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Narratives and Sensemaking in the New Corporate University: The Socialization of First Year Communication Faculty

Andrew F. Herrmann
University of South Florida

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Narratives and Sensemaking in the New Corporate University:
The Socialization of First Year Communication Faculty

by

Andrew F. Herrmann

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Communication
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Arthur P. Bochner, Ph.D.
Eric M. Eisenberg, Ph.D.
Carolyn Ellis, Ph.D.
Charles Guignon, Ph.D.

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Dedication

To my advisor, mentor, teacher and friend, Dr. Arthur P. Bochner. Thank you for the critiques, guidance, support and wisdom. And patience.

To my committee members, Dr. Eric Eisenberg, Dr. Carolyn Ellis, and Dr. Charles Guignon. Thank you for your insights and encouragement.

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To my nephew Garrett, for reminding me to play.

To the CB from the EB.

To the brave participants who opened their lives to me, showing me the future.

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**Narratives and Sensemaking in the New Corporate University:
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Andrew F. Herrmann

ABSTRACT

I examined what brand new Ph.D.s in Communication experience when they start their first, entry-level, tenure-track assistant professor position at a new university. Through the lens of social construction, I review vocational and organizational socialization, individual agency by newcomers, academic socialization processes, and the concept of the academic career in the current climate of university change and transformation. Then, I present the method of research, including the population and sampling method, and rationales for utilizing a narrative approach, interactive interviewing, and autoethnographic writing. After presenting the participants' narratives, I revisit both within— and between-case issues, beginning with socialization from the “bottom-up” lived experiences of the new faculty.

The universities socialized these new professors through individual socialization processes. To lessen their uncertainty in their new place of work, the faculty members utilized seven individualized tactics to lessen ambiguity. Collectively, the new assistant professors saw the organizationally provided orientations and mentoring processes as inadequate. The loss of graduate school cohort necessitates the development of a new cohort with peers for new faculty development, despite the modern isolationist definition

of the academic “subject.” The new communication faculty generally found teaching to be an activity of stabilization within the new equivocal university environment, despite the supposed unpreparedness of new faculty.

I discuss the interrelated use of strategically ambiguous communication, power, and the disciplining of the self and how they relate to the tenure process. I examine how the discourses of academic capitalism impact the daily lives and decision-making of new faculty, including compromised research agendas and publication production. I interrogate the pursuit of prestige by higher educational institutions and the manner in which this pursuit adds additional pressure and stressors on new professors. Finally, I consider how the short-term narrative of “getting tenure” truncates the canonical narrative of the academic career, and legitimizes the outsider-within category of the new faculty members.

Chapter 1

The Agenda – Studying Organizational Socialization in the University

In this dissertation, I examined what brand new Ph.D.s in Communication experience when they start their first, entry-level, tenure-track assistant professor position at a new university. For newcomers to any organization, including academia, the need to make sense of a new situation, a new organizational culture, and one's place in that culture is one of the first demands they face. The newcomer, however, is not necessarily 'discovering' a fixed organizational culture, but is actually involved in the co-creation of a socially constructed and changing organizational culture (Gergen, 2001b; Rorty, 1979; Weick, 2001). Sensemaking involves the development of a set of explanatory concepts or ideas that enables the newcomer to interpret and engage a complex and unfamiliar organizational setting. Most sensemaking research has focused on how people come to understand those events in which they are currently, or have in the past, participated, i.e., how individuals structure the unknown (Weick, 1979, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005).

Sensemaking can be viewed as a narrative process, accomplished through storytelling, which makes the unexpected intelligible, and helps individuals map their reality (Bochner, 1994, 2001; Eisenberg, 2007; Weick, 1999). Through narratives, newcomers create accounts of their experiences that are plausible, coherent, and reasonable, and that create opportunities for agency within social contexts. Narrative sensemaking by the newcomer clarifies the immediate past and refines possible future

actions. As the newcomer transitions to a new organization, he or she is continually re-making and refining identity, and simultaneously making sense of social contexts and events.

I construe academic identity as an ongoing narrative accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of ongoing experiences. Although the Western tradition conceives of identity as something one creates and owns, identities are not created in isolation. Identities are mutually responsive, socially constructed and related to each other in cultural contexts, which both restrain and enable the formation of particular identities (Baxter, 2004; Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995). Identities are not unitary; they are relational. They are social achievements that provide a sense of belonging, a sense of personal significance, and sense of continuity through time (Baxter, 2004; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Bochner & Ellis, 1995; Eisenberg, 2007; Foster & Bochner, 2008; Guignon, 1998, 2004).

As I have discovered through my own personal development, and as others have noted, the workplace is one social context that has a profound effect on personal identity (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002; Bean & Eisenberg, 2006; Eisenberg, 2007; Weick, 1995). Through assimilation and socialization, individuals become members of organizations by internalizing the behaviors, norms, rules and values of their organizations (Allen, 2000; Ashcraft, 2004; Dickmeyer, 2003; Jablin, 2001). For the new faculty member, there are two overlapping spheres of organizational identity: identity with one's workplace and identity with one's discipline (Austin, 1990; Becher, 1989; Boyer, 1990). The first sphere involves the new professor's institutional and departmental relationships, i.e., his place of work (Clark, 1987; Shumway, 1999; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). For example upon

graduation, I will be able to say, “I’m from the University of South Florida, a Research I university.” [I will continue to use the older Carnegie Foundation classification “Research I,” since the new designation “RU/VH: Research University” is not yet accepted everyday vernacular.] The second sphere of academic identity is identification with one’s academic discipline or field. Academics generally identify more strongly with the knowledge domains – their disciplines – than with the institutions in which they work (Austin, 2002; Becher, 1991; Clark, 1987; Rhode, 2006; Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2003). Again, using myself as an example upon graduation, I expect to think of myself as “a communication scholar.”

Although no such thing as a standard academic career path may exist, professors usually develop a sense of career (Baruch & Hall, 2004; Dowd & Kaplan, 2005). The path of academic socialization includes a number of turning points, events that separate the past from the future. Professional academic turning points include acceptance into graduate school, completion of graduate school coursework, passing a qualifying exam, finishing a dissertation, accepting a position as an assistant professor on a tenure-track line, gaining tenure, and traveling through the academic ranks to become a full professor. The new professor is expected to create a particular research program, develop expertise in teaching, and serve both institutional and scholarly communities. Normally, one expects this linear progression to be recognized and rewarded by one’s home institution as well as one’s department (Diamond, 2002; Mallard, 2002).

Universities have gone through enormous changes over the past twenty years and currently face numerous economic and environmental dilemmas that challenge their continued survival: mounting funding cuts from all segments of government, increased

competition for funding, growing needs of the community, the implementation of new technologies, and calls for greater accountability from parents, students, and government (Jacob & Hellström, 2000; Lechuga, 2006; Lustig, 2006; Rhode, 2006; Shuster & Finkelstein, 2006a, 2006b). These changes not only affect higher education at the institutional level, but also have consequences for an individual professor's identity development as well.

In this dissertation, I seek to better understand the process of personal sensemaking among new tenure-track assistant professors in the discipline of communication. How does the new professor make sense of all of this? My goal is to focus on lived, concrete and detailed experiences of tenure-track assistant professors in the discipline of communication through the exploration of the narrative sensemaking processes they use during the career turning point, when they transition being from doctoral students to occupying tenure-track positions. It is through narratives that individuals story their lived experiences and make sense of themselves and their surroundings. This is particularly important during transition phases and turning points that affect an individual's identity (Bauer, McAdams, & Sakaea, 2005; Bochner, 1997; Frank, 1995). To achieve this goal, I conducted narrative research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) and interactive interviews (Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997) with first-year tenure-track assistant professors in the discipline of communication.

In this project, I explore the background of the problem by depicting academic identity work as a narrative sensemaking activity. I situate this project in two main bodies of literature. First, I present a preliminary literature review on social construction and the role communication plays in the construction of social reality. Then, I present a review of

the relevant literature on vocational and organizational socialization, including individual agency by newcomers.

As institutions and non-profits, however, universities are different than for-profit organizations. Therefore, I review academic socialization processes, and the concept of the academic career in the current climate of change and transformation. Then, I present the method of research to be used throughout my study, including a description of the population and sampling method, an overview of my research procedures, a rationale for using a narrative approach, interactive interviewing, and autoethnographic writing, and initial research questions to be addressed in the dissertation.

After providing the narratives of my participants, I offer critical and reflexive responses to the research process. Finally, I discuss research-based guidance on the conclusions reached during this project – guidance that can provide graduate students, doctoral programs, department chairs, and first-year tenure track assistant professors in communication insight into the sometimes joyous, sometimes agonizing, transitional phase of academic life – the first year as a professor on the tenure-track.

Chapter 2

The Construction of Social Reality and Academic Socialization

Culture is not static; it is an ongoing process of social construction, ever changing, always in negotiation. But if one were to freeze just the right moment, he would be standing there, perhaps not in the center, but there, in the academic culture, smiling and frowning, glad to be a part of it all (Pelias, 2004, p. 110).

* * *

The link among organizations, identities, and communication is rooted in processes of social construction (Allen, 2004; Eisenberg, 2007; Weick, 2004). Social construction focuses on how the social world comes to be bestowed with meaning, how these meanings are reproduced, navigated, and transformed through communicative social practices (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Eisenberg, 2007; Foster & Bochner, 2008; Gergen, 1991, 1999). Language is not simply a mirror of an objective reality or a means of transmitting information. Rather, our communicative practices create and promote social realities – and they are essential to what makes us human (Carey, 1988; Rorty, 1979). As Berger and Luckmann (1966) noted, “Language marks the coordinates of my life in society and fills that life with meaningful objects” (p. 36). Social construction posits that individuals derive knowledge from and of the world through larger social discourses. These discourses vary across time and place, and powerfully represent and reinforce dominant belief systems (Foucault, 1986, 2006; Gergen, 2001b; Hacking, 1999).

Social knowledge is indeterminate, polyvocal, contextual, and pragmatic (Bakhtin, 1981; Gergen, 2001b; Herrmann, 2007d, 2007e, 2008c). More to the point, social reality is intersubjectively constructed. As Berger and Luckmann, (1966) wrote, “Man’s self-production is always, and of necessity, a social enterprise. Men *together* produce a human environment.... *Homo sapiens* is always, and in the same measure, *homo socius*”(p. 51). Individuals are constantly in the process of moving through two developmental stages of socialization: primary and secondary socialization (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). During primary socialization in childhood, a person becomes a full participant and member of society, as he or she internalizes various norms, values, attitudes and beliefs. Primary socialization prepares individuals to participate in society, and ensures that a society’s cultural features will be carried on through new generations. One’s primary socialization is strongly influenced by family, school, and peer groups.

Secondary socialization is “any subsequent process that inducts an already socialized individual into new sectors of the objective world of his society” (p. 130). Berger and Luckmann (1966) noted that secondary socialization takes place later in childhood and into maturity. Agents of secondary socialization include schools, peer groups, organizations, and the workplace. Socialization corresponds to the process of internalization in which, “the objectified social world is retrojected into consciousness in the course of socialization” (p. 78). There is a dialectical relationship between action and structure. *Through internalization and socialization identities are transformed as individuals become insiders in a society, an organization, or a profession.*

Many social constructionists ask us to be critical of how we understand the world and our place in it, reminding us that knowledge is culturally and historically situated

(Allen, 2004; Foster & Bochner, 2008; Foucault, 2006; Hacking, 1999; Miller, 2008).

Categorizations, designations, markers, and classifications are all products of their specific socio-historical period and often reflect the ideological underpinnings of cultural history. Likewise, social construction processes sustain knowledge. We use communicative practices to produce and reproduce knowledge as we enact various roles within different contexts. Language is the system by which we objectify subjective meanings and internalize socially constructed meanings. In our daily activities we receive, reproduce, and transform recurring versions of institutional truth.

Changes in the conception of the discipline of communication are examples of changing institutional truth. Over the decades, communication scholars have defined themselves and their discipline, first through the lens of public speaking and rhetoric, then as a more expansive field, incorporating positivist social science, and more recently as one that includes interpretivist and cultural studies scholars practicing multiple research agendas. The discipline changes and evolves through our conversations about what “it” is, and what it means to be a communication scholar (Bochner & Eisenberg, 1985; Craig, 1999; Foster & Bochner, 2008; Gronbeck, 2005; Shepherd, 1993).

The focus of social construction is to uncover how individuals, groups and institutions participate in the creation of their perceived reality (Hacking, 1999). It entails examining how social phenomena are created, institutionalized, and objectified. Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that all knowledge, including the most basic, taken-for-granted common sense knowledge of everyday reality, is derived from and maintained by social interactions. As individuals act within their common knowledge, socially constructed reality becomes reinforced. Since individuals collaborate in the creation of

social reality, human typifications, significations, and institutions come to be presented as part of an objective reality. According to Hacking (1999), a social construction is an idea that may appear to be natural and obvious to those who accept it, but in reality is an invention or artifact of a particular culture or society and the social processes that produce it.

Social construction also examines the socio-cultural processes of meaning-making (Hacking, 1999). Social construction challenges the orthodox, positivist assumptions of empirical science acknowledging, “all claims to knowledge, truth, objectivity or insight are founded within communities of meaning making – including the claims of constructionists themselves. At the level of metatheory, most constructionist scholarship has been critical” (Gergen, 2001b, p. 2). Socially constructed reality can serve to keep power structures intact, and social constructionists can expose these structures showing they are not inevitable or a natural state of affairs (Hacking, 1999; Foucault, 2006; Hacking 2008; Miller 2008). Social construction “asks a new set of questions – often evaluative, political, and pragmatic – regarding the choices one makes” (Gergen, 2001b, p. 2). Since socially constructed reality both enables and constrains individual identity, I investigated and interrogated the socially constructed realities faced by new tenure-track communication faculty through an analysis of their personal narratives and the discourses surrounding academia.

One important aspect of secondary socialization is assimilation – the processes through which people learn how work and organizational life is viewed in their culture and subcultures (Ochs, Smith & Taylor, 1989). Newcomers to organizations learn the rules, norms, behaviors, and expectations in their work environments from many sources,

including the literature of one's vocation and one's organization, coworkers, and supervisors. In organizations, unmasking the socialization process helps us understand how the new employee learns about and makes sense of an organization's culture – "how things are done around here" (Jablin, 2001; Kramer & Miller, 1999). This learning process has three stages: 1) anticipatory socialization, 2) encounter, and 3) metamorphosis through organizational turning points. Although socialization processes in academia are in some aspects unique, they share certain similarities with these broader organizational socialization processes. Thus, I first review the broad spectrum on vocational and organizational socialization before turning to the specifics of socialization in a changing academy.

Vocational and Organizational Socialization of Newcomers

There are two forms of anticipatory socialization regarding the workplace: vocational and organizational. Much of what the individual learns in anticipatory socialization occurs during the period that Berger and Luckmann (1966) refer to as primary socialization. Vocational socialization is "the process by which people selectively acquire the values and attitudes, the interests, skills and knowledge – in short the culture current in the groups to which they are, or seek to become a member" (Merton, 1957, p. 287). Vocational socialization in particular begins in childhood, and involves learning generally about work and careers from families, friends, teachers, and the media (Jablin, 2001).

Organizational anticipatory socialization, on the other hand, involves learning about a *particular* job and organization. During this learning period prospective members begin to internalize the beliefs and values of the organization to which they desire to

affiliate. Through company literature, websites and interaction with teachers, interviewers, organizational members and network ties, individuals develop expectations *about* a prospective career. Three specific sources of information have been examined regarding organizational anticipatory socialization: *(1) recruitment, (2) accuracy of expectations, and (3) the employment interview* (Goodall & Goodall, 2006; Jablin, 2001; Jablin & Krone, 1987).

Organizations use the interviewing process to begin the socialization of new members (Anderson & Killenberg, 1999; Jablin, 2001). An appropriate job preview attempts to paint a realistic picture of what to expect from the job and the organization, so that upon entry the recruit is not shocked by unanticipated problems (Goodall & Goodall, 2006). Interviewing is also used to determine the degree of match between the values of potential recruits and the values of the organization. New recruits with personal values matching those of the organization have been found to adjust to the organization's culture more quickly than recruits with non-matching values.

The encounter phase of organizational socialization begins when the newcomer enters the workplace. This phase is multi-faceted and multi-modal, concerned with the newcomer's functional role, as well as the newcomer's understandings of organizational culture. While functional role socialization is important, organizational culture is considered more important because it includes organizational customs, espoused values, norms, organizational climate, rituals, traditions, and shared meanings (Hatch, 1993; Schein, 2004; Smircich, 1983; Trice & Beyer, 1993; Weick, 1995). At the encounter phase, socialization is "the process by which a person secures relevant job skills, acquires a functional level of organizational understanding, attains supportive social interactions

with coworkers, and generally accepts the established ways of a particular organization” (Taomira, 1997, p. 29).

Organizations attempt to assimilate newcomers across a number of dialectics: collective/individual, formal/informal, sequential/random, fixed/variable, serial/disjunctive, and investiture/divestiture (Van Maanen & Schien, 1979). Through collective socialization a group of new recruits goes through the assimilation processes together. In contrast, in individual socialization the newcomer is socialized separate from other neophytes (Ashford & Saks, 1996). Likewise, socialization can be formal or informal. In formal socialization, newcomers are separated from the other employees throughout the process, while in informal socialization, the newcomer is assimilated in tandem with regular organizational members (Saks & Ashford, 1997a).

Similarly, socialization can be either sequential – through identifiable steps – or random – through ambiguous and changing sequences. Organizational socialization can also be fixed with a precise timetable, or variable. In serial socialization experienced organizational members serve as role models for the newcomer. In contrast, disjunctive socialization occurs when there are no role models for the newcomer to emulate. Finally, socialization can be investiture or divestiture, that is, socialization either values the personal characteristics of the newcomer, or attempts to remake the newcomer in the organization’s image.

According to Ashford and Saks (1996) institutional tactics (collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, investiture) and individual tactics (individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, divestiture) have different outcomes. The institutional tactics “promote a more loyal workforce” while the individualized tactics “promote role

innovation and superior performance” (p. 170). Other socialization studies have suggested that institutionalized socialization tactics are related to lower role ambiguity, less role conflict, fewer intentions to quit, higher job satisfaction, more effective task mastery, and greater organizational commitment (Ashford & Saks, 1996; Saks & Ashford, 1996, 1997a, 1997b).

Upon entry, almost all organizations provide new employees with some type of oral and written orientations to their workplace (Goodall & Goodall, 2006; Jablin, 2001; Jerris, 1993). The duration of these orientations may be brief – lasting only one day – to a number of weeks. Importantly, departmental orientations are often added to the newcomers’ agenda and are usually provided by one’s new supervisor and/or other co-workers (Noe, 1999). Formal orientation programs generally provide a congenial welcome, a historical overview of the organization, products and services the organization provides, various policies and procedures, a mission statement and an organizational philosophy. The new employee is also inundated with information about compensation and benefits, including vacation, health and retirement options. Similarly, the newcomer is introduced to key staff members and departments. More often than not, orientation programs supply the newcomer and the organization a checklist to make certain necessary information is covered appropriately.

As Jablin (1987) noted, “from the organization’s perspective, the effective communication of policy-related information is essential, if for no other reason than that the organization is often legally bound to communicate such information to employees...” (p. 698). In essence, managerial communication to the new employee is unidirectional, top-down, and information providing (Van Maanen, 1977). Organizational

research has consistently shown that institutional socialization increases employee job satisfaction, organizational identification and organizational commitment (Bullis & Tompkins, 1989; Goodier & Eisenberg, 2006; Jones, 1986; King, Xia, Quick & Sethi, 2005; Riketta, 2005; Sturges, Conway, Guest & Liefoghe, 2005).

Although the period of transition varies, eventually employees may evolve from newcomer status into full-fledged organizational members (Jablin, 1987). In the metamorphosis phase “the recruit begins to become an accepted, participating member of the organization by learning new behaviors and attitudes and/or modifying existing ones” (Jablin & Krone, 1987, p. 713). Through a turning point – a critical moment in the relationship between the individual and the organization – the newcomer becomes a full-fledged insider (Bullis & Bach, 1989). The newcomer becomes accustomed to not only her new surroundings, but to the organizational culture. Eventually through these processes a newcomer internalizes the rules, norms and expectations of an organization. By defining herself in terms of organizational rules, processes and culture the newcomer takes supposedly given realities for granted and becomes immersed within given definitions of organizational roles and rules.

Important to this process of adjustment are other organizational members. They assist newcomers by providing knowledge, feedback, role models, social support, and entry to expansive networks and other work-relevant resources (Major, Kozlowski, Chao, & Gardner, 1995; Morrison, 2002). Predictably, newcomers find organizational insiders (e.g. peers, supervisors) more valuable than official organizational orientations. Supervisors, peers, and senior colleagues are the most available and helpful information sources. Coworkers can also act as gatekeepers of significant information. Therefore, in

order to “learn the ropes” newcomers need to establish agreeable relationships with coworkers (Louis, Posner, & Powell, 1983; Nelson & Quick, 1991).

Since the 1990s, researchers have shown that role-related learning and cultural learning are the core of organizational socialization (Jablin, 2001; Saks & Ashforth, 1997a). Scholars developed a number of models to represent what a newcomer needs to be socialized properly into an organization (Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994; Haueter, Macan & Winter, 2003; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992; Taormina, 1994, 1997, 2004). The literature suggests organizational socialization is comprised of the following domains: (1) task, (2) role, (3) interpersonal relationships, and (4) organizational training. These attempts to model organizational socialization are valuable. However, they promote a managerial perspective, attempting to help organizations socialize newcomers more efficiently and economically, while often neglecting the storied experiences of newcomers (Ashcraft, 2004; Brief, 2000; Chugh & Brief, 2008, Feingold, 1987). They also decontextualize the narrative sensemaking process. *In short, these models depict organizational socialization as a neutral, balanced, and value-free process, ignoring the implicit political and power issues involved.*

According to models of organizational socialization, newcomers go through a number of set stages until they become full-fledged organizational members. Moreover, these linear organizational socialization models assume that “through social processes and institutional arrangements, some voices are positioned as dominant or master voices while others are positioned as marginalized, excluded, or servant voices” (Bullis & Stout, 2000, p. 55). Critical, feminist and postmodern organizational communication researchers, however, have focused attention on embodiment (Trethewey, 1999;

Trethewey, Scott & LaGreco, 2006), gender (Ashcraft, 2004, 2006; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Mumby & Ashcraft, 2006) managerialism (Fine & Buzzanell, 2000), organizational narratives (Ashcraft & Pacanowsky, 1996; Buzzanell & Lucas, 2006; Gabriel, 2004; Mumby, 2001) and race (Allen, 2000), showing that organizational socialization is not a neutral occurrence, but rather one in which identities, relationships and processes of domination, subordination and marginalization are produced and reproduced through communicative action.

For example, Dickmeyer (2003) argues that organizational socialization practices may be crafted to gain normative control of newcomers. From this perspective, managerial messages are attempts to communicate how members should think and act, ensuring that members embrace, internalize, and communicate the organization's culture. Control through organizational socialization is not limited to publicly owned corporations, but extends to non-profit and academic institutions as well (Ackelsberg, Binion, Duerst-Lahti, Junn, Van Assendelft, & Yoon, 2004; Allen, 2000; Dowd & Kaplan, 2005), a topic to which I will return.

As employees become more comfortable within an organizational culture, they begin to individuate. During the transitional period of organizational assimilation, employees differentiate between the rules and norms that need to be followed and those that can be ignored without consequence. They begin to behave in ways that both conform to and transform existing organizational rules. According to most organizational socialization scholarship, individualization occurs within organizational discourses, culture, and structure (Jablin, 2001).

The development of organizational socialization research provides a detailed and systematic account of how newcomers become members of an organization by learning functional and cultural norms within the organization. Newcomers learn about an organization's norms through organizational literature, orientation and training programs, supervisors and coworkers. According to critical and feminist scholarship, what is missing or overlooked in the managerial, top-down accounts of organizational socialization stages, processes and constructs is the individual agency and lived experiences of the newcomer (Ashcraft, 2004; Jablin, 2001). Not all newcomers are mere sponges who absorb their roles and tasks as they enter an organizational culture. Many are, in fact, active participants, proactively attempting to attain information, acquire understanding, and make sense of their surroundings as they begin working in a new place of employment. Conceptualizing newcomers as active agents resulted in a second line of socialization research on information seeking and sensemaking to which I now turn.

Individual Agency, Information-Seeking, and Sensemaking

The orthodox approach to organizational socialization depicts the newcomer as a passive recipient of socialization programs and practices (Morrison, 1993a, 1993b). However, a second line of organizational socialization research has emerged in which the newcomer is not seen as passive, but as an active agent in her socialization process (Gruman, Saks & Zweig, 2006; Miller & Jablin 1991; Wrzeniewski & Dutton, 2001). One research approach that developed to understand individual activity during socialization is concerned with newcomers' individual psychological and personality differences (Fisher, 1986; Holland, 1996; Jones, 1983). Research on these variables

shows these differences influence newcomers' socialization as does the similar concept of behavioral self-management (Bauer & Green, 1994; Morrison & Brantner, 1992; Saks, 1995; Saks & Ashforth, 1996).

Psychological constructs suggest individual differences may affect the newcomers' desire to become organizationally socialized, although there has been little published research on this interesting idea (Fisher, 1986). According to Holland's (1996) typology, most people are one of six personality types: 1) realistic, 2) investigative, 3) artistic, 4) social, 5) enterprising and, 6) conventional. The realistic person is best suited to work with animals, tools, or machines, and generally avoids social activities. The investigative person is a problem solver and generally avoids leadership, sales and social situations. Individuals with the artistic personality enjoy the creative process, are often involved in artistic endeavors, are disorganized and allergic to highly structured situations. The social individual enjoys working with and helping people, but is not detailed oriented. Enterprising individuals are leaders able to persuade and to sell, but avoids activities requiring careful observation and scientific, analytical thinking. Finally, the conventional personality enjoys working with numbers, records, or machines in a set, orderly way while avoiding ambiguous and unstructured activities.

Individual differences may affect how organizational insiders respond to the newcomer. Again, there is little research evidence, though Chen and Klimoski's (2003) study provides initial support for this, with newcomer self-efficacy positively predicting team ratings of a newcomer's performance. Similarly, few studies have looked at newcomers' values during organizational socialization. The difficulty with the concept of individual differences and other person-organization fit constructs is that they view

identity (i.e., individual differences) as a stable inner core, *rather than a communicative and hence relational process* (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Bell & Bauer, 2006; Eisenberg, 2007; Herrmann, 2007d, 2007e, 2008a).

In this dissertation, I examine various types of newcomer agency, that is, what newcomers do during organizational socialization to become members of an organization. Research has hinted at what newcomers proactively do to reduce uncertainty in their occupational environments through their own inventiveness (Barge & Little, 2002; Fisher, 1986; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Weick, 1979). Upon entering an organization, the newcomer begins the process of organizational assimilation, which involves both surprise and sensemaking. At this time organizational newcomers can become a bit perplexed, feel slightly disoriented, and experience a variety of surprises in their new work environment (Louis, 1980; Weick, 1995, 1998).

Organizational newcomers attempt to gather information about the organization through six techniques such as overt questioning, indirect questioning, third parties, limit testing, conversational disguise, observation and surveillance (Miller & Jablin, 1991). The first information-seeking tactic is *overt questioning*, going directly to the source that may have the needed information. The likelihood of newcomers using overt questions is partially dependent on the perceived openness of the information source, as well as low probability of a loss of face.

The second tactic is *indirect questioning*, a face-saving information-seeking technique whereby newcomers can ask a question “in a way that neither embarrasses newcomers nor puts incumbents on the spot” (Miller & Jablin, 1991, p. 105). Third, newcomers use *third parties, or secondary sources*. This generally occurs when the

newcomer's supervisor is not available or when she needs confirmation of her supervisor's instructions. A fourth tactic of newcomer information-seeking tactics is *limit testing*. Newcomers test boundaries by breaking various organizational and relational rules. In effect, newcomers violate norms in order to find out what constitutes proper organizational behavior.

The use of *disguising conversations* is a fifth tactic in which newcomers seek out information by making their attempt appear as part of natural conversation. By putting their source at ease, "information seekers subtly encourage their targets to talk on a particular topic" (Miller & Jablin, 1991, p. 108). A sixth information-seeking tactic is *the use of observation* to unobtrusively obtain specific information from a source. This tactic is one of two non-communicative information-seeking tactics, the other being surveillance. *Surveillance* is the monitoring of one's organizational surroundings to gain general information, as compared to the specificity of observation.

Through all of these information-seeking tactics, newcomers come to understand what things mean by learning and internalizing the definitions and labels that insiders apply to events, artifacts and individuals. For example, using survey responses from 151 new organizational members, Ostroff and Kozlowski (1992) examined newcomers' acquisition of information in four content domains – task, role, group, and organization. They found newcomers across a variety of organizations relied primarily on observation, and interpersonal communicative practices with co-workers and supervisors,

Research in the last 30 years has acknowledged the role of the newcomer as an active agent in the socialization process, able to influence group norms and performance outcomes, as well as being the subject of organizational influences (Organ, Podsakoff, &

MacKenzie, 2006). The information-seeking literature has been particularly influential in this respect. First, Louis' (1980) model of newcomer surprise and sensemaking placed the newcomer at the center of the organizational socialization process as an active problem-solver. This fits with Ashford and Cummings' (1983) two-component model of information seeking, comprising feedback and monitoring. Subsequent research has developed these information-seeking and sense-making models, including several studies that elaborate on the two strategies of feedback and monitoring to include, for example, various questioning strategies, experimenting, and disguising conversations (Louis, Posner, & Powell, 1983; Miller, 1996; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Nelson & Quick, 1991).

A number of studies, based largely on surveys, questionnaires and close-ended interviews, have looked at the relative availability and effects of using different information-seeking strategies. Observation appears to be the most commonly used method of seeking information, with newcomers showing relatively stable information seeking behaviors over time while using different strategies and sources for specific types of information (Jablin, 2001; Morrison, 1993a, 1993b). Gaining information from supervisors is strongly related to positive socialization, as is seeking information more frequently overall (Ashford & Black, 1996; Louis, Posner, & Powell, 1983; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). As newcomers become more comfortable within the organizational culture, they can – and often do – individualize their roles. Newcomers in organizations are not necessarily passive recipients of the socialization tactics used by their employers. New organizational members are active participants in socialization through varied information-seeking tactics, and sensemaking processes. Simultaneously, newcomers are

individualizing their roles determining how far they may push organizational role boundaries and act proactively.

While the above literature provides an overview of assimilation, socialization and individuation in general, there are differences that are specific to academic socialization, including *socialization during graduate school, socialization into a disciplinary culture, an academic department, and the university*. Academic socialization differs as well, because professors need to learn three competencies simultaneously – teaching, research and service. Because of these differences, I now turn to researching the process of socialization in academia.

The Socialization of the Academic

The ongoing, interrelated restructuring of academic appointments, work, and careers is fueled by economic and technological megaforges that are accelerating the transformation of higher education, and accordingly, its faculty.

Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006a, p. 57

Like for-profit and other nonprofit organizations, universities attempt to socialize newcomers through similar orientation processes, including alcohol, drug and sexual harassment guidelines, institutional policies, and various benefits packages. However, university orientations generally include a description of the “typical student,” as well as theoretical and practical advice about teaching. In his autobiography of his first year experience, *Life on the Tenure Track: Lessons from the First Year*, Lang (2005) noted the orientation for new faculty

is about as interesting and helpful as orientations ever are. It would be great if they held it two weeks into the semester, when I had the space in my brain to

absorb all the information – and the experience with students and the campus that would allow me to make practical use of it. A week before the semester begins, though, everything pretty much washes into one ear and out the other (p. 17).

However well or poorly institutional socialization practices are, most members of the academy are tied more closely to and identify more often with the culture of their discipline (Clark, 1987; Lindholm, 2003).

The culture of a discipline is harder to define. Disciplines are “the primary units of membership and identification within the academic professions” (Clark, 1987, p. 7). Disciplines are “territories” populated by “tribes,” constructed by individuals, based on knowledge areas and arenas of inquiry, that cross national, organizational, institutional, and departmental lines (Becher, 1989). The culture of a discipline furnishes a way “faculty can identify themselves in relation to their work, their field, and their research interests” (Lechuga, 2006). The various academic disciplines examined by higher educational scholars include chemistry, communication, economics, education, engineering, English, history, law, mathematics, modern languages, pharmacy, physics, and sociology (Becher, 1989; Cawyer & Friedrich, 1998; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996; Weidman & Stein, 2003; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001).

Using the discipline of communication as an example, even a partial list of research topics and methods includes such diverse subjects as dialogue, rhetorical theory and criticism, close personal relationships, ethnography, discourse analysis, family structures, personal storytelling, gender in cyberspace, organizational voice, literary performance, and existential and poststructuralist philosophy. I mention these because all have been part of my research agenda as a blossoming communication scholar. What

makes all of these topics, subjects, and methods part of the discipline of communication is that “language itself is central to the construction of social worlds” and that “meanings are the products of understandings negotiated in and through relational communication” (Foster & Bochner, 2008) including the socially constructed world of the discipline of communication.

Socialization and academic careers are not unambiguous. Academic careers are often envisaged as consisting of three phases: early, mid-career, and senior faculty (Austin, 2002; Boice, 1992; Boyle & Boice, 1996; Menges, 1996). Many researchers include the experiences of graduate students, and teaching and research assistantship experiences, suggesting academic socialization commences before and during graduate school, rather than with initial faculty appointments (Anderson & Swazey, 1998; Golde, 1998; Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001). One wonders how well this academic socialization works, given that 10 percent of M.A. students continue onto doctoral programs and approximately 60 percent of doctoral students do not complete their Ph.D. programs (Golde, 1998; Offstein, Larson, McNeill & Mwalde, 2004).

Doctoral students continue to be socialized as they pursue faculty positions (anticipatory), as they transition from student to new tenure-track assistant professors in the discipline of communication (encounter), and as they make sense in a new organization and culture in their new department (turning points). According to Goldsmith, Komlos, and Gold (2001), as an assistant professor

you are now both an adult professional, fully responsible for your own work, with virtually no direct supervision, and a neophyte in a totally new environment. It

doesn't help that your adaptation to a new situation takes place when you are probably the most overwhelmed you will ever be (p. 136).

Since faculty readily define themselves in terms of their disciplines and departments, most research on new faculty member socialization takes place at the departmental level.

Studies typically showed that newcomers often felt insecure about their competencies, felt pressured to write grants, and believed their teaching was not valued. They expressed confusion regarding their role expectations and tenure requirements, limited collegiality within their departments, minimal feedback and evaluation regarding their teaching and service obligations, and a sense of isolation (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996; Turner & Boice, 1987; Whitt, 1991; Williamson, 1993; Wright, 2005).

First-year faculty from various disciplines said low levels of collegiality existed between junior and senior faculty. The new faculty wanted advice from senior colleagues, but were hesitant to ask for it. When they started their new positions, they anticipated supportive relationships with senior colleagues, but supportive relationships did not come to fruition, suggesting the low level of collegiality may have deterred the newcomers' performance, morale, and professional development (Turner & Boice, 1987). Most new faculty cannot identify any social network in their department or college to discuss teaching, experience a lack of collegial support, and receive little advice or information on teaching methods from their senior colleagues (Bataille & Brown, 2006; Boice, 1991).

A longitudinal study of new faculty from different disciplines at a large regional university suggested that new faculty experienced low levels of collegiality and intellectual stimulation (Boice, 1992). In fact, the new faculty viewed senior faculty as

nonproductive, tired, and unable or unwilling to provide support. The newcomers perceived promotion and tenure decisions as being made on a random, case-by-case basis, with little regard to any standards that may or may not have existed for such decisions. Despite warnings and advice to newcomers about devoting more time to research and publishing, new faculty seem to insist on putting more of their precious time into revising lecture notes and preparing for classes (Austin 2002; Toews & Yazedjian, 2007). These new faculty members convinced themselves that these activities would be more important for their success than production of scholarly work.

Back in 1984, Fink found that 50 percent of the new faculty in every type of post-secondary institution had four or more different classes to prepare and teach during their first year. Most new faculty were unsure as to whether the reward system at their university actually rewarded good teaching. Fink concluded universities offer “little in the way of purposeful activities designed to develop teaching competence in beginning teachers” (p.7). Although teaching has been given more attention in recent years, many new faculty feel disillusioned about the academic readiness of their students. They lowered their expectations for students, thereby lowering their own academic standards, and noted that information and training for the teaching role was often inadequate (Adams & Rytmeister, 2001; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006a; Sorcinelli, 1988; Turner & Boice, 1987; Whitt, 1991). Similarly, lack of time and gaps in one’s knowledge base and skills are stressful to novice faculty, while the most disappointing aspect of their first year was the lack of collegial support.

Conversely research productivity, a positive atmosphere for scholarship and teaching, and support from colleagues are sources of satisfaction (Sorcinelli, 1988). New

college faculty were satisfied with the intrinsic rewards of the career, such as autonomy, opportunities for intellectual growth, and sense of accomplishment. Daily interaction with their peers during work was rated as the most important aid to newcomers' feelings of effectiveness, job satisfaction, commitment, and intention to stay in the organization (Sorcinelli, 1992).

The importance of new faculty socialization through departmental peers and supervisors should not be underestimated. New faculty note significant elements in their socialization experiences include: (a) experiences in the interview framed later expectations for the new role; (b) relationships with formally appointed mentors provided little assistance or support; (c) integration seemed to proceed more quickly with individuals who seemed to match their new colleagues demographics, including age and lifestyle; (d) development of teaching skills was informal and individual; and (e) grading was learned under a formal, sequential, serial structure that encouraged conformity to current practice rather than innovation (Gibbs, Gold, & Jenkins, 1987; Kinman, 2001; Lease, 1999; Verrier, 1994).

Unfortunately newcomers to university faculties are "left alone to figure out what they are supposed to do" and that they must "*rely on experiences and interpretation from a previous setting to make sense of events and activities in the new setting*" (Whitt, 1991, p.179). New faculty members described their feelings and experiences as "predominantly negative," "stressful," and "threatening" and felt confusion, non-support, pressure to perform, and isolation. Even when new faculty reported themselves as satisfied with their new career (because of an increased sense of accomplishment, personal autonomy, opportunities for intellectual growth, etc.), work stress steadily eroded satisfaction (Olsen

& Sorcinelli, 1992). For new faculty members, five factors increased stress: (a) not enough time to get everything done without threatening themselves physically and personally; (b) inadequate feedback, recognition, and rewards for the work the institution says it values; (c) unrealistic expectations; (d) lack of collegiality, and (e) difficulties in balancing work, family, and personal life.

According to Reynolds (1992), social adjustments made by junior faculty in a research university fell into two categories: socialization and acculturation. Socialization described the experiences of individuals whose initial world view was generally compatible with the environment they faced after entering the institution. For these junior faculty socialization is part of an ongoing developmental process begun earlier in their careers as graduate students. In Berger and Luckmann's (1966) terminology, these junior faculty continue to internalize and objectify the demands and expectations of their new role through communicative practices of everyday life.

Acculturation on the other hand, consists of a much more demanding process experienced by new faculty, whose initial world view can be extremely different from the reality of the institutional environment in which they now work. New faculty members undergoing acculturation, according to Reynolds (1992), may be less likely to survive in the organization than those who are undergoing socialization. *For these newcomers, the differences between their previous roles as graduate students and their current roles as junior faculty members are enormous.* The situation of these faculty members is similar to that of a minority group member in a new culture (Orbe, 1998), and is also related to the concepts of reality shock and surprise (Louis, 1980; Scott & Myers, 2005; Wanous, 1992).

* * *

Having decided the academy was where he wanted to be, he heard the tenure clock ticking for the first time. The official standards were clear: publish about six substantive articles, teach well enough not to generate complaints, and take on some university and professional service. The one criterion that was just as real but never part of any formal document was collegiality (Pelias, 2004, p. 107-108).

* * *

Differences between the expectations and the realities of academic life often leave new faculty dissatisfied with or alienated from their work environments (Cawyer & Friedrich, 1998). “I guess most people would say they like the freedom of faculty life, but it’s a weird freedom, isn’t it? The freedom to work all the time” (Tierney, 1997, p. 9). In fact, junior faculty tend to describe adjusting to the pressures, professional alienation, and the time constraints experienced in tenure track positions as a struggle. Many junior faculty feel like outsiders in their own departments, twisting in the wind, learning by their mistakes, and playing a guessing game as they begin their new positions (Lang, 2005; Tierney, 1997; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996).

Adjusting to the pace and pressures of the academic life, a new faculty member remarked,

I don’t know if I’m a distance runner, biker [or] swimmer. I feel like I’m asked to do everything at once and all the time. At work I had one job, one task, and maybe one on the drawing boards. Here, you have one project going, one in planning, one or two you’re writing grants for, and the constant revision of articles. Then there are the students. My graduate students line up outside the

door, the undergraduates want their exams back, and somebody's always in crisis. And then there's the service side where you're asked to sit on committees. Who can do all of this? Whoever thinks faculty life is the leisurely pursuit of knowledge should follow me around for a while (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996, p. 61-62).

Less well-established faculty “long for a more meaningful sense of connection with their work environment – in short, a yearning for a greater sense of academic community” (Lindholm, 2003, p. 145). Six of the seven principle rationales faculty give for leaving research universities are intangibles: professional congeniality, rapport with departmental leadership, research possibilities, and the reputations of the department, institution, and associates (Amery, 1996).

Finally, and particularly important to this project, is the research by Cawyer and Friedrich (1989), who examined organizational socialization among new faculty in departments of communication in the United States. Through statistical analysis of survey research they determined new communication faculty “perceive they receive less support than they need to satisfactorily facilitate organizational entry” (p. 243), and that although job interviews are “a positive experience, arrival on the job was perceived as less satisfying” (p. 242). One insightful survey respondent noted the paradoxical nature of attempting to collect information on socialization processes through the use of surveys.

I think this survey trivializes the issue of socialization by: (a) assuming that socialization is a good thing, even though in my department many aspects of it are not (e.g., being taught that the purpose of graduate students is to make life easier for faculty, being taught that effective teaching is equal to high ratings on closed-

ended evaluation forms, etc.): (b) asking questions that gloss over all specifics except those most likely to be provided in written form such as salary, benefits, tenure expectations, etc. While these issues are part of socialization, they are only one part and probably not the most interesting one. Subtle pressure to redefine grading standards, spend less (or more) time with students, use some forms of evaluation (e.g., multiple choice tests) rather than others – these are real socialization issues that probably distinguish institutions and institutional types (p. 242).

This insight is important, as it emphasizes that the socialization of new faculty members is a continual process of sensemaking and narrative continuity that occurs on both the macro and micro levels of social contexts and interpersonal interaction – *processes that cannot be captured in any depth or detail through survey research.*

The means of socialization may occur in many ways, including orientation, training, education, and apprenticeship programs. Newcomers to academia are concerned with learning their role and understanding the culture of the institution, the discipline, and the academic profession. All these various pressures – to publish early and often; to face larger undergraduate classrooms; to provide service to the university and the community; to develop a research program; to attain money through grant writing and other means; to keep up with new technologies – occur within the larger framework of socialization. New tenure track assistant professors are being socialized as newcomers into a discipline, a department, a college, and a university that may be substantially different from the university where they completed their doctoral program. One thing is certain, new faculty

need to make sense of these changes and cope with the challenges they face in order to be successful.

Moreover, during the past twenty years universities have been undergoing numerous cultural, financial, and organizational changes (Altbach, 2005; Lustig, 2006; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006a, 2006b). These profound changes necessitate an investigation of those developments to better understand the challenges new academics face as they enter tenure track positions, changes which may not have come up in previous research on newcomer socialization in universities.

Chapter 3

The Changing University and the Discourses of Academic Capitalism

Researchers on newcomer's socialization generally perform studies in organizations other than the university. The university is a unique type of organization that has undergone numerous changes in the last half century. As non-profit cultural institutions, universities differ from for-profit organizations. Historically, societies prize universities for the values and service they embody, rather than for the performance and profit they provide (Altbach, 2005; Scott, 1987, 1995; Selznick, 1957). Cultural institutions consist of cognitive, normative, and regulating structures and activities that give meaning and stability to social behavior. Universities, as cultural institutions, operate at several different levels and social norms, structures, and routines maintain them (Scott, 1995).

The American university has gone through many changes due to socio-economic and historic challenges. Forty years ago people would have largely dismissed a book such as *The Professors*, which attacks supposedly left-wing academics (Horowitz, 2006). Today it is part of a larger trend that potentially undermines the institutionality of the university, by throwing into doubt the idea of the university as a "public good." Critics are questioning many of the basic premises of the modern day university (Altbach, 2005; Zusman, 2005). Some critics are calling for universities to be run like businesses by managers where the goal is "to ensure more accountability and efficiency in the management of academic institutions" (Altbach, 2005).

Universities now receive less funding from state government and more financial patronage from industry (Dator, 1998; Jacob & Hellström, 2000). Over the last thirty years, states have cut their budgets for postsecondary education by a national average of 34 percent (Zumeta, 2006). At the same time, vocational training in universities increased due to pressure from both students – who want to graduate and attain employment – and industries that need students to have certain skills. Institutions of higher education began engaging in market-like behaviors, a kind of “academic capitalism” in which educational outcomes (students and artifacts of research) are “products” (Bousquet, 2008; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). In the past twenty years, university autonomy has shrunk under the pressure of government, industry and student demands for accountability (Lechuga, 2006). Academia is becoming managed. While managing is supposed to reduce chaos, it does not necessarily create order (Lennie, 1999), satisfaction (Vigoda, 2000), or community (Tompkins, 1996).

These socio-economic transformations are changing hiring practices in higher education and changing the lives of individual faculty members. As of 2003 only 44.9 percent of all faculty members hold full-time tenured positions (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006a). Schuster & Finkelstein (2006a) conclude “contingent or term appointments became during the past decade the *modal* form of new *full-time* faculty appointments” (p. 55). In addition, from 1993 to the present, the percentage of all newly hired full-time faculty appointed to non-tenure track positions increased every year from barely more than 50 percent to almost three in five. Looking through a wider lens, in the last thirty years the categories of full- and part-time non-tenure-track faculty – both increased by over 200 percent (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 2008). Just as

in other areas of the economy, more and more faculty members are “outsourcers” (Eisenberg, Goodall & Trethewey, 2006). Outsourcers are contingent, non-traditional, term contracted employees, who are solely responsible for their career development and receive little, if any, organizational support, benefits, or recognition.

In sum, the academy is undergoing change unlike any other time in recent memory and socio-economic pressures have affected some of these changes (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). First, the increased competition for declining federal and state dollars makes funding more difficult to achieve (Altbach, 2000). Governmental funding for the academy has fallen across the board, giving corporate entities a larger role in research (Rhode, 2006). Academic publishers are having financial difficulty, reducing publication opportunities for young scholars (Gardner, 2004; Smooden, 2005). The curricular choices of students have changed to a more vocational focus. The demands for budgetary accountability from the government have forced administrators to gain more control over their institutions and therefore over individual academics’ lives.

Almost all of these trends can be summed up in the phrase “academic capitalism” (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), a discourse that promotes the view that higher education needs to be run as a business according to capitalist economic principles (Breneman, 2005; Rhode, 2006). Academic capitalism can affect the professor-student relationship in undergraduate education. “Overcrowded classrooms and the revolving door of contingent hires also prevents students from developing long-term relations with individual faculty members, and faculty members from responding to individual student needs” (Lustig, 2006, p. 148).

This socio-economic discourse affects the way professors do their work. While the pressure to balance teaching and research is a well-known academic's dilemma, the pressure on the professorate now includes service work and grant writing. "Demands for accountability, the increased bureaucratization of institutions, fiscal constraints...and an increasingly diverse student body have all challenged the professorate" (Altbach, 2005, p. 30). Traditional career paths have changed. Many professors work in non-tenure track positions as adjuncts, one-year renewable appointees, instructors and lecturers, in effect creating a "two-tier academic labor force" (Zusman, 2005, p. 121). For those non-tenure track academic employees, working a second or third job is not unheard of in order to make ends meet in a challenging economic climate.

Baruch and Hall (2004) suggest "that the future role for the academic is neither in the university nor in the corporate world, but as a self-employed knowledge worker, serving in boundaryless fashion in the research and development, production, and marketing functions" (p. 260). The rapidity of change in the socio-economic climate of higher education during the last twenty years necessitates that universities need new tenure-track Assistant Professors with specific abilities. Yet, as Goldsmith, Komlos & Gold (2001) note,

Each person has to decide for herself, of course, how she wants to develop her life and her career. There is no particular recipe regarding how one ought to balance teaching, research and service. Each offers certain rewards and demands, varying sorts of involvements and activities (p. 137).

I wonder, however, how much is up to the individual person and how much is demanded by the socially constructed academic reality in which academics live and

work. Discourses, after all, change definitions, practices and power structures through the way reality is socially constructed (Deetz, 1988; Foucault, 2006; Miller 2008). Although there may not be a “particular recipe,” we shall see there is pressure in academia to choose some ingredients more than others.

What do institutions of higher education desire from new tenure-track Assistant Professors? Research, teaching, and service are the oft-quoted triumvirate in the academic profession. According to Boice (1992), teaching is the responsibility that consumes the most time and energy from new faculty, and hiring institutions want new faculty to be classroom ready. However, the preparation of new faculty for classroom teaching varies widely. Some graduate students never teach. Others serve as teaching assistants for large classes. Few teach a variety of courses independently. According to Seidal, Benassi, and Richards (in press), a national survey of newly hired faculty and their chairpersons agreed they were not adequately prepared for college teaching. This should come as no surprise, given graduates have spent the better part of their doctoral education performing dissertation research and that, in general, the canonical narrative circulating in graduate programs promotes the view that research will be more highly regarded in the tenure review and evaluation process than teaching (Austin 2002; Boyer, 1990).

Teaching, however, includes more than being in the classroom as a lecturer. Administration asks many new faculty members to develop new courses, and teach liberal arts and general education courses their first few years. New faculty members need to know new technology, supervise practicums, internships, independent studies, and undergraduate theses. Finally, advising is also a part of each faculty member’s

teaching responsibilities. Faculty need to be available to students on a regular basis about educational, career, and personal issues. Besides teaching, faculty work usually includes “responsibility for some aspects of governance of the institution, usually in the form of a faculty senate and associated committee work” (Adams, 2002, p. 7). Service on committees involved with curriculum, finances, hiring, funding, among others is a generally accepted practice.

Finally, active scholarship also determines faculty success. Regardless of the type of four-year institution, tenured and tenure-track faculty need to develop a research program (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006a). While in some ways a research program may be a continuation of the research new faculty completed during their doctoral program, new faculty members expect to develop a new research agenda, and have this research disseminated quickly through publications and conference presentations. New faculty consider research (and therefore scholarship) the number one priority and they are rewarded for research through compensation, time off from teaching, and reputation (Alpert, 1985; Fairweather, 1999; Purcell, 2007).

Popular characterizations of faculty describe them as unproductive, lazy, failing to educate undergraduates, and not involved in “real work” (Berube & Nelson, 1994; Hersh & Merrow, 2005; Smith, 2004). The reality is different, as faculty put more time and effort into their teaching, research, and community service than ever before. Since 1972 the proportion of faculty who report working more than 50 hours a week doubled from 23 percent to 66 percent (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006a). Over the same period, the overall proportion of faculty working more than 55 hours per week has increased from one in eight to one in four. Twenty-five percent of faculty are now considered prolific

publishers, producing five or more publications within a two-year timeframe. “Although one-third of all faculty have published something over the course of their careers, the proportions who are publishing and who are publishing prolifically have increased across all sectors and all fields, and among women as well as men” (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006a, p. 103).

Teaching loads increased slightly across academia, excluding comprehensive research universities. Two-thirds of full-time faculty report increased involvement in community and university service (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006b). The full-time professorate in general appear to be working harder across all areas of the triumvirate. As Goldsmith, Komlos, and Gold (2001) noted,

The juggling problem is the single most difficult problem that a junior academic has to face. If all has gone well in graduate school, you have already learned how to do research, but now you have to learn how to do research while being an assistant professor. That’s like learning to balance a stick on your nose and then learning how to do it while riding a bicycle (p. 137).

The discourse of academic capitalism challenges and reforms what the academy is, what it does and how it is understood, beginning with the way in which we communicatively construct the university and its constituents. Programs become profit hubs. Students become customers and clients. Professors become individualistic entrepreneurs. Professors who once followed a call to a vocation now follow a path of careerism (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Plantinga, 1990; Tompkins, 1996), that “in its anxious and voracious need for continuing, quantifiable achievement - a certain number of books or articles published, a certain hierarchical ranking of affiliated institutions and presses, a

certain salary increase – is never satisfied or satisfiable” (Hall, 2005, p. 12). Academic success becomes measured by productivity and efficiency. Tenure is anathema in the corporate discourses of the academy, because continued measurable individual success leads to job security.

The capitalist economic model of the university alters an institution distinguished for its heterogeneity and loose coupling into a cohesive, managerial directed organization, rendering shared governance, a long held tradition of the academic workplace, less effective (Couturier, 2005; Lustig, 2006; Nelson, 1995, 2008). According to Lustig (2006), academic capitalist discourses and practices work to

change the standards to which academic work is accountable, and the objectives for which it is accountable, and to change the people to whom faculty are accountable—from peers and journeymen professors to campus bureaucrats and those who simply want the university to produce wage thinkers (p. 152).

Power moves away from the weakened full-time tenured professorate into the hands of administration.

Although scholars often consider organizational culture unitary, competing cultures and subcultures exist in any organization, including within the university. Austin (1990) believes faculty members “live and work in at least four (and often more) cultures. As ‘interpretive frameworks,’ these cultures affect how faculty interact with students, conceptualize and organize their work, participate in institutional decision-making, and balance disciplinary and institutional responsibilities” (p. 61). The three main cultures are: (1) the culture of academia, (2) the culture of the institution, which includes the

department, the college, and the university as a whole, and (3) the culture of the discipline.

Academia is based on a culture that values research, teaching, autonomy, academic freedom, and collegiality (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). At the macro level, different cultures arise at different types of institutions. For example, professors at private liberal arts institutions enjoyed teaching and autonomy, while professors at comprehensive research universities were more enthusiastic about scholarship (Becher, 1989). However, given the fragmentary nature of the university, currently scholars are debating whether the university as a whole can be defined in cultural terms, theorizing that the only commonality all faculty share at their university is that they practice their profession in the same location (Dill, 1982; Shils, 1983; Silver, 2003). As Astin (1993) noted,

I have always been attracted to the idea of the university as a ‘community of scholars.’ However, given its massive size and the diversity of interests and purposes embodied in the modern university, and given the powerful incentives that it offers for individual scholarly accomplishment, the ‘community’ of scholars remains more an ideal than a reality. *We have scholars, to be sure, but we lack the community.* One might more aptly characterize the modern university as a ‘collection,’ rather than a community of scholars (p. 4, emphasis added).

Looking at the various practices, fragmented research agendas, disciplinary differences, tensions between faculty and administration, and other dilemmas in the modern university, Silver (2003) is more blunt. “Universities do not now have an organizational culture” (p. 167).

As I noted earlier, the academy is different from for-profit organizations, and this includes aspects that are unique to faculty socialization. These include socialization during graduate school, socialization into a disciplinary culture, an academic department, and the university. Importantly, socialization into academia and the identity construction of new professors does not happen in a vacuum, but is constrained and enabled through the discourses surrounding the academy, including the discourse of academic capitalism. It is through the stories of new professors, rather than theories, these discourses may be revealed and understood.

Narrative Sensemaking in Academia

How do new tenure-track Assistant Professors in the discipline of communication make sense of their new environments? Do they have competing commitments that bring about internal and external conflict? Are they faced, as the literature suggests, with dilemmas such as maintaining work-life balance, sustaining the teaching-research-service triumvirate, learning various cultural norms of their discipline, institution, and department, being collegial, developing a research program and becoming excellent teachers, all while being assimilated and socialized into a new setting? And if so, how?

In this dissertation, I collected the stories of second year assistant professors in communication, looking back on their first year on the tenure track. I focused on the stories these professors told about their lived experiences as newcomers and how they made sense of their changing identities in a new organization. Unlike survey research that *tells* us about new faculty, collecting stories offers the opportunity to *show* the challenges new faculty members faced and how they coped with them. Narrative researchers note a distinct difference between telling and showing. Telling presents a summary of events,

but distances the reader, writer, and listener through a lack of dialogue and evocative rapport (Adams, 2006; Bochner, 1997, 2001, 2002; Bochner & Ellis, 1999; Ellis, 2004). Showing on the other hand allows readers, writers, and listeners to “experience an experience” evocatively (Ellis, 1993, p. 711). I will return to the approach through which I collected participant stories in the upcoming Methods and Modes of Representation chapter.

To discover how anything happens in an organization, we ask people to tell us stories. To convince others that we know something about how things happen in organizations, we construct and tell stories about those stories. As others react to our stories, they tell stories about the stories we have told — and so on.

O’Connor, 1997, p. 304

Researchers often turn temporal processes into static objects (Herrmann, 2007b). As an example, network analysis, while producing integrated charts of communication patterns, gives a picture of a particular organization only at one particular time. Survey research objectifies in much the same manner. Similarly, examination of organizational artifacts produces knowledge of a particular instance and item, but often does not take into account the sensemaking processes that went into the creation and eventual dissemination of the artifact itself. This objectification contradicts the basis for examining everyday life existentially (Guignon, C., & Pereboom, 2001; Herrmann, 2007b). By objectifying, we distance ourselves from the flow and temporality of the sensemaking process. Temporality and process are what narrative offers us through showing rather than telling.

Narrative is not only a subject *of research*, but also a method by which to *do research* (Bochner, 1994; Bochner & Ellis, 1999; Bochner, Ellis, & Tillmann-Healy, 1998; Bruner, 1990; Coles, 1989; Frank, 1995). Since the “narrative turn” (Mishler, 1991), scholars determined and understand that identity and narration are linked, and although we find ourselves embedded in socio-historical narratives, personal narratives are the cornerstones of our identities, and in fact, selves are storied (Bruner, 2004; Coles, 1989; Crites, 1986).

Stories are not only the way in which we come to ascribe significance to experiences...they are one of the primary means through which we constitute our very selves...We become who we are through telling stories about our lives and living the stories we tell (Andrews, 2000, pp. 77-78).

Narratives help us make sense of experience and give our lives meaning (Guignon, 1998; MacIntyre, 2001).

Narratives are not simple reproductions of personal life experiences, but are reconstructions, interpretations, and reinterpretations of past events (Bochner, 1994; Bruner, 1990; Crites, 1986). Narration is a creative act, as an individual meditates on previous events in light of current understandings and perspectives, continually reconstructing and reevaluating the meaning of these past personal experiences. Personal narratives re-story “the past in terms of their meaning for the future” (Lerner, 1998, p. 556). Narratives are a way of making sense of ourselves and our situatedness (Krizek, 1992, 2003). Lang (2005) tells us much the same in the introduction to his academic autobiography:

As I look back over the year and try to reconstruct so many weeks and months from both documents and memory, invariably the events that stand out most clearly are the ones that were especially traumatic or puzzling. Those were the events that I continued to reflect on long after the year had ended and that still stand out in my mind now, three years later (p. ix).

For Weick (1988), narrative is an inherent part of the sensemaking process, because data “are inconsequential until they are acted upon and then incorporated retrospectively into events, situations, and explanations” (p. 307), that is, until they are storied. He stresses how “reality is selectively perceived, rearranged cognitively, and negotiated interpersonally” (Weick, 1979, p. 164). It is during sensemaking that individuals search for contexts within which to fit various details together. Since an organizational participant creates meaning based upon her specific interests and frames of reference, her identity is implicitly involved. People are definitely part of the context they puzzle over. Stories are crucial to sensemaking because they advance comprehension, provide order for events, direct action and communicate shared values and meanings. Sensemaking is grounded in the process of constructing, narrating, and restorying one’s identity simultaneously with one’s social context (Eisenberg, 2007; Krizek, 2005; Weick, 1995; Weick & Browning, 1986). According to Weick, sensemaking is continuous and retrospective, similar to Heideggerian and Kierkegaardian concepts of temporal existence (Herrmann, 2007b.). While newcomers attempt to make sense of their new surroundings, they live in ambiguity and equivocality.

Of particular importance to organizational communication scholars is how sensemaking occurs through narrative processes. Narratives depict multifaceted

experiences “that combine sense, reason, emotion, and imagination. Narrative stirs all these elements together...” (Weick & Browning, 1986, p. 250). Through the use of narrative, individuals reflect on their past through the lens of the present. According to Richardson (1990), narrative exhibits the objectives and intentions of the individual agent and makes sense of “individuals, cultures, societies, and historical epochs” holistically, while allowing us to envisage and to modify the path of our lives (p. 200). Bochner (2002) suggests, “We need not assume that narratives seek to represent lives correctly, only that narrators believe they are doing so” (p. 86). Narratives are especially important during the turning points of people’s lives (McAdams & Bowman, 2001).

New faculty face a number of challenges as they enter their first academic appointment, an important turning point in their careers. They are no longer under the direct tutelage of their dissertation advisor. They are no longer one of the “anointed” doctoral candidates, but are newcomers starting fresh in new positions. They may have moved to a new geographic location, a new state, and a new city. They are in a new department in a new university with different policies, procedures, and cultural norms. They are required to fulfill the necessary requirements of teaching, research and service effectively and productively. They are confronted with new tasks and responsibilities with graduate and undergraduate students. They need to develop new and different relationships with peers and colleagues. The manner by which new tenure-track communication faculty make sense of and story these challenges will provide insight into narrative sensemaking processes, and present an in-depth exploration of socialization in the academy.

Chapter 4

Methods and Modes of Representation

In this chapter, I present the procedures I used to collect, tell, and interpret the stories I share in this dissertation. I review the choices I made as I shaped the narratives from the interviews and recorded autobiographies of first-year, tenure-track assistant professors in communication. As I discussed in Chapter Two, most socialization research on new faculty members tends to be survey-based and highly structured. I was startled to find that most of the research lacked autobiographical and in-depth interviewing and thus stories of lived experiences of first year professors are virtually nonexