the earliest findings to appear in all of my interviews was that all of my participants insisted they were authentic throughout the entire process. That would indicate that the necessary standards for tenure is part of their identity or desires already, which agrees with Identity Negotiation Theory. The relationships created during the tenure process, through service in the community, teaching students, and researching and collaborating with peers is a goal the candidates have—despite the stress associated with it. Many candidates returned to the idea that this university was their home, and the right fit for them. One professor shared "there are a couple things that really make this a good fit. I use 'homecoming' in my letter and I mean that. The university has a focus on the meaning, that's a part of your education, [not just what you're producing]" (Dom). On a similar note, Sam shares the unique opportunities they've had at this university with their students and peers: "I hear these really touching stories, and that's what makes it for me, that 's what brings me joy. I live for these stories and these intimate moments that a lot of people just don't get to see, so I treasure that. That's why I do what I do." Ultimately, these feelings of being

in the right community are so important to identity, especially in the stressful tenure process, where "self-verifying evaluations feel 'right,' diminish anxiety, and foster stability in the identities of targets. Stable identities afford people a sense of psychological coherence, a sense that they know what to do and the consequences of doing it." (Swann et al 2009, pp. 85-86). Responding to the boundaries and finding elements that professors want to embrace is what drives this identity-work forward and for their resilience to allow them to become tenured professors.

IX.   Limitations

There were a few limitations to this study, many of which guide what I believe future study in this topic can use to build even deeper studies. Due to the ripple effects of the COVID-19/Coronavirus Pandemic, the lead researcher lost time due to needing to move abruptly in the middle of the study. Additionally, the population of the study (professors) lost time on needing to adapt to online classroom teaching, and the additional stress of this burden made fewer professors able to set time aside to interview. Recording the interviews initially became easier due to the use of Teams, but one of my interviews was unable to properly record the participant's responses. For this reason, I only have general notes of that interview, and was not take any quotations from their testimony—only general opinions.

An additional limitation to my study was needing to change the scope of my study, limiting the perspective to only the professors'. In future studies, it would be valuable to get the perspectives of students, the Rank and Tenure committee, and teachers that were unable to secure a tenure position. In future studies, students could be given a small questionnaire in addition to interviewing a random selection of students. This would allow for a more full understanding of how students negotiate their impact on the tenure process, which I would

estimate (based on my ongoing conversations with students, although that is from only a small pool of the student population) is very minimal—I don't think many students understand how they impact the do-or-die nature of tenure.

X.   Conclusion

The tenure process is vulnerable and challenging, but ultimately worth it. Tenure has specific goals in mind for the professors to achieve, which creates an element of concertive control over the candidates. Due to the nature of tenure, it also brings students and peers into the equation, and they co-construct the boundaries that dictate how professors should perform their teaching, research, and service. Tenure becomes most achievable when candidates' identities align with the mission of the institution they enter, but there are impacts of the institution on the candidates as well. They are not only impacted by the organization's mission, but also by the relationships they cultivate during their teaching, research, and service. Future studies should consider other identity theories that may assist in exploring why professors endure the stressful tenure conditions, as well as reach further out to administration of universities and discover the possible value in continuing to use this process, despite being one of few career fields to operate this way. Lastly, the findings indicate that Identity Negotiation Theory can be used in organizational settings while upholding its assumptions of identity, shedding light on possible motivations for professionals working in stressful situations. The more attention that this subject is given, the more likely that improvements in the tenure system can be created and the academic field can become more inclusive to new and diverse ideas.

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