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Feminist Catholic Organizational Identity: A Phenomenological Study of Charism in the Lay Educator of a Notre Dame de Namur Learning Community

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FEMINIST CATHOLIC ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF CHARISM IN THE LAY EDUCATORS
OF A NOTRE DAME DE NAMUR LEARNING COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

The Catholic schools of women's religious congregations in the United States possess a distinctive Catholic identity, owed in great part to the charism of their founders and the feminist worldview that emerged in the sisters' mission, communal narratives, and ministries. With the decline of women religious across the country, schools and congregations ask questions for the future of that identity in the hands of lay educators. As with many religiously sponsored schools, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and their lay partners in education are engaged in these critical questions for their own learning communities across the country.

This study proposes *feminist Catholic organizational identity*, a charism inspired phenomenon present in the Catholic schools of women's religious congregations. This organizational phenomenon arises from the lived experience of lay educators as they seek to embody the charism and Catholic identity of the sponsoring congregation. Using an emergent and feminist hermeneutic phenomenology, this research provides understanding for how female lay educators in a Notre Dame de Namur learning community construct and enact this distinctive identity. Narrative phenomenological data was collected from eight, diverse female lay educators in semi-structured interviews. Feminist and hermeneutic research principles centered the life experience, professional contributions, and reflections of the participants.

An interdisciplinary conceptual framework rooted in feminist theories of Catholic theology, organizational theory, and education was applied as a hermeneutic lens in the generation of participant themes and a general description of the organizational

phenomenon. Key findings were organized in thematic categories aligned with individual life experiences prior to and during one's relationship with Notre Dame de Namur as well as organizational experiences for the learning community. First, feminist Catholic organizational identity became a source of attraction for those potential educators whose personal formation and feminist perspective aligned with that vision in the learning community. This inclusive worldview and experiential resonance led to a deeper relationship with Notre Dame de Namur. Second, the lived experience of the lay educator revealed the significance of belonging, mentorship from sisters, and partnership with female lay colleagues for imprinting newer educators with the feminist Catholic beliefs, stories, and practices of the Notre Dame de Namur community. Third and finally, feminist Catholic organizational identity is the visible witness of a systemic and integrated 21st century iteration of Notre Dame de Namur charism in these lay women and their learning community. In this, these educators claim the call and responsibility to embody a charism and legacy that is much bigger than they are: "We are Notre Dame de Namur."

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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CHAPTER ONE:

Introduction

Each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody,

at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel (Francis, 2018).

Sr. Teresita Weind, SNDdeN, congregational leader for the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur from 2008 to 2022, referenced these words of Pope Francis's *Gaudete et exsultate* in her remarks at the Networking for Mission III summer conference in July of 2018. For the assembly of Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, associates, students, and partners in Notre Dame ministries, the moment evoked the atmosphere of a global family reunion. Sr. Teresita continued:

> Indeed, today we do have cause to rejoice and be glad because this "a- mission"
>
> as Pope Francis says, identifies *who* we are. *We are* a mission. And there is a
>
> significant difference between *being a mission* and/or doing, going on, or
>
> completing a mission. Each of us may say, "This is *who* I am. I am a mission
>
> planned by the Father. Wherever I am and whatever I am doing, *I am* a mission"
>
> (Weind, SNDdeN, 2018)

Like St. Julie Billiart and Francoise Blin de Bourdon, who founded the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and inaugurated this mission to educate for life, all in that room could be known as the mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. Sitting with my own students from Notre Dame High School, San Jose, I was keenly aware of the multi-generational community and living tradition to which we belonged. And, I, too, was a Notre Dame educator charged with being, reflecting and embodying the Gospel in this historical moment.

Since the founding in 1804, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur distinguished Catholic education, especially the education of girls and young women, as the primary ministry of their apostolate (Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, 2020b). In the wake of the French revolution, they began this pioneering work at the border of modern day France and Belgium, soon sending sisters around the world to open or administer schools of all levels. The United States was the first country beyond the European continent to receive the sisters. Following their arrival in 1840, they established schools across the country with Ohio, California, and Massachusetts hosting the greatest concentrations of Notre Dame schools in what is now over 180 years of Catholic education in the United States (Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, 2020a; Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, East-West Province, 2020).

For over a century, Notre Dame schools in the United States were staffed primarily by Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (Bosler, 1991; Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, East-West Province, 2020). These women religious experienced work and prayer, formation and teacher training, in community with other sisters. From this history emerged the stories and themes of the congregation that would narrate the identity of the community and its commitments to goodness, justice, diversity, and women's leadership. By the 1940s, lay educators shared the professional ministry of Notre Dame education as evidenced in province statistical reports (Bosler, 1991). This introduction would become the norm by the arrival of the new millennium. Today, that work of education now depends substantially on the contributions of lay educators as the sisters retire from active ministry and pursue different ministries in health care, social services, and social justice, all the while redefining their relationships to schools.

Sr. Teresita's reflections affirmed the evolving identity for this international women's religious congregation as it further embraces the lay partners who continue and now lead the work of Catholic education, health care, and social service in the present day. The Networking conference itself, the third of its kind in recent history for the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, was a lived testament to the timely necessity of storytelling, dialogue, and imagination for the present and future of this sacred, communal identity. Drawing her remarks to a close, Sr. Teresita named this:

> Mission as identity…So being, growing, and nurturing Notre Dame de Namur
> mission network is a revelation. It's a revelation of ongoing, continuous
> transformation in our lifestyles, in whatever way we continue to manifest the
> charism of Notre Dame de Namur (Weind, SNDdeN, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Catholic education in the United States owes much to the influence and contributions of religious congregations (Caruso, 2012; Heft, 2011; Jacobs, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c; Walch, 1997, 2001, 2012, 2016). The women and men of vowed religious orders—sisters, brothers, and priests—authored an evolving narrative of Catholic education in the United States over more than two centuries of ministry and leadership. In the process, these pioneers of Catholic education and the human formation they promoted became synonymous with the Catholic identity of schools (Cook, 2001; Jacobs, 1998abc; Walch, 2003). Indeed, "popular consciousness equated these women and men with Catholic schools—so much so that many Catholics (and non-Catholics) found it difficult to conceive of a Catholic school that did not have religious as teachers or administrators" (Jacobs, 1998a). More specifically, the U.S. imagination associated these schools with the

teaching sisters who embodied a paradigmatic Catholic identity in the habits of their

educational philosophy and pedagogy as well as their dress. While the religious habit

worn by sisters prior to Vatican II transitioned in some cases to secular clothing, women

religious themselves would continue to prove the symbolic measure of a Catholic school

for many years (Caruso, 2012; Walch, 2016).

Who we are: Catholic identity and charism

Beyond popular understandings, however, Catholic schools occupy Catholic,

educational, and organizational spaces that demonstrate similarities and, more

importantly, aspire to distinction. Church documents of the twentieth century reflect the

effort to distinguish the special ecclesial, religious, and cultural identity of Catholic

schools as they participate in the evangelizing mission of the Church and the formation of

young people (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997; Second Vatican Council,

1965b). These and other ecclesial documents further recognize that educational ministry

can be a pastoral expression of a religious congregation's unique charism and apostolate

(Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, 1997, 2002, 2007).

In this, the Catholic school of a religious congregation possesses a distinctive

Catholic identity and mission shaped by the congregation's particular founding charism

and continuing deep story (Cook, 2001; Heft, 2011; Lee, 2004). Charism, operative under

two primary definitions, speaks generally to that special gift or grace of the Holy Spirit

given to an individual or a group, and specifically, to the unique characteristics of a

religious community and its founder (Johnson et al., 2014; Lee, 1989, 2004; Renfro,

S.S.S, 1986; Second Vatican Council, 1964). Recent perspectives explore the role of

charism and its relationship to the identity of the congregation and its ministries (Cook,

2001, 2015; Lee, 1989, 2004; Renfro, S.S.S, 1986). Sr. Jean Renfro, S.S.S. proposes that

charism "is not limited by time or culture and is found in, and is enfleshed in, the present

day followers of the founding person, enabling them to live his or her vision in our time"

(1986, p. 528). Marianist Bernard Lee (2004) disagrees and suggests the embodiment of

charism is constructed within a time, locale, and a historicized, situational context; rather,

it is deep story—the narrative structure and style of the community—that possesses an

enduring quality which "cannot be handed on and continued without structures that

maintain the story, within which new members can be socialized" (p. 28). How the

congregation and its members live out those mission commitments and organizational

processes in contemporary times reveals the integration of charism and deep story

suggested by Lee.

As a key element of congregational identity, charism enables the schools and

ministries of religious communities "to sharpen their focus and clarify their distinctive

educational vision and qualities" (Cook & Simonds, 2011, p. 320). For schools founded

by women religious in the United States, this distinctive Catholic identity promotes a

feminist view of Catholic education that emerged from the life and work of the Catholic

sisters (Cook, 2001, 2015; Jacobs, 1998b; Schneiders, 2000). The origins of this Catholic

feminism can be first noted in the founding of congregations that centered their

educational work on girls and women. The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur were among

those congregations founded by European women who aimed to educate young women in

European and then North American contexts. The sisters taught who they were and

centered the experience of women in the education they offered. Such actions were

counter to cultural priorities and expectations for women of the time (Bosler, 1991;

Schier & Russett, 2002; Schneiders, 2000; Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, East-West Province, 2020).

Once established in the United States, women religious in Catholic school communities fostered a Catholic feminism through their leadership example, gospel values, and educational paradigm. Rooted in the experience of faith, this feminist Catholic worldview contributed to the advancement of women's equality and social justice in American society (E. M. Brewer, 1987; Jacobs, 1998b; Katzenstein, 1995; Schneiders, 2000). Jacobs elaborates, "As these women instructed their students, especially during the first 65 years of the 20th century, they revolutionized Catholic pedagogical practice and shaped how the next generation of American Catholic women would envision their lives, their religion, and their roles" (Jacobs, 1998b, pp. 26–27). The special identity of women's religious congregations—attributed to charism, deep story and the lived experience of their mission and ministry—permeates their Catholic schools in a myriad of ways even now.

The storied legacy of this identity persists in contemporary learning communities amidst dramatic social shifts, the most obvious being the prominence of lay educators to realize that identity in Catholic schools. The stark decline of women religious serving as faculty, staff and administrators since 1965 presents a significant and evolving dilemma for Catholic identity—will the school remain Catholic without sisters? Recent years have seen, some dedicated lay educators who intentionally aimed to foster that distinctive identity of a congregation's religious heritage. That legacy now serves to inspire more lay educators to continue the congregation's Catholic identity, charism, and mission on behalf of the founding or sponsoring religious order (Caruso, 2012; Heft, 2011; Jacobs,

1998abc; Walch, 2003). And yet, today's educators are, themselves, more likely to have little to no exposure, experience, or relationship with Catholic sisters. Within this landscape, how does the charism and identity of women's religious congregations endure? How is it imprinted in the newest generations of lay educators? Religious communities, scholars and practitioners alike recognize the gift of lay partnership in the work of Catholic education, just as it also presents situational differences and challenges for the lay women and men educating on behalf of the religious congregation (Cook, 2001, 2015; Heft, 2011; McLaughlin et al., 1996; Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, East-West Province, 2020). These realities lead to important questions for the continuation of feminist Catholic identity and the charism of women's religious communities in the Catholic schools they founded. Like their contemporaries, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and their lay partners in education now discern these same questions.

Background and Need for the Study

The current moment in Catholic education is greatly informed by a confluence of events in the 1960s. Pope John XXIII (1962), recommending that the Catholic faith "be studied afresh and reformulated in contemporary terms," opened the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and ushered in a profound reimagination of the Catholic identity of the universal Church where all share a common call to holiness (Second Vatican Council, 1964). Among the many outcomes of the Council, the Church recognized a new mandate to engage faith with culture so as to realize more fully the evangelizing mission of the Church (Second Vatican Council, 1964, 1965e). The pursuit of the gospel amidst the lived reality for all humanity formalized the Catholic social teachings of the previous

century and led to the rise of social justice commitments for the marginalized around the world.

For religious, or consecrated, women and men as well as Catholic educators, specific Council documents were authored to illuminate the specific vocations of these members of the Church. *Perfectae Caritatis* (Second Vatican Council, 1965c) directed religious communities to rediscover the spirit of the congregation's founder, whose characteristics served as a model for the congregation and its ministries, in light of the needs of the gospel. Women religious accepted the invitation to identity renewal, found inspiration for their apostolates in the charisms and heritage of the founders of their congregations, and set into motion organizational changes that would respond to the signs of the times (Johnson et al., 2014; Schneiders, 2000; P. Wittberg, 1994). *Gravissimum educationis* (1965) would explicate the special identity of Catholic schools and the influential role of educators, parents, and faith community in the educational sphere. For the first time, teachers received the call to an apostolic spirit in their accomplishment of educational goals for the formation of young persons in their care (#8). The representation of the lay vocation in *Apostolicam actuositatem* (1965) further gave rise to the realization that lay women and men could participate in the evangelizing mission of the Church with their own social identity and organizations.

The liberation afforded by the conciliar documents to reimagine Catholic identity in the service of God's people prompted women's religious communities, their lay partners, and Catholic schools to amplify a public facing service and justice orientation. In the U.S. context, this reimagination combined with the emerging movements for civil rights and women's equality to disrupt understandings of the religious vocation and the

ministries in which women served. Just as the numbers of women graduating women's

secondary and undergraduate schools with a feminist Catholic view of society were

increasing, the demographics of those in women's religious communities experienced

decline.

Changing narrators: religious to lay

Statistics from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate reveal that

women religious numbered 39,452 in 2021, a 78% percent decline from the heyday of

1965 when the population included 181,421 sisters (Center for Applied Research in the

Apostolate, 2021; National Religious Retirement Office, 2022; Stockman, 2018).In those

very same fifty years, Catholic schools sponsored by religious congregations have seen

stark decreases of faculty, staff and administrators who are women religious (Caruso,

2012; Heft, 2011; Jacobs, 1998; Walch, 2003). Today, 97.4% of all Catholic educators

are laity, with 1.5% numbering the religious sisters (National Catholic Educational

Association, 2022). For the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in the United States,

national census information indicates similar transitions underway: in 1965, the number

of professed sisters, novices, and postulants numbered 3,439, (*The Official Catholic

Directory*, 2018; *The Official Catholic Directory*, 2021)whereas in 2018, that total

population was 668, and then 544 in 2021 (*The Official Catholic Directory*, 2018, 2021).

Most Notre Dame de Namur learning communities are led and staffed by lay educators,

and sisters are rare and revered community members.

These statistics give credence to the necessary post-Vatican II transition of school

governance, leadership, staffing, and operations to the laity. As a result of this shift, these

schools and their congregational sponsors have endured challenges and changes in the

organizational processes and systems that frame the work of Catholic schools. These organizational mechanisms require the gifts, skills, and responsibility of lay educators so as to ensure school viability in the 21st century. The changing landscape of the last fifty-five years points now to a variety of identity-related issues for the Catholic schools of religious congregations. Many religious communities and their schools have and continue to undergo revisions of governance, sponsorship, leadership, formation practices, and mission integration assessments as their religious populations diminish further and lay populations more firmly take responsibility for the stewardship of religiously sponsored Catholic schools.

With new statistics from the National Religious Retirement Office, these efforts to govern, lead, and form become more urgent: 81% of all women religious are above the age of seventy, and projections for the lifespan of these congregations suggest mere decades remaining for some 300 of the 420 women's religious congregations in the United States (National Religious Retirement Office, 2022). For those congregations, the life and sustainability of the educational ministries at the heart of their missions are significant.

Previous studies

Previous studies highlight the relevance of these needs for today's religiously sponsored Catholic schools. Some researchers have focused on understandings of sponsorship, governance, and leadership, highlighting the existing structural models for theory and praxis (Caretti, 2013; Horgan, 2022; Tavis, 2010; Thomas, 2009). Additional studies have focused on charism and culture within the experience of a school community (Argento, 2020; Baccari, 2018; Bludgus, 2018; Donahue, 2012; Herb, 1997; Leigh, 2018;

Lek, 2016; Vercruysse, 2004) while others consider these concepts as they relate to the role of particular school leaders, their leadership characteristics, and their influence or effectiveness in creating a charism aligned culture (Bruno, 2005; Ferrera, 2000; Franco, 2016; McDermott, 2006; Rentner, 2010) Some research has considered the perspective of women religious in teaching or as sponsors (Bosler, 1991; Murphy, 2017; Tavis, 2010) (Bosler, 1991; Murphy, 2017; Tavis, 2010). Finally, other researchers have examined how the charism of the founder and congregation informs the formative programming offered by the school, be that for students or faculty and staff (Argento, 2020; Bludgus, 2018; Cannon, 2016; Fussell, 2016; Leto, 2018; McDonnell, 2002)).

In the majority of these studies, the emphasis leans toward theological, sociological, or educational research perspectives. A review of this literature suggests three significant gaps for the future: (1) the study of the distinctive Catholic identity that clearly perpetuates the charism of the women's religious congregation in a majority lay context, (2) the exploration and analysis of that identity for its feminist Catholic worldview, and (3) the application of organizational identity theory to understand the interplay of various dynamics for charism within the lay organizational setting.

Women religious are committed to establishing the means for their legacy to continue through their lay educational partners in the decades and centuries to come. Likewise, lay educators recognize the responsibility to continue that legacy while asking questions of how best to foster the charism and identity of the those they will outlive. This is the case for the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and for their educational partners in learning communities across the United States. The determination to continue the

distinctive Catholic identity and worldview of the congregation's charism and culture in the hands, hearts, and minds of lay educators is at critical juncture.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how lay educators in a Notre Dame de Namur learning community construct and enact a charism-inspired feminist Catholic organizational identity (FCOI). The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur—the creators and enactors of a distinctive feminist Catholic congregational identity—now entrust the embodiment of that Catholic educational identity to the laity of the learning communities they own and sponsor. Realizing charism in lay terms presents a phenomenon that was served in this study by the confluence of feminist, Catholic, and organizational theoretical lenses. This interdisciplinary approach revealed the interplay of the lay vocation and charism interpretations for the educational sphere.

Research Questions

For sisters and lay educators in learning communities sponsored by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, several questions emerge for the future of the Catholic identity, charism, and mission. Guiding the work were the following research questions:

1. How is feminist Catholic organizational identity (FCOI) understood by lay educators in the Notre Dame de Namur learning community?

2. How do lay educators construct and enact FCOI in their work and participation in the learning community?

3. How does FCOI continue and interpret Notre Dame charism for lay educators in the contemporary learning community context?

Conceptual Framework

Scholars in organizational and Catholic spheres suggest that identity and culture are essential components for the life of an organization. Organizational theorists support the view that all organizations possess an identity and culture. Albert and Whetten (1985) defined the identity of an organization as that which is *central*, *enduring*, and *distinctive*. Contemporaneously, Schein (1985) wrote significantly on the cultures of organizations and outlined different levels for cultural understanding based upon artifacts, espoused values, and assumptions and beliefs. Cook (2001, 2012) outlined a comprehensive view of charism and its relationship to the Catholic school identity and culture. Lee (2004) echoed similar ideas, writing about the confluence of charism, culture, and what he calls "deep story" for the dynamic and sustainable living of a religious community's legacy. The latter two authors pose pointed questions for the ways in which lay educators understand identity and experience formation so as to embody charism and employ that in organizational life.

Religious congregations demonstrate the same organizational characteristics that are seen in corporations, nonprofits, and educational institutions; further, women's religious congregations and their schools demonstrate operational characteristics of feminist organizations. Therefore, to further the aims of this study, organizational identity theories, feminist studies of organizations, the feminist theological dynamics of women's Catholic religious congregations, and charism were combined into conceptual framework to examine Notre Dame Catholic learning communities and the implications for charism within a lay context. The elements of this conceptual framework are introduced here and explored with greater depth in Chapter Two.

Women's religious congregations and feminist theory in organizations

As illustrated earlier in this chapter, teaching sisters developed a distinctive feminist and Catholic identity that emerged from an interpretation of their faith, their charism, and their lived experience. This identity permeated their schools to inform the experiences of culture, structure, and organization. While this development originally took place within the formation and communal life of the sisters, the organizational understanding of feminist Catholic identity in the life and work of laity is critical for the continued vibrancy of the Catholic schools of women's religious congregations:

> The feminist vision is not simply one utopian dream among others, the private cause of some disgruntled women, but a crucial factor in the shaping of the future because it is quintessentially a gospel vision of full humanity for all persons and right relations among all creatures. Therefore, the women (and men) who embody this feminist vision and commitment have a vital role to play in the present and the future of both church and society. (Schneiders, 2000, pp. 115–116).

Feminist theologians consider this gospel vision and its proclamation in the mission and ministry of religious congregations—most notably witnessed in the principles of their structures, language, and ministerial priorities (Brigham, 2015; Cahill, 2014; Johnson et al., 2014; Katzenstein, 1995; P. Wittberg, 1994)

In the secular realm, the emergence of feminism and its organizing principles resulted in the recognition of feminist organizations, defined by Ferree and Martin as those "embracing collectivist decision-making, member empowerment, and a political agenda of ending women's oppression" (Ferree & Martin, 1995). They delineate four

elements informing the longevity of feminist organizations: institutionalization, the relationship of feminist organizations to the women's movement, the tensions arising from the multidimensionality of feminist politics, and feminist organizations as the outcome of situationally and historically specific processes (p. 6-8). Congruent to these dynamics of the long story of feminist organizations are themes of language for aspirational storytelling, discursive processes for identity construction, and realization of feminist ideology, goals, or values (D'Enbeau & Buzzanell, 2013; Ferree & Martin, 1995; Katzenstein, 1995; Leslie J. Miller & Jana Metcalfe, 1998). As a feminist organization that is shaped by feminist theological premises, this study could not be adequately realized without the lens of feminist organizational insights.

The social interactionist model of organizational identity

Albert and Whetten (1985) introduced the seminal definition of organizational identity as those descriptors which are *central, enduring, and distinctive* when articulated by the organization members. In the thirty-five years of organizational identity scholarship, three meta-theories emerged most frequently: social construction, social identity, and social actor(Cornelissen et al., 2016; Gioia & Hamilton, 2016; Haslam et al., 2017). Each theory approaches the conceptualization of the organizational identity through a specific metaphor, process for identity formation, and degree of organizational scale. Cornelissen et al. (2016) compile these theories into a matrix they call *the social interactionist model of organizational identity formation and change (SIMOI).* "The key feature of the SIMOI model is that it describes the processes through which an initial socially constructed framing of an inter-subjective group or social identity may eventually scale up to become a property of the organization as a whole" (p. 9). Within

this model are processes of sensemaking, sense giving, and enactment of organizational identities. These processes bring in to focus the relational behaviors of members in determining organizational identity. Like the discursive and communally based processes of feminist organizations, SIMOI accounts for the negotiated meanings of various language, processes, and relationships at work within a varied organization. Given the dynamics for the development of a lay realized feminist Catholic identity, this model holds potential for insight and understanding of the organizational underpinnings of a charism-inspired iteration. Further, the model opens hermeneutic possibilities for the innovative interpretations of the charism and identity.

Conceptual framework in summary

Religious congregations demonstrate the same organizational characteristics that are seen in corporations, nonprofits, and educational institutions; further, women's religious congregations and their schools operate within understandings of feminist organizations. Therefore, standards of feminist theory in organizations and the social interactionist model of organizational identity can be applied to the study of Notre Dame Catholic learning communities.

Sr. Sandra Schneiders, feminist theologian and scholar on the narrative of women's religious life, recognizes the present landscape as opportune for "constructive imagining":

> At colleges that have maintained their Catholic and all-women's identity, the student body often includes many non-Catholics, and the faculty often includes only a small number of Religious working with lay colleagues, both Catholic and non-Catholic…Our dreams for a new world order of

universal right relations can serve as the launch pad for commitments in

our own time that are both continuous with and distinctly different from

those of our forebears in the last century (p. 114-115).

Sr. Patricia Wittberg (1994) suggests that we might conceive of religious congregations

in ways similar to social movements with a lifecycle pattern. While she critiques the

disruptive effects of Vatican II on religious communities, Wittberg is clear in the

"necessity of a coherent, relevant, and lived ideological frame for the survival of a social

movement." Propelled by Schneiders and Wittberg, to study the charism and Catholic

identity of religiously sponsored schools in light of feminist theories of organizational

identity may imagine the next generational social movement and the fullness of a

feminist Catholic organizational identity.

Educational Significance

This study aimed to understand the dynamics of feminist organizational identity

within 21st century Notre Dame Catholic learning communities. For the Sisters of Notre

Dame de Namur, these dynamics are currently at play within their learning communities

across the United States, yet there is little documentation, structure, or consistency within

and across the schools. The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and lay educational leaders

need to understand these dynamics in order to continue the charism and identity

associated with Notre Dame schools for over one hundred seventy-five years.

Understanding the organizational formation of community members within the schools

reveals important considerations for the sisters as well as the educational leaders at each

school site.

These considerations will have impact on the processes within the school for hiring, orientation and onboarding, formation and professional development in formal and informal ways, strategic planning and institutional commitments. Many religious congregations are interested in the Catholic identity and charism sustainability, organizational processes for identity construction, and developing programs that serve the formation and growth of their educators and employees. The results of this study shed light on what systems, content, and strategies work and which are less than effective.

The study's findings also uncovered valuable understandings of vocation and role behaviors for Catholic educators within learning communities. The confluence of work and spiritual vocation categories for the educator served to blend mission aligned characteristics in the individual and the community; this confluence also created challenges for those same educators.

Finally, this study can serve as a source of assurance for religious communities that their response to the gospel through education will now reside in the good hands of their lay beneficiaries. And lay educators may realize more fully their responsibility to the charism and culture of the congregation just as they are transforming that into a full lay iteration of that charism and culture.

CHAPTER TWO: THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Restatement of the Problem

Catholic schools sponsored by religious congregations possess a distinctive Catholic identity shaped by a congregation's founding charism and continuing deep story (Cook, 2001, 2015; Heft, 2011; Lee, 2004). For schools founded by women religious, this distinctive organizational identity, which promotes a feminist view of Catholic education, was at one time the work of Catholic sisters and now resides in the efforts of lay educators (E. M. Brewer, 1987; Jacobs, 1998b; Schneiders, 2000). Notre Dame de Namur learning communities continue the educational ministry of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur; the sisters and their lay educational partners engage the questions that emerge for the dynamic continuation and interpretation of a charism aligned feminist Catholic organizational identity in Notre Dame de Namur schools.

Overview

This chapter provides a review of the relevant literature in four primary sections: (1) organizational identity, (2) Catholic identity and charism, (3) Catholic identity and charism in women's religious congregations, and (4) feminist Catholic organizational identity. Section one explores definitions, assumption, conceptual dynamics, and key theories of organizational identity, including the social interactionist model of organizational identity. Section two discusses the concepts of Catholic identity and charism in light of organizational identity and the perspectives introduced by the Second Vatican Council and fifty years of commentary from Catholic bishops, sisters, theologians, and educators. Section three narrows the discussion to examine the historical, theological, and organizational currents of Catholic identity and feminism in

women's religious congregations and their schools. The final section proposes the confluence of interdisciplinary theoretical material to craft a feminist Catholic organizational identity framework that attends to the multiple levels of identity construction and enactment.

Organizational Identity

The field of organizational theory investigates the nature and processes of social groups. Organizations of all sizes, structures, and contexts and a variety of organizational constructs, such as culture, identity, image, leadership, reputation, and socialization—are the subjects of modern scholarship. Among these conceptualizations, organizational identity (OI) responds to essential and existential questions of group identity. Just as the human person asks, "Who am I?" so too does the human collective ask, "Who are we?" or more specifically in this case, "Who are we, as an organization?" (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000; Albert & Whetten, 1985; Pratt, Schultz, Ashforth, & Ravasi, 2016). This inquiry points to the organization's fundamental task of self-definition and self-understanding, a critical line of questioning within the context of organizational identities that are engaging with pressures from the external environment and aspirations for future longevity.

Definition and assumptions

Albert and Whetten (1985) introduced organizational identity (OI) as a scientific concept for empirical study and a means for organizations to understand themselves. They observed organizations respond to challenges or crises with statements of OI. These statements, or claims, demonstrated the articulation of three criteria: organizational features which are *central, enduring, and distinctive* (CED). *Central* is understood as

those features which are the essence of the organization. *Enduring* refers to that which is the same or continuous. And, *distinctive* describes elements which differentiate the organization from others in comparison. For Albert and Whetten, each CED feature is an individually necessary component that combine to create a complete framework. Further, this tripartite framework suggests that these characteristics of organizational identity are essential to the authenticity, longevity, and categorical understanding of the organization.

This conceptual approach relies upon two significant theoretical assumptions. The first is that OI extends twentieth century identity conceptualizations from the individual to the group at multiple levels (Erikson, 1959, 1968; Gioia & Hamilton, 2016; Mead, 1934). This anthropomorphic attribution suggests that the organization possesses human-like qualities and behaviors that reflect communal complexity, presence, agency, and spirituality (Gioia & Hamilton, 2016). Organizations can be treated in social spaces as if they were individuals with responsibilities and powers (Whetten, 2006). At both micro and macro levels, the organization yearns for "a sense of 'self', to articulate core values, and to act according to deeply rooted assumptions about 'who we are and can be as individuals, organizations, societies'" (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 127). This assumption provides insight into the institutional dimension of religious congregations, communities, and schools, who may be seen to speak as "we."

The second assumption is that OI is self-reflective, self-referential, and self-defined (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gioia et al., 2010, 2013; Whetten, 2006). OI is determined by the organization and its members, not from external stakeholders as is the case with organizational reputation or image (Ravasi, 2016). This self-reflexive orientation is coupled with a desire for both relationality and distinction, to illuminate

similarities and differences through comparison with others in an analogous classification or social space (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gioia et al., 2013; Pratt et al., 2016b). These self-oriented processes of reflection, reference, and definition provide an intriguing view of the communal behaviors that contribute to an organization's actions and priorities as it seeks to understand and determine its place in the world.

Organizational identity, its criteria, and underlying assumptions offer a compelling addition to the organizational research field (Gioia, 2008; Pratt et al., 2016; Albert et al., 2000). Pratt et al. (2016) discussed the appeal of OI—namely its pragmatic usefulness, its propensity to define similarity and difference with other organizations, and its aptitude to showcase potential relationships among people or ideas. Albert et al. (2000) suggested identity is inherently powerful because this construct anchors an entity within a situation and enables the organization an "integrative and generative" positionality that includes multiple levels of analysis and evolving dynamics (p. 13). Further still, OI may be aptly resonant for today's twenty-first century milieu:

> The idea of organizational identity simply resonates. It resonates with people in organizations, and it resonates with those of us who study organizations. It resonates because it constitutes the most meaningful, most intriguing, most relevant concept we deal with in both our personal and organizational lives. Identity is about us—as individuals and as organization members—and it enquires into the deepest level of our sensemaking and understanding. When you study identity you are delving into the inner reaches—of yourself and your subject of study. There is just something profound about the idea itself, as well as the scholarly effort to

study it. Identity also has the requisite mystery that characterizes all the

great domains of study (Gioia, 2008, p. 63-64).

Such description suggests not only the multiple dimensions of the human community, but

perhaps surprisingly, an emotional, sociological, and even spiritual significance for OI.

For the proposed study, the holistic quality of the construct and the questions to which it

responds are apropos.

Conceptual dynamics

Recent publications and surveys of OI scholarship document the growth of the

field in the last thirty-five years (e.g. Corley et al., 2006; Cornelissen, Werner, & Haslam,

2016; Foreman & Whetten, 2016; Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamilton, & Corley, 2013; Pratt,

Schultz, Ashforth, & Ravasi, 2016b; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Gioia, Patvardhan,

Hamilton, and Corley (2013) described this research growth in terms of developmental

stages, suggesting that the field now transitions into maturity as an established theoretical

domain. Scholars also agreed that the breadth of OI literature represents a diversity of

theoretical traditions and disciplinary domains (Alvesson et al., 2008; Cornelissen et al.,

2016; Haslam et al., 2017). As a result, several dynamics of contemporary relevance

emerge from the literature for this study

Albert and Whetten's CED criteria are the subject of considerable discussion and

critique. While the terms, referenced regularly in the literature, are viewed as a seminal

contribution, several scholars named concern for the inconsistencies and lack of clarity in

what exactly qualifies as central, enduring, and distinctive (Albert et al., 2000;

Brunninge, 2005; Corley et al., 2006; Haslam et al., 2003; Whetten & Mackey, 2002).

Gioia, Schultz, and Corley (2000) debated the validity of the enduring criteria, positing

that OI is instead an "unstable" and "fluid" concept that experiences revision of meaning,

even while the labels organization members use may remain consistent (p. 64). Whetten

(2006) responded to the identity crisis with the suggestion that many neglected the larger

framework of the original proposition. He described how CED was only one third of the

whole framework.

> The Albert and Whetten (1985) description of organizational identity
> contained three principle components. Although we didn't use these terms,
> the *ideational* component equated organizational identity with members'
> shared beliefs regarding the question "Who are we as an organization?";
> the *definitional* component proposed a specific conceptual domain for
> organizational identity, characterized as the CED features of an
> organization; and finally, the *phenomenological* component posited that
> identity-related discourse was most likely to be observed in conjunction
> with profound organizational experiences. (Whetten, 2006).

Whetten addressed the conceptual gap with discussion of functional and structural

definitional attributes in order to provide validity standards and guiding questions for the

study of identity claims and referents. Whetten demonstrated the schema and its

corresponding questions (Table 1):

Table 1

Using the CED Definition to Enhance the Construct Validity of Organizational Identity

Using the CED Definition to Enhance the Construct Validity of Organizational Identity, Within a Functional/Structural Perspective

Functional Definitional Standard: *Distinguishing* Organizational Attributes		
Focus	*Validity Standards*	*Illustrative Guiding Questions*
Conceptual Domain: Identity Claims (What)	Attributes used by an organization to positively distinguish itself from others. Attributes spanning what is required and what is ideal for a particular kind of organization.	Does this attribute reflect the organization's distinctive set of preferences / commitments? Would it be considered an organization-specific attribute? Is it a positive distinction? Is it an essential distinction?
Phenomenological Domain: Identity-Referencing Discourse (How)	Represented as categorical imperatives, drawing attention to what must be done to avoid acting out of character, both comparatively and historically.	Is there an imperative tone to the discourse? Are positions presented as truth claims, comparable to moral obligations? Are emotions running high?
Structural Definitional Standard: *Central and Enduring* Organizational Attributes		
Focus	*Validity Standards*	*Illustrative Guiding Questions*
Conceptual Domain: Identity Claims (What)	Attributes that are manifested as an organization's core programs, policies, and procedures, and that reflect its highlight values. Attributes that have passed the test of time or on some other basis operate as "irreversible" commitments.	If this attribute were removed, would the character / history of the organization be significantly altered? Would it be a different kind of organization? Does this attribute reflect the organization's highest priorities and deepest commitments? Is it a "higher level" organizational attribute, or directly linked to one (i.e., An important extension or expression)? Is it considered a sacrosanct element? Is it celebrated in organizational lore?
Phenomenological Domain: Identity-Referencing Discourse (When, Why)	Invoked by member-agents "when nothing else will do," as decision guides / justifications, in conjunction with profoundly difficult situations. The dominating topic of conversation when seemingly "nothing else matters," in the face of a credible identity threat.	Have "lesser" decision guides been tried and discarded? Is this the "court of last appeal" for resolving conflicting proposals pertaining to a fork-in-the-road decision?

Gioia et al. (2013) update the definitional discussion with their own commentary. First, the most essential criterion is *central*, since identity is nigh impossible to imagine without "key values, labels, products, services, or practices" (p. 125-126). The *distinctive* criterion allies with the concepts of *optimal distinctiveness* (M. B. Brewer, 1991) and the *uniqueness paradox* to reveal "that what really matters is that the organization members themselves believe that they have distinctive identities, regardless of whether such beliefs are 'objectively' verified" (p. 126). Finally, Gioia et al. (2013) argue the *enduring* criterion is better understood as 'continuous over time' in an effort to resolve an ongoing debate over whether OI is an enduring or dynamic proposition. They suggest that organization members may perceive identity stability over time, using the same identity vocabulary even as those label meanings shift subtly with time.

The ongoing discussion over criteria definitions stands alongside a clear predominance and preference for conceptual treatments of OI in the literature (Foreman & Whetten, 2016). Some engage ontological and epistemological considerations to question whether OI is entitative or processual, substantive or dynamic, a noun or a verb (Gioia & Hamilton, 2016). Rather than an either/or dichotomy, the recursive, "both-and framing" of structurational thinking offers a "more nuanced and realistic portrayal of organizational identity as both process and product" (Gioia & Hamilton, 2016, p. 11). Building off earlier work around synoptic and performative accounts, Gioia and Hamilton (2016) suggest:

> Attribute-focused descriptions of identity give us a sense of the main
> features that members consider to be essential to their conception of
> themselves, while process-focused descriptions give us a sense of the

> continuous, ongoing development of identity as enactings and
>
> accomplishings (p. 12)

The complexity of this organizational identity formation aligns with the realities faced by

women religious and educators in their schools with Catholic identity and charism.

Within the epistemological arena, the most significant debate surrounds two

theoretical approaches to organizational identity: social construction and social actor

views (Corley et al., 2006; Gioia et al., 2010; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Whetten, 2006;

Whetten & Mackey, 2002). In the social construction perspective, OI is "an

organization's members' collective understanding of the features presumed to be central

and continuous, and that distinguish the organization from other organizations" (Gioia et

al., 2000). This self-referential concept relies upon the consensual and shared meaning

making of OI by members for the articulation of that identity within and beyond the

organization (Gioia et al., 2000, 2013; Gioia & Hamilton, 2016; Hogg & Terry, 2000). To

accomplish this, members attend to the labels and interpretive schemes they construct in

order to generate organizational meaning (Gioia et al., 2000, 2010, 2013; Gioia &

Hamilton, 2016; Whetten, 2006). This collaborative quality of the social construction

perspective also points to a preference for a continuous depiction of OI in light of

possible revision over time as members understand themselves within the organization

(Gioia & Hamilton, 2016). Further, social constructionists adeptly connect this view with

sensemaking processes (Gioia et al., 2010; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Weick, 1995, 2012).

In the social actor view, organizational identity is believed to be the property asset

of the organization, which, in this case, is treated as an independent entity or "social

actor" with its own legal status, powers, and assets (Gioia et al., 2010; Gioia & Hamilton,

2016; King, Brayden G. et al., 2010; Whetten, 2006; Whetten & Mackey, 2002). Here, the anthropomorphic attribution of the organization is accentuated; as such, organizational commitments, behaviors, and proclaimed priorities—known as identity claims or referents—demonstrate the organization's identity and position in the social sphere (Corley et al., 2006; Gioia et al., 2010; Whetten, 2006). Unlike the social construction view, a social actor understanding places the predominance of self-referential identity determination in the articulation of public claims made by the organization (Corley et al., 2006; Whetten, 2006). Stability is significant for the long-term realization of the social actor's OI, and therefore, a connection with sensegiving processes is common to ensure consistency among members (Gioia et al., 2010; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991a; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Whetten, 2006).

Sensemaking and sensegiving serve as dialogic processes that play out within the social construction and social actor conceptualizations of organizational identity. Sensemaking generally refers to the cognitive process individuals utilize to make retrospective meaning of a situated experience within an organizational setting (Brown et al., 2015; Weick, 1995). The result is attribution or understanding of identity for the organization and the individual as a member (Weick, 1995). Sensegiving is "the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). These two processes are significant for the mutual relationship of leaders and members in the organizational identity space. Clark and Geppert (2011) commented:

> In a *sensemaking* process, social actors perceive, interpret, and evaluate
> each other's conduct as it impacts on their understanding of the subsidiary;

in a *sensegiving* process, actors use power and other resources to enact

their subsidiary identity, to respond meaningfully to and thereby influence

the behaviour of others. One actor's sensegiving prompts the other's

sensemaking responses, in turn leading to the latter's sensegiving acts and

the emerging political process of [meaning] integration . . .' (emphasis in

original). (Clark & Geppert, 2011, p. 399).

Organizational exchanges, structures, language and symbols all provide influence on

what are ultimately interpretative moments of meaning and authoritative action, or

enactment (Weick, 1995, 2012).

   While a review of the literature seems to suggest that scholars have a preference

for one of these two theoretical approaches to the exclusion of the other, some have

begun to posit the value of a mutual relationship for social construction and social

identity conceptualizations (Cornelissen et al., 2016; Gioia et al., 2010, 2013; Ravasi &

Schultz, 2006). Ravasi and Schultz (2006) proposed the complementarity of these views

when studying OI phenomenon in order to generate greater accuracy of OI

representations that emerge from the "interplay between identity claims and

understandings" (p. 436). Gioia et al. (2010) discovered this mutuality to further

empirical insights in their study of identity formation within a new educational

community; their findings revealed that the collaboration of these perspectives "not only

produced a better sense of the processes and practices in the forging of an identity," but

went beyond Ravasi and Schultz's proposal to suggest that social construction and social

actor perspectives are "mutually recursive and constitutive" (p. 6):

> [S]ocial actor and social constructionist views are not simply competing or
>
> countervailing views, nor merely complementary views, but rather are
>
> mutually constitutive processes that are recursively implicated in
>
> generating an identity. Identity understandings and identity claims not
>
> only inform each other, they help constitute each other because of their
>
> recursive, reciprocal relationships (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006, p. 35).

This discussion of social construction and social actor approaches takes us back to

underlying assumptions and questions for OI: how do we conceive of the "we" in the

organization? Is this an entity or a process or both or more than that?

Gioia et al. (2013) saw the current and future steps of the work bridging related

questions and constructs within the organizational arena (p. 128). Recent scholarship

continues the conversation on these approaches. Gioia & Hamilton (2016) examined

these questions and concluded that structurational thinking (Giddens, 1984 as in Gioia &

Hamilton, 2016) may offer a way to blend perspectives: "Meaning making (via social

construction processes), claims making (via social actor processes), and legitimizing

forces (via institutionalization processes), all swirl together recursively to produce this

phenomenon we treat as the subject of our study" (p. 11). In this, the authors added the

layer of an institutional view wherein OI is internally determined and strongly informed

by the wider social context and external forces (p. 6). Such a global view suggests

relevancy for the internationality and corporate status of a religious congregation and its

anthropomorphic identity features.

Similarly, Cornelissen, Werner, and Haslam (Cornelissen et al., 2016; Haslam et

al., 2017) proposed the *Social Interactionist Model of Organizational Identity* that put

forward root metaphors for social construction, social identity, and social actor

perspectives. These root metaphors and their accompanying constructs are *frames* (social

construction, sensemaking and sensegiving), *categorizations* (social identity), and

personifications (social actor, image). The first two are most appropriate for analysis of

individuals and groups because the focus is on the individual's relationship with the

organization, whereas the latter is best for analysis of organizations (Cornelissen et al.,

2016). Joining social construction and social actor theories, the inclusion of social

identity seeks to bridge the individual and the organizational efforts of OI with

representation of the social group affiliations that afford emotional and value

significance. This self-categorization impacts personal understanding, narratives and

practices.

> In this meta-theoretical proposal, the dynamic interplay between varying
>
> individual, group, and organizational levels offers a conceptual
>
> framework: Alongside longitudinal studies of identity emergence and
>
> change, exploring the dynamics of consensualization and contestation
>
> should also shed light on recursive influences and interactions across
>
> individuals, groups and organizations, such as the influence of institutional
>
> labels and claims at the organizational level on individual sense-making
>
> and group definitions (Haslam et al., 2017, p. 330).

The processes of consensualization and contestation are demonstrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The social interactionist model of organizational identity

From "Metatheories and Metaphors of Organizational Identity: Integrating Social Constructionist, Social Identity, and Social Actor Perspectives within a Social Interactionist Model," by Mirjam D. Werner, Joep P. Cornelissen, S. Alexander Haslam, 2017, *International Journal of Management Reviews,* 19 (3), p. 330 (https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12150). Copyright 2017 by John Wiley and Sons. Reprinted with permission.

The multivalence of the social interactionist approach offers a window into the complexity and recursiveness of OI as well as a way in which to approach the consideration of OI players (i.e. members, leaders, founders, subgroups) as well as related constructs of formation, culture, and image/reputation that return us to initial descriptors of what may be central, enduring/continuous, and distinctive for organizational identity.

Organizational identity summary

The organizational identity literature showcases the investigation of human experience in organizations, "Who are we as an organization?" While much of this

scholarship has focused on corporate, civic, and non-profit sectors, that body of work

holds ramifications for the examination of religious and educational spheres. This is

especially poignant for the two primary vocational groups earmarked for this particular

study. Women religious constructed and enacted an identity for their congregations;

charism, deep story and the ministerial activities could be examined for the ways in

which they reveal central, enduring, and distinctive attributes. Further, for those lay

educators involved in the Catholic schools of religious congregations, the social

interactionist model of organizational identity generates a space for analysis of the

relationship between those identity mechanisms and the work of educators, leaders, and

sisters connected to a learning community. Beneath the narrative of Catholic

organizational identity, there are structures and processes for sensemaking, sensegiving,

and enactment that are shaping the structure of the evolving story.

As this section concludes and moves on to the discussion of Catholic identity and

charism, Albert, Ashforth, and Dutton (2000) remind us that organizational environments

are dynamic and complex, that hierarchies are flattening, that collaboration,

empowerment, and adaptability are emerging as macro-level characteristics in the

twenty-first organizational space. Poignantly, they offered this:

> It becomes more important to have an internalized cognitive structure of
>
> what the organization stands for and where it intends to go—in short, a
>
> clear sense of the organization's identity. A sense of identity serves as a
>
> rudder for navigating difficult waters" (Albert et al., 2000).

Catholic Identity and Charism

Just as organizational identity scholarship recognizes the prominence of "Who are we?" as a salient question for organizations' self-understanding, Catholic bishops, religious congregations, theologians, sociologists, and educators anchor much of the last half century in similar terms: who are we as a Church? As a religious community? As a Catholic school? Catholic identity has emerged as an increasingly important concept in the parlance of Catholic life since the Second Vatican Council (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, 1982, 1988, 1997, 2002, 2007; Cook, 1998, 2001; Cook & Simonds, 2011; Heft, 2011; McLaughlin et al., 1996).

The Second Vatican Council

Beginning in 1962, the Second Vatican Council and its published constitutions, decrees, and declarations introduced a revision to the Church's self-definition and self-understanding in the world. *Lumen Gentium* (1964) articulated a widening lexicon of metaphors for describing God's relationship with the Church, chief among them "The People of God" who share a common and collegial "call to holiness." This description also included the explication of structure and function of social groupings within the whole—bishops, clergy and hierarchy, laity, religious or consecrated persons (Second Vatican Council, 1964). *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) added values and priorities for the life of the Church in the modern world. With discussion of pastoral and doctrinal concepts of *human dignity*, *community* and the *common good*, the faithful were charged with the mission of evangelization and the dialogue between faith and culture in all spheres, including economics, politics, and globalization (Second Vatican Council, 1965e). The Catholic identity of the contemporary Church is marked by understandings such as these.

From the vantage point of organizational theory, the publications of the Second

Vatican Council can be viewed as a seminal moment for the determination of what is to

be considered central, enduring, and distinctive in the life, structures, and membership of

the Church. John W. O'Malley (2008) discussed the context and issues at play in Vatican

II. He noted three underlying issues for the Council: understanding change appropriately,

the relationship of centralized to localized authority and leadership, and the style for the

implementation of that oversight. Ultimately, these issues "are about identity—how to

maintain it while dealing with the inevitability of change, and then how to make it

effective in new but recognizably authentic ways. In that perspective the council serves as

a case study, a paradigm" (O'Malley, 2008, p. 8).

Though the Council has not been a focused subject of study for organizational

theorists, O'Malley's analysis provides both historical and theological insight into the

Council's own organizational dynamics. His evaluation revealed evidence of both the

characteristics and debated questions of the organizational identity. For example,

Whetten's reminder of the ideational, definitional, and phenomenological OI components

can also be applied to discussion of what might be Catholic identity attributes (Whetten,

2006). The Council specifically aimed to communicate key identity descriptors and

vocabulary, functions and structures in the enumeration of the roles of clergy, religious

congregations, and lay people (O'Malley, 2008). Further still, conceptualizations of

organizational identity as entity and process are both visible in the use of the term *living*

tradition in *Dei Verbum*, the vocabulary for discussing sacred scripture and the ongoing

legacy of interpretation in the doctrine and practices of the Church—yesterday, today,

and forever (Gioia & Hamilton, 2016; Second Vatican Council, 1965a).

O'Malley's discussion of language also points to wider Catholic organizational identity concerns—tensions that evolve for understandings of vocation and how authority is implemented. At the center of O'Malley's argument is the word *charism*:

> Here the council becomes more explicit by introducing a new vocabulary and literary form. Words like "charism," "dialogue," "partnership," "cooperation," and "friendship" indicate a new style for the exercise of authority and implicitly advocate a conversion to a new style of thinking, speaking, and behaving, a change from a more authoritarian and unidirectional style to a more reciprocal and responsive model. This was a momentous shift (O'Malley, 2008, p. 11).

Charism, a special gift of the Holy Spirit defined in *Lumen Gentium*, articulates the diversity of gifts and ministries within the People of God and specifically the laity for the good of the Church. The shift in theological conceptualization could have prophetic implications for the construction and enactment of Catholic identity. And yet, the Catholic identity proclaimed by the multiyear council would require further clarification and discussion for pastoral realities. For this study, those pastoral experiences focus on the mutual confluence of Catholic identity and charism in religious congregations, the laity, and Catholic education.

Vatican II perspectives on the laity, religious congregations, and Catholic education

Even before the Second Vatican Council was to conclude, the explanation of significant elements in the life of the Church was a necessity; this manifested in the release of several decrees and declarations with that purpose in mind. These three documents—*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, *Perfectae Caritatis*, and *Gravissimum*

Educationis—demonstrate the further challenge of determining Catholic organizational

identity in theological, vocational, and practical terms.

   Apostolicam Actuositatem. The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Second

Vatican Council, 1965d) spoke to the mission, or apostolate, of the lay person in daily life

to build up the reign of God, just as the apostles modeled in Jesus's times. The universal

call to holiness introduced in *Lumen Gentium* is accentuated here as the lay vocation

alongside recognition of the diversity of gifts among lay people and the exercise of those

gifts in spiritual and temporal spaces. In other words, the laity are witnesses to a life of

faith in the family and society through their activities and relationships. While much of

the decree addressed roles, social identity groups (i.e. parents, families, etc.), and

formation for lay people, two specific comments are worthy of note. First, there is some

discussion of more organized communities and associations which seek to fulfill

particular goals of the apostolate; as such, these associations should be approved by the

hierarchy in order to be known as Catholic (Second Vatican Council, 1965b, #18-21, 24).

The second note is a section that highlighted the unique role of each vocation and the

necessary collaboration of laity with clergy and religious women and men for the greater

work of the Church (Second Vatican Council, 1965b, #23-27). The juxtaposition of "one

mission, different vocations" and hierarchical authority over the lay establishment of

organizational efforts highlight a tension that has pervaded Catholic life for the next fifty

years. While the laity occupies the largest population segment of the Church, they also

experience the least social actor power for articulating Catholic identity in organizational

spaces beyond the domestic sphere.

Perfectae Caritatis. The Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life

(Second Vatican Council, 1965c) recognized the longstanding role and influence of

religious communities in the life of the Church. In religious communities for men and/or

women—also termed in the decree as religious congregations, families, and institutes—

members participate in the mission of the Church as they follow the example of Christ

and unite themselves to God through the evangelical counsels of chastity, obedience, and

poverty. Religious congregations are founded with an emphasis toward a contemplative,

cloistered life of prayer and separateness or toward an apostolate ministry for the good of

society (typically education, charity, or health care). Most relevant in the decree was the

admonition to adapt and renew religious life, which was at once an invitation to look to

the past as well as the present and future for the Catholic identity of the institution. This

invitation was to consider the narrative and spirit of the founder and then seek to respond

to the needs and signs of the times in society with their congregational mission and

ministry. In other words, the Council asks religious communities to reflect and act upon

what is deemed central, enduring, and distinctive about their communal identity (Albert

& Whetten, 1985). As the decree outlined guiding principles for effective adaptation and

renewal, there was an operating sense of subsidiarity and collegiality for the self-

determination of each religious congregation's apostolic spirit and activity. Cooperation

and coordination with the episcopal hierarchy was advised, though this relationship

received less treatment than in the decree on the laity.

Gravissimum Educationis. The Declaration on Christian Education (Second

Vatican Council, 1965b) privileged the importance of Catholic education in the

evangelizing mission and life of the Church. Unlike the previously discussed decrees, this

statement briefly defined objectives and cultural characteristics of this apostolic ministry to which all vocational identities contribute. Education was named as a universal right for every human person, stemming from their God-given dignity, and a project that weaves the collaborative efforts of parents, teachers, and community so that students may receive an integral human formation (Second Vatican Council, 1965b, #1-3). Catholic schools are described as creating a community with "a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity" so that culture and the world are "illumined by faith" (Second Vatican Council, 1965b, #8). Further, the declaration recognized the special role of educators in this apostolate:

> But let teachers recognize that the Catholic school depends upon them almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and programs. They should therefore be very carefully prepared so that both in secular and religious knowledge they are equipped with suitable qualifications and also with a pedagogical skill that is in keeping with the findings of the contemporary world. Intimately linked in charity to one another and to their students and endowed with an apostolic spirit, may teachers by their life as much as by their instruction bear witness to Christ, the unique Teacher. (Second Vatican Council, 1965b, #8).

While the other highlighted documents include references to the necessity of spiritual formation for laity and religious alike, this declaration suggested a professional preparation and expertise in order to embody the ministry educators are to perform within a community culture.

Catholic identity and charism since Vatican II

The close of the Second Vatican Council effectively launched an ongoing discussion for Catholic identity, particularly in the ministry of Catholic education and its implementation by religious and lay educators. Common throughout the ensuing fifty years of theoretical and practical exchange are questions of what central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics articulate Catholic identity, how that identity is formed and enacted, and in what structures, roles, and authority that identity would be sustained (Curtin et al., 2010; Haney & O'Keefe, 2009; Hunt & Nuzzi, 1998; McLaughlin et al., 1996; Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). With the considerable influence of religious congregations on the growth of Catholic education in the United States, charism grew as a significant topic of discussion when the personnel balance shifted toward laity (Caruso, 2012; Cook, 2001, 2015; Heft, 2011; Jacobs, 1998c). The follow section showcases theological, educational, and organizational perspectives that contributed to the evolving discussion of identity in the U.S. Catholic educational context; this contemporary scholarship reveals that the determination of Catholic identity is a more complex and interpretative human enterprise than might have been initially suggested by *Gravissimum Educationis*.

Perspectives on Catholic identity from theologians, sociologists, and educators

The Vatican's Congregation of Catholic Education sought to provide a guiding voice on the articulation of Catholic identity for schools in the years following Vatican II. In these documents, such as *The Catholic School* (1977) and *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988), Catholic education is further defined as a distinctive, ecclesial project with specific characteristics (Congregation for Catholic

Education, 1977, 1988). United States bishops also contributed to this effort in pastoral messages and statements, like *To Teach as Jesus Did* (1972):

> More than any other program of education sponsored by the Church, the Catholic school has the opportunity and obligation to be unique, contemporary, and oriented to Christian service: unique because it is distinguished by its commitment to the threefold purpose of Christian education and by its total design and operation which foster the integration of religion with the rest of learning and living; contemporary because it enables students to address with Christian insight the multiple problems which face individuals and society today; oriented to Christian service because it helps students acquire skills, virtues, and habits of heart and mind required for effective service to others. (*To Teach As Jesus Did*, 1972, #106 as cited in Nuzzi & Hunt, 2012).

The Catholic identity presented in documents such as these led to the development of philosophies, theories, standards, and practices of Catholic education. A general search of publications—books, journals, and dissertations—reveals a wealth of discussion on the topic of Catholic identity for scholarship as well as practical usage (Cook, 2001; Haney & O'Keefe, 2009; Heft, 2011; Hunt & Nuzzi, 1998; McLaughlin et al., 1996).

Akin to Albert and Whetten's view that OI is to be understood as central, enduring, and distinctive, Catholic scholars engaged Church ideas of education in similar ways. Thomas Groome (1991, 2002, 2014) identified the Catholic educational setting in terms of eight different theological and anthropological themes that "make us Catholic," while Archbishop Miller (2006) culled out "five essential marks of Catholic schools"

from analysis of Church documents. Building from Groome, Miller, and others, Lorraine

Ozar and Patricia Weitzel-O'Neill led a national task force to publish the *National*

Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools

(NSBECS), which included nine defining characteristics of Catholic identity: (1) centered

in the person of Jesus Christ, (2) contributing to the evangelizing mission of the church,

(3) distinguished by excellence, (4) committed to educate the whole child, (5) steeped in

a Catholic worldview, (6) sustained by gospel witness, (7) shaped by communion and

community, (8) accessible to all students, and (9) established by the expressed authority

of the Bishop (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). These defining characteristics serve as a

foundation for thirteen standards and seventy benchmarks in domains such as mission

and Catholic identity, governance and leadership, academic excellence, and operational

vitality (Ozar, 2012). These examples further Whetten's proposition that OI is best

understood from ideational, definitional, and structural perspectives as many are

interested not only in the theological/philosophical underpinnings, but more

pragmatically, how to realize that Catholic identity in practice—a question that is

frequently posed in Catholic educational dissertations, theses, and the conferences of the

National Catholic Education Association (NCEA).

　　　　With definitions such as these entering the educational literature, why is Catholic

identity the topic of such frequent interest for Catholic schools? Response may lie in the

underlying issues raised earlier by O'Malley in his commentary on Vatican II—

specifically, that questions surround how to handle changes, how to navigate leadership,

authority, and vocational categories, and stylistic approaches for ministry (O'Malley,

2008, p. 8). These themes are certainly included in the Vatican and U.S. church

documents in reference to the growing social change towards pluralism, changing demographics from educators who are religious women and men to lay people, and challenges for the governance, leadership, and formation of schools (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, 1982, 2007; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005). Scholars in U.S. as well as international contexts also wrestle with these realities in an effort to provide greater clarity and understanding of the ecclesial and educational dynamics (Groome, 2014; Heft, 2011; McDonough, 2016, 2017; McLaughlin et al., 1996; O'Keefe, 2009; Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010). Despite the breadth and depth of Catholic identity treatment, the good intentions of Church leaders, scholars, and practitioners alike still demonstrate epistemological tensions for Catholic identity in schools. Consideration of Catholic identity in tandem with organizational identity perspectives (i.e., social actor, social construction, social identity, and institutional perspectives) sheds new light on the various questions of identity determination, legitimacy, and authority that confront Catholic educators and stakeholders today.

Perspectives on charism from theologians, sociologists, and educators

The Vatican II references to charism narrow the conversation on Catholic identity in important ways for the relationship of religious congregations and laity in Catholic education. Though charism is explained as a gift of the Holy Spirit for the common good, it is associated in *Lumen Gentium* with the laity and in *Perfectae Caritatis* as that founding and dynamic spirit of a religious community (Second Vatican Council, 1964, 1965c). Indeed, though Vatican II suggests a dualism in the vocational assignment of charism, the concept became synonymous with the identities of religious congregations over the next fifty years. Several Vatican publications on Catholic education highlighted

this assignment and urged the commitment of the religious community to continue the

charism in its educational ministry or apostolate, even as demographics and relationships

shifted between religious and schools (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, 2002,

2007). Additional Church publications explored religious life and advised the renewal of

congregations (John Paul II, 1996; Paul VI, 1971; Sacred Congregation for Religious and

For Secular Institutes & Sacred Congregation for Bishops, 1978). From these, Sr.

Marlene Weisenbeck, FSPA highlighted criteria for the recognition of charism in

congregations and made a connection to the possibility for lay communities to enact

charism as described in *Christifideles Laici* (Weisenbeck, FSPA, 2008). Cerullo (1999)

and Schneiders (2001 as cited in Cook, 2015) echoed the emphasis on the corporate

personality or style of the religious order that comes from charism as that which is

identifying and distinguishing.

The emphasis on understanding theory and influencing practice necessarily raise

questions for the realities of charism in Catholic schools. Scholars suggest that charism,

identity, and culture are essential components for the life of an organization. Drawing

upon organizational studies, Timothy Cook (2001, 2015) outlined a comprehensive view

of charism and culture for Catholic schools. Tracing the roots of charism in both religious

and lay vocations, Cook (2015) defined charism as "a spiritual asset that a Catholic

school community has available to help it be distinctive, achieve its educational goals,

and enhance its well-being" (p. 10). Further still, the charism provides a "sharp focus,

localized and meaningful vision, faith-based vocabulary, and a brand" (p. 10). Cook's

perspective suggests that whether rooted in a religious congregational origin or created by

the laity, a charism possesses a dynamism that can only serve the interests of a Catholic school.

Like Cook, Lee, S.M. (2004) echoed similar ideas around charism, identity, and culture from the lens of a religious community. Addressing the challenges faced by these communities, he posed questions for how charism, culture, and community practice continue or reimagine their identity and livelihood for the future. Building off sociological understandings of culture, Lee considered how religious charism and culture are transmitted, from one generation to another. He put forward two important definitions: (1) a deep story is "a fundamental, formative narrative form that gives a culture its character and its consciousness" (p. 21); (2) charism is that gift given to the founding person of a religious community which gives that community its basic identity (p. 25). He describes religious orders that survive over time as having the ability to respond to particular human needs with strategies that are emblematic of the founder's particular style.

Lee also examined this reality for religious and laity in sponsored ministries like education. For these stakeholders, Lee made a few critical points: (1) the deep story of a learning community can be considered in terms of institutional culture, whereas there are also congregational cultures which may hold some parallels; (2) the institution's ability to live forward the deep story is largely dependent on its promotion from internal social groups (i.e. laity, leadership); (3) "Forming lay communities in which the founding narrative is embedded is a different and more complex socialization process than sharing the story with individual lay persons" (Lee, 2004, p. 158). From this vantage point, Lee offered a layered approach to formation and socialization for the purposes of passing on

the deep story and institutional culture. In this approach, the realization of charism and

deep story rely upon the Spirit-filled agency of lay and religious alike. He writes,

> What may be new is breaking dependence upon the congregations. What
>
> may also be new is promoting a lay appropriation of the deep story,
>
> turning it loose for some new creative increment…What may also be new
>
> is the formation not just of individuals, but of lay communities who live
>
> from a thoroughly lay appropriation of the founding narrative (Lee, 2004,
>
> p. 163-164).

Though based in theological and sociological views of culture, Lee's point of view

resembles the organizational complexity named by Haslam et al. in the social

interactionist model of organizational identity and asks provocative questions for the

relationship of religious and lay educators.

Catholic identity and charism in women's religious congregations

Within this chronicle of Catholic identity in the Church and Catholic schools,

women's religious congregations and their apostolate of education occupy a uniquely

transformative space. Responding to the dearth of study on the subject, Jacobs (1998a,

1998b, 1998c), Heft (2011), Caruso (2012), and Walch (1997, 2001, 2012, 2016) detailed

the history of U.S. Catholic education with gratitude for the substantial contribution of

women's religious congregations, who led the way in the establishment and growth of

Catholic primary and secondary schools for more than two centuries. This narrative

illuminated how women's religious communities provided personnel for instruction and

administration, educational access for immigrant and impoverished children, and

curriculum based upon gospel values and Catholic faith practice (Caruso, 2012; Jacobs,

1998a, 1998b). With the expansion of Catholic schools across the country, religious women took steps in the twentieth century to promote national leadership, develop teacher preparation programs, revise curriculum and pedagogy, and support parental rights (Caruso, 2012; Jacobs, 1998b; Johnson et al., 2014; Schneiders, 2000).

While the episcopacy became the public voice in the systemization of Catholic schooling, the sisters were the generative and organizing force behind the emergent Catholic educational paradigm. This pioneering workforce boldly charted new territory and defined the formative purpose and pedagogy of Catholic education in moral, spiritual, and intellectual terms (Jacobs, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c; Schier & Russett, 2002). Further, these schools influenced a commitment to charity, service, and social justice; the education of immigrants and the poor combined with a public outreach for philanthropy and advocacy (Jacobs, 1998a, 1998b; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005; Walch, 2016). With an increasing emphasis on professionalization, sisters simultaneously influenced the local lived experience of Catholic education as well as diocesan and national arenas for educational leadership with a power that can be characterized by progressivism (Jacobs, 1998b). In fact, the sisters were steeped in an autonomy, initiative, and intellectualism that was a marker of their heritage (Schier & Russett, 2002). "Perhaps unbeknownst to—or even, tolerated by—those who paid the bills, the religious controlled the nation's Catholic schools" (Jacobs, 1998b, p. 18). Indeed, women religious gave sense to the identity, culture, and organization of Catholic education at every level through their life and work.

Scholars note the paradox of Vatican II in the historical accounting of religious communities. Reports show that U.S. Catholic school enrollment and the population of

teaching sisters were at their height in 1965, the same year when the council documents

on Catholic education, the lay apostolate, and religious life were published (Caruso,

2012; Jacobs, 1998c; Schier & Russett, 2002; P. Wittberg, 1994). Though some may have

imagined the strength of those demographics to remain steady or climb further, the years

following the close of the council demonstrated a striking decline in both Catholic school

enrollment and the vocations of teaching sisters. Such population decline can be viewed

with many emotions—disappointment, frustration, and grief, among them.

The moment, though, presents another paradox that reveals measures of the

central, enduring, and distinctive qualities of the Catholic identity for women's religious

congregations and their schools. Just as *Perfectae Caritatis* (1965) announced the

renewal of religious life through engagement of the founder's charism, such a return

served to further and make prominent the distinctive educational paradigm of women's

religious congregations for generations. The earliest schools opened by women religious

were those for the education of girls and women. Alongside the co-educational primary

parochial schools, single gender secondary schools (also known as convent schools or

academies) and colleges advanced a focus on women's dignity and leadership. These

convent schools, academies, and colleges offered young Catholic women—both students

and lay educators—the means to see their equality and contributions to society beyond

the traditional domestic sphere (Brewer, 1987; Jacobs, 1998b; Schneiders, 2000;

Steinfels, 1996). Schneiders (2000) pointed out that,

>Women Religious, through these institutions, passed their own vision of
>
>women, Church, society, and life in Christ on to successive generations of
>
>Catholic women, creating a cadre of well-prepared women who are having

and will continue to have a major impact on both the Church and society

(p. 77-78).

This impact of identity—for the mission and vision, the female students/alumnae and the religious congregations--is significant, especially in conjunction with organizational and sociological effects.

Such efforts were all promoted with the recognition of a hierarchical Church and traditional female roles amidst a Catholic sub-culture where women held leadership and decision-making authority (E. M. Brewer, 1987; Schier & Russett, 2002; Schneiders, 2000). Schier and Russett (2002) suggested that women's religious congregations, especially in their secondary schools and colleges, wielded an autonomy and authority that operated outside the bounds of the hierarchical model; further, they highlighted the history of relationship between religious and lay educators which begged the interpretation and enactment of that identity, and the "innovative practices" of American sisters in their educational and organizational work (p. 6).

Thus, with the conclusion of Vatican II in 1965, the women of these Catholic schools experienced synchronicity with the feminism of the secular women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The dignity and centering of women's experience, women's voice and leadership, and the egalitarian, human promotion of the common good became themes that brought a Gospel-based feminism in communion with the secular movement. Women's education, as led by the sisters of religious orders and in partnership with committed lay educators, became fertile ground for the elevation of the feminist project and a social movement in itself (Wittberg, 1994). To this end, the charism,

congregational heritage, and deep story would become the means of furthering a central,

enduring, and distinctive feminist Catholic identity.

> When the story of women's education in Catholic institutions founded by
> women Religious is finally told, it will be clear that the enthusiastic
> embrace of the feminist agenda by twentieth-century Catholic women,
> especially women Religious and their former students, is rooted more
> deeply in the culture of Religious congregations and the schools for
> women they founded than in the liberal agenda of the secular women's
> movement (Schneiders, 2000, p. 81).

Thus, the Catholic school for young women holds a unique place in the U.S. Catholic

educational landscape for its influence on the wider aims for justice and leadership of

traditionally marginalized community members, for the transformation and

empowerment of women specifically, and for the representation of women's

organizations as models of power and possibility.

Feminist Catholic Organizational Identity

The women of religious congregations—through their shared charism, life, and

work—created and sustained a feminist Catholic organizational identity (FCOI), a

phenomenon and conceptual framework I propose in this work based upon the confluence

of previous scholarship. Taken together, the confluence of the theoretical canon for each

of these descriptors suggest a depth of possibility for this conceptual framework, not only

for a retrospective of the women's Catholic schools of religious congregations in the past,

but more importantly, by providing a pathway for those lay educators who, with the

blessing of the sisters, continue and interpret that identity for the same schools in the

future. This section illustrates the combination of these constructs into that conceptual framework.

Feminist Theory

Feminism is an umbrella ideology and movement that includes a diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches (Ferree & Martin, 1995; Schneiders, 2000; Scholz, 2012). Central to feminist theory in its many iterations is its primary concern for women's lived experience and the role of gender as an analytic category, particularly in the face of injustice or oppression (Cahill, 2003; Hesse-Biber, 2008; Schneiders, 2000; Scholz, 2012). Scholz (2012) highlighted the importance of feminism for its connections to identity work and its critical aim to analyze the motivations and truths underlying reality. Tisdell (2008) extended the identity connections:

> Although there are multiple complex discourses on feminist epistemology, at their root is the consideration of the role of gender in determining how knowledge is constructed, both by individual knowers and by social and cultural groups of women and men (p. 337).

Not only is women's experience the basis for knowledge, but it also points to methodologies for the construction and enactment of that identity as well as the research processes for examining that same identity (Hesse-Biber, 2008; Tisdell, 2008). This feminist focus on identity embraces a synchronicity with the previous literature of both organizational identity and the historical, theological arc for women religious in the life of the Church.

The theologians who bring feminist Catholic perspectives to the light are quick to remind that the goal of feminism is at once the full humanity of women *and* the full

humanity of all people (Cahill, 2003, 2014; Schneiders, 2000). This commitment to justice and equity is rooted in a gospel-based paradigm for a reimagination of the world. Henold (2008) highlights that "Catholic feminism reveals a divergent ideological approach to feminism," where feminism finds its foundation in faith (p. 6). Cahill (2014) suggests that in the feminist theological project,

> Traditions should always be discerned with a threefold hermeneutics of appreciation, suspicion, and praxis: How does wisdom from the past give life today? (appreciation); how do traditions mediate dominant ideologies that continue to oppress some community members? (suspicion); and how can our traditions be embodied in just relationships now? (praxis) (p. 28).

These questions are apropos for the interpretation of charism and its articulation in the ongoing deep story of a religious community and its schools. Here, the response of language and discourse are highlighted for their prophetic potential and power to impart a new and imaginative narrative (Brigham, 2015; Cahill, 2014; Henold, 2008; Johnson et al., 2014; Schneiders, 2000). Schneiders (2000) remarks, "An imaginative change is not simply a modification of ideas or policies. It is a new world construction, a different, affectively loaded, holistic vision of reality" (p. 23).

Several feminist Catholic scholars further the conversation towards the organizational sphere. Henold (2008) explores the dual identification with feminism and Catholicism and highlights the historical record, suggesting that a movement emerged from the feminist aims, the result of which was a legitimacy for feminist principle, roles, and relationships with a patriarchal church.

On a more abstract level, Catholic feminism has helped change the way

that American Catholics understand their identities as Catholics. Along

with other reform movements in the sixties and seventies, Catholic

feminists embraced the Vatican II ideal that the people do indeed

constitute the church, and as such they have helped define what it is to be

"Catholic." Their movement provided a means of making that vision

concrete (Henold, 2008, p. 11)

Sr. Patricia Wittberg (Finke & Wittberg, 2000; Johnson et al., 2014; P. Wittberg, 1994; P.

A. Wittberg, 2013) brings sociological examination of communities and organizations to

the phenomena of social movements, women's religious congregations, and the faith-

based non-profits established in relationship with those congregations. Recognizing the

far-reaching changes within social and organizational spaces, Wittberg correlates

religious virtuosity with charism, spirituality, and social movements to suggest

connections to sensemaking and identity construction:

Successful religious virtuoso movements are initiated when the

interpretive framework that defines the new spirituality "resonates" with

the needs or desires of the population at large. When several competing

models of religious virtuosity exist, whichever version best fits the

experiences of its audience and/or can best be expressed in terms of their

stories, myths, and accepted wisdom, will be adopted in preference to the

others. (Wittberg, 1994, p. 25).

This perspective is resonant with the theoretical work on the formation of organizational

identity within feminist organizations.

The collaboration of feminist theory with organizational theory in scholarly treatment is a relatively recent partnership and yet, covers meaningful ground for the study in question (Acker, 1995; Ferree & Martin, 1995; Gherardi, 2005; Katzenstein, 1995; Martin, 1990). Ferree and Martin (1995) define a feminist organization as "embracing collectivist decision-making, member empowerment, and a political agenda of ending women's oppression" as they confront pervading social values and change with the times (p. 6-7, 9). They go on to highlight the confluence of feminism and social movements where feminist organizations serve as "entities that mobilize and coordinate collective action" and "the places in which and the means through which the work of the women's movement is done." (p. 14).

Martin (1990) puts forward initial criteria for the determination of feminist organizational alignment: "(a) has feminist ideology; (b) has feminist guiding values; (c) has feminist goals; (d) produces feminist outcomes; (e) was founded during the women's movement as part of the women's movement" (p. 186). Linking feminist goals to organizing practices and strategies enable egalitarian decision-making, broader participation, and flatter organizational structures. (Acker, 1995). Taken together, these elements possess the potential to surface the construction and enactment of feminist organizational identity at multiple levels.

Katzenstein (1995) returns us to that situational reality, with discussion on the relationships of feminist, Catholic, and organizational contentions:

> Feminist discursive politics has had a transforming effect summarizable
> under three headings: (1) the empowerment of women religious; (2) the
> change in popular attitudes toward gender issues in the Church; (3) the

influence over the agenda of church authorities" (Katzenstein, 1995, p. 46).

Gherardi (2005) places the dialogue in terms of gender and its situation in the human body, in society, culture, or politics, and in language. These three components offer a purposeful complexity: if schools and educators are to realize the identity of congregation, it must be embodied in individual members, demonstrated in behaviors and practices of individual members, groups, and the community as a whole, and proclaimed in the language of the organizational milieu. Here we witness the opportunity to conduct investigation into the social interactionist model of organizational identity in combination with feminist Catholic organizational theories.

Feminist Catholic Organizational Identity
in Notre Dame de Namur Learning Communities

Feminist Catholic Organizational Identity (FCOI) can be located within Notre Dame de Namur learning communities – a contemporary theoretical framework for the comprehensive and integrated approach to Notre Dame Catholic identity, charism, and mission in its educational ministries. The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur demonstrate a commitment to articulation and interpretation of this FCOI in the congregation and learning communities, as evidenced in a variety of publications, conferences, and organizational practices. Amidst this effort, lay educators serve an essential role for the lived experience of FCOI in the present and for the future. There remains a need to examine the ways in which this identity is constructed and enacted by lay educators, what it means, and how it continues and interprets Notre Dame charism. The future depends upon it.

While the articulation of FCOI is a new conceptualization, the history and organizational efforts for the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and their ministries reveal evidence of this legacy and identity. Congregational documents, such as the mission statement, Constitutions, and Chapter Acts, name the simultaneous presence of their commitments to the present realities as well as the foundations of the congregation's spirituality and the ongoing transformation of that narrative in each new time and place and circumstance. The Sisters engage in communal discernment processes at multiple levels of their global structures, holding both subsidiarity and internationalism. Beyond the Sisters own organizational processes, they have published several documents on charism, education and sponsorship. The most notable of these are the Hallmarks of a Notre Dame de Namur Learning Community (Appendix A), a set of guiding values and characteristics embraced by schools around the United States and many of the ministries worldwide. Within the Hallmarks are places for expansive thinking and the centering of women's experience.

In addition to these congregational publications, scholarship has ventured into historical, educational and mission related research. Bosler (1991) and Linscott, (1965) examined the education and preparation of sister teachers. Several have explored the relationship of mission and education for secondary and college settings (Gilfeather, 2001; Hilliard, 1984; Lord, 2008). Additional publications have expanded to consider governance models (Curran, 1990), charism (Merkle, 2016), and the intersections of race, gender, and inclusion (Clevenger, 2016).

Summary

Having engaged this deepening review of the literature coalescing around feminist Catholic organizational identity, this researcher endeavors to add to the body of existing work with the study. As has been shown, the combination of organizational identity work and feminist theories for organizations, theology, and research practice offer a new framework by which to consider the history and practice of women's religious congregations. For this study, exploration of FCOI in a lay contextualization meets a need, fills the gap, and will imagine a future for schools of women's religious congregations, and Notre Dame de Namur specifically. The methodology and methods will be introduced in the next chapter. As will be shown, these efforts aim to be in alignment with the needs of the study and the feminist Catholic worldview and practices.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how lay educators in a Notre Dame de Namur learning community construct and enact a charism-inspired feminist Catholic organizational identity (FCOI). This study utilized an interdisciplinary approach to the exploration of charism and Catholic identity in the Catholic schools of religious congregations through the integration of feminist theory, Catholic theology, and organizational identity. Together, the theoretical combination addresses a critical gap in our ability to authentically, dynamically continue the feminist Catholic social movement proclaimed in Notre Dame de Namur education. This leads to an imaginative contemporary response to the need and desire for Notre Dame charism to continue in the life and work of lay educators.

Guiding the work were the following research questions:

4. How is feminist Catholic organizational identity (FCOI) understood by lay educators in the Notre Dame de Namur learning community?

5. How do lay educators construct and enact FCOI in their work and participation in the learning community?

6. How does FCOI continue and interpret Notre Dame charism for lay educators in the contemporary learning community context?

This chapter will highlight the foundations of qualitative research and the specific methodological choices used during the study. I outline the design for the study, including discussion of the research setting, participants, and role of the researcher;

procedures for data collection and analysis; considerations for methods, academic rigor, reflexivity, and ethical concerns.

Research Design

Human experience and meaning are served well by qualitative research (Bhattacharya, 2017). This research study undertook qualitative research to examine the experiences of lay educators as they pertain to charism and feminist Catholic organizational identity. Specifically, the methodology implemented an emergent feminist and hermeneutic phenomenology. As an emergent design, the study included flexibility and responsiveness of methods to the purpose, the data, and the participants (Lochmiller & Lester, 2015). As a phenomenology, the study recognized the complexity of human experience in a shared phenomenon and explored how it is perceived from both theoretical and methodological vantage points (Adams & van Manen, 2008; Bhattacharya, 2017; Peoples, 2020; van Manen, 1997). "The central question asked in phenomenology focuses around the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a phenomenon for a person or group of people" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 98). With hermeneutic phenomenology, the study called upon previous philosophical and methodological work from Gadamer and van Manen to emphasize the role of language and interpretation of the "texts" of lived experience (Bhattacharya, 2017; Dibley et al., 2020; Gadamer, 2013; Peoples, 2020; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; van Manen, 1997). And, with feminist phenomenology, the study took a critical view that fore fronted gendered existence and women's voices in the methodological process (Hesse-Biber, 2008; Simms & Stawarska, 2013).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology began as a philosophical tradition and now figures prominently in the epistemological and methodological approaches to qualitative research. Its aim is the study of lived experience and the ways in which human subjects make sense, understand, and interpret that experience. "Phenomenological research is the study of lived or experiential meaning and attempts to describe and interpret these meanings in the ways that they emerge and are shaped by consciousness, language, our cognitive and noncognitive sensibilities, and by our pre- understandings and presuppositions" (Adams & van Manen, 2008). Hermeneutic phenomenology emphasizes the interpretive, meaning making of human experience, much as theology does. Feminist phenomenology adds a critical approach to the phenomenon—describing and conceptualizing gendered experience while amplifying women's voices—as well as to the process of the researcher who "has to be critical of her own intellectual history as well as of the institutions which produce knowledge" (Simms & Stawarska, 2013).

Phenomenological processes vary from researcher to researcher. Informed by the work of Moustakas (1994) and others, Creswell and Poth (2016) outlined the main steps of a common procedure (p. 78-81):

- Determine if the research problem is best examined by using a phenomenological approach.

- Identify a phenomenon of interest to study and describe it.

- Distinguish and specify the broad philosophical assumptions of phenomenology.

- Collect data from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon by using in-depth and multiple interviews.

- Generate themes from the analysis of significant statements.

- Develop textural and structural descriptions.

- Report the "essence" of the phenomenon by using a composite description.

- Present the understanding of the essence of the experience in written form.

In this study, the primary means of data collection is the interview. van Manen (1990) says,

> In hermeneutic phenomenological human science the interview serves very specific purposes: (1) it may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon, and (2) the interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience (p. 66).

These steps are adjusted in hermeneutic phenomenology in order to allow for two particular features: (1) the role of the researcher and (2) the interpretative process, known as the hermeneutic cycle (Laverty, 2003; Peoples, 2020). Peoples (2020) articulates the importance of dwelling with the text and being conscious of how one moves from whole to parts to whole again. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher's own reflections are not separated or bracketed from the data collection and analysis, rather they are "embedded and essential to interpretive process" (Laverty, 2003, p. 17). Further, the interpretive process, known as the hermeneutic cycle or circle, is a multi-step process of analysis that begins with the "text" of lived experience and engages that text in steps of

reading, reflective writing, and interpreting the data for meaning (Kafle, 2011; Laverty, 2003; Peoples, 2020).

As a feminist phenomenology, the study engaged in critical efforts that were emblematic of feminist research practices. Simms and Stawarska (2013, p. 12-13) highlight several of these practices:

1. Approach the study of human experience with respect as well as critical analysis to uncover the fullness of meaning.

2. Be critical of any notions related to power, privilege, or inequity.

3. Practice reflexivity in order to create awareness of researcher assumptions and confirm participant perspectives.

4. Be relation-centered in the research process so as to authentically lift up the voice of the participant.

5. Empower participants and engage them as research experts.

6. Consider different or creative means for sharing data that amplifies the voice of the participant.

I conducted an emergent feminist and hermeneutic phenomenology in order to meet the needs and opportunities of the problem and purpose. Lay educators continue educational efforts in Catholic schools with an aim towards the integration of mission, Catholic identity, and in the case of religiously sponsored schools, the charism of the congregation. For schools sponsored or originated by women's religious congregations, the contemporary experience of feminist Catholic organizational identity by lay educators was a phenomenon that had not yet received adequate research treatment and could illuminate new understandings for charism beyond the theological, leadership, and

formational discussions to date. The lived experiences of longtime, committed Notre Dame educators revealed the themes of feminist Catholic organizational identity, how it was actualized, and what it meant for those women who carry forward the legacy of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur.

Simms and Stawarska (2013) shed light on the potential of this opportunity to align with a feminist and hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry:

> Feminist phenomenology is interdisciplinary as long as it intersects the methods and approaches of reflective and empirical disciplines, and ties theoretical study with practical relevance (p. 8)
>
> Phenomenologists train themselves to dwell with phenomena and work on unraveling the fundamental structures of being which constitute the world as it appears in the researchers' particular time and place – a necessarily incomplete process because there is always more that can be researched and thought (p. 9).

The lived experience of a religious congregation's charism in Catholic schools today is a phenomenon that deserved an interdisciplinary approach that pointed towards the depth of human experience, the consideration for professional practice, and the ever evolving co-creation of God-with-us in Catholic education.

Research Setting

The setting for this study was a single-gender secondary school owned and sponsored by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. The school was located in a major metropolitan region that also served as one of several geographical centers for Notre Dame de Namur learning communities across the United States. The geographic region

included several Notre Dame schools from preschool through university levels that originated in the nineteenth century. This setting afforded connection to the school's considerable history and legacy of relationship with the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. Further, the metropolitan location also situated the school in the midst of social evolution in several sectors: racial, ethnic, economic, and religious diversity; corporate and civic prominence; influences from globalization and technology.

A single-gender Notre Dame de Namur learning community was selected because of the literature indications for clarity of feminist organizational identity as well as for the consistency of mission and Catholic identity over more than a century. This study focused on participation from one learning community for the promotion of familiarity with the site context, relationship rapport with participants, and depth of intended data collection. The research design for setting and sample could be replicated with educators from additional single-gender learning communities.

Beyond the above features of the research setting, I wish to to recognize that the research setting also included three significant social realities: pandemic, racial injustice, and political turmoil. Each of these social realities would be sizeable on their own; yet, the confluence of all three would figure prominently in the national conversation and provide an undercurrent to the research setting on the local level. At the time of the proposal and methodological development, school life was conducted via remote/distance learning, schools were responding to diversity and inclusion grievances, and political rancor threatened democratic processes. For educators, this period of time presented unprecedented challenges. The realities of this time would also be imprinted on the life

experiences of those who participated in the study just as they endeavored to provide space and grace for their own students and colleagues.

Population and Sample

"Qualitative research conducts in-depth inquiries within a small sample of population" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 18) The purpose called for study of educators in a single Notre Dame de Namur learning community. This population designation focused research efforts on those employees who could be characterized by faculty and/or administrator designations. Without diminishing the necessary role of various staff functions, this research aimed to identify the experiences of those faculty and administrators who had direct participation and/or influence with the educational culture, communications, curriculum and programming, and organizational processes.

Purposeful sampling was used to narrow the sources of data collection in order to meet the parameters of the study and provide "information-rich cases for detailed study" (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 616). The criteria for sampling included:

- Female identification (Gender) – As gender serves as an essential identity marker for feminist research and serves as an organizing principle within feminist organizational identity, the sampling limited participation to female identified participants.

- Lay identification (Vocation) – Participants identified as educators who are not members of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, in other words, who are members of the laity.

- Ten years or more of employment (Time) – Time spent within the professional community offered a level of knowledge and experience with which to support phenomenological data for organizational identity. In addition, these individuals

possessed lived experience of events in recent history, such as accreditation,

strategic planning, adult formation, and program development, which were

predicted references in common among the sampling. Finally, the length of

employment served as a marker of professional commitment.

- Notable Notre Dame network experience (Mission experience) – Each participant

  in the sampling demonstrated participation in a professional experience that

  included connection to the wider Notre Dame de Namur network.

The target sample for the study of 5-8 participants followed research guidance for

sufficient depth (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Polkinghorne, 1989). Further, the criteria and

sampling above affirmed the phenomenological recommendations made by Peoples

(2020) Laverty (2003), Polkinghorne (1989) and van Manen (1997):

> The aim in participant selection in phenomenological and hermeneutic
>
> phenomenological research is to select participants who have lived
>
> experience that is the focus of the study, who are willing to talk about their
>
> experience, and who are diverse enough from one another to enhance
>
> possibilities of rich and unique stories of the particular experience
>
> (Laverty, 2003, p. 18).

Direct recruitment took place to invite participation from eligible educators.

Role of the Researcher

In this study, I served as a co-researcher. Feminist and hermeneutic

phenomenology recognizes that (1) the participant is an expert of her own experience and

interpretation, (2) the researcher shares experience of the phenomenon in question, and

(3) the researcher participates in the co-construction of meaning and interpretation with

the participant through the research process (Peoples, 2020; Simms & Stawarska, 2013; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; van Manen, 1990). As one who identifies with the same criteria articulated for participants, I was uniquely positioned with a familiarity and lived closeness to the experience to engage in the mutuality of the meaning making in the hermeneutic phenomenological process. I contributed to the individual and organizational understanding with my own "text of lived experience" (van Manen, 1990). Some hermeneutic phenomenological researchers recommend that the researcher be interviewed for this purpose as a means to acknowledge pre-conceptions of understanding prior to the dialogic relationship with participants. I participated as an interviewee myself prior to conducting participant interviews and maintained a researcher's journal and memos throughout the process to capture my own reflections, assumptions, questions, and interpretations for purposes of reflexivity.

Methods

I review here the particular data collection methods employed in the study.

Participant Demographics

The researcher provided the participant with an electronic demographics data collection form and requested completion of the form to confirm participation and collect demographic information. Demographics collected confirmed eligibility criteria, surfaced relevant identity/educational/professional background information, and provided introductory self-assessment to feminist Catholic organizational identity (FCOI). The FCOI self-assessment information provided was used to support the interview and analysis steps of the process. Participants also chose an alias for the duration of the

research relationship. These demographics were collected by the researcher via secured electronic form prior to the interview phase.

Interviews

The study employed an interview-based protocol that supported feminist hermeneutic phenomenological research goals and the focus of this study. Seidman's (2006) Three-Interview Series, a method that "combines life-history interviewing and focused, in-depth interviewing" (p. 15), was the initial framework for the interviews. Designed originally by Dolbeare and Schuman (Schuman, 1982), the Three Interview Series enables the participant and researcher to explore experience through its context and meaning. The first interview is a "focused life history" as it relates to the participant's experience and context. The second interview examines "the details of the experience" in order to reconstruct the phenomenon. Building upon the two previous interviews, the third interview aims for "reflection on the meaning" of the phenomenon in the participant's life and work. These three interviews would combine for a phenomenologically rich data set:

> Making sense or making meaning requires that the participants look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation. It also requires that they look at their present experience in detail and within the context in which it occurs (Seidman, 2006).

The layering of experience and reflection offered a rich opportunity.

In the development of the interview protocol, I considered the impact of a three part interview series for participants during the pandemic. The significant duration of participant engagement was deemed sizeable enough to warrant an adaptation to the

framework, and therefore, the protocol was developed to condense Seidman's structure into two ninety-minute interviews covering the ground of the three areas – life history, contemporary experience, and reflection on meaning. I designed a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix B) to provide rich descriptions of life experiences that would align to the research questions and theoretical frameworks. The revised structure followed the general outline here:

- Interview One (Life History and Contemporary Experience): How did the participant come to be a Notre Dame educator? What was the participant's life history before coming to Notre Dame? What was the participant's early experience of life and work at Notre Dame? What professional roles has the participant held at the school? What school projects were areas of emphasis? What is it like for the participant to be a Notre Dame educator? What are the details of the participant's work as a Notre Dame educator? What does the organizational life look like for the Notre Dame learning community?

- Interview Two (Contemporary Experience and Reflection on Meaning): What does it mean to the participant to be a Notre Dame educator? What characteristics are central, enduring and distinctive for the organization? What meaning do organizational culture, messages and processes provide? How do participants respond to feminist and feminist Catholic perspectives? Given what the participant has said in, how does she make sense of her present life and work in the context of her life experience and look to the future?

Throughout the series, the interviewer and interviewee engaged in dialogue that centers the interviewee's experience so as to support interpretation and co-construction of lived experience. The interview protocol is available in Appendix A.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection procedures commenced with University of San Francisco and IRB approval. I contacted the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and the site head of school to introduce the research study, describe participant criteria, and request permissions to conduct research with eligible employees at the determined site. Initial contact was accomplished by in person/video meetings (via Zoom) and was followed by sending both electronic and hard copy letters of request (via USFCA email and US Postal Service). The latter was provided in case of possible record keeping by the supervising authorities. Those communications are included in the Appendix. Permission to proceed was granted by both the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and the site head of school.

At the time of the proposal, the faculty and administrator population in the participating school site who were potentially eligible to participate numbered 17 out of 92 total employees. The researcher contacted those employees who met research criteria to invite their participation in the study. The researcher provided written/digital materials for introduction to the study (purpose and significance) and details of the interview process. I provided assurances for confidentiality and protection of the participant as well as directions for the completion of informed consent by the participant. Participant invitations and introduction letters were transmitted via USFCA email.

To sign on to the study, participants were asked to provide electronic signature on the informed consent form and then return that form to the researcher. Consent forms

with electronic signature and other participant communications were conducted via

USFCA email (Appendix C). As needed, the researcher was available to answer

questions from the participant(s) during this phase via email, phone, or video conference.

Eight Notre Dame de Namur lay educators agreed to participate in the study.

As the recruitment stage was underway, I asked a scholar-colleague to participate

with me in the interview protocol in order to pilot the experience, to learn interviewing

styles via modeling from this colleague, and capture my own pre-conceptions of the

phenomenon.

Participants were directed to complete the participant demographics form and

schedule their two interviews with the researcher. The interviews followed the process

outlined above with the recommended structure of 90 minutes per sitting and were

scheduled with participants within successive weeks (Schuman, 1982; Seidman, 2006).

No more than two weeks passed between interviews for most interviews. These

interviews took place via Zoom and were recorded electronically with video and audio

files which were secured. During the interviews, I kept field notes on for each participant

which supported my engagement with participants. Audio files were labeled with

participant aliases and securely transmitted to a transcription service (Rev.com). Initial

transcripts were made of each interview within a few days of each interview. I reviewed

interview recordings, initial transcripts, and my notes in between interviews so as to tailor

the questions of the second interview for each participant. In accord with feminist

research practices, participants were provided the opportunity to review and confirm final

transcripts in order to main authenticity of voice and support empowerment of the

participant (Simms & Stawarska, 2013). Throughout, I maintained field notes and a

research journal to document my own notes, reflections, and questions before, during, and following the interviews.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the transcript data followed the general approaches of existing hermeneutic phenomenologists (Dibley et al., 2020; Kafle, 2011; Peoples, 2020; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; van Manen, 1990). The essentials of the process—reading, reflection, and writing—promoted "textual reflection on the lived experiences and practical actions" of the participants (Sloan & Bowe, 2014; van Manen, 1997). Peoples (2020) and Dibley, Dickerson, Duffy, and Vandermause (2020) provided the clearest approach and processes for the hermeneutic endeavor. "In hermeneutic phenomenology and the use of the hermeneutic circle, the parts inform the whole and the whole informs the parts. moving from whole to part and back again" (Peoples, 2020). This dialogic was significant for the emergent nature of the study and my dwelling with the various characteristic of the participants' lived experiences.

The process began with the reading of transcripts for the participant's story and the removal of unnecessary language. These corrections were especially important since the transcription service version also required review for accuracy. What followed was a close reading of each transcript for the determination of "preliminary meaning units" which are data that "reveal a feature or trait of the phenomenon" (Peoples, 2020, pg. 59-60). Those moved into final meaning units, or themes, which serve as "structures of experience," following a review of the transcripts for key phrases, idioms, or statements that can be highlighted (van Manen, 1990, p. 79). From this level of analysis comes the writing of hermeneutic reductions that anchor the lived experience to an interpreted text;

this can further be combined with other such texts to reveal the commonalities and complexities of the phenomenon. This interpretive phase can be described in three phases: situated narratives, general narratives, and general description (Peoples, 2020). Situated narratives combine thematic meanings with quotations for each interview question. General narrative synthesizes the accounts of participants into one summary. The general description discusses the phenomenon and its key thematic findings. Because of these phases, the ability to read, dwell with data, and analyze affords the application of additional lenses to the reading of the text. The result was the construction of a feminist organizational hermeneutic phenomenology.

Academic Rigor and Trustworthiness

Qualitative studies, particularly feminist and hermeneutic phenomenology, must demonstrate appropriate means for academic rigor and trustworthiness (Bhattacharya, 2017; Crotty, 1998; Kafle, 2011; Lochmiller & Lester, 2015; Peoples, 2020; Simms & Stawarska, 2013). Bhattacharya (2017) and Lochmiller and Lester (2015) enumerate several strategies for this demonstration. In this study, academic rigor is represented in the "alignment of epistemology, theoretical frameworks, methodology, and methods, data analysis, and representation" as well as "interrogation of the values, assumptions, and beliefs" of the researcher (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 23) For this study, I utilized member checking for accuracy and authenticity of voice by participant and researcher (Bhattacharya, 2017; Lochmiller & Lester, 2015). And, reflective journaling also supported my efforts towards reflexivity and sincerity (Lochmiller & Lester, 2015; Peoples, 2020; Simms & Stawarska, 2013; van Manen, 1990). For hermeneutic phenomenological inquiries, the quality of the research was validated by concepts of

orientation, strength, richness, and depth; these speak to the researcher's ability to reflect the fullness of the lived experience in the phenomenological outcomes (Kafle, 2011; van Manen, 1990).

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations for this study are based in my desire to honor the dignity and sacredness of the human person, a principle of Catholic social teaching. More formally for the academic setting, I refer to the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and their guiding principles for research practice: professional competence; integrity; professional, scientific, and scholarly responsibility; respect for people's rights, dignity, and diversity; and social responsibility (Lochmiller & Lester, 2015, p. 68-69). I followed the direction of my dissertation chair and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for procedures that ensured permissions from the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and the site leader, and informed consent from the participants. Additionally, the interview series and member checks of transcripts prioritized care for the participant and the vulnerability that emerged in the sharing of stories and perspectives. None of the potential participants were under the direct, professional supervision of the researcher so as to preserve a sense of openness and transparency for the participants and limit any conflicts of interest. Additionally, the questions posed were akin to those that the researcher engaged with colleagues in professional work.

Limitations/Delimitations

This study was limited in several ways. The first major limitation was the scope of the study. Within the topic of study, potential existed to study various levels of organizational identity, participating constituent populations, and organizational

communities. This study was limited to female lay educators in one learning community

so as to be able to focus on social construction, social identity, and social actor dynamics

within a unique learning community setting. This reduced variables of context present if

the study included other learning communities across the United States. The criteria of

the population sample also limited the breadth of employee participation in order to

prioritize illustrative data for the phenomenological investigation of lived experience and

interpretation. The study was limited by the researcher's primary experience with a single

learning community; in this way, data is not broadly generalizable to other communities.

A delimitation for the researcher's primary experience with the single learning

community is the potential for the researcher to understand more readily the lexicon and

meanings at work within the community.

Background of the Researcher

My career demonstrates a commitment to Catholic education, campus ministry,

religious studies, and liturgical music for over twenty years. I hold a Bachelor of Arts in

Music and Religious Studies from Santa Clara University and a Master of Music from the

University of Minnesota. I attend the University of San Francisco, pursuing a doctoral

degree in Catholic Educational Leadership within the School of Education's Department

of Leadership Studies. I have served on the administration and faculty of a Notre Dame

de Namur learning community for over twenty years in various professional capacities:

religious studies and choir faculty, campus minister and director of campus ministry.

Currently my role provides leadership for mission and ministry at the administrative level

and supports the integration of mission, charism and Notre Dame Catholic identity for the

learning community. I also serve as a leader and presenter for student and professional

conferences with the Notre Dame de Namur network and the National Catholic

Educational Association. My professional interests focus on authentic and sustainable

Catholic identity, mission integration and formation for all members of the learning

community. Inherent in this summary of my background is a deep love for the charism of

the St. Julie Billiart, Francoise Blin de Bourdon, and all the Sisters of Notre Dame de

Namur. My work with the Notre Dame de Namur learning community and the network of

educational communities is regional, national, and international in scope. I am uniquely

positioned in this work of charism, Catholic identity, and organizational leadership.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine how lay educators in a Notre Dame de Namur learning community construct and enact a charism-inspired feminist Catholic organizational identity (FCOI). In this chapter, I present the findings from the lived experiences of the participating female lay educators through this emergent, feminist, hermeneutic phenomenology. I introduce the participants and their demographics, and then present findings from the data collection and analysis—the salient themes, general narrative, and general description for the phenomenon.

Participants and their Demographics

This research study included the participation of eight female lay educators from a single Notre Dame de Namur learning community. Participants chose pseudonyms for their identification in the study; this option for choice was offered in accord with feminist research practices (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 2008; Simms & Stawarska, 2013). In some instances, pseudonyms chosen by participants held personal significance to the educators.

Participants completed a participant demographics data form after recruitment for the study. Seven of the eight participants completed the form in full online with one completing it partially in discussion with me. The form collected demographic information, educational background in two categories (experiences prior to Notre Dame and current Notre Dame experiences). The form also included an initial self-assessment of perspectives on topics related to the research study. This self-assessment provided space for short answer responses; it also used a Likert scale from 1-7 for assessment of perceived alignment with study criteria (see next section below). I present here

introduction to the eight participants and summary of their demographics, organized by a)

participant criteria and self-assessment to relevant study concepts, b) personal identity,

and c) educational background.

Participant Introduction

Adele

With twenty years of experience in the Notre Dame de Namur learning

community, Adele is a veteran faculty member with a director level position focused on

the operations, infrastructure, and requisite skill building that enable students' learning

toward 21st century objectives.

Annika

Annika is a twelve-year Notre Dame de Namur educator who leads efforts to

advance a 21st century educational paradigm. As a faculty member with a director level

role, she has interfaced with faculty across campus to support creative strategies for

learning and leadership.

Diane

Diane is an eleven-year educator at Notre Dame de Namur whose experience and

career prior to the school was in public schools. Predominantly in the classroom, she

works with students to develop confidence in their curricular challenges as they also

claiming their diverse identities.

Hieu

With eleven years of experience, Hieu is a faculty member who makes the

theoretical practical for students. She has an affinity for levering community partners and

real life scenarios to make a social impact while promoting mission-aligned service learning.

Maria

Maria is 22 year community member who has served in various capacities with administration being the most recent area of focus. She offers a deeply mission-aligned commitment and perspective in her work with various stakeholders and constituents in order to honor the past and more importantly discern the future call.

Raika

Raika has a long tenure in the learning community with over twenty years as teacher, director, and administrator. She leads significant work to build a new way of life as a learning community.

Rosemarie

Rosemarie is the veteran educational leader with over 26 years with Notre Dame de Namur. Her vantage point brings a demonstrable knowledge of the institution and how transformation has taken place.

Sunflower

Sunflower brings a heart for joy, a love of learning, and desire to accompany students however she can. With eleven years under her belt, her work with them enables her to model those characteristics.

Alignment to Study Criteria

All participants demonstrated alignment to the study criteria outlined in Chapter Three, including female identification (gender), lay identification (vocation), ten years or more of employment (time), faculty or administration designations (role), and notable

Notre Dame network participation (mission experience). Alignment to the criteria was verified in the participant demographics form.

Table 2

Participant Demographics: Study Criteria Alignment and Hallmarks Self-Assessment

Participant	Role	Years at School	Notre Dame Network Participation	Hallmarks Aligned
Adele	faculty	20	yes	5
Annika	faculty	12	yes	5
Diane	faculty	11	yes	7
Hieu	faculty	10	yes	6
Maria	administrator	21	yes	7
Raika	administrator	21	yes	
Rosemarie	administrator	27	yes	7
Sunflower	faculty	14	yes	6

Note. The Hallmarks alignment was self-assessed on a Likert scale of 1 (low) to 7 (high).

Participants occupy administrator and faculty roles. All the administrators had previous experience as faculty earlier in their careers. The length of participation within the learning community ranged from ten to twenty-seven years. All participants provided verification of engagement with one or more offerings of the Notre Dame Network for adult and/or student programming. Noted in Table 2 is the self-assessment score provided by the participant to perceived individual alignment to the Hallmarks of a Notre Dame de Namur Learning Community. Alignment responses from participants ranged from 5 to 7 on the Likert scale.

Participants also provided the following school related information in the form to aid the researcher in the personalization of the interview protocol and establish individual situational context:

- job roles/titles and responsibilities

- definitions of the concepts *mission-aligned* and *feminist*

- self-assessment scores to their own definitions of these concepts

Job roles/titles and responsibilities provided a frame of reference for my review of the

data between and after interviews. Definitions for mission-aligned and feminist were not

uniform across the participant group. Most of the participants scored themselves as a 6

out of 7 on the Likert scale for mission-alignment. For the understanding of feminist,

most participants indicated 6 out of 7 on the Likert scale. I utilized these definitions and

scores to preview participant perspectives and to tailor interview questions.

Personal identity

Personal identity demographics focused on religious, racial/ethnic, and gender

identities to center these descriptors and to enable me greater ability to listen for how

these identities may inform the participants' lived experience and the research findings.

These identities are personal understandings of self to honor in the process.

Table 3

Participant Demographics: Personal Identity

Participant Pseudonym	Religious identity	Racial/ethnic identity	Gender identity
Adele	Christian	Asian - Taiwanese	Female
Annika	Catholic	White	Female
Diane	Christian	Black	Female
Hieu	Catholic	Asian - Vietnamese	Female
Maria	Catholic	Azorean	Female
Raika	Catholic	South Asian – Sri Lankan	Female
Rosemarie	Catholic	White	Female
Sunflower	Catholic	White	Female

Note. Identity terminology was self-defined and self-reported by the participants.

Participants represented an overall congruence in religious and gender identities. All

identify with female gender and Christian identity, with the majority more specifically

naming a Catholic identity. Racial/ethnic identities named were primarily Asian and

White identities with one Black and one Azorean identified participant each. Though not

collected in the demographics form, some participants also revealed through interviews their identification with immigrant (4 of 8) and/or first generation to college experiences (2 of 8). Similarly, three indicated via interview their experience as a parent of a Notre Dame de Namur student. Again, these identities are significant to the life experience of the Notre Dame educator.

Educational Background

For educators, educational background represents part of the process for human formation, educational achievements, and, in this case, part of the preparation for the role of educator. For this study, I asked participants to indicate the degrees and fields of study as well as the previous experience as students in Catholic educational settings, schools sponsored or led by religious congregations, and single gender schools—variations of experience germane to learning communities within the Notre Dame de Namur Network.

Table 4

Participant Demographics: Educational Background

| Participant | BA/BS | Masters | Previous Schooling Experience | | |
			Catholic education	Religious Congregation	Single Gender
Adele	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Annika	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Diane	yes	yes	no	no	no
Hieu	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Maria	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Raika	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Rosemarie	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Sunflower	yes	no	no	no	no

All participants earned bachelor's degrees and the majority pursued advanced degrees in the educational field. Most participants had previous experience of Catholic education at one or more phases of their schooling, whether in elementary, secondary, and/or higher

education. Similarly, six of eight participants reported previous schooling experience that was connected to a religious congregation. In a contrast to the learning community of their employment, only two participants had firsthand schooling experience of single-gender schools; all others attended co-educational schools.

Themes/Situated Narratives

In the hermeneutic process, I immersed myself in the narratives presented in participant transcripts. The first review of the transcripts resulted in 1307 preliminary meaning units. Successive reviews of the transcripts led to the determination of final meaning units by (a) combining preliminary meaning units together and/or (b) utilizing the emphases of the conceptual framework and the research questions to focus on those meaning units most relevant to the understanding of the phenomenon. Following that phase, situated narratives led to the identification of major themes. For Notre Dame de Namur lay educators and a charism-inspired feminist Catholic organizational identity (FCOI), major themes of significance emerged from individual and organizational experiences.

- Lay Educator Life Experience Prior to Notre Dame de Namur
    - Theme 1: Called to Educate, Formed for Justice
    - Theme 2: Encountering Feminist Catholic Perspectives in Educational Spaces
- Lay Educator Life Experience at Notre Dame de Namur
    - Theme 3: Mutual Encounter: Recognition and Affirmation
    - Theme 4: Belonging to the Notre Dame de Namur Community
    - Theme 5: Women in Companionship

- Organizational Experience at Notre Dame de Namur

    - Theme 6: Mission with Intention: Feminist Catholic Design and Integration

    - Theme 7: Female Lay Educators: Empowered for Mission

    - Theme 8: It's Bigger Than Us: The Work of Identity

These themes and their findings, or subthemes, are presented in this chapter in conjunction with narrative excerpts from the transcripts in order to center the voices and perspectives of the participating lay educators. These themes and findings contributed to the development of a general narrative and general description for the phenomenon.

Life Experience Prior to Notre Dame de Namur

The hermeneutic phenomenological approach focuses on the life experience of the participant. For the purposes of this study, I chose to begin interview and dialogue with the introductory question, "What led you to be in education?" From this open-ended prompt, participants revealed significant impetus for their work as educators as emerging from their experiences of family and community as well as both student and professional spaces prior to becoming a Notre Dame de Namur educator. The first two major themes speak to the importance of these life experiences for the journey toward Notre Dame de Namur.

Called to Educate, Formed for Service and Justice

The first phenomenologically significant theme emerged from the life experiences prior to becoming a member in the Notre Dame de Namur learning community. All participants named meaningful preparatory elements which I interpret as calling to and formation for educational work that aims at service and justice. Two key findings (or subthemes) were illuminated by participants' life experiences:

1. Notre Dame de Namur lay educators named their strong sense of "being drawn" to Catholic education, service, and/or justice work in ways that brought together their individual purpose, spirituality, and career discernment.

2. Relationships and experiences with family members, educators, and youth leaders provided formative example and affirmation for this vocational path and sense of self.

These experiences of calling and formation contributed to the commitment, motivation, and preparedness of the educator for mission. Each was articulated in connection to specific, time bound life experiences as well as aggregate themes. Calling and formative experiences positioned the individual educator to become a valued and mission aligned member of the Notre Dame learning community. I first look at the shared experience of calling for Notre Dame de Namur educators.

Calling. Most participants provided rich descriptions of being drawn to education, of feeling a desire to be of service to the poor and disadvantaged, of realizing their mindsets, interests and skills were aligned with that work of education, service, and justice. Rosemarie was drawn to Catholic education from an early age, where she could be frequently found helping her teachers, some of whom were Catholic sisters. She said, "I always wanted to be a teacher. I emulated my teachers and I saw myself going down that path." Later, Rosemarie understood teaching to be service:

> Education has been appealing to me. I see it as service and not as a nine to five kind of job. That's guided my vision of a career, and I always felt like I, from the beginning, wanted to do more. Being in the classroom was really important to me. It was very fulfilling, but I always wanted to--

wherever I worked--contribute to the greater institution and work beyond

just my classroom work.

Rosemarie highlighted the confluence of one's work with the aim for that work to benefit

others and the personal fulfillment that occurs in that extrinsic aim. This is central to the

Gospel-based ethos of Catholic education. In addition, I see Rosemarie's reflections

indicate her willingness to go beyond normative boundaries of what might be expected in

a career. There is an aspirational, feminist view that motivates Rosemarie.

Maria and Hieu concurred with the desire to be of service to the underrepresented,

poor, or vulnerable—a desire which was deeply spiritual. Both women were engaged in

this work and then experienced a keen awareness that they were being called by God to

something bigger than themselves. Maria worked in educational services will a goal to

help underrepresented, underserved communities. She said, "I thought I could be of

service to other students and create a gateway and an opportunity for them. And I think I

was good at it." She went on to describe the moment when the calling to go further was

most poignant:

I can still visualize every single aspect of it. I was sitting in my office,

typing on my keyboard. I was writing up a report and a very quiet voice

said to me, "You're not doing what you're supposed to be doing." And I

paused and I thought, "Okay, I'm not doing what I'm supposed to be

doing." And it was such a peaceful…it was a moment filled with clarity,

very centering, but then about five seconds later the panic set in. "If I'm

not doing what I'm supposed to be doing, what am I supposed to be doing?

And what does that mean? And why are there voices in my head?" So, that

> moment of grace and that stillness and that quiet voice certainly was
>
> followed by a wave of confusion and feeling pretty overwhelmed. So, I
>
> entered into a discernment process, and in that time of discernment, really
>
> identified that education was a space that had been life-giving to me and I
>
> thought I could bring life to others through it.

For Hieu, the calling had at one time been focused on service to the poor. Later, and like

Maria, that sense of mission evolved in a similar moment of awareness at work:

> I remember that day as I was just doing my routine at the clothes closet, I
>
> think it was noon. I needed to clean up for the last time before I came out
>
> for lunch. Then I heard, "Teach the children." Wow, where does that come
>
> from? I felt God tell me, "Teach the children" because I always ask him,
>
> "What am I going to do?" So that just came up and I was totally surprised
>
> because in my life I never think I can teach. Never ever. I can see it if I
>
> dream to be a doctor, to be a pharmacist, to be a psychiatrist. Usually, it
>
> has to do with helping people. But of course, I did not say anything. I just
>
> kept that in my heart and pondering -- just like Mother Mary, she always
>
> ponders, "What does that mean? What does that mean?" So, it's on my
>
> mind, in my heart, and I ponder.

Hieu and Maria already felt positioned in work for service and justice that was

meaningful and important. Because of their established spiritual life and relationship with

God, these moments of divine awareness were understood as an invitation to respond to

something more. For both, the result of the moment was awe, clarity, question, surprise,

and trust. Ultimately, Maria and Hieu entered into spaces of contemplation, pondering, and discernment before identifying their next steps.

Raika, Diane, and Annika discovered their callings to education and teaching through experiences of service with young people. Raika spoke of choices she made outside of college courses that focused on work with youth. She was drawn to programs that provided for disadvantaged communities who, for example, didn't have art programs and for whom she would start the program. Upon reflection, Raika related, "I realized I was always called to, 'How do I serve my community? How do I offer what I have to my community?'" Diane related a similar experience as a tutor for a program designed to support African American students. There she discovered she really enjoyed teaching math and helping people understand. She said,

> I found a lot more joy in that than studying anatomy and physiology at the time. I did care about helping people. I did care about mathematics. I did care about closing gaps for people with their understanding. I cared about having people come to me one way and then end up leaving, feeling a different way about math."

For Annika, the realization of the calling to education came from someone asking, "What would you get up in the morning for? What do you care about? What makes you feel alive?" Her part-time work with children informed her response:

> I really like hanging out with other people's kids and hadn't realized that was a specialized skill set. I thought everybody liked to hang out with kids. I could get up in the morning and work with kids and I could be

happy. And it was a really fast decision. I just pivoted and called a local

university and said, 'I want to be a teacher.'"

These three educators articulated the connection between personal fulfillment and their

potential to support learners of various ages and address disparities.

For all of these participants, the sense of calling to education and service figured

prominently as a precedent to joining the Notre Dame de Namur learning community.

The call to serve students and/or God led to an intentional process of discernment as well

as a growing sense of purpose and self-efficacy for these educators. Being called or

drawn to contribute through this professional space was also intensely personal; the

passion, spiritual experience, and life-giving essence of calling described by participants

resonates with understandings of religious vocation. These characteristics echo those

observed by scholars of lay leadership (Zeni, 2005; Zeni and Bechtle, S.C., 2005). This

precedent calling also positioned the participants to respond affirmatively in the more

specific invitation to join Notre Dame.

Formative Experience. In this theme's second cluster of meanings, participants

identified key life experiences that were instrumental to their formation prior to becoming

a Notre Dame de Namur educator. Relationships and experiences with valued family

members, educators, and youth leaders figured prominently in participant narratives. As

trusted adults, these individuals offered models of how to educate and serve; they also

provided direct affirmation for the participants. This modeling and encouragement

frequently served to praise, accompany, guide, or even challenge the frames of

understanding held by the participant. As an example, Raika described her mother as a

woman of faith, service, and love. This modeling led to Raika's experience in a Catholic

high school and her active engagement in campus ministry, particularly service and justice programming. She described how the campus ministers were "huge in my formative periods of life" and how they recognized in her qualities and gifts of which she had not previously been aware. Raika recognized this modeling and affirmation by her mother and campus ministers, respectively, contributed to her realization of her own core values and calling to a life of service and justice.

Similarly, Hieu and Annika both speak to the recognition they received from supervisors and professors—in Catholic educational and corporate sector environments—which encouraged their discernment and their progress with educational and career plans. Hieu reflected with amazement on the support she received to pursue two separate masters' degrees as she described moments when her work supervisor and religious mentor each said, "I think you should get a [_____] degree." Further, their financial subsidy also made that study possible. Attending a Jesuit university, Annika highlighted her exchanges with Jesuits and lay professors for instilling the belief that learning leads to service for the good of all. Reflecting on these conversations, she recounted,

> You're going to learn something; you're going to teach somebody else. You stepped up and then you're going to put your hand down and pull the person up behind you. It wasn't about money and it wasn't about prestige and it wasn't about success. It was truly about improving yourself so that you could help others improve."

As a result of these exchanges for Hieu and Annika, both participants were provided began to see themselves in a new way. These mentors engaged in sense giving practices within their congregational community context to support Hieu and Annika's

sensemaking within that social context (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991a; Lee, 2004; Weick, 1995, 2012).

These formative experiences with mentors and the external recognition they provided participants furthered the capacity of participants to see themselves living those same values or stepping into that similar space or roles. This notion of "seeing yourself" was significant for several more participants in different ways. As first-generation students to college, Maria and Rosemarie were able to lean into those personal experiences in their first professional roles in education prior to Notre Dame in order to work for access, opportunity, and growth for students who shared similar circumstances. Both believe that educators hold the door open for students like them. Maria described it this way,

> For me, I was the first person in my family to go to college, to receive an undergraduate degree. That part of it alone felt like a gateway into a new world and new opportunities that just by virtue of that undergraduate degree was never available to my siblings and certainly not my parents [with an] elementary level education.

This experience of being "the first" imprinted in them a motivation to make that access and opportunity possible for others with a deep commitment and work ethic that combined with the calling described earlier.

Several participants noted that their identities and backgrounds as immigrant, working class, and/or BIPOC women influenced their formative experiences and how they observed themselves in learning spaces or hold that space for others. Hieu, Maria, Raika, and Diane tutored for a few programs that worked with underserved students,

diverse in racial and socio-economic backgrounds; these four could see their own

identities, backgrounds, and stories reflected in the student communities they served.

Diane shared that because of her identity and experience as a Black woman and the

daughter of a single working mom, she was able to create spaces where African

American students of all generations (children to working moms) could see themselves in

her and receive her direct support to succeed in math. She described her desire to provide

representation and flip the more prevalent narrative that math is not for women, girls, and

students of color.

Raika, who felt called to social justice work in part because of her own immigrant

background, spoke to the recognition of how powerful these formative experiences could

be for understanding your own sense of place, belonging, and privilege.

> The most formative piece in college for me was working for the […]
>
> program, for students of color and later for any disadvantaged youth. I
>
> have never felt so at home. I always felt like an outsider in college until I
>
> started that program in my fourth year. I worked on the summer program
>
> for primarily Black and brown students, and I realized this is my space.
>
> Even though there was a huge disconnect between my privileged
>
> educational background from the lived experience of the folks I was
>
> working with, now I understand why I too don't fit into this school. Even
>
> though I have the socioeconomic privilege, I've never felt like I belong.

Raika's realizations about her sense of self and place were also connected to the

relationships she cultivated with her students in the program. Those students provided a

personal-communal case study of the complexities for identity and "what it meant to

stand in solidarity with people, and be proud of who you are, and it's okay if you don't fit

into that norm." In this reflective attitude, Raika's own sensemaking reveals that a

reversal of the expected teacher-student norm can empower the educator to forward

priorities for justice and community.

   Theme 1 Summary. Raika sums up the formation process as one of integration,

expansion, and alignment in this way:

> It was like bridging worlds for me. I think that that was probably the most
>
> formative experience where I really could align so many parts of my life,
>
> my academic understanding, my social and emotional understanding into
>
> this one area. Even though it was a secular space, it felt like a religious
>
> space because we came together in a place of solidarity that I'd never felt
>
> before.

Raika's reflections are in alignment with research observations that lay leaders may

realize that calling and formation in secular terms at first (Fox & Bechtle, 2005). In

combination with calling, these formative experiences shaped the approach of these Notre

Dame de Namur educators. They valued identity, service and justice, and prioritized the

sacredness of meaningful relationships with self and community, values and priorities

which would become operative in their future work and promote an integration of

personal and professional identities. Here the early confluence of sensemaking and

vocation are apparent for individuals.

Encountering Feminist Catholic Perspectives in Educational Spaces

The second theme revealed the mutual phenomenological encounter with those individuals, communities, or experiences that promoted a feminist Catholic perspective, particularly in educational spaces, prior to joining the Notre Dame de Namur learning community. Three key findings (or subthemes) surfaced from participants' life experiences:

1. Encounters with women religious provided models of caring relationship, feminist language and embodied spirituality, dynamic and relevant engagement with the world, and a lived commitment to service, justice, and solidarity.

2. Encounters with lay leaders offered both peer and educator understandings of care, shared power in community, and intentional inclusion.

3. Participants utilized feminist Catholic qualities to make sense of experiences and identify them as moments of alignment or dissonance (with their calling and formation).

The moments, discussed in the context of preparation for the Notre Dame de Namur learning community, provided these educators with an awareness, understanding, and engagement with feminist Catholic thought and experience that would create an affinity or drawing toward those same ideas and values. These findings contributed to the calling, formation, and pre-disposition toward resonance with feminist Catholic perspectives.

Encounters with women religious. This first area of meaning revealed the seminal impact that experience of and relationship with Catholic sisters had on participants. Most participants were able to speak to who these women were—names, their personalities or approaches to ministry, their roles and/or congregations, remembered interactions and

situations. The vibrancy of these recollections suggests the import of the formative effects for each person and demonstrate the model provided by these women religious: caring relationship, feminist language and embodied spirituality, dynamic and relevant engagement with the world, and a lived commitment to service, justice, and solidarity. In Catholic sisters, these female lay educators could see example of women's Catholic spiritual leadership and vocation.

Annika and Adele were moved by the genuine care demonstrated by the sisters with whom they met and worked. Annika's experience with Sister E took place during college when she was preparing to receive her First Communion as a college student. The joy, humor, and personalized attention Sister E offered made Annika feel welcome; the simplicity and reflective approach to faith sharing disarmed Annika and made theology accessible for someone who not experienced Catholic education until that Jesuit university experience. Adele, who had experiences as both student and employee in several Catholic schools for young women, was struck by the close working relationship she had with the Sister R who was the school principal. And even when Adele left her position earlier than anticipated to relocate out of the area, she worried that she had upset Sister R. Though at first taken aback by the unexpected departure, Sister R provided Adele a quality recommendation, which surprised Adele for the show of kindness and care. Adele moved away from the area, though not before helping to hire her replacement, and she continued to stay in touch with Sister E. In combination, the relationships with the two sisters provided these participant educators with the lived knowledge of Catholic women religious as hospitable, joyful, friendly, respectful, supportive, and caring. Further, these sisters were willing to readily meet the needs and

concerns of those with whom they worked, whether that was translating faith experience for a young adult or supporting a working mother in a cross-country move.

Maria's significant experience of a Catholic sister came during her time as a student in a co-ed Catholic high school. She described how the arrival of Sister F broke open the rote and paternalistic experience of Catholicism Maria had known to that point:

> When I was in high school, a new director of campus ministry came and joined us, a Dominican African-American woman. I had never met anybody like her before. And she was the first person who used a feminine pronoun to speak about God. And it just cracked open this full image and experience of God that I had never had access to anywhere else before. So she was talking about *She* who loves us. *She* loves you. *She* who walks with us, *She* was merciful, and Sister herself was such a gentle, gentle person. And I hadn't really known a lot of gentleness like that in my life. And in her gentleness, she just cracked open so many new perspectives about what our faith could be and what Catholic education was, in the way that she approached us as learners, too.

Sister F offered Maria and the other students an introduction to feminine language for God, a hallmark of feminist theology and spirituality. This, along with an honest and teen-friendly approach to human, spiritual experience—absent of any pretentiousness or inauthenticity was meaningful. For Maria, this relationship was a divergent way to be Catholic that planted seeds for a more expansive knowing of God and her own potential to be valued in her experience as a young woman in the Catholic community.

Hieu and Rosemarie's encounters with women religious included both individual sisters like previous participants as well as those sisters living and working in community on shared ministries. Hieu described her experience of the Daughters of Charity, a religious community whose charism of education and work with the poor, drew her to join them for a period of time. This relationship with the community began as a way to answer her call to serve the poor and educate children in concert with women who lived by a common mission. Over time, Hieu's formation and ministries as a sister in the congregation connected her to the life circumstances of those experiencing poverty, especially women and children, in the U.S. and Asia. Having experienced her own migration to the US as a refugee, Hieu ministered with the poor and displaced, which deepened her understanding of human struggle and brought her joy.

Rosemarie's Catholic schooling was taught almost exclusively by Catholic sisters—Felicians, Sisters of Charity, and Salesians. In this experience, Rosemarie was herself immersed within a Catholic culture that was led by communities of women religious. Like Hieu, Rosemarie felt a draw to participation in that Catholic community, though not through vowed religious life. She recalls one sister-teacher who utilized a dynamic approach to teaching and learning that was engaging, relevant, and made contemporary connections to society. It was not learning that was separate from the world, but rather a part of it. In the first years after Vatican II, this approach appeared to Rosemarie almost revolutionary for its break with staid tradition. Rosemarie also encountered Catholic sisters who lived, not within the convent, but rather in marginalized urban neighborhoods where their direct service took place. She described her experience this way:

> There was a group of sisters who were living in an apartment in the
> projects from the Sisters of Charity. We would go there after school
> maybe once a week to do tutoring and stuff and play with the kids in the
> project. So, they were embedded in the neighborhood. Then on occasion,
> we were there for home masses and they would have mass at home. It was
> a totally different experience working with them and being there and part
> of that.

Again, this observation that the sisters were embedded and not apart from those whom they served prompted Rosemarie to examine the underpinnings of what it means to be Catholic. Both at school and in direct service, Rosemarie's sister-teachers and leaders introduced her to a version of Catholic life where empowered women were engaged in the community to serve and educate with a closeness to the reality of those whom they served.

The relationship with women religious for these Notre Dame de Namur educators provided tangible and embodied example of a Catholic faith that is integrated with one's work and prayer, leadership and life. The proximity to these Catholic vowed women enabled the participants to witness first-hand that model of integration, a model which they could then utilize to bring into dialogue with the greater social paradigm and their lay experience. This dialogue and the promotion of a Catholic perspective that empowered women, emphasized social justice, and centered human dignity and relationship is salient for their future as Notre Dame de Namur educators.

Encounters with lay leadership. This second area of meaning focused on the influential effects of lay leadership. The findings highlighted the experience of care,

shared power in community, and intentional inclusion. Most participants recognized the value of relationality in these narratives. These experiences do, however, put forward important groundwork for the lay experience of feminist Catholic perspective for community building and leadership, particularly when those spaces are most visibly represented by clergy or women religious. The ability to conceive of lay people with power and influence in spiritual or educational spaces provides a more expansive paradigm.

Raika, who previously commented on the important role played by her campus ministers, also referenced the immersion leaders with similar appreciation. She described the adult leaders of the service and immersion program who were for her "the epitome of love and service, and kindness, and God's goodness." These immersion leaders embodied a spirituality and commitment to service and justice that was discernible to Raika in ways that were different from other individuals. Further, this embodiment and the caring relationship they shared may be part of what drew Raika to participate in the program multiple times.

Some participants showcased moments of lay community that resulted in mutual empowerment. For Sunflower, Diane, and Annika – all of whom had connection to Catholic life in their families, but never any Catholic school exposure until adulthood— the church community provided for that lay-led faith community experience. Sunflower, for example, discussed her Catholic and Presbyterian community participation. It was the latter that hosted a youth group and community service each Sunday. She said:

> I got to see both [denominations] and I got to see the similarities -- that it's
>
> the people living out their faith that makes the community. And, my

> parents are really good. We went to both and we kind of took turns. I
>
> ended up being very involved with a Presbyterian youth group because the
>
> Catholic church where we were at that certain time didn't have a youth
>
> group. So I did a lot of activities in those formative years as a teen. On
>
> Sundays, I lived at church—from the worship service and then community
>
> service in the afternoons, and then the youth group and pizza dinner in the
>
> evening. A big part of high school for me is the church community. It just
>
> felt like that home away from home.

The faith community represents the primary setting for the presence of the laity and their

shared practice of spirituality. That Sunflower was so at home in this environment (even

though she did not experience Catholic education) indicates that it offered her a space of

belonging as well as self-efficacy as an active participant in her faith community. Diane

also named church groups as valuable and life-giving for her spiritual growth. A member

of a Baptist community and then a nondenominational church, she was involved in the

choir and the young women's ministry. Diane related,

> We had a group that was set up just for young women, college age, to get
>
> to know God in a different way. And it taught them different things:
>
> everything from etiquette to how to read your Bible to how to pray and
>
> how to seek God and how to have good boundaries. I was part of that
>
> team. And I loved being there for that.

As a lay leader, Diane found connection to the women in this community and saw her

contributions to their holistic growth. Diane's experience highlighted recognition of a

specifically women's centered companionship and its ability to nurture and strengthen participants, which points to an important communal priority for feminist spirituality.

Lay leadership encounters, found in the relationships among student peers and professors at the university level, revealed an inclusive paradigm for the learning project, where student and educator shared power and a sense of belonging. Annika witnessed the enthusiasm shown by her lay professors for their subject areas and their eagerness to share that with students. Teaching and learning in this setting was a more dialogic one between student and professor. Further still, the professors became both ambassadors and community builders in the way they approached their classrooms and students. Annika remarked that "everyone was always so kind and so gracious, and so accepting and forgiving" especially as they sought to "bring her into the fold." This effort by professors to create inclusion for students proved to be affirming for Annika, even as she herself wrestled with the socio-economic disparities she witnessed among her classmates. The result for Annika was an increase in self-esteem and confidence.

Annika's experience at university also highlighted the way that peers can participate in this lay leadership. Though she had been baptized at an earlier age, Annika had not received her First Communion by the time she began her studies at the Jesuit university, as previously mentioned. For this reason, she "felt like an unofficial Catholic." Her friends, active student leaders in campus ministry programs, were determined then to rectify Annika's feelings: "'Let's just get you your communion so that you can stop feeling like an outsider.'" So, it was her friends who connected Annika to Sister E and it was those same friends who arranged for the Jesuit administrator to turn a daily mass into the liturgy for Annika's First Communion.

> They made Father P move the daily mass from the little chapel in the back
> to the whole cathedral. And it was this whole thing, they played the piano.
> He was like, "What is happening right now?" Because he was trying to do
> his quick, 20 minute mass. It was really small, and they were trying to put
> on a production on a Wednesday. I think there were only 10 of us there. I
> think if anything, it made me feel better about being Catholic. I wasn't a
> pretend Catholic anymore and I could be in the club. But even that went
> back to this idea of, "Well, of course we want you to be part of this. We
> want you to feel included. So, what can we do to fix that? That's easy.
> Let's fix it."

These young adults, motivated by a desire to create inclusion and erase self-doubt for
their friend, used their experience within ministry settings to problem solve Annika's
circumstances. In the process, they called upon the personnel who could partner with
them to meet their inclusionary objective. And, these personnel were a sister and priest
who, yes, had further spiritual vocation and skillset to respond, but more importantly,
held a meaningful relationship with these young adults to extend that care to their friend
and support their efforts for intentional inclusion. Annika named her surprise that these
vowed religious adults would be so quick to help her and that her peers had the power to
engage these spiritual leaders at their own initiative. This was a moment of expansion for
Annika on how students like her, how lay people could have agency and power for
Catholic leadership alongside those traditional leaders.

In these educational and religious contexts, these Notre Dame de Namur
educators participated in and were witness to collegial and collaborative dynamics where

young lay people were provided the opportunities and encouragement to claim their power and leadership. They were able to see themselves as active members, recipients of, and contributors to these inclusionary communities. In these experiences, the reliance upon hierarchical structures gave way to informal and flattened iterations in those same contexts.

Making Sense: Alignment and Dissonance. This final area of meaning showcased evidence that participants employed feminist Catholic perspectives to make sense of their life experience prior to joining the Notre Dame de Namur learning community. In these moments of self-assessment or discernment, the participant determined alignment or dissonance with those feminist Catholic values as well as their past experiences of calling or formation. These sensemaking applications are found in the valuation and devaluation of women's experience, the centering and de-centering of people/students of color, and the engagement with charism and its interpretations for participants. The sensemaking experience raised critical questions for participants in their beliefs and decision making.

Participants wrestled with their experiences as women and how that identity was valued by those around them. Annika and Diane both described the caring, "you can do it" attitude and work ethic their mothers possessed, something which influenced their views on women's empowerment and their own abilities. Annika applied this frame to make sense of her experience in the Jesuit university. Earlier, I highlighted the impact of professors and peers for Annika's experience of lay leadership and inclusion. One female professor of history impressed Annika with her passion and enthusiasm for the study of history. This educator encouraged her to become an active interpreter of history, to inquire and critically investigate the narratives presented. Annika said,

> I think that was the first time there was this idea that history is not static. It just depends on who stirs it and what lens you're looking through—which is very different than the way high school presents history, "Here's the facts." That was a fun way to learn.

With history's narratives predominantly written from a Western, male, and racially privileged perspective, this new insight for historical study reoriented Annika for recognition of the devaluation of women and how to interpret that differently. Likewise, Diane recognized the greater variation of life experiences and ages known to women seeking a college education. As she worked with African American women to provide support, Diane aimed to be a cheerleader whose encouragement would enable women to achieve academically when social norms promoted a different narrative for math and college success. For both Annika and Diane, their introduction to new processes and approaches enabled them to disrupt social norms to re-center women in the narrative.

Maria's experience of feminist spirituality and language in her Catholic high school was a significant frame for her worldview. She said,

> I find it beautiful, and I hold such gratitude that individual people, like Sister H can come into that experience. And in her gentleness, she just cracked open so many new perspectives about what our faith could be and what Catholic education was, in the way that she approached us as learners, too.

This broadening was extended in her Jesuit university experience, where Maria began to see herself as part of the solution within an Ignatian spiritual paradigm. In spite of this alignment, Maria experienced dissonances within that same university environment. She

did not have a female mentor and had to carry forward the feminist Catholic concepts on

her own. Maria describes the misogyny she experienced in the academic space from male

professors and students. In one course, the professor led discussion of the Joseph

Campbell's *The Hero's Journey*. Maria contributed to the class by saying,

> Feminist critique of that is that you don't need to go on an external journey
>
> to have that journey. In fact, for many women, especially since they were
>
> physically prevented from doing that, the heroine's journey can be an
>
> internal one, but you can have that same experience, gifts, mentors, the
>
> Christ, all that stuff is still part of it."

Maria's comment was dismissed, and her voice was silenced or diminished as the course

continued when the professor would say, "We already know what you think," and move

on to another student. Maria's feminist Catholic framing enabled her to assess that

dissonance and dis-ease of those learning encounters; the incongruency would serve her

to look elsewhere for that alignment in her continued formation.

Like Maria, Hieu and Rosemarie each named experiences that challenged their

views of Catholic life. Their engagement with women's religious congregations and their

own relationships to those communities became a source for the tension and dissonance.

Hieu named the important discernment she undertook to determine whether she

continued to align with a particular religious community. She struggled with her

individual giftedness and calling for education and the community's expectations for her:

"Is this the right community and charism for me?" Ultimately, she chose to follow her

calling in search of another community in which to teach.

Rosemarie witnessed Catholic sisters from two different congregations engage with the issues of the day and wrestled with which version made more sense for her. Earlier in this chapter, I highlighted Rosemarie's service participation with sisters who were embedded in the neighborhood they served. In contrast, the sisters for her schooling appeared to Rosemarie to be behind the signs of the times. She commented, "The three of us who were going down to the projects once a week with these nuns who were in an apartment and we're at this other school where changing their habit just a little bit was their big concession to modernize." Rosemarie and her two classmates, dissatisfied with the kind of Catholic they witnessed in their school sisters, made the choice to leave the school. "I think our paths just changed. We were thinking differently from the rest of that community there. We weren't as conservative in our thinking as they were. I think that's why we ended up leaving. I went to public school from that."

Theme 2 Summary. For most, participants did not specifically recognize the feminist Catholic emphasis in their experiences of alignment and dissonance. Yet, they did call upon the values and perspectives of women's empowerment, inclusivity in practice and language, and the promotion of service, justice and community building in order to determine their alignment or dissonance with situations and choices. This engagement with and sense making of feminist Catholic perspectives would coalesce with their calling and formation to position them to respond affirmatively when Notre Dame de Namur would come into view.

Life Experience at Notre Dame de Namur

The next set of themes are situated in the experiences of participants as they became part of the Notre Dame de Namur learning community. Here, I witnessed the

continuity of individual narratives begun prior to hire situated now with the establishment

of the educators' relationships with Notre Dame de Namur. Like those experiences

considered in the previous sections of this chapter, participants provided rich descriptions

and reflections of these initial Notre Dame de Namur encounters. I found the early

relationship of the educator with Notre Dame gave deepening life to the themes of

calling, formation, and engagement with feminist Catholic perspectives previously

discussed. Further, the following themes provided a view of the individual now in direct

relationship with the learning community and organization.

Mutual Encounter: Recognition and Affirmation

A phenomenologically relevant theme arose from the hiring and onboarding

processes for educators who joined Notre Dame de Namur. In this new relationship, there

was mutual encounter between the educator and the learning community that evidenced

the significance of belonging. All participants described their initial encounters with

Notre Dame de Namur, particularly in the specifics of the interview processes as well as

their first years with the learning community. Two key findings (or subthemes) emerged

from participants' life experiences:

1. The female lay educator experienced the interaction of their individual sense
   of calling, formation, values, and worldview with the identity of the learning
   community. In retrospect, these early interactions revealed occurrences of
   identity recognition for the educator.

2. For both the educator and the learning community, these early encounters
   provided a space for reciprocity of alignment, discernment and affirmation for
   belonging.

These findings illuminated the early stages of a lengthy relationship between educator and learning community. The dialogic between these two entities demonstrated what happens when the educator asks, "Who am I in this learning community?", an essential question in that progression toward, "Who are we as a learning community?"

Identity Recognition. With clarity of detail and a palpable fondness, all participants lifted up their moments of first encounter with Notre Dame de Namur. For almost all participating women, these encounters in the hiring process were their first with the Notre Dame de Namur learning community. Most had little knowledge of the learning community prior to these interactions. Yet, the recognition that this job opportunity and/or this particular learning community could *be a fit* was noted by most, whether that was before or in proximity to the interview process.

Adele explained that though she had moved into the area and had first been working with a Fortune 500 company, she was pleased to see the posting for an education position in a Catholic school for girls that matched her skillset and her previous experience. She felt confident at her interview with administrators, seeing her ability to contribute. Adele also expressed some surprise when Notre Dame de Namur hired her; she worried that her lack of longevity at similar schools would be a risk for her hire. Sunflower also felt the sense of fit because of a few interactions. She spoke first of a Notre Dame de Namur alum and former faculty member who recognized her expertise and commented that Sunflower would be a good fit there. This encouragement, along with Sunflower's growing appreciation for Catholic and single gender learning environments, were meaningful to her; Sunflower "felt a real connection" to something bigger. She recounted her first meeting with a group of women administrators and faculty

and said, "I just remember leaving that interview, thinking I want to go have dinner with these women. If I can do anything to help this group, I want to do it." And though she planned for a part time role, it later became full time. For both Adele and Sunflower, the notion of fit was connected initially to seeing themselves and what they could offer to support the needs of the learning community. And, as Sunflower's experience shows in its desire for social connection with "these women," that relational interview space opened up unexpected possibilities for a greater affinity.

Alignment, Discernment, and Affirmation. Annika and Diane's hiring experiences illustrated this unexpected affinity. Both came from professional public school environments and held pre-conceptions for Catholic, private, single-gender learning environments. Diane highlighted her curiosity about the private all girls environment, musing whether it would feel like the 1980s comedy depiction, *The Facts of Life*. Annika described her negative view of Catholic girls' schools as places for gossip and drama, a view which was disrupted by the research she did on Notre Dame de Namur prior to her interview. She found that this school "does not fit the mold that I have come to believe about single-sex education." Annika went on to comment that "it was this different space that I didn't know existed that was more similar to the way I had been raised – you're female and you're capable – and there was Notre Dame saying some of the same things."

For both, the interview process led to discovery of greater alignment. Annika brought samples of her work as an educator which received praise from the two interview teams. She noted the surprise and personal/professional affirmation she felt from these potential colleagues and supervisors who were impressed by her work. Annika received further affirmation over the course of the interview conversations that alleviated her fears

that she was not qualified or prepared or a fit; rather, she was invited to consider how her background and experiences outside of Catholic private school spaces might be translated to that Notre Dame de Namur learning community. Annika named that sense of value and inclusion as akin to her experience at the Jesuit university, albeit with "an undercurrent of women's empowerment and the importance and value of women."

Noting the "different vibe" she felt at Notre Dame de Namur, Diane, too, experienced a sense of confidence and felt valued in the interview process. She described how she was invited to read the mission of the learning community for the conversation and then provided a demo lesson for students. These requests introduced Diane to what was important to the learning community—something she appreciated so she could ascertain that alignment for herself. She discussed the experience of her demo lesson and how positive and warm the students' response was. Beyond the surprise of applause from the students and faculty in the room, Diane recognized that Notre Dame was offering to support her in her own professional growth. If she joined the learning community, she felt she would be supported and encouraged to develop new subject area expertise. This affirmation was significant for Diane.

Like previous participants, Raika, Hieu and Maria also experienced Notre Dame de Namur's positive response in their interview experiences as well as the awe of the unexpected affinity. They elaborated on this congruence in terms of spirituality and "finding home." Raika named that she found a spiritually grounded presence in the school's female leader. Hieu discussed feeling a sense of peace, calm, and welcome in her campus interview, even though school was not in session. Maria shared feeling the approbation and affirmation of the all-female interview team as she spoke of her affinity

for feminism and gender inclusive spiritual language. For all three, there was a clear

spiritual lens evident in their reflections on these interview experiences. Raika was drawn

to this spiritual grounding, the social justice aims, and the sense of belonging she felt at

the school. Hieu believed St. Julie's charism was what she felt in the exchanges and

campus on her interview day. And, Maria spoke of hearing God's voice in the car ride

afterward, offering a confirmation that this was right for her:

> When I got into the car, I thought, "This could be perfect, but I don't know
>
> if I'm good enough. I don't know if I'm going to get it." And I turned the
>
> key on my ignition and the song that played was God's voice. It wasn't the
>
> little whisper voice in my office. It was like God singing beautiful [….]
>
> voice saying, "Count on me. You're doing the right thing." And I
>
> experienced, in Jesuit language, such a moment of consolation, and every
>
> single part of me just settled and deepened. And I was like, "This is it. I
>
> know this is it." And then of course I was offered the job later that day. So,
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> what prepared me to come to Notre Dame? Yeah, it's those little things. It
>
> was the little voice. It was a sister who planted seeds in me. It was a
>
> journey to be a person of faith. It was a call to serve others. And then I
>
> figured out how to be a teacher, [laughter] and I just did it from there.

Theme Summary. In these various memory-based descriptions, I witnessed the meeting of

the individual educator and the Notre Dame de Namur learning community. This meeting

brings to light the recognition of both entities in their identities, a discernment of

alignment in mission and values, and the affirmation of that congruence. This feeling of

belonging—sometimes articulated as "feeling at home"—was something each participant

experienced early in their time with Notre Dame, whether in the interview and hiring phase or in the first year. It would serve as a significant marker for identity within and as part of the Notre Dame de Namur learning community. It is also a dominant sentiment in the next theme.

Belonging to the Notre Dame de Namur Community

The next theme discusses the phenomenological prominence of belonging in community for the lived experience of the participating female educators in the study. Building beyond the initial encounters named in the previous section, participants named their own experiences of belonging within the Notre Dame de Namur learning community. These experiences were a source of significant meaning for Notre Dame de Namur educators. And, they would also resonate as spaces for vulnerability. Three key findings (or subthemes) were derived from the experiences of participants:

1. Belonging was experienced as welcome and acceptance, loving care and support by members of the community.

2. Acts of care, service and justice for the greater community provided an inclusive and familiar space for belonging and self-recognition.

3. Belonging within the community also undergoes periods of distance or disequilibrium.

These findings provide a resonance with those formative experiences and relationships prior to Notre Dame de Namur. Further, the dynamics surrounding belonging are the fertile ground for sensemaking and enactment processes and the realization of feminist Catholic priorities for care, inclusion, and justice. These dynamics are expanded upon more fully in the following sections.

Belonging as welcome, acceptance, care and support. Belonging is a significant human experience. Within the Notre Dame de Namur learning community, participants spoke easily to their initial experiences of belonging. Many described these experiences in terms of welcome, acceptance, care, and support; in that description participants' evidenced emotions and tone that correspond with familiarity, closeness and warmth. Annika, for example, related that she felt and observed more welcome in the Notre Dame de Namur learning community, a contrast to the cliques of previous school environments. She described those adult community observations this way:

> Notre Dame has definitely been one of the more welcoming schools that I've worked at. So while people do gravitate towards their colleagues that they're most comfortable with, people they've worked with most frequently, I didn't feel like it was exclusionary. I've definitely worked in spaces and places where certain groups eat together in certain places on campus and people are not invited to join them. I never got that impression at Notre Dame. I always felt like if you happened upon people eating and you sat down, they would just welcome you and be fine with it.

The communal inclination toward hospitality was a notable characteristic that Annika observed and felt early in her time with the learning community. In her sensemaking of these experiences, she noted a distinctiveness indicative of the ethos of the school as well as the behaviors of faculty and staff.

With her previous experience with women's religious Catholic schools, Adele expected to fit in to the Notre Dame de Namur learning community and believed she understood her role in the school. Within a short time, that sense of belonging went far

beyond her expectations. Adele first experienced that difference in her role as a faculty

member which called her to be involved in areas of community life beyond her specific,

unique job function; she noted the isolation she felt in her previous schools. At Notre

Dame de Namur, Adele was included and felt included in the spiritual and communal life

alongside students and colleagues; she commented on how much she learned about the

learning community's values and programs because of that. This relational experience in

her faculty capacity was also extended to her sense of membership in a more

personal/social sense. Adele, in her second or third year with the school, completed her

naturalization for citizenship. On the day she returned from the ceremony, she was called

to the faculty lounge by an administrator. Expecting the summons to be related to her

work, Adele was surprised to be greeted by the administrator and colleagues with a cake

with an American flag decoration. Adele said,

> They celebrated me being a U.S. citizen. That is so long ago, but I still
>
> remember so clearly that everyone just give me a surprise party and
>
> welcomed me to be a U.S. citizen. So that was very meaningful to me.
>
> That's really, really meaningful to me. And it's really a surprise to me.

Adele felt that she was a part of the Notre Dame family, not a neighbor as she'd felt in

her previous schools. In that moment of celebration and welcome, Notre Dame de Namur

demonstrated how it values the experiences of its employees within the learning

community. Adele said,

> So it's really mutual. I feel that Notre Dame's a very caring environment. I
>
> feel that when people join Notre Dame they show their kindness. When

we are in this environment, you just show the good side of your heart
because this is a loving environment.

Participants spoke of belonging in terms of care and support for one another. As might be expected, this was described in friendships that developed among co-workers and with social/familial vocabulary. This care and support extended to the professional nature of the work as well. Hieu described the friendships and sense of community she knew at Notre Dame de Namur, that there was an approachability and transparency she experienced with peers and supervisors alike. She also highlighted two experiences that tested her professional relationship and the school's risk management processes for student safety. In one of those situations, the laboratory lesson didn't happen as planned, requiring emergency personnel to determine whether certain class materials posed a danger to students. Circumstances were such that students were safe and the all clear was given. Afterward, Hieu noted three dynamics in the follow up with administrators: 1) the primacy of concern for student well-being, 2) the review of protocols in place to provide for students' safety, and 3) the care, comfort, and consolation Hieu received from administrators. Hieu named these moments as ultimately positive experiences of care and support from the school as well as a learning experience to improve safety processes.

The welcome and acceptance, loving care and support experienced by these lay women educators provided an emotional, social and spiritual imprint for each person. They felt seen and valued for who they were, not for their accomplishments; in some cases, this was counter to the expectations they perceived would be normative as employees. Rather, they felt a warmth and affection that came through in their

storytelling. This imprint within a community experience later contextualized the responsibility that would be theirs to extend for students and colleagues alike.

    Belonging found in acts of care, service, and justice for the greater community. The deepening of belonging and community was realized for multiple participants as a result of experiences in the Notre Dame de Namur network as well as retreats, service and justice immersions. In these contexts, that deepening of relationships with colleagues and students was both formative and meaningful. Rosemarie, whose more recent role as an administrator limited her direct work with students, was able to re-connect with students through retreats and immersion related travel. The blend of service, advocacy, and civic participation in these trips aligned with her earlier impetus for education and enabled her to step back from a leadership capacity to take on a supportive relationship with students and colleagues. She named the opportunity to know colleagues through side by side direct service as part of what was meaningful. Finally, Rosemarie found that her collaborative work with the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur cultivated her sense of belonging in the community and her grounding in the charism and mission narrative. While parallels exist with her experiences with Catholic sisters from her teenage years, Rosemarie's experience was a deeper professional context with these lay and religious colleagues.

    Raika, too, found belonging in those familiar spaces of retreat and immersion. Knowing the influence and connection she felt in her own formative experiences of retreat and immersion, Raika contributed to these spaces for students with ease. These provided her with a connection to the experiential Catholic paradigm she had been formed in, only now within a Notre Dame de Namur contextualization and with the

opportunity to develop relationships with teachers in a meaningful way beyond the confines of the classroom and assessments. She could see her herself and step into authentic engagement and spiritual leadership that continued her own growth in mission.

Diane, too, named immersion experiences as a space to connect with communities that held personal value for her and respond to a call to serve in a way that she had not been able to before. Connecting to this personal calling in the Notre Dame de Namur community space side by side with students and colleagues contributed to her sense of belonging. To witness the openness of students and educators to serve a community that was important to Diane struck a chord for her. She related,

> I was just serving alongside of [my colleagues] in such a messed up place. I look back to how incredibly hard we worked. The kids were like, "Yes, we're here and ready to serve." I just loved how socially aware and how much we cared about this community. My connection is my family is from there; I could relate to that. But the fact that people that don't have that sort of connection are there, and they're working, and they're giving up their time. Faculty and students are just lifting heavy weights while we're there; it was incredibly demonstrative, really demonstrated well the charism of the school.

Diane's first experience of that immersion led her to return annually for many years. In the process, Diane came to associate that direct service with what it looks like to be Catholic and put your belief on display, "to be the hands and feet of God." Diane was moved by this lived commitment to service and justice. At the same time, it complicated her previous views of what church could be: that the care for the community and the

work for justice could extend beyond the needs of one's own church and community

membership.

> The Catholic Church is where I saw, "This is where we fight for justice,
>
> period. So, this is where we're going to care about people that might not
>
> look like us. This is where we're going to serve communities that might
>
> not be serving us." And I think that was where I was like, "Huh. I think
>
> that's how church is supposed to be." And I liked that, because I wanted to
>
> be part of that, and I wasn't getting that at my church, but I was getting it
>
> there.

In this experience, Diane was opened to an expansive and integrated model of faith in

action where she as educator could participate in new ways and where students of all

faiths and campus activities could demonstrate their commitment to serve.

Distance and Disequilibrium in Belonging. Several participants provided

remembrance and reflection on experiences where their sense of belonging in the learning

community was best described in terms of distance or disequilibrium. These experiences

presented work related challenges and prompted questions and doubts of

personal/professional efficacy for participants as they endeavored to make meaning from

the situations. Raika described the early belonging she felt as a honeymoon period that

was later called into question by interactions with a mentor. She said,

> When I started to have my own voice in the department, I started to feel
>
> like I don't belong as much. I'm just going to be really candid: I did not
>
> agree with some of the things that the department chair did, and then I
>
> started to feel like I don't belong. A colleague helped me to feel like,

"Okay, it's not just me. I am a not crazy person." I feel like it's difficult

sometimes when the loud voices make you feel like you don't belong.

That's why I really feel like veteran people, when they're not mission-

aligned or if there is not an understanding of what we do, it becomes

problematic.

Raika raised a critical insight on the significance of mission alignment, especially in

those who serve as mentors or in roles of power and authority. If those relationships or

programmatic decisions are mishandled, there can be harmful impacts for the educator.

Yet, in this instance, Raika's sensemaking process attuned her to the positionality of

mission in the work and the uncovering of her own leadership voice from under the

shadow of one who had been her mentor.

Sunflower and Maria also described experiences where they encountered

disequilibrium with co-workers or collaborators. For each of them, the experience

involved high stakes situations where the behaviors and decisions of co-workers or

collaborators ran counter to the values espoused in the Notre Dame de Namur learning

community. Both Sunflower and Maria discerned that their dis-ease was significant

enough to raise concerns even at the potential risk of personal cost. In the face of those

concerns, they each considered leaving their roles because of the distance they felt from

belonging. Fortunately, resolution in favor of the mission eventually came about in the

long run, though Sunflower and Maria held onto these experiences with a keen awareness

of what it felt like to witness the mission at risk.

Theme Summary. For all participants, belonging within the Notre Dame de Namur

learning community was predominantly experienced and recounted positively. This

intrinsic connection to the community edified lay educators in terms of both identity and membership--who I am, who are we—and contributed to the motivation for inclusive practices (internally and externally). The internal and external practices served to build the Notre Dame de Namur community where people are known and valued. And yet, belonging ebbs and flows over time for the Notre Dame de Namur educator. This dissonance will also be considered later in the chapter for its implications for the efficacy of the participant, the relationship with the learning community, and mutual identities.

Women Companions: mentoring, partnership, and collegiality

The next phenomenologically significant theme discusses the companionship of women within the Notre Dame de Namur learning community. For the female educators in the study, this companionship was experienced as mentoring, partnership, and a common sense of collegiality among most educators. These lived experiences provided meaningful relationships that deepened the sense of belonging. More prominently, these relationships served a formative purpose for feminist Catholic identity and understanding of Notre Dame charism and mission as well as the intentional creation of program and community. Two key findings (or subthemes) emerged from the experiences of participants:

1. Mentorship by Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and veteran lay women imbued newer female educators with the qualities, values, and practices of Notre Dame de Namur charism and spirituality.

2. Experiences of partnership and collaboration enabled lay women educators to engage in shared leadership and friendship that promoted collegiality, complementarity, innovation, and mutual empowerment.

In this companionship, our participants found continuation, extension, and context for the feminist Catholic seeds planted prior to Notre Dame de Namur. These findings point to the ongoing narrative of women's companionship and mutual empowerment particular to the narratives of women's religious congregations and Notre Dame de Namur.

Mentoring. Most of the study participants provided description and storytelling of the mentoring relationships that were significant for their experience at Notre Dame de Namur. Commonly, these relationships were most pivotal in the early years of the educators' employment with the learning community. Several participants experienced mentorship by Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, relationships which fostered the understanding and animation of the Notre Dame de Namur charism and spirituality. This mentorship could be found in group contexts as well as one to one contexts. Sunflower and Rosemarie highlighted collaboration as a characteristic practice they learned from the sisters. Initially, this focus on communal process seemed inefficient, and overtime, they came to appreciate this approach. It was in these settings that Rosemarie and Sunflower developed familiarity with the sisters' personalities and perspectives. For example, they were surprised by the feminist approach and progressiveness of the sisters. Sunflower named it this way:

> The thing that struck me the most when I first started working with the
> sisters is how progressive they were, how liberal they were in women's
> rights, human rights, social justice. I was not expecting that. Once you get
> to know them really as a person, they just open up and you have
> conversations like you'd want to have with a more mature woman that you
> respect.

The esteem Sunflower held for the sisters she knew and worked with was evidence of the effect of their mentorship for the Notre Dame de Namur mission.

Adele and Annika, too, held affection and esteem for the sisters. One sister served as a spiritual mentor for each of them. Adele spoke of how Sister D would remind her of the goodness of God and focused on mutuality, caring, and kindness with her, other employees, and students. This was a model she appreciated. For both Adele and Annika, Sister D provided counsel on how to interpret scripture or offered Catholic perspectives for contemporary times. Annika recalled:

> I remember having a conversation with Sister D and saying to her, "I really, really like the Catholic that we are here, and I'm really feeling uncomfortable with the Catholic that we are down the street." And her response was so compassionate and grounded and just made me feel so affirmed in my choice to work at Notre Dame, saying, "Of course, you shouldn't blindly accept things. You should be questioning; that's what makes you a good Catholic," and I was like, "Oh, wow, okay, thank you."

For Annika, this exchange was a moment of resonance with her previous experience at the Jesuit university: "You don't have to accept 'what is' as the reality; you can push for what should be, you can bring other people along." This resonance in perspective also brought forward Annika's memories of her lay leader classmates who had friendships with women religious and clergy in college. While she had held a view that the Jesuits or the sisters were "exalted people, above us, apart from us," her friendship with Sister D showed her a new way to understand sisters:

> It was really, really nice for me to get to know and become friends with
> Sister D and understand who she is as a person, and that her vocation is
> who she is, but it doesn't prohibit her from being a human. It was really
> good to be able to feel like you could be friends with someone and then
> also ask them deep religious, spiritual questions.

For Annika and Adele, the close relationship with a Notre Dame de Namur sister served to connect them personally and spiritually to the mission with a broader and more accessible definition of what it means to be Catholic as seen in feminist circles.

Maria and Raika described the influence of several Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, especially in their early years with the learning community. For each there was the mentorship from one close relationship and the witness of the models provided by other sisters on site. Raika's experience with Sister A provided her with a warm and non-judgmental presence that she found that she needed:

> I could fall apart in her office and Sister A would be okay with that. I
> remember times just being like, "I can't do this," and she's like, "Okay." It
> was just love, just love. It was always about who you are and what you
> need. I think every new teacher needs that space.

Raika found Sister A's companionship to be affirming, caring, and supportive. This relational mentorship was different from the guidance she received from others on what to do as a Notre Dame de Namur educator. In other Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Raika witnessed how different personalities as well as their shared priorities would come through in their work. These observations gave her insight into how charism, storytelling, and institutional aims could shape the mission and ministry of the learning community.

Maria's mentorship by Sister U afforded the experience of both one to one guidance in the work and a modeling of a lived feminist Catholic perspective in spirituality and educational practice. Sister U, whom she described as a gifted teacher, would ask Maria questions and provide space for that exploration. With support and encouragement from Sister U, Maria discovered new opportunities and the cultivation of the feminist Catholic seeds (i.e., inclusive language, "our Mother God who loves us.") planted during her high school and college experiences. Maria found resonance in the creative, artistic, and embodied forms of prayer led by Sister U.

> So, here's this woman who's bringing in this very body affirming and body
> inclusive way of praying. And in it, through that, I could tap into a deeper
> spiritual experience, but she was in the process infusing that with Notre
> Dame charism. So, we're singing "How good you are, God." We're
> decorating with sunflowers. When we are praying for all people, it's also
> very intentionally inclusive and integrating traditional pieces from
> different religious and cultural experiences. And so, the way that she
> prayed with me and with our students was so deeply meaningful for me,
> but also taught me the Notre Dame charism in a very lived embodied way.

This experiential mentorship also extended into the preparation of programming for the faculty and staff. Maria noted the explicit focus on St. Julie and the storytelling of founding narratives:

> So, there was storytelling around St. Julie. We would get t-shirts with St.
> Julie quotes on them, and Sister U invited me to read the book about
> Julie's story, which I did. So, I think that there were institutional pieces

that reinforced, maybe not the entire Sisters of Notre Dame, but certainly the charism of St. Julie and her story with books shared with me and retreats and things like that. And I loved St. Julie's story and it was easy to love and to enter into that.

Maria credits Sister U with enabling her to build upon her experiences and skill building to hone those competencies and leverage her own giftedness: "Sister U taught me how to do that in an all-girls high school with a Notre Dame charism." This gave Maria the ability to look for and create that integration in her work for Notre Dame de Namur.

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur were not the only notable mentor figures for study participants. Lay women administrators and veteran faculty were noted by several participants for their invitations, modeling, and mentorship. Annika described how the request for her assistance on a curriculum project led her to a deeper study of St. Julie and Francoise's founding story. Sunflower highlighted the example of one administrator who in her leadership always centered students in decision-making, solution finding, and assessment; the care and concern for students and who they are becoming was observable. Sunflower also commented on another administrator who invited her to participate in Notre Dame Network activities:

And then she invited me into the [……], and it just spoke to me. I loved it. I feel like my understanding went from the point of, "I just love the people I'm working with, the students, what they're doing, who they are," to then understanding the Hallmarks—why this is so important, not just what it does, but why.

Similarly, Diane, Adele, Hieu and Annika lifted up the guidance they received from those who provided leadership for student curriculum and program; in their preparation for student experiences, they too were on the receiving end of direct and situational mentorship for Notre Dame identity and charism integration, something that gave them life.

Partnership and Collegiality. All participants clearly identified the significance of partnerships and collegiality in their work for the learning community. The meaningful partnerships named were those between two lay women educators. Experiences of partnership enabled laity women educators to engage in shared leadership and friendship that promoted creativity, complementarity, and mutual empowerment. In the Notre Dame de Namur context of women's leadership and charism, the gender-specific experience of partnership is notable, particularly in its contrast to the negative stereotypes of women in community and in demonstration of a feminist paradigm in which mutuality and horizontal power structures are prominent. Diane described three different female co-workers and the characteristics of the respective partnerships she shared with each one. The first one, a fellow classroom teacher, pushed Diane "to do better and to do more and to innovate and to not stay stagnant in [her] teaching." The second partner offered wisdom to center students' perspectives and have fun. And the partnership with the third colleague is what Diane described with terms of complementarity—that their respective strengths met or filled each other's gaps. Adele and Maria agreed with this last partnership characteristic in the multiple pairs with whom they have regularly worked. On this, Adele suggested that the rapport she built with each colleague resulted in a team-

teaching style that benefits students and the learning objectives and is something of which she is proud.

Annika spoke to her experience of partnership and its disruption or reimagination of power dynamics. In work with her administrator/supervisor, Annika brought forward perspectives for resource infrastructure that would necessitate a shift in mindset and pedagogy. She tied the rationale for the shift to the mission and St. Julie's mandate to "teach them what they need to know for life." The administrator was uncertain about the shift but came to set aside her own fixed mindset to embrace Annika's proposed changes for the sake of students and the mission. Annika described the dynamic:

> I think sometimes I'm too radical and so she would push back; and then sometimes she's too traditional and I push back. We've been plotting together to meet in the middle, and then we met and then we've moved forward together. And that was really exciting because I, for a long time, felt like it was me against the world. Once we came together, then I had an ally and we were both fighting like, "No, we have to change this." And she even said, "This is hard for me. I'm at the end of my career. I didn't want to have to learn this, but now I get it. I have to learn it because we have to be able to show our students that this is what they're going to be expected to know. So, if we haven't exposed them to it, then we've fallen down."

What began as a supervisor/employee relationship led to a revision and leveling of the vertical power dynamic between Annika and her supervisor. The supervisor's adherence

to the needs of mission, the operative humility around knowledge, and the openness to

change enabled them to move ahead as allies.

Raika named appreciation for a white female colleague who approached the racial

tensions following the murder of George Floyd with a similar humility and learning

posture. Raika described how she trusted this co-worker when she came forward to offer

allyship with support in whatever way Raika might need and in listening to whatever

Raika might need to call in. Raika said,

> People say they want to be an ally, but if it makes them uncomfortable
>
> then they don't want to be an ally. There are very few people who I can
>
> honestly say, "That doesn't sit right," and this person was one of them.
>
> Not everyone will ask, "What do I need to learn?"

The humility to acknowledge the ongoing work of learning is an important characteristic

of partnerships, especially those that lean into intersectional feminist tensions.

Maria spoke to the collection of partnership characteristics and lifted up the

intentionality inherent in the previous accounts of partnership. She described the parallels

she finds in her partnership with a particular colleague:

> The two of us many times have noted that Julie and Francoise—two
>
> women with complimentary gifts—journey together. They have a vision
>
> that they themselves are different, but their accompaniment is mutually
>
> supportive and accomplishes tremendous things. And so when I look back
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> on my time at Notre Dame, I see how that has played out for me when I've
>
> been mentored by another woman, but also where I have been that mentor
>
> for other people as well. And then if I had to be simple about it, I'd say it's

in our DNA at Notre Dame, women walking together and making that

journey in that sort of companionship is what we do. It sounds really

simple, right? Julie and Francoise did it and now we do it. Jesus said, send

them out two by two. There's a lot of skillset and intentionality that needs

to go into that, right? It didn't just accidentally happen for Julie and

Francoise either. There were years of praying together and knowing each

other, getting over maybe first impressions that were not right, growing to

appreciate skillset, recognizing that complimentary nature, that takes time.

So, it's more than just saying, "let's get two women together and have

them walk." It doesn't actually work like that. There is a lot of

intentionality that goes into it.

Following in the tradition of the Sisters, the commitment to partnership in Notre Dame de

Namur was a meaningful one that became the nexus of charism and identity creation in a

way that centers women's experience.

Collegiality and Collaboration. Most participants spoke to the collegiality and

collaboration among faculty and staff as a dynamic within the adult membership of the

learning community. Collegiality and collaboration were an operative value and

approach, respectively, to relationships among co-workers that built community and

fostered the integration of mission. Hieu defined collegiality as a willingness to help and

meet needs for co-workers. She further defined it as an authentic expression that is not

superficial and is more akin to an extended family. Adele felt it was easy to collaborate

with others and that the willingness to help or support was easily offered by co-workers.

She gave the example of a lesson she was slated to lead where she felt unprepared for the

possible emotional needs of students. She sought the help of more skilled colleagues who readily agreed to step in as collaborators.

Several participants noted the relevance of collaboration for deepening that notion of complementarity—combining strengths together to meet the needs of the moment—to a further understanding connected to participant voice, perspective, and representation. Annika, for example, pointed to a practice of seeking perspective from colleagues for the determination of needs and the sourcing of solutions. "We're not all bringing the same skillset to the table, and so if we can hone in on what strengths people are bringing, then we can accomplish far more together than we could independently." She reflected that such an approach was beneficial in order to widen her own limited knowledge while at the same time building buy in and value for colleagues in the process. In her department of one, Annika said,

> I had to be acutely aware of not just bringing my voice to the table
> because that wouldn't have been representative of everybody else's needs.
> I knew how to complete the task. What I wanted to do was to try to ensure
> that I was going to do them in a way that was going to serve the most
> people the most effectively. But I'm only one brain. So, I've got to get
> other people's ideas in the mix.

Annika's impetus toward representation and communal concern gave her supervisor some initial concern that she needed more direction. As their relationship grew into allyship, this concern was ameliorated; the results were processes and plans that involved stakeholders more broadly.

Annika also named a unique perspective on the nature of collegiality. Observing that co-workers will engage in criticism or grumbling at times, especially when change is taking place, Annika was aware of her own frustration which then slowed progress or even appeared unprofessional. Then, she wondered about the role for complaints within a collegial space:

> In order to have a compassionate and collegial community, you have to have a community that can complain and whine and cry. Because you have to have people who can be extremely honest and vulnerable in order for those other two things to happen. I can't support you as a colleague unless I know that you're suffering with this change. Knowing that you are struggling means that I can help. Suffering in silence, I think, probably would lead to more people leaving, actually exiting. Because I think they wouldn't feel like they could be honest about the experience they were having or their real or perceived need. Because a lot of the times people just need someone to be there with them. They can do it all, but they just need someone to say, "Yes, you're on the right track. Yes." They just need the affirmation. But I don't think we could have the first two without the last. We just couldn't. And then we wouldn't be a community that could embrace change. We would have to be a stagnant community because I think we'd have a huge turnover. It would be really hard to get traction.

The visibility or audibility of complaints may be a sign of the trust and affinity the educators have for the learning community, trust enough to voice their concerns or gripes. Notably, this raised questions about the organization's own treatment of

complaints and whether validation through interpersonal affirmation translates into change and recognition within the organization itself. It may also indicate outward demonstration of sensemaking or the response to sense giving.

Theme Summary. Mentorship and partnerships emerge as two of the most significant experiences that deepen the mission commitment of Notre Dame de Namur educators, These relationships became a way in which to live into mission allyship with one another. Not only were these suggestive of sensemaking and sensegiving, but they cultivated an empowerment that helped participants realize their own ability to make contribution.

Organizational Experience at Notre Dame de Namur

The hermeneutic phenomenological approach focuses now on the life experience that illuminates the organizational experience. Here, I draw forward themes from the individual experiences of study participants to their work and participation in the Notre Dame de Namur learning community. I also posed questions of participants for the organizational identity and future of Notre Dame de Namur. From these open-ended prompts, participants revealed perspectives for "who we are we and who are we becoming." Three major themes speak to the importance of these organizational experiences for Notre Dame de Namur.

Mission with Intention: Feminist Catholic design and integration

This theme discusses the phenomenological significance of intentionality for mission from the lived experiences of the participating female educators in the study. This intentionality evidenced the commitment to pull forward earlier themes of life experience for Notre Dame de Namur educators in the organizational domains where they have influence and power, whether that is work with students or adults. These experiences of

feminist Catholic design and integration were a source of significant meaning for Notre Dame de Namur educators. Three key findings (or subthemes) were derived from the experiences of participants:

1. Female lay educators prioritized caring relationships and personalization with students and faculty as a foundation for the educational endeavor.

2. Women's empowerment and leadership emerges from a feminist Catholic approach throughout the learning community's programs and processes.

3. Strategic and schoolwide initiatives serve to leverage feminist Catholic commitments into definition of the learning community and provide guideposts for that ongoing work.

These findings showcase the multivalent, multilayered enactment of identity within the learning community. In behaviors and interpersonal practices to community wide vision and initiatives, the intentional integration across all of these levels promotes a full-fledged authenticity of that feminist Catholic identity. And, it can also engender an awareness of and attentiveness to when that same identity is not realized in whole.

Relationships and Personalization. Most participants identified the primacy of relationships in the approaches, strategies, and behaviors they undertook in their work. Diane, for example, described how she is thinking about the whole student who arrives in her classroom with a desire to ensure that their experience feeds their growth and provides support emotionally and spiritually. She believes the learning experienced by a student is a result of the relationship built between student and teacher. With that in mind, Diane works to put students at ease, to address the hardships of negative learning

experiences, and alleviate fears about the subject area. She includes humor, showcases her own mistakes, and celebrates birthdays in class. Diane explained,

> This is a space where I need you to feel like, "I'm so well taken care of here. Let's learn some […]," versus, "I'm afraid. I'm already afraid. I don't like this vibe. I don't like this." Without saying holistic learning communities, that is a mark of who I am as a person and, in all of these things, I hope to be. So, whether I serve on one committee or another or with the focus group, I think either way I want to make sure that we're taking care of our whole kids and their wholeness, making sure they are well and not being broken.

Diane's commitment to center students starts with that classroom context and broadens out in her work with co-curricular and leadership spaces. In this way, she keeps mission at the heart of her design and decision making.

This holistic approach to care and learning for students is also part of Adele's work as well. Adele works one on one with students to ensure they learn critical skills that will enable their knowledge acquisition—whether under direct guidance from a faculty member or with their own agency. She engages students with a personalized approach to ensure that she breaks down and models the skills and that they can demonstrate it for her. Adele commented on the gratification of seeing students' curiosity piqued by their growing efficacy with the skills and how she will later work with some students on specialized projects that further the learning community's signature programs. Adele also spoke to her contribution to and participation in the learning

community's programs that promote care and respect for different beliefs and learning needs.

Rosemarie, Maria, and Raika held positions where they were charged with supervision and coaching of faculty and staff. All three operated from the principles of care and personalization in their work with their colleagues, especially in one on one contexts. Rosemarie saw her role as the person who facilitated or provided resources or solutions to make a faculty member's ideas a reality. "I always took the approach of people bring an idea to the table and let's see how we can make it work." She would give advice and ask questions to support planning or approach stumbling blocks that might get in the way.

Maria, aware of what her own mentors provided for her, saw her role as a privilege which called her "to do right by that person in terms of seeing their giftedness and their strengths instead of harping on their areas of growth or why their gifts don't fit your gifts. So, you have to do right by that person by giving space to know that person for who they are and then moving forward all parts of who they are." Maria saw her mentoring successes when she began with the relationship focus in order to build trust and confidence. This served as a foundation for both encouragement and specific feedback on strengths and needs for improvement, "all of that within the context of the relationship, professional and personal." This approach of care enabled the employee to see the coaching in a constructive rather than critical way.

Serving as a coach for faculty members for Raika was based in a view of authenticity and companionship that provided the faculty member with compassion and personalized attention. Raika provided a listening ear, response to questions, solution

finding, side by side collaboration, shared stories of her own learning and failures, and

offers to help or co-teach. In those various scenarios and with those differentiated

strategies, Raika aimed to be a model:

> It's really just showing up as myself, whether I know the answers or not,
>
> but also not being afraid to say, "Yeah, you could do better." And always
>
> putting students in the center, so when I talk to you, "This is not about
>
> your ego, this is not about my ego, it's about what's best for students." I
>
> don't think any of my teachers ever feel like it was my ego that's driving, I
>
> think most of them know that it's always what's going on with students.

Raika's experience drives home the relationship that educators have to the lived

experiences of students; she wants teachers to have that experience of care and

personalization for learning and growth, so that students can experience it in turn.

Women's empowerment and leadership. All participants recognized the essential

priority for women's empowerment and leadership in their work with students and the

learning community; they understood this effort with programs and processes as their

contribution to the Notre Dame de Namur mission. At the same time, some participants

had not previously considered the direct connection between that work and feminist

Catholic understandings until the interview conversations, instead viewing it not

necessarily feminist but rather as "that's what we do at Notre Dame de Namur."

Several participants highlighted curricular efforts to center women's story,

leadership, skill building, and community culture. Adele, for example, discussed the

representation of women in available source material for curriculum and how processes

had been initiated to look at the availability of sources representing diverse women, to

change expectations to include "non-traditional" media sources where contemporary women's stories were available, and to make new decisions about required reading selections for courses. Adele highlighted the existing disparities within the access to women's centered sources and Notre Dame de Namur's effort to redress that for student learning. Annika, Hieu, and Diane expressed a mindfulness to this intention in STEM related disciplines so as to bolster the encouragement of and confidence for students to engage these traditionally male dominant subject areas. Annika described empathy building and solutions finding pedagogy that she implemented with students to disrupt fixed mindset learning habits. Further, Annika, Rosemarie, Raika, Maria, and others worked on grade level programs to integrate academic disciplines, connect to Notre Dame narratives, utilize critical thinking and Catholic social teachings, and build fluency and skill toward school learning expectations for graduates. Hieu, Sunflower, and Diane also integrated spirituality, service, and leadership objectives into their implementation and design of curricular and co-curricular student experiences. Hieu, for example, developed a community service-learning project that included a community benefactor who spoke to students on behalf of the neighbors whose needs were being met by students. And, Diane prepared students to serve so as to be able to build relationship with those they would serve, to "lend a hand" instead of "be a savior," and situate their efforts with humility and love.

Strategic and schoolwide intentions. These efforts to center feminist Catholic priorities in behaviors, practices, curriculum, and program as showcased in the previous two sections are connected to larger strategic and schoolwide efforts to do the same for more than twenty years. Rosemarie observed that the early work of creating infrastructure

in the learning community leveraged intentions to develop mission aligned programs that would serve students from all backgrounds, work that was formative for those involved. Though organic, that laid foundation for more recent work strategic and school wide initiatives that deeply root feminist Catholic intentions. Rosemarie commented,

> I think the work that we did around this academic and co-curricular initiative, being part of that and helping to push it in the curriculum and to make those kinds of integrated connections, I think that's a highlight that made us distinctive and defined how we see our mission and we tied it to mission. But I think aligned with that, I think that the work that the sisters did around the hallmarks and their sense of mission. Now it was a long process because it started in the late 1990s, early 2000. But that work about defining who they were, was really important. We didn't have that before.

Rosemarie sees the work of the school to build programs for mission as closely connected to the efforts of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur to understand their own educational ministries.

More contemporaneously, participants recognized the powerful role that strategic and school wide initiatives could and did play in forwarding the intentional integration of mission. Annika, for example, spoke of the hallmarks and strategic plans as guides for her work individually and with other colleagues:

> I quite literally carried around a little strategic plan booklet because to me that was always a really helpful signpost—this is where we're headed. And so it was always a really quick litmus for me, kind of the, "teach them

what they need to know for life." Where are we headed? Why are we

doing this? Just as a tangible reminder to myself. Let's not continue to do

things that we know are not serving us—leading us in the direction we

want to be going, or are we reinforcing behaviors we don't want to

reinforce. So that constant questioning that I just naturally tend to is

something I do that I think I bring to most of my roles and assignments,

with the goal of help helping us to get where we're going.

That these signposts and litmus tests served to support planning, decision making, and

even inspire the direction ahead with possibilities was an asset. Annika further explained

that these documents and the processes used to create them engaged a collective and

collegial effort and prompt agency for growth and new ideas. This space for strategic and

school wide initiatives will be explored further in a later theme.

Theme Summary. The experience of meaningful relationships at Notre Dame de

Namur are powerful for their ability to seep into one's intentionality around what kind of

experience to create for the learning community and the students especially. Feminist

Catholic design becomes integral to the perpetuation of Notre Dame de Namur's way of

life for all constituents.

Female Lay Educators: Empowered for Mission

For these long time Notre Dame de Namur lay educators, their life experiences

bring to light a phenomenologically significant focus on empowerment for mission.

These seasoned educators are no longer the new arrivals, settling into Notre Dame de

Namur life. Rather, these lay educators now occupy other roles—those of leader, legacy

keeper, mission bearer, prophet and visionary, among others—that forward Notre Dame

de Namur identity and mission for the future in relationship with connection to the past

and present and for constituents of multiple generations. Participants spoke to various characteristics of this empowerment: purpose and motivation; responsibility, agency, and intentionality; companionship; awareness and self-reflection; professional tensions; affirmation. Some of these characteristics were named in dialogue with a video clip from Sr. Teresita Weind, SNDdeN, where she spoke of being "a mission" for all those in the Notre Dame Network.

Three key findings (or subthemes) emerged from the experiences of participants:

1. Notre Dame de Namur lay women educators feel a sense of purpose and responsibility that are expressed through intentionality, initiative, and professional agency.

2. Notre Dame de Namur lay women educators embody a spirit of humility, reverence, and love in their practices of learning, self-reflection and discernment.

3. Educators experience feelings of personal/professional dissonance as well as affirmation in their ongoing participation with the Notre Dame de Namur learning community.

These findings are presented and expanded upon in the following section.

Purpose and Responsibility. Participants' experiences gave evidence to the sense of purpose and responsibility they felt for their work as Notre Dame de Namur educators. Adele and Maria named that purpose explicitly. Adele said, "There is a purpose for me being here, and because of what I do or what I say, it might change somebody." Maria spoke of recognizing that purpose and meaning in the mission, hallmarks, and her relationships, and how those sustain her and her sense of self:

A sense of purpose, a sense of meaning to anchor into that is aligned with

who I am. And as a woman, it takes tremendous energy and courage to

navigate some of the spaces that we do as professionals, as individuals.

When I think of myself as a feminist, a woman educator within the context

of [previous experiences as the only woman or person in the room who

looks like me], there is a type of encouragement and care that comes from

the relationships in the community that is around me. I'm in the room with

many, many other people whose hearts are just like mine, and whose eyes

are looking in the same direction as mine, and whose hands are busy with

the same tasks as mine. So, it is so important for me to be in a working

community that offers that meaning, and purpose, and support.

Several participants similarly named their motivation in terms of the relationships and

impact they have. Diane described that she is motivated by relationships, which she finds

appropriate for anything pertaining to faith: "Because when you think about Jesus and

when you think about God, it's about the relationship. It's not about, 'Did you do this?

Did you do that?' But it's about having that relationship and that gets so many different

things in order once that is established." Sunflower sees that foundational and loving

relationship with students as key to her motivation. She said, "I just truly enjoy watching

these girls grow in confidence and compassion. The fact that we provide a place where

these girls can be silly, and don't have to grow up so fast…I love that. And that's why I'm

there." Annika and Raika described the work with students and colleagues as contributing

to the common good and making the world better. Annika said, "What motivates me is

that I am helping to create a better present and future for all the women in my life." Raika

named it this way, "The world is falling apart, we have a pandemic, injustice is everywhere, racial crisis, but I know that my daily actions make a difference and I'm living what I need to do in order to make the world a better place." This confidence of purpose is deeply ingrained for participants.

Earlier in this chapter, findings demonstrated the intentionality behind behaviors and practices, educational programs, and school wide/strategic initiatives. The efficacy of these organizational examples is due to the sense of purpose and the sense of responsibility that prompted these same educators to thoughtful intentionality, initiative, and agency. The sense of responsibility witnessed among the participants is significant. Rosemarie and Maria, two administrators with long tenures in the learning community, identified the perceived responsibility to serve as caretakers, protectors, and stewards of Notre Dame Catholic identity and mission. Rosemarie described how she was not provided with much orientation or documentation as to "who we are" in Notre Dame when she arrived.

> I think it's kind of a mighty weight on your shoulders when you think about it that way. I do have to say that I certainly didn't come to Notre Dame with that thinking. But I think that the work evolved in that sense of protecting what we had and who we are and better defining it and explaining it became a part of me understanding it.

In the more than twenty-five years she had been with Notre Dame de Namur, Rosemarie recognized the import of her work to provide that continuity and stewardship. Maria felt similarly:

> Now I'm at this place [in my career], that's looking more at all of it, not
> just for myself, but everyone who's in it. And I feel like a caretaker, like a
> steward, like someone who is tending this piece that I'm not always as
> personally involved in, in terms of exploring the terrain, but who is like
> the park ranger that is saying, "This is protected forest land, and I will
> enforce that protection of it."

Alongside this commitment to caretaking and protection, there was a dynamic among participants that revealed a personal drive to push forward with growth and change. Raika recognized the impact of the Notre Dame experience led to her own growth as an educator and leader:

> It makes me do things I don't want to do. It just puts me in situations
> where I'm like, "I don't want to be the person to do this or I don't think I
> have enough courage, or I don't think I have the skillset or whatever," but
> it makes me push myself to do things that are uncomfortable and to take
> the next step even if it's hard. But it also makes me keep wanting to learn.
> My students are so smart and they need things and that's important.

For Raika, the individual drive for change makes her determined to lead change with school-wide initiatives. She related that sometimes she comes up against people who are not happy with that change, but she believed this resistance made her stronger. Her additional insight:

> It makes me also realize that our small community can actually make these
> changes whereas larger districts can't, so pave the way, do the change.

> And I have amazing companions along the journey because it's a very
> particular type of work.

Maria spoke to the impact of being mission in terms of responsibility and resolve this way:

> I am a mission, it feels good. And it feels affirming and it feels right,
> because it does have a meaning and a purpose that resonate with me and
> propels me forward. So, that part's good. And then, just like my
> experience when that little tiny voice that told me I wasn't doing what I
> was supposed to be doing, and I was good with it. And then a couple
> seconds later, that moment of panic sets in? So, if I can sit in that moment
> of grace and consolation, I can sit there, and then, moments later think,
> "That's a really big responsibility, Sister Teresita, to be Notre Dame, and
> in all things, that's a lot, that's a very big responsibility. And gosh, I hope I
> live up to that." But that little voice, too, is always followed by a voice of
> resolve and vision and a sense of, "I'm going to start right here and I'm
> going to keep at it, and it's going to make sense along the way."

Like Maria and Rosemarie, the commentary on responsibility for mission also raised questions and reflections for participants on whether they were doing enough or good enough. Annika summed up those sentiments:

> Sometimes it feels, and this is me personally, but it feels hard. I feel like
> maybe I'm not doing enough. I feel pushed by our community to be doing
> more. Sometimes maybe that's a negative. Right? Everyone around me

> seems to be doing amazing things, maybe I'm not doing enough. But I
>
> think that's just me.

Annika was not the only one to name this self-judgment on not doing or being good enough. This will be discussed further in another section.

   Learning and Reflection. Participants throughout the interview process named a consistent practice of learning and reflection that was grounded in a relationship with Notre Dame de Namur mission, hallmarks and feminist Catholic perspectives. These interpretative acts revealed a humility and openness to their engagement as Notre Dame de Namur lay educators that is also congruent with sensemaking, sense giving, and enactment. As we heard from Raika, learning beyond your comfort zone and space of familiarity is a common experience for participants. Hieu and Adele echoed that learning was part of their time at Notre Dame de Namur, particularly in the more recent time periods of the pandemic and focus on equity and inclusion. Rosemarie took the longer view and commented on her increased awareness of herself, her profession, and the world because of her time as a Notre Dame de Namur educator:

> I always saw myself as a feminist and a strong believer in women's rights.
>
> It's just who I am. I think creating those opportunities, just being aware of
>
> myself and my own sense of learning, continuing to learn and to grow, I
>
> think that's critical for anyone who's involved in a learning community. I
>
> hope I've modeled that in terms of just being open to learning new things
>
> and ideas.

This openness to her own learning is forwarded in her efforts to center learning and professional development for colleagues that articulate the community's values.

Diane highlighted the important dynamic of becoming, or co-creation, as central to her Notre Dame de Namur experience.

> You're part of creating it, but you're becoming as well. The humility part of it that still resonates is I haven't arrived. I never want to be a non-teachable teacher or an unteachable teacher; I still have things to learn. I'm still part of this mission for myself; I'm still growing. There are still things that I need to learn, so things that Notre Dame will continue to teach me as I'm also part of the process of teaching others and helping others. And so I think that I love it. I love it because it makes me feel like, "Yeah, I'm part of this mission. I'm part of this bigger picture."

Her understanding of her own learning in the midst of the Notre Dame de Namur learning community is not only significant for her role and work, but for the students she serves and for the longer arc of Notre Dame de Namur.

Reflection was an important practice for participants in the study. Annika, for example, perceived a value in stopping, pausing, and reflecting. Raika described reflection on "why you're doing what you're doing" as a "prayerful moment." Diane found that reflection on how she came to Notre Dame led her to use that experience of discernment as a litmus test for herself over the years.

> Having that as a litmus test has served me well in other things. Having the time to reflect on coming into Notre Dame has helped me in terms of my decision-making in so many different ways, because it helps me to challenge, "Well, why am I doing this? Am I doing this because it is something I want to do? Is it something that I feel like I'm going to grow

from?" Or if I'm not doing something, if I'm saying no to something, is it

because I'm doubting myself or is it because it's just not the right path for

me. And so having this time of reflection has been really good in terms of

reevaluating what I'm doing and why I'm doing what I'm doing. So it's

been helpful for me in that way, beneficial.

In addition to serving the "why I do what I do" approach, reflection also served

the Notre Dame de Namur lay educator to see a larger purpose for herself in moments of

struggle and within the learning community's history and legacy. Annika described it this

way:

I was struck by the interconnectedness of everything, seen through a lens

that I hadn't seen it through before. You always hear people say everything

you've done before prepares you for what you'll do next. But I hadn't

necessarily been able to have the meta view to recognize the connections

in my own experience. I had felt like, "Oh, well, those were people who

have an anomaly experience. I'm not fortunate enough to have that

experience." So it's interesting to feel there is a reason that I'm supposed to

be where I'm at in this moment, which was both a little disconcerting

because I hadn't noticed it, but also comforting and stabilizing. This is the

right place. It was nice to have that larger perspective, grounding

foundation to stand on when I'm having those conversations with myself--

that maybe it wasn't accidental first of all and that there is the larger

purpose that can supersede a bad day or a piece of a project you don't like.

So I think it helps weigh out the pros and cons in times like that.

The experience of reflection on oneself and the work within the learning community

provided valuable space for the determination of alignment and dissonance for the

educator, featured in the next finding.

  Dissonance and Affirmation. The relationship between the lay female educator

and the Notre Dame de Namur learning community is like any human relationship with

its ups and downs. Given the significant length of that relationship between educator and

organization, the witness provided by participants to the experiences of dissonance and

affirmation reveals that reflects both the personal and the professional nature of the

educator's engagement.

  The tensions experienced by participants connect to several thematic areas

addressed in this chapter. For most of the participants, the dissonance was experienced by

these educators as a challenge to the realization of Notre Dame mission and hallmarks for

them individually or for the learning community in the collective. In the design of

curriculum and program, experiences of dissonance were provided by several

participants. For example, Sunflower shared the experience of taking over leadership of a

beloved student competition that had been tradition for many years. Though she took a

"This is how it's done; I'm not going to change anything" approach in the first year,

Sunflower was shocked by the detrimental effects on the student body and families

because of the competition. The discord and poor sportsmanship that resulted from her

announcing an unexpected winner left her thinking, "This is not who we are. This is not

what Notre Dame stands for." This first reflection on the dissonance led her to approach

administrators with a proposal to shift the approach in a direction that would lift up

student leadership, diversify winning, and build up community rather than tear it down.

In the process, she centered the experience on Hallmarks aligned values and reprioritized what was important in the tradition. Sunflower found that students were easy to bring along with the revised vision; it was faculty who offered the most resistance. She took a personalized tact to talk one on one with colleagues who were skeptical. In a few years, the dissonance had turned into greater alignment. After making these changes, Sunflower shared this perspective:

> The students who have been in leadership a while, by senior year, they just roll it off—about how it's building our community. I said, "You can learn math anywhere. You're going to find great teachers a lot of different places. But we're a family. We're a community here. We have a mission. We have something so much greater that you get to be part of. That's why we do this. Not to see who's the best, but to have fun with each other, to relax with each other, to become fearless and not be afraid to be silly. It's getting as many people involved in whatever way they can and making sure you recognize their contribution."

Sunflower's experience highlights the confluence of community and women's leadership and how even traditions may be sources of challenge and require evaluation from a feminist Catholic framework.

Several others lifted up similar moments of dissonance that challenged their images of who Notre Dame de Namur is and how that is enacted. Raika and Maria described a few separate encounters where their voices were diminished, where their leadership contributions were devalued when working with women colleagues. As a result, these two women were unsettled and felt a distance from the belonging and

affirmation they had previously known. In each of these circumstances, Raika and Maria took measures to protect their own hearts, confront the tensions with those involved, and discern next steps. Both spoke of the internal wrestling around their own self-worth and roles as well as what this dissonance meant for the learning community. Raika suggested that the undercurrents of the patriarchy remain at play, even in a Notre Dame de Namur space.

> We think, "Oh well, we're all women so then it should be good." No, that's bullshit. That shouldn't be the way it is, so I think some of it is the internal work around that because the patriarchy is so deeply ingrained like racism. But we think because we're at an all-girls environment, that, "Oh, well, it doesn't happen here." It doesn't happen as much or overtly, but it still happens.

Maria engaged in reflection to make meaning out of those difficult experiences. In the second interview she offered this:

> We talked about disillusionment along with that belonging. After further thought, I really thought in our work, there are values that we espouse institutionally and individually. And for many of us at Notre Dame, we choose this work because there's tremendous alignment between the two, those values that we espouse institutionally and individually. And when I look back on the places of disruption, shall we say, it is when those espoused values do not match the actions and the decisions. This happened in my experience of others. And as I think about it, it happened in other people's experience of me too. So, the insight then is that we all need to

> continually discern and help one another to always be closer in alignment
>
> with those espoused values. I appreciate that I was able to come to that
>
> insight. It was a really helpful way for me to frame some tough
>
> experiences within the context of why it matters, what made it so hard, but
>
> also why is there still hope.

In these moments of tension, participants showcase that these are not simply about the individual in a workplace. There is a greater meaning for the sense of self and the sense of community and the relationship they share. And, because of the beliefs held by the individual and the community, there is a greater impact when all is not well.

Despite the experiences of dissonance, participants strongly articulated their experiences of affirmation, pride, and further calling to leadership within the learning community. In response to Sr. Teresita's comment that, "We are a mission," participants responded favorably to that proposal. Some hadn't considered before that they were the source of mission today. Sunflower said, "I've never thought of myself as the mission. I've always thought of myself as just being so lucky to be part of this mission. I hope I have modeled that for the students."

Annika felt lucky to work with others in community on this shared goal. Annika felt invited into membership on this special work. She described it this way:

> Every time I am reminded of who the Sisters are and what their mission is
>
> and what they value and what they honor and what they cherish, it reminds
>
> me again of how lucky I am to work in an environment that holds those
>
> values, that honors those values, that is connected to those values. That

gets to serve alongside them because it's not the same old Catholic. It's not

the same message that I hear all the time.

Others agreed with the centrality of values, community relationships, and integrity. Adele

summed it up:

"I agree with what the school is doing and the mission statement and why

they're actually doing it. And the entire school--working atmosphere, the

environment--make me want to continue working here. And the support

from the colleagues and the leaders, just make me feel good, make me feel

good that I am helping. And the school treats me well and very fairly. And

the most important thing is I just feel right working here, what the school

is doing, what they teach the students or curriculum. I just feel we are

doing right."

And, Diane and Hieu were drawn to Sr. Teresita's suggestion that we are human beings,

not human doings. Hieu reflects on mission being as who we are with affirmation from

God:

God asks us to carry on our mission just with our being, the who we are.

To me, I feel if I'm called to be, I am a mission, meaning right now,

whatever I'm doing right now, the present moment, God asked me to do

my task. I do it with God. I do with the goodness, with the intention. I am

on a mission all the time, so I feel so affirmed. I feel like, "Wow. That's all

we need to do is just to teach who we are." And hopefully, the who we

are... Of course, I need to grow to be able to see, to let the students see

Jesus in me as well as I see Jesus in them. And I see that's really the

> ultimate mission, don't we? I mean, to me, I feel, "Wow. That is rejoice
>
> and be glad." I don't have to be on mission. I am a mission at Notre Dame
>
> School.

Theme Summary. The findings of this organizational theme point significantly to the ownership of the charism and identity. Aligned with feminist organizational aims, the empowerment, initiative, and effect of formation for these lay women educators is akin to goals expressed by Ferree and Martin, the result of which is an individual authenticity and intrinsic motivation to encourage Notre Dame de Namur to iterate, grow and evolve.

Bigger Than Us: The Work of Notre Dame de Namur Identity

The final theme discusses the phenomenological prominence of the collective identity work of a feminist Catholic Notre Dame de Namur based upon the lived experience and reflections of the participating female educators in the study. For most participants, consideration of their work from a feminist Catholic perspective was new. Only a few had previously attributed this nomenclature to the Notre Dame de Namur experience. That said, the dialogue and reflection between participant and researcher revealed several thematic findings of meaning and significance.

1. Feminist Catholic understandings among participants center women's experience and feminist practices, look to the models provided by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, and seek to deepen intersectional commitments for inclusion and equity.

2. The identity dynamics in the learning community reflect an organizational growth mindset and respond to the signs of the times with aspirational alignment to feminist Catholic perspectives.

3. Female lay educators in the Notre Dame de Namur learning community recognize their participation, leadership and the community's future calling in the longer narrative arc of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur.

These findings provide the concluding and essential thematic findings that will enable the demonstration and discussion of the study's research questions.

Feminist Catholic Understandings. Prior to the interviews, all participants provided the researcher with a personal definition of *feminist*. This methodological design feature served two purposes. This definition offered me a window in the pre-knowledge of feminism participants possessed, and second, it would provide a springboard to richer discussion of feminist Catholic understandings and shared meaning making. This was especially important since feminist and feminism were not operative terms used within the Notre Dame de Namur learning community to self-identify in community messaging and lexicon. These participant definitions are provided here:

- Feminists are people who believe and advocate equality between men and women (Adele).

- A person who sees the value and capacity of women and works to provide opportunities to women that may or may not currently exist (Annika).

- A feminist is a person that considers and advocates for the rights of all women (Diane).

- A feminist is a person who advocates for and fights for women's rights and interests (Hieu).

- Feminism is a paradigm and praxis oriented toward empowerment and against
  social norms and structures that promote oppression. It is often, although not
  exclusively, women centric (Maria).

- Centering female voice and energy and prioritizing it (Raika).

- A feminist is one who supports the equal position of women in society, and its
  institutions. Women have the same rights as men. Women can and should have
  access to positions of leadership in society (Rosemarie).

- Women should have equal rights and opportunities as men (Sunflower).

Within these definitions and the discussion that followed, there was an observable
connection between the work with students in the learning community. This was initially
and most commonly discussed in terms of centering women's voice and experience,
relational approaches, women's leadership, confrontation of stereotypes, and
empowerment. Several participants had not previously considered the Notre Dame de
Namur experience with that expressly feminist lens previously.

Some participants lifted up important feminist characteristics for this discussion.
Annika questioned how issues of access, opportunity, and power could be valuable topics
for students, especially considering the disparity between workplaces and the Notre
Dame de Namur experience. She further imagined what a student's transformative impact
could look like if she was encouraged to leverage her capacity and skill for divergent,
solutions-based thinking as described here:

> I'd like to be able to take a student who maybe hasn't found her space or
> place in the world, and help her comprehend how using a thought process
> that's based in the work world of men, how she can use that to be a

transformative human. And that here are the industries that she could go

disrupt quite literally, because she's able to approach things differently

from her perspective as a woman and be really smart doing it. That to me

feels more impactful. And so I've started to try to look for spaces and

places where we can create opportunities like that.

Diane described how the work for all women is "about the ninety-nine and the one." In

this scriptural reference, she draws parallels to the effort to engage all students in learning

while also being attentive to the specific realities of students who may face greater

challenges or disadvantage.

I am also taking into consideration that not every student has the same access

to the things that they might need in order to be successful. Not everyone has

wifi, not everyone has a quiet place to study, not everyone has the time to

dedicate to this because they're also working a job or two jobs, or they're

taking care of their siblings or they're doing these….And so when I'm

considering all of the students and advocating for all students, I'm including

those "ones" that need the extra support in order to meet this level."

For Diane, access and support is accompanied by the necessary advocacy for needs and

the procurement of resources. And, when the glass ceiling breakthrough happens, Diane

is expecting that "we all need to be able to go," not just the few.

This connection to liberation is a concept that both Maria and Raika highlight as

well. Maria saw feminism as paradigm and praxis—how you think about the world and

what actions you'll take—that has a social justice orientation. This comprehensive

approach recognizes the flexibility of feminist aims according to Maria:

> In terms of fundamentally against structures that oppress, I think that's
>
> why we see so many feminists that are active in other spaces as well,
>
> whether that was really early on in the suffrage movement, having overlap
>
> with abolitionist movement or even the work that we do now.

This positions feminism for identity intersections and social complexities. Raika parallels

this thinking in offering parallel to the marginalization and oppression of Black,

indigenous, people of color: "Women are exploited very minute of the day, so I think its

so deeply embedded that we don't even realize that it's happening. The patriarchy is so

deeply ingrained like racism." Raika suggested that there is a challenge between naming

feminism and actually living it well. If both were operative, then women would be valued

in every space and in community spaces and relationships.

These understandings of feminism provide meaningful coincidence with the

conceptualization of feminist Catholic. All participants spoke to the recognition of the

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur as the embodiment and example of what it means to be

feminist Catholic. In the storytelling of St. Julie Billiart and Francoise Blin de Bourdon,

the early decades and expansion of the Sisters globally, and in the lived experience with

contemporary sisters, these lay educators witnessed a vision of the Catholic church that

was divergent from the perceptions. Annika described this divergence:

> In terms of Notre Dame, in some ways it feels like a parallel universe. It's
>
> like, okay, here's the church. Okay, here's where we're doing the work. I
>
> think for me, there's the philosophy of the church, the values of the church
>
> and maybe in the Catholic church of the institution is more like the

academic side of the house. Then you have Notre Dame and that's the

practical. That's where the application is being realized.

Similarly, Diane identified the important voice of the sisters for the church.

Catholicism has beliefs and I know that there's Catholic social justice

teaching, but in my purview, where I see so much of it being done in

action is when I think about the Sisters of Notre Dame and the ones that

I've met, I've been able to hear their stories and what they're doing. And,

that is amazing to me. If there was a voice for Catholic church, that is a

beautiful voice to me.

Maria illuminates the mixed reality of that relationship between feminist and Catholic

thought.

At times, it coexists quite naturally. And at times, there is a tension and

what feels like a little bit of an opposition in the space where we hold both

together. So the times where it co-exist, in my humble opinion, are the

times when there's not any sort of sense of fear. Fear just drives us into

these really oppositional spaces and spaces of hesitation. And for both the

experience of women and the experience of God, you wouldn't want either

one of those things getting in the way. So when we can be quite confident

and anchored in the experience of being a woman and in the experience of

being a person of faith, they coexist quite nicely. When, however, there is

a fear that, "that's not what the rubric says," or "how does this gender

expansive thinking line up with Catholic teaching?" In those moments, it

can feel a little oppositional.

Maria comments point toward to the next horizon for feminist Catholic perspectives with attention to intersectionality and diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. She extended her thoughts this way:

> As we understand intersectionality, that there's an opportunity to expand that feminist framework with many layers to it that are meaningful and make a lot of sense. So this is why I feel like when people say that feminists are just only about women. No, they're not. That's too simplistic because it is much more than that. Although, it is often fundamentally oriented toward the experience of women because, hey, guess what? That has often been overlayed with structures of oppression.

There was affirmation that the potential for a fuller feminist Catholic reality was possible and the seeds of which were already planted in the Hallmarks. Yet, as Annika found, there was also a blindness to that fuller vision. Raika suggested that individual internal and organizational processes that deconstruct patriarchy, sexism, and racism in the learning community fabric would be important space to push into.

   Identity dynamics and the signs of the times. The life experiences and reflections of participants reveal specific identity dynamics that are noteworthy in this context. The first dynamic relates to the perpetuation and reifying of Notre Dame de Namur narratives in storytelling, vocabulary, and aphorisms. Throughout the interviews, participants demonstrated familiarity with quotations from St Julie, Hallmarks concepts, and familiarity with certain Notre Dame stories. The result of this imprinting of Notre Dame de Namur narrative is the fluency in that narrative and the ability to see one's own

experience through that same lens. Annika, for example, describes her relationship with

those stories:

> I feel like every time we have stories of the sisters--I love stories of the
>
> sisters--but I feel like every time... And I used to be like, "Oh, that's really
>
> interesting that they were able to select a story that so perfectly captures
>
> what's happening in our own of community." And then the more it
>
> happened, I was like, "This is not a coincidence. We are living the
>
> experience over and over again." I do feel like St. Julie is quite present
>
> among us. We are living out her works and her stories often, often, often.

Hieu, too, recognizes St. Julie's presence in the community and feels a closeness to her in

this work. Maria references multiple stories of meaning for feminist Catholic depiction:

Julie's joyfulness, her trust in God's goodness, Julie and Francoise's partnership, the

hardships they faced within and outside the congregation. She also makes connection to

the Sisters who arrived in the United States and their pioneering spirit and courage.

From these storytelling and Notre Dame charism vocabulary, lay educators

engage with the processes of continuity, evolution, and interpretation. What will lend

itself to continuity with the legacy of Notre Dame de Namur? What needs to evolve?

How can this value or practice from previous generations be interpreted for the current

context? There is a consistent inquiry to read the signs of the times and listen to the needs

of the community. Participants identified this continuity and transformation as a

significant dynamic, especially for a learning community more than a century old. This

attention to the legacy of "who we are" alongside the draw toward the future orientation

of that identity is evident in the way lay educators engage change. [quote or two].

This legacy and transformational inclination is also at work in the strategic and schoolwide initiatives. [quotations] This suggests an organizational growth mindset that takes a positive and increasingly expansive view of the future.

The final dynamic of note is one of humility and accountability. Several participants spoke to the learning community's willingness to respond to racial outcry. Like many learning institutions, the Notre Dame de Namur learning community received an outcry from its students and alums calling for greater efforts for diversity, equity, and inclusion. While the school had enacted curriculum in that direction, it was not sufficient to the signs of the times. Rather than hide or diminish the concerns and pain of constituents, the leadership of the learning community-initiated apology and steps to build process, practice, and accountability for the dignity of its members. Participants named this as a source of pride and mission alignment as well as space for necessary ongoing work. The humility and transparency were appreciated by participants and notable for its protection of constituents first, rather than the institution.

Notre Dame de Namur Narrative. All participants named a recognition that they were part of "something bigger" than their individual work and particular Notre Dame de Namur context, that their participation and leadership contributed to the larger arc of the Notre Dame de Namur story. Sunflower, for example, recalled a moment of insight early in her time with the learning community that would influence her perspective. While in a Notre Dame Network meeting with Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Sunflower found herself impatient with the slow pace of the work process. She told a colleague, "I don't know if I can do this. I don't know how you do this. I love these people." This colleague

responded, "That's the process. It doesn't have to be rushed, that's an important part of it."

Sunflower reflected on that saying,

> It's like, 'Okay, I don't have to come up with a plan by the end of the
> meeting, have the timeline and get it started before the next meeting.' This
> is something bigger and it's okay to take more time to reflect. That was
> new to me, but now I appreciate that. It goes back to understanding the
> why, why are we doing this? Not just, how are we doing it and getting it
> done, it's really trying to remember with everything that we're doing: how
> does that relate to our mission? And the mission is the why.

That discernment style approach to communal work, introduced and modeled by the

Sisters made Sunflower feel connected to the larger arc of the Notre Dame narrative and

charism.

Diane was drawn to the imagery of women companions in her own reflections of

the exponential impact possible for partnerships. She said,

> As long as we're walking together and we're in agreement and we're on
> mission and this is what our goal is, then how much more powerful and
> how much more impactful would we be in this community or to our
> students? I think partnership grows my impact exponentially. I think that it
> has such a bigger impact when you can link arms with somebody and dig
> in and do the work. I think that you can get more done, but I think your
> impact is what is felt more and felt the most. And that's where you can
> fight issues. That's where you can accomplish bigger things. Because I
> may have thought, "okay, here's our goal." And then somebody else comes

> in and it's actually, "this is our goal." And then when we join forces, we're
>
> just at a whole extra level. And I think that can impact the world in so
>
> many different ways, because I just don't think we're meant to do this by
>
> ourselves.

In the shared goal, in the refinement of that aim, and in the realization that one is not

alone, Diane describes important features of an organizational approach that has the

potential for social movement transformation.

> Hieu makes the spirituality and charism connection in her reflections:

>> We're not doing it by ourselves, of course, but we need to tell people that.
>>
>> We're not just doing whatever the work we're doing, but there is
>>
>> spirituality. There is goodness. There's God. There's Saint Julie. There's
>>
>> Sisters. There is something bigger than us, I feel. Otherwise, we can feel
>>
>> like, "Why do I belong here? What's so different about this place?" The
>>
>> prayers we have for each other, yeah, all of that. I'm glad I'm part of the
>>
>> Sisters' charism. I just feel so blessed.

Hieu is joined by Maria in a recognition of expansiveness of the Notre Dame de Namur

charism and how that is continued and transformed in the hands of lay educators.

>> When I think about culture and narratives and kind of an ethos that moves
>>
>> forward, even if we think about this moment, and it's true there has been
>>
>> loss and there has been disruption to the narrative, what I am hoping and
>>
>> imagining is going to carry forward from this and passed from generation
>>
>> of employee to generation of employee is just ... I don't want to say
>>
>> scrappy, but I will. Scrappy resourcefulness to innovate, to grow, to not

give up. "We're going to move forward. God is with us! God is good! We can do this." And I think we got that spirit from St. Julie, from the sisters, from our sisters who made their way to [……..]. That hutzpah has been part of the community from the very start. Even if a newer member to our community does not know the story of the sisters or any of that, there is that transmitted ethos in the way that we carry forward and what we do and transmit that story.

So that different thinking in that innovation and that drive to move the mission forward, it would be my hope that that's what outlives us generations from now, even if they don't know your name or my name, or even about this strategic plan, but that that's what's getting transmitted in our culture, in our actions, in our storytelling and in the pride that people have around this Notre Dame identity. This is bigger than us, for sure, and I fundamentally know that and believe that and anchor myself in that.

In each of the women educators featured here, there is a commitment to the Notre Dame narrative that is deeply ingrained and embodied such that "I" and "we" are essentially synonymous.

Participants were also asked to consider in what ways the Notre Dame de Namur was being called for the future. Several educators highlighted the continuation of women's education and leadership with emphases on the student centered, holistic growth that empowers students for justice. Some educators pointed to growth and change to ensure relevancy, representation, and response to the signs of the times. And some

pointed to new frontiers, the exploration of women's roles in the Church or expansive

gender positions in that context. Maria provided a synthesis of these sentiments:

> Because of our diversity, because of the students who see themselves in
> our community, I think we are being called in a way that the other
> Catholic high schools have not yet been called to minister, to resource, to
> partner with underserved communities.
>
> I think Notre Dame is being called to being a leader in answering a lot of
> questions around gender and women's leadership in the Catholic church.
> These are spaces that are uncomfortable for a lot of people and there's not
> clear directives and there's a lot of gray area, but there's also a lot of
> potential for missteps and also to take the right step, but be reprimanded
> regardless. So there's a type of frontiership or pioneering that needs to
> happen in that area and I think it's going to be Notre Dame that's being
> called to it.
>
> We're called to be always is an institution and individuals within the
> institution whose espoused values line up, right? We say is what we do
> and that is a lot easier said than done. So we have to call ourselves to be
> accountable to one another and to have the courage to hold each other
> accountable, but also the courage to have care with each other for some
> space and grace in that process, because the journey is not an easy one.
> Those three things I just said are really big boulders and I think it's what
> we're called to.

Theme Summary. The work of identity may hold rewards but the journey on the way may not always be easily straightforward. Participants named the realization that their individual contributions are what contribute to a much larger work in progress. Given those realities, participants spoke to critical questions that require attention, patience, and work together. The discernment and work in community becomes more important as the scope becomes more extensive. As with belonging, this theme prompted painful or challenging reflections from the last few years—moments when that feminist Catholic organizational identity was not where people wished it to be—as well as great hopes for the future to address needs for equity and inclusion.

General Narrative

The female lay educators of a Notre Dame de Namur learning community possess rich life experiences that reveal phenomenologically significant meaning for the understanding of feminist Catholic organizational identity. In life experiences prior becoming a Notre Dame de Namur educator, participants were called to the professional field and vocation of education; they were formed with mindsets for service and drawn to work for justice. These women also encountered feminist Catholic perspectives in their experiences of women religious and lay leadership. These experiences provided a spark that would grow in vibrancy for each person upon their joining the Notre Dame de Namur learning community. These educators found recognition and affirmation from the learning community that reified the calling, formation, and feminist Catholic understandings from their earlier life stories. Belonging and companionship were realized by these Notre Dame de Namur educators, and most especially in the relationships of meaningful work with women colleagues. As a result of these experiences, participants

were empowered to take responsibility for the mission and Notre Dame de Namur identity, forwarding the ways they had been formed, now forming others through design and integration of mission at all levels and spaces with the members of the learning community. Simultaneously stewards and transformers of that charism and identity, the lay female educators of a Notre Dame de Namur learning community contribute to the bigger work of feminist Catholic organizational identity.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, & CONCLUSIONS

Summary of the Study

This study endeavored to examine how lay educators in a Notre Dame de Namur learning community understand a charism-inspired feminist Catholic organizational identity (FCOI). Furthermore, the examination included a focus on the construction and enactment of that FCOI as well as how that FCOI provides continuity and interpretation of Notre Dame de Namur charism in the life and work of lay educators for the benefit of the learning community. This study utilized a hermeneutic phenomenology with the theoretical lenses provided by the integration of feminist theory, Catholic theology, and organizational identity. This interdisciplinary approach provided salient insights for the lay contextualization of charism, feminist, organizational and Catholic identity in the Catholic schools of women's religious congregations. The emergent findings of this hermeneutic phenomenological research revealed characteristics and dynamics of feminist Catholic organizational identity as demonstrated in the narratives, reflections, and experiences of Notre Dame de Namur lay educators. Feminist Catholic organizational identity in turn became a construct for the realization of a lay realized charism in the faith-based learning community.

Summary of Findings and General Description of the Phenomenon

In Chapter Four, I presented relevant hermeneutic phenomenological findings from the lived experiences and reflections of eight female lay educators from a Notre Dame de Namur learning community. Based upon those narratives, a general description of the phenomenon of feminist Catholic organizational identity emerged.

Feminist Catholic organizational identity is the integrative vision, self-understanding, and operative approach witnessed as the Notre Dame de Namur learning community seeks to answer the question, "Who are we?" within a predominantly lay female membership (Albert et al., 2000; Albert & Whetten, 1985; Pratt et al., 2016a). It is both a co-creative effort by the members of the learning community and a litmus test for assurance of continued legacy and transformational distinction in response to the signs of the times. This distinctive identity attracts those lay female educators who possess previous alignment or affinity in their previous experiences for elements of that feminist Catholic organizational ideation. Early in the employment relationship, the identity of the individual educator interacts with the existing feminist Catholic identity of the organization and finds self-referential identity recognition through sensemaking processes (Weick, 1995, 2012). This sensemaking leads to the mutual reciprocity of alignment, discernment, and affirmation between the educator and the learning community, mostly commonly discussed in terms of belonging and its periods of distance or disequilibrium.

Learning community members and organizational processes contributed to the realization of feminist Catholic organizational identity through sensegiving and enactment efforts. Mentorship by Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and veteran lay women imprints newer educators with the beliefs, stories, and practices of Notre Dame de Namur charism and spirituality. This mentorship combines with experiences of partnership and collaboration amongst lay women educators who then engage in shared leadership and friendship which promotes collegiality, complementarity, innovation, and mutual empowerment (D'Enbeau & Buzzanell, 2013; Ferree & Martin, 1995).

Feminist Catholic organizational identity's integration throughout the learning community is notable for its comprehensive implementation, be it evidenced in the behaviors, thought processes, and interpersonal relationships of educators, or as demonstrated in the priorities for women's empowerment and leadership throughout the learning community's programs and processes, strategic and schoolwide initiatives. This enactment is further confirmation of "who we are" as a Notre Dame de Namur learning community. These initiatives and organizational priorities become "mutually recursive and constitutive" (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006, p. 6), such that Notre Dame de Namur lay female educators possess purpose and responsibility for the organization, see themselves as the organization, and experience strong reactions when personal, professional dissonance threatens the feminist Catholic organizational identity of the learning community. This is more contemporaneously observed in the efforts to a) center women's experience and feminist practices, b) look to the models provided by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, and c) seek to deepen intersectional commitments for inclusion and equity. The identity dynamics in the learning community reflect an organizational growth mindset and respond to the signs of the times with aspirational alignment to feminist Catholic perspectives. This aspirational alignment is especially significant for its resonance with the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur as the vision of feminist Catholic most participants are drawn to. These continuity and transformational approaches, now operative in the lives, work, and commitments of lay female educators, are part of the longer narrative arc of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and their educational mission and ministries.

Responses to the Research Questions

Guiding the work were the following research questions:

7. How is feminist Catholic organizational identity (FCOI) understood by lay educators in the Notre Dame de Namur learning community?

8. How do lay educators construct and enact FCOI in their work and participation in the learning community?

9. How does FCOI continue and interpret Notre Dame charism for lay educators in the contemporary learning community context?

Responses to the research questions for this study are presented in the sections that follow.

Research question #1: How is feminist Catholic organizational identity (FCOI) understood by lay educators in the Notre Dame de Namur learning community?

Study participants did not specifically conceptualize feminist Catholic organizational identity at the outset. As a new conceptual proposal, I recognized that participants would describe meaningful life experiences which could then be confirmed with deeper meaning in the reflective portions of the interview process and the hermeneutic process. As a result of this multivalent process, the following characteristics were deemed central, enduring, and distinctive for the identity of the Notre Dame de Namur learning community:

- Regular reference to and inclusion of the spiritual charism and narratives of St. Julie Billiart, Francoise Blin de Bourdon, and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur.

- Notre Dame de Namur's legacy of educating young women.

- Authenticity of identity for the individual and the community.

- Community that welcomes and cares for the individual with joy.

- Reverence for the diversity of the community membership and the call this mandates for equity, inclusion, and intersectionality.

- Collegiality and similar relational processes (collaboration, partnership, mentorship) which flatten power structures and provide educative formation.

- Service and justice motivations which lead to a growth mindset and change orientation for learning community challenges and societal problem solving.

- Spiritual motivations for right relationship and the promotion of dignity that promote humility and transparency for the individual and significantly for the organization.

Over the course of the interview series, most participants provided description or storytelling to the above characteristics. Further, participants also were asked to name three to five central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics, which provided confirmation and synchronicity for the multiple participants. The findings also revealed the participants demonstrated beliefs, priorities, behaviors, practices, and strategic/school-wide initiatives which furthered a particular "Notre Dame" quality, style or way of doing things. Upon reflection, I recognize that the characteristics named above are similar to and a nuanced iteration of the existing Hallmarks of a Notre Dame de Namur Learning Community. I believe this provides evidence to the lived embodiment of those Hallmarks by the participating educators, and this also points to the process of evolution and transformation to meet the signs of the times. Network commentary from

others in Notre Dame de Namur have suggested that the Hallmarks require updating. This component of the research provides example to the very evolution.

Interestingly, participants did not overtly use *feminist* for their own understanding of their Notre Dame de Namur experience; rather, I heard description of women's leadership and/or empowerment as the more operative concept to point towards women's equality and equity. It was, also, with direct prompting and dialogue that participants showcased an openness and interest in the discussion of feminist Catholic perspecives and how those connected to their understanding of their responsibility to mission, individually and communally. All could recognize the different feel of Notre Dame Catholic in the learning community. When it was explicitly noted that this is a distinctive way to approach Catholic educational life because of the charism and organizational practices, participants saw the "Notre Dame way" of approach and implementation was marked and meaningful.

Research question #2: How do lay educators construct and enact FCOI in their work and participation in the learning community?

As named in the prior section, the participants demonstrated their understanding of feminist Catholic organizational identity through their beliefs, priorities, behaviors as well as the practices and strategic/school-wide initiatives of the learning community, which featured a particular "Notre Dame" quality, style or way of doing things. These same elements which showcase the demonstration of feminist Catholic organizational identity are also connected to the construction and enactment of that identity.

First, the young adult schooling and early career life experiences provided critical beliefs, purpose, and pursuant behaviors for lay female educators to contribute to the

construction and enactment of FCOI. Though not yet embedded within a Notre Dame de Namur learning community, participants' life experiences planted the seeds of feminist Catholic organizational perspectives. All participants possessed a Catholic or Christian religious identity and the majority had previous experiences of Catholic education with religious congregations at the secondary and/or higher education level. Further, with most participants identifying as BIPOC, immigrant, and/or first generation to college, the intersection of religious, educational, and racial, socio-economic identities converged to prepare their positionality for their calls to the education sector and what was meaningful in their formation—identity, service and justice, and caring relationships. This "who am I" processual work was bolstered by encounter with feminist Catholic perspectives which were introduced or modeled by women religious and respected lay leaders as measures of mission and values resonance. The sum of these pre-Notre Dame de Namur experiences preceded the construction of FCOI in the specific learning community context, but was substantial, nonetheless, for the educator's identity formation.

In the hiring, onboarding, and early formation of the lay educator in the Notre Dame de Namur learning community, I witnessed that individual educator engage their identity with that of the learning community in sensemaking processes to determine alignment, dissonance, and make meaning of Notre Dame de Namur identity (Weick, 1995). With each occurrence and in combination with experiences of belonging, mentorship, partnership, collaboration, the lay educator was developing a sense of "self in community" which served to enable the individual's view of themselves as part of the communal entity. Further that early and ongoing sensemaking would contribute to the empowerment of those same educators to be co/creators of FCOI.

The agency to be a creator of FCOI engages sense giving processes which shape the behaviors and decision making of other community members (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991b). For the participating educators and the length, breadth, and depth of experience with the Notre Dame de Namur learning community, they are shaping the collective, communal experience of FCOI by colleagues, students, and other stakeholders through enactment (Weick, 1995, 2012). The confident realization of language and behaviors, practices and programs, and strategic and school wide initiatives are the multilayered enactment of FCOI and Notre Dame de Namur mission with intentionality and systemic integration.

Research question #3: How does FCOI continue and interpret Notre Dame charism for lay educators in the contemporary learning community context?

Feminist Catholic Organizational identity provides response to the essential question, "Who are we as a Notre Dame de Namur learning community of lay educators?" With demonstration in beliefs, practices, and learning community structures and priorities, FCOI illustrates the significant attention to the determination of authentic Catholic identity for a contemporary learning community. Notre Dame de Namur lay educators showcased this attention to quality of the community life and the integration of Notre Dame de Namur spirituality and narratives, namely the Hallmarks and stories of St. Julie Billiart and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. These educators spoke concretely to their sense of responsibility for the continuity of that legacy as well as their recognition of that charism and deep story in dialogue with and responsive to the signs of the times (Lee, 2004). The iterative, growth mindset approach taken by lay educators is not unlike the communal discernment undertaken to pastorally respond to the needs of a community

in context. From a vocational perspective, the embodiment of the charism in these community members is visible in their commitment, authenticity, design, and responsibility for the identity of the learning community.

Discussion of Findings According to Conceptual Framework

In this section, I will discuss the findings according to key theoretical materials that were initially proposed in the literature review and are significant for the understanding of these findings and the research questions. Key topics for discussion will include the following:

Organizational identity

The findings provide relevant illustration of Whetten (2006) and his clarification of the ideational, definitional, and phenomenological components of organizational identity; it is in these shared beliefs, organizational features, and the identity connect discourse and experiences for a fuller bodied understanding of organizational identity. Further, the Social Interactionist Model of Organizational Identity (SIMOI) proposed by Cornelissen et al (2016) is visible in the interactions between individual educator, educational leader, and the institution and conscious of the recursive processes that move between social construction, social identity, and social actor dynamics working in concert. The debate surrounding organizational identity's "enduring" nature as continuous or evolving will be examined as a both/and reality that is germane to the charism and deep story dynamics of Catholic identity. Finally, this section will examine the dynamics of feminist organizations, as revealed here and in connection to previous studies.

Charism and Catholic identity.

The findings provide valuable consideration of what it means to be Catholic in today's contemporary context. This discussion will include the juxtaposition of vocational identities and the questions of ownership, responsibility, and stewardship of charism and Catholic identity from a women's religious congregation in a lay Catholic educational ministry. Further, conversation with the charism and deep story perspectives from Lee (2004), Schneiders (2000), and Fox (2005) will explore what lay empowerment can mean for the life of the church and lay organizations. Discussion will engage the tensions experienced by lay educators in the conceptualization of Catholic and the differences observed from clergy, women's religious, and lay spaces. Finally, consideration of feminist Catholic dynamics of power and structure will round out this section.

Feminist Catholic Organizational Identity.

Feminist Catholic organizational identity is itself an attractive proposition to those individual lay educators who would align with those same priorities and practices. When we think about the journey of the female lay educator in relationship with the Notre Dame de Namur learning community, we witness a progression from "I" to "We". And the terms that we use in the praxis of that – professional/personal background, hiring and onboarding, formation, shared, work and leadership, mission integration – all of that speaks to the spaces within which this feminist Catholic organizational identity is given life and shape.

Therefore the construction and enactment of FCOI by those female lay educators becomes a dynamic, significant, and everyday kind of experience. My analysis points to

an important theoretical and theological underpinning. When we combine feminist lenses

for theology and organizations with the Social Interactionist Model of Organizational

Identity, we observe a mutual reciprocity of creative power that recursively moves

between the individual's construction and sensemaking with the enactment of that

identity by all and the sensegiving provided by veterans or leaders.

Figure 2

Feminist theological and organizational lenses on social interactionist model of

organizational identity
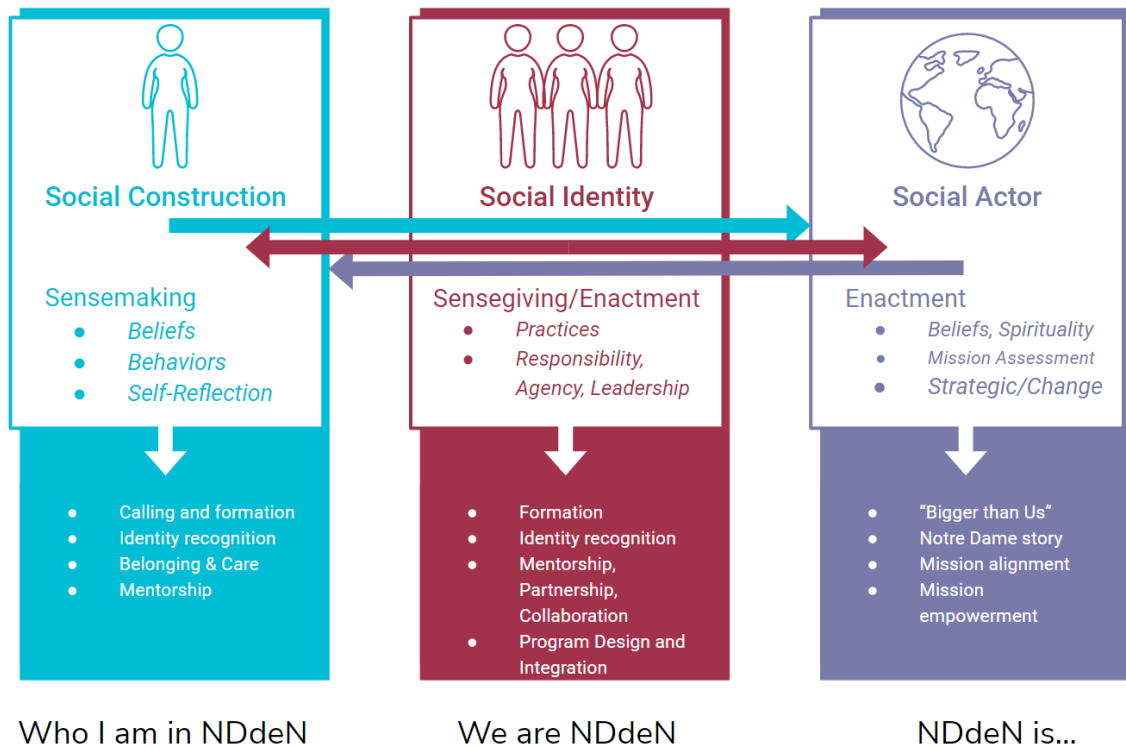
Given the lived experience of participants, I want to emphasize the role played by

those in the learning community who hold responsibility, agency, and provide leadership.

Their efforts are significant for the sensegiving they provide to individual educators, yes,

absolutely. And, they are the proactive determinants of what the feminist Catholic

organizational identity will and can look like in its next iterations. They are shaping the

Notre Dame de Namur story because they have been empowered to do so.

The implications of FCOI for educational settings, women's religious

congregational ministries, for women in the church and society are significant. And, the

revelations for points of tension or contention related to structures, power, risks, and

leadership deserve thoughtful and accountable action for learning communities and

women's religious congregations to step forward with humble intention.. The findings

also reveal tremendous opportunity for the intersectional feminist Catholic organizational

identity to step forward into current needs, ie. diversity, equity, and inclusion, women's

leadership and participation in the church.

Recommendations

I now include recommendations for future research and future practice.

Recommendations for future research

The first area of future research is the exploration of feminist Catholic

organizational identity across additional Notre Dame de Namur learning communities.

This study was limited to a single learning community within the Notre Dame de Namur

network. As such, the generalizability of feminist Catholic organizational identity for

Notre Dame de Namur would earn greater distinction with examination in more

ministries. Similarly, the next area for future research would be the engagement of

feminist Catholic organizational identity in the study of the various mission and ministry

spaces for women's religious congregations as well as those lay led ministries and

organizations. Finally, comparisons of women's religious congregations, their associate

programs and lay educators for their embodiment of FCOI collectively would contribute

to the future distinction of those vocational paths and how they are understood and realized within Catholic spaces. This would deepen the efficacy of the theoretical framework.

Additional areas of future research consider contemporary trends in education. The work to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion as an expression of mission and ministry in today's religious schools would be a valuable area of research for the engagement of a deeper intersectional feminist Catholic organizational identity. School governance and leadership, reliant upon lay leaders and their relationship with sponsoring women's religious congregations, would be a research area in which to study congruence of understandings at various levels—institutional, governance, administrative leadership—for the continuity and transformation of that FCOI. Each of those levels possesses a different relationship to that identity and stewards it according to their role and relationship. Finally, there is an opportunity to engage students, faculty/staff, parents/guardians, and alumnae/alumni of the secondary and higher education schools sponsored by women's religious congregations to determine the impact of that FCOI for purposes of vocational/life purpose and social movement studies. I would propose the potential for a new iteration of spiritual community or religious engagement that emerges in the life choices and justice activism work of current/recent community members.

Recommendations for future practice

The first recommendation for future practice pertains to the necessary attention to a systemic view in a learning community or religious ministry, in order to ensure comprehensive integration and the engagement by all stakeholders and processes with FCOI. What is created by the community? What comes from the sponsoring congregation

or from the local history? The next area for future practice considers hiring and onboarding processes—critical spaces for identifying and forming mission-aligned educators. Relatedly, the empowerment of long term educators to be pro-active stewards and leaders of charism and mission is important investment in the continuity and transformation of FCOI for the community. Finally, practice would benefit from the review and re-imagination of power structures from vertical to horizontal in nature and the pursuant behaviors and practices. Such work would disrupt those existing systems that perpetuate a hierarchy of power.

Conclusion and Final Thoughts

This work is my contribution to the scholarship of surrounding women's religious Catholic schools with proud addition of the Notre Dame de Namur charism to that conversation. The confluence of Catholic charism with feminist and organizational frames provides a different look at the critical questions so many Catholic educators and congregations are pursuing. My hope is that this study adds impetus to a systemic and relational view of the continuity and transformation of Notre Dame's Catholic identity. And, I close with an excerpt from Sr. Teresita Weind's 2018 remarks (previously referenced in the first chapter). She said,

> So being, growing, and nurturing Notre Dame de Namur mission network is a revelation, a revelation of ongoing continuous transformation in our lifestyles, in whatever way we continue to manifest the charism of Notre Dame de Namur.

May the Holy Spirit of wisdom be by my side and by each person who aims to be a part of that ongoing transformation to manifest the charism.

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APPENDIX A

Hallmarks are the essential characteristics, values and activities of a Notre Dame learning community. The Hallmarks emerged in response to the question from both the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and their co-workers: "What makes a learning community a Notre Dame Learning Community?" The Sisters and the learning communities began to explore this question in 2003. The culmination of these discussions — seven Hallmarks that concisely and beautifully express the values of a Notre Dame Learning Community.

1. *We proclaim by our lives even more than by our words that God is good.*

2. *We honor the dignity and sacredness of each person.*

3. *We educate for and act on behalf of justice and peace in the world.*

4. *We commit ourselves to community service.*

5. *We embrace the gift of diversity.*

6. *We create community among those with whom we work and with those we serve.*

7. *We develop holistic learning communities which educate for life.*

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, 2005

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

Components

- Purpose and Research Questions
- Participant Demographics – Data Collection Form
- Interview One – Focused Life History and Contemporary Experience
- Interview Two - Contemporary Experience and Reflection on Meaning

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Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine how lay educators in a Notre Dame de Namur learning community construct and enact a charism-inspired feminist Catholic organizational identity (FCOI). The research questions are:

1. How is feminist Catholic organizational identity (FCOI) understood by lay educators in the Notre Dame de Namur learning community?

2. How do lay educators construct and enact FCOI in their work and participation in the learning community?

3. How does FCOI continue and interpret Notre Dame charism for lay educators in the contemporary learning community context?

Participant Demographics via Data Collection Form (completed prior to Interview One)

Section One – Personal Identification

- First and Last Name
- Contact information – phone number and email (non-Notre Dame email recommended)
- Please choose an alias (first name and last initial) that will be used in place of your actual name for the duration of the research relationship. Record that alias here.

Section Two – Demographic Information and Background

- Religious identity – How do you identify religiously? If you affiliate with a particular tradition, please indicate that here.
- Spiritual identity – How do you identify spiritually? If you engage in spiritual practice, please describe your practice and frequency.
- Racial and Ethnic identity – How do you identify racially and ethnically?
- Gender Identity – How do you gender identify? Please indicate your pronouns.
- Educational background (Part One) – Please mark the appropriate boxes to identify the types of schools you attended. [This will be structured in a grid]
    - School levels: Elementary, middle, high school, college, graduate school

- ○ School type1: Public, charter, private-religious, private (non-religious), home school
  - ○ School type2: Co-educational, single-gender
  - ○ If you marked private-religious for any of the schools above, please indicate the school's affiliation: parish, diocesan, religious congregation (women's), religious congregation (men's), religious congregation (women's/men's inclusive)
- Educational background (Part Two) – Please name your fields of study and degrees in higher education (bachelor's degree and beyond).
- Professional Role/s
  - ○ Title of Current Position
  - ○ Number of Years in Position
  - ○ Please list briefly the major areas of responsibility that are part of your current position
  - ○ Please list other roles you have held during your Notre Dame employment
  - ○ Total years of employment at the school
  - ○ Please indicate whether you have participated in or served in leadership capacities with the following leadership groups or school-wide efforts:
    - ■ Administration
    - ■ Department Chair/Program Director
    - ■ Program Development
    - ■ Immersive experiences - Campus ministry
    - ■ Immersive experiences - Global travel (Cultural, justice, and leadership)
    - ■ Instructional or technology coaching
    - ■ Notre Dame Network committees, conferences, events,
    - ■ Strategic Plan Committee/s or Working Groups
    - ■ Accreditation
    - ■ Other notable _____
- Confirmation of participant criteria
  - ○ Please review the participant criteria for this research study.
    - ■ Criteria for inclusion in the study are as follows: (a) I am employed as an administrator or faculty member, (b) I have ten years or more of employment at the school, (c) I identify as female, (d) I identify as a lay person (not a Sister), (e) I have notable Notre Dame leadership and engagement in the life of the school and/or Notre Dame network experience.
  - ○ I confirm that I meet the criteria outlined for participation in the study.

Section Three: Self-Assessment on topics related to the research study

- Mission-aligned:
  - How do you define this term?
  - On the scale below (Likert 1-7), please indicate the extent to which you self-identify as Notre Dame mission-aligned by your definition.
- Feminist:
  - How do you define this term?
  - On the scale below, please indicate the extent to which you self-identify as feminist by your definition.
- Hallmarks: The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and their partners describe seven key characteristics for Notre Dame de Namur learning communities (goodness, human dignity, justice and peace, community, service, diversity, community, and holistic learning).
  - On the scale below, please indicate the extent to which you self-identify as aligned with these Hallmarks.

Interview One: Focused Life History and Contemporary Life Experience

Semi-structured Questions for Interview One

The interview will begin with a review of the informed consent contents. The researcher will ask the participant if they agree to voluntarily participate in the first interview. If agreement is given, the researcher will then begin the recording.

Researcher: Today's interview will focus on your background and relevant life experiences leading up to and including the present day. The questions and prompts I offer today are designed to invite your storytelling of various experiences connected to the Notre Dame de Namur learning community. I encourage you to be descriptive as much as you are able.

To confirm, I am speaking with (first name and last initial alias). Is that correct?

Focus Area	*Probe questions and possible follow ups*
General Background/Before Notre Dame (10 min) Let's begin by talking about your background prior to Notre Dame.	1. What led you to be in education? Possible follow ups: family, education, women's leadership, leading into Catholic education specifically
	2. Describe your experience of Catholic education and/or Catholic life prior to working at Notre Dame. Possible follow ups: schooling types (single gender/co-ed, grade

	levels), influencers (faculty, staff, activities), women and spirituality, digging into revealed positive/negative experiences
	3. What in your background prepared you to join a Notre Dame learning community? Possible follow ups: family, education, women's leadership, Catholic spirituality, priorities, values
Early Notre Dame (15 min) ● *First Knowledge* ● *Hiring/Onboarding* ● *ND Identity* Let's move to your early years at Notre Dame.	4. What brought you to Notre Dame? Possible follow ups: description of experience, language/vocabulary that indicate feminist Catholic organizational identity markers, pre-knowledge, hiring process, decision to accept the position
	5. Think about your first five years at Notre Dame. Tell me about an experience that taught you about Notre Dame's values, characteristics, and charism? Possible follow ups: description of experience (what, who, when, what), description of thoughts and feelings, language/vocabulary that indicate feminist Catholic organizational identity markers, mentors, formation, and professional development, growth
	6. To what extent do you feel like you belong in the Notre Dame community, and at what point did that sense of belonging start? How did it happen for you? Possible follow ups: description of experience (what, who, when, what), description of thoughts and feelings, language/vocabulary that indicate feminist Catholic organizational identity markers

Contemporary Experience (60 min) ● *Your work in the organization/learning community* ● *Behaviors, practices, processes, words in the learning community* So, you've been at Notre Dame for some time now. I'm going to ask you to speak now about your Notre Dame experiences from the last few years.	7. For your current role, describe for me how your responsibilities contribute to the mission, culture, and programs of the learning community. *Specific follow up:* ● In what ways does your work inspire or shape larger goals that are strategic or distinctive for the learning community? Possible follow ups: description of experience (what, who, when, what), description of thoughts and feelings, language/vocabulary that indicate feminist Catholic organizational identity markers, description of construction and/or enactment, identification of work that articulates central, enduring, or distinctive attributes or strategic or institutional outcomes
	8. There are a variety of individuals and groups with whom you regularly work to realize Notre Dame's mission, culture, and programs. Tell me about the process and dynamics of how that collaboration happens. *Specific follow ups:* ● How do you approach and engage in this group work? ● How about others? Do you see common practices in how groups interact to complete projects? ● Tell me how you inspire, influence, or direct others to realize specific learning community goals. Possible follow ups: description of experience (what, who, when, what), description of thoughts and feelings, language/vocabulary that indicate feminist Catholic organizational identity markers, description of construction and/or enactment, identification of work that articulates central, enduring, or distinctive attributes or strategic or institutional outcomes
	9. You indicated that you participated in _____ (see list of leadership groups and Notre Dame Network from Demographics Form). Can you choose one of these experiences that have been particularly meaningful for you and tell me more about that experience.

	Specific follow ups: • What has this work involved and has been your role within it? • What has been most meaningful for you about this experience? • What has been most difficult about this experience? Possible follow ups: description of experience (what, who, when, what), description of thoughts and feelings, language/vocabulary that indicate feminist Catholic organizational identity markers, description of construction and/or enactment, identification of work that articulates central, enduring, or distinctive attributes or strategic or institutional outcomes
	10. At Notre Dame, we reference the legacy of the Sisters and the Hallmarks. Can you describe a recent time when you experienced a sense of mission-alignment or Hallmarks alignment in the community? *Specific follow ups:* • Can you think of a time when you were challenged by these aspects of the school community? What happened? • Why were you challenged and how did it shape how you moved forward in your work? Possible follow ups: description of experience (what, who, when, what), description of thoughts and feelings, language/vocabulary that indicate feminist Catholic organizational identity markers, description of construction and/or enactment, identification of work that articulates central, enduring, or distinctive attributes or strategic or institutional outcomes, gaps or tensions
	11. As we close today, let's say you are talking to someone who is new to the Notre Dame community here. What story would you tell them that would really capture who we are as a learning community? Possible follow ups: description of experience (what, who, when, what), description of thoughts and feelings, language/vocabulary that indicate feminist Catholic organizational identity markers, description of construction and/or enactment, identification of work that articulates central, enduring, or distinctive attributes or strategic or institutional outcomes

Interview Two: Contemporary Life Experience and Reflection on the Meaning

Semi-structured Questions for Interview Two

The interview will begin with a review of the informed consent contents. The researcher will ask the participant if they agree to voluntarily participate in the second interview. If agreement is given, the researcher will then begin the recording.

Researcher: Today's interview will pick up on the experiences you named when we last met. The questions and prompts I offer today are designed to invite your storytelling and reflection on various experiences connected to the Notre Dame de Namur learning community. I encourage you to join me in seeking to understand the significance of these experiences for you and for the learning community.

Focus Area	Probe questions and possible follow ups
Re-introduction (10 min)	1. Do you have anything that came to you after we finished that you'd like to start off with today?
Let's recap our last meeting. We began with your experiences before joining the Notre Dame community and in your early years with the school. Then, we focused on experiences related to your recent work.	2. A follow up/clarifying question I have is… *To be determined by outcomes/transcript of previous interview.*
Understanding Notre Dame Identity - (25 min) ● *Identity* ● *Words* ● *Actions* So let's move on. I'd like to talk about Notre Dame's identity.	3. In our last interview, you shared a story about the learning community. In it you described _____. Why did you choose that particular story to share with someone new to Notre Dame?
	4. Every school has its own qualities and characteristics that are central, enduring, and distinctive. Thinking about your time at Notre Dame what three to five qualities or characteristics are most emblematic of Notre Dame for you? Possible follow ups: • Why did you choose them? How did you learn this? How do you enact this? Hallmarks, mission, quotations • Can you give examples that capture these qualities in action?

	What challenges do you have with these characteristics as they are expressed or enacted in the learning community? • hierarchical/horizontal, prophetic, hidden curriculum (what's not said and done/blind spots)
	5. In what ways are these qualities or characteristics continuous over time? Or evolving? Why do you think that is? Possible follow ups: • How has that played out? For students? For employees? • Can you give me an example of this continuity/evolution? • How does this inform decision making or curriculum/program? (Possible link to previous interview)
	6. What do you think would happen to Notre Dame if one of these qualities or characteristics was no longer part of the school's identity or priorities? What effect would that have? Possible follow ups: norms, expectations, power, influencers, construction, enactment, responsibility, tradition, legacy, future
Reflection on Contemporary Experience from a Feminist Catholic Organizational Lens (55 min) ● *Feminist Catholic* ● *Storytelling* ● *Strategic, institutional* ● *Participant identity alignment* Last time, we talked about your responsibilities in the learning community and the recent work of Notre Dame. I'd like do some reflection on the meaning of that collective work.	7. Before our interviews, I asked you to define feminism. You wrote that feminism is [definition from demographics form]. Is that definition accurate for you today? Anything to add or revise? *Specific follow up:* ● How do you use this definition to shape your work here at Notre Dame? ● For you, what's the relationship between Catholicism and feminism? How do you see that reflected here at the school? ● What tensions do you engage with in carrying out this understanding of feminism within the Notre Dame community? Possible follow ups: St. Julie, SNDdeNs, Hallmarks, mission, quotations, collaboration, communal, hierarchical/horizontal, prophetic, hidden curriculum (what's not said and done/blind spots)

	8. Last time you discussed [story/experience from previous interview]. How do you think this story/perspective emphasizes women's leadership, spirituality, and justice?
	
	Specific follow ups:
	
	   ● In what ways does this embody a feminist Catholic understanding?
	   ● What does this mean for the students you serve?
	   ● Are there other stories you have told or have heard that articulate this more strongly?
	
	Possible follow ups: impact for students and alums, impact for faculty, impact for participant, social movements,

	9. Reflecting on recent strategic and school-wide programs, such as [give examples from previous interview], how do you feel these efforts foster a feminist Catholic identity? What could be done differently?
	
	Specific follow up:
	
	   ● How do you see these efforts in the larger arc of Notre Dame's history and future? For society?
	   ● What are your own personal feelings on these efforts and our identity as a school community?
	
	Possible follow ups: Catholic formation, signature programs, equity and social movements, what role will you play, what role will the school play.

	10. Where/who do you believe Notre Dame is being called in the future? Why?
	11. For you, as a female Notre Dame educator and leader in this community, what motivates you to contribute to this feminist, mission-aligned, Hallmarks-aligned work? What impact does this have on you? Possible follow ups: what role will you play, vocation/calling, formation, professional development, growth; what challenges do you encounter in doing this work?

	12. I want to share with you some thoughts from Sr. Teresita Weind, the congregational leader of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur.
	In 2018, speaking to a conference audience of Sisters, educators, and more, she said: *We are a mission. And there is a significant difference between being a mission and/or doing, going on, or completing a mission. Each of us may say, "This is who I am. I am a mission planned by the Father. Wherever I am and whatever I am doing, I am a mission...." (Weind, SNDdeN, 2018) She goes on to say that this identity is shared by Sisters, Associates, Ministry Partners, Volunteers and more in our Notre Dame network. And when we tend that, we become a visible sign of the on-going, continuous transformation of our own lives of goodness in whatever way we manifest our charism.* How do you feel about <u>being</u> the mission of Notre Dame, being part of an ongoing continuous transformation of the Notre Dame charism? Possible follow ups: relationships with Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, ownership, sponsorship, partnership, stewardship, responsibility, innovation, creativity, future hopes, worries, concerns, impact on the world
Closure	As we close today, is there anything further you'd like to elaborate on or offer? Any questions you have for me?

APPENDIX C

UNIVERSITY OF
SAN FRANCISCO

CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

Informed Consent Form - Adults

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of your rights as a research participant. You should read this information carefully. If you agree to participate, you will sign in the space provided to indicate that you have read and understand the information on this consent form. You are entitled to and will receive a copy of this form.

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by [....], a graduate student in the Department of Leadership Studies, School of Education at the UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO. The faculty supervisor for this study is [....], a professor in the Department of Leadership Studies, School of Education at the UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO.

WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT:
The purpose of this research study is to examine how lay educators in a Notre Dame de Namur learning community construct and enact a charism-inspired feminist Catholic organizational identity (FCOI). Through interviews, this study asks you, an experienced faculty member/administrator, to discuss your lived experiences as a Notre Dame educator and reflect upon its significance for the charism and Catholic identity of the Notre Dame de Namur learning community.

WHAT WE WILL ASK YOU TO DO:
The research methodology of this study—feminist, hermeneutic phenomenology—is designed to draw out a collection of personal narratives which reveal the depth and insight into a human phenomenon. Using feminist and hermeneutic principles, this approach seeks to empower participants and authentically center their voices.

During this study, you will be asked to participate in the research process through these five steps:

1.   Step One: You will complete this consent form.

2. Step Two: You will complete a confidential, electronic participant demographics data form. This form collects some information relevant to your identity, educational and professional background. This information will be used to verify that you meet the study criteria and collect your initial self- assessment to feminist Catholic organizational identity; the self-assessment information you provide may be used to support the interview and analysis steps of the process. This will be the only portion of the process that includes your real name; you will also choose an alias (first name and last initial) that will be used for the duration of the research relationship and in any data, analysis or findings.

3. Step Three: You will join the researcher for a first semi-structured interview that will focus on your life experience as a Notre Dame educator. This interview will last approximately 90 minutes and will be conducted over recorded Zoom video conferencing. A transcript will be created following the interview.

4. Step Four: You will join the researcher for a second semi-structured interview that will focus on the significance and meaning of your life experience as a Notre Dame educator as well as Notre Dame Catholic identity and charism in the learning community. This interview will last approximately 90 minutes and will be conducted over recorded Zoom video conferencing. A transcript will be created following the interview.

5. Step Five: The researcher will provide you with secure access to the interview transcripts for a "member check." In an electronic form, the member check will ask you to a) review the transcripts, b) affirm the accuracy, clarity, and authenticity of the life experience descriptions, reflections, and meanings recorded in the transcripts. The participant may note any edits, revisions, clarifications, or additions in the member check form. The researcher may follow up with you via email, phone call, or video conference to clarify any revisions or additions. This step ensures clarity of your voice and assures collaboration and transparency in this stage of the research process.

6. Following the completion of Step Five, the researcher will utilize the transcripts for a feminist hermeneutic phenomenological process--a multistep interpretive process that considers individual and collective responses to study the experiences and reflections of multiple Notre Dame educators.

DURATION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY:
Your participation in this study will involve completion of a brief demographic data collection form (approximately 10 minutes), two separate interviews of 90 minutes duration for each, and independent review of the interview transcripts, also called a "member check." (approximately 30 minutes). The two interviews will be scheduled on separate days and must occur within one to two weeks of each other. The study will take place via Zoom video conferencing. The interviews will be recorded.

VIDEO AND AUDIO RECORDINGS:
Your participation in the study will be recorded using the Zoom video conferencing platform. The recording will begin once you and the researcher have verbally reviewed this consent document. You will be asked to identify yourself with your chosen alias at the beginning of each interview.

Both video and audio recordings will be generated from each interview. The audio recording will be utilized to procure a transcription from a professional transcription service. The video recording will be viewed by the researcher for the purposes of confirming transcription accuracy and completing research memos based upon researcher observations and situational insights.

Recordings will be saved to a private cloud server and hard drive accessible only to the researcher. The audio recording will be sent using secure means to a reputable transcription service. File identification will be according to the alias provided by the participant.

Upon completion of the study, data files will be maintained in a secure archive by the researcher. Consent and demographic data in separate files will be kept for a minimum of three years according to IRB procedures.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:
We do not anticipate any risks or discomforts--beyond those encountered in everyday life--to you from participating in this research. The researcher will take steps necessary to a) ensure the confidentiality of participation information and interview data, b) empower and support the participant in the research process. These steps will be outlined in the following sections below.

If you wish, you may choose to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the study without penalty.

BENEFITS:
You will receive no direct benefit from your participation in this study; however, participation in the research study will offer you a) a storytelling and reflective experience based upon your Notre Dame work and professional contributions as well as b) participation in the collective interpretation of the unique identity of the Notre Dame learning community. As an experienced Notre Dame educator, your participation in the study contributes to the creation of critical knowledge for Notre Dame learning communities, Catholic learning communities, especially those sponsored by women's religious congregations, and the educational sector. This new knowledge will support the continuity and evolution of feminist Catholic learning communities and organizations.

PRIVACY/CONFIDENTIALITY:
Any data you provide in this study will be kept **confidential** unless disclosure is required by law. In any report we publish, we will not include information that will make it possible to identify you or any individual participant. Specifically, we will collect any personally identifiable information in two forms only (this informed consent form and the demographic data form). Both forms will be electronically secured and accessible only to the researcher. This consent form and demographic data form will be securely archived by the researcher for a minimum of three years per Institutional Review Board requirements, after which the researcher will destroy this data. Further, this data will be stored separately from the interview, member check, and researcher data.

After the submission of these forms, your chosen alias (first name and last initial) will be utilized for identification in all successive stages and products of the study--the interviews, transcripts, member checks, or study findings to ensure that attribution to you is not discernible.

Interview recordings, transcripts, researcher memos, and study findings will be secured on the researcher's hard drive as well as a private access cloud server. Audio recordings with alias identification only will be transmitted to a professional transcription service. You will be provided secure access to review your interview transcripts in the member check phase. For study confidentiality, you will not be able to download, copy or share the transcripts.

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and the principal of [………] have granted their permission for the researcher to conduct this study with the voluntary participation of Notre Dame de Namur employees who meet the criteria for this study. The researcher maintains the commitment to participant confidentiality and will not provide the names of participants or collected data to these school authorities.

Likewise, you are asked to maintain confidentiality and not disclose your participation to Sisters, school leadership or fellow employees in order to limit the risk from a breach of confidentiality.

Communication to/from the researcher will be done through the researcher's USFCA email address. As a participant, you will be asked to provide a preferred email address for correspondence. You are encouraged to utilize a personal/non-Notre Dame email to facilitate confidentiality outside of the learning community Google suite of products.

COMPENSATION/PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION:
You will receive a $75 gift card for your full participation in this study. If you choose to withdraw before completing the study, you will receive a gift card in an amount prorated to the approximate length of your participation.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:
Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty.

As your colleague, the researcher values you and your commitment to the mission of Notre Dame. As named previously, the research methodology of this study—feminist, hermeneutic phenomenology—is designed to draw out a collection of personal narratives which reveal the depth and insight into a human phenomenon. Using feminist and hermeneutic principles, this approach seeks to empower participants and authentically center their voices. Therefore, as a participant, you can expect the following:

- The interview phases are designed with open-ended questions relevant to the purpose of the study in the educational and professional Notre Dame context. Using a semi-structured interview, the researcher will offer you questions to prompt your storytelling, descriptions, and reflections. You may respond with as

       much or as little narrative as you choose; the researcher will engage in dialogue with you based upon your responses to explore your perspectives.
- The member check phase is designed to allow you greater participation and transparency in the research process. This ensures that your perspective is articulated with accuracy, clarity, and authenticity.
- Furthermore, you may skip any questions or tasks that make you uncomfortable, and you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty.
- Finally, the researcher has the right to withdraw you from participation in the study at any time.

As stated previously, if you withdraw before completing the study, you will receive a gift card in an amount prorated to the approximate length of your participation.

Your nonparticipation or withdrawal from the study will not affect your employment or treatment.

OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS:
Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you should contact the principal investigator: [….] at [….] or [….] If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board at IRBPHS@usfca.edu.

I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION. ANY QUESTIONS I HAVE ASKED HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT AND I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.

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PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE   *DATE*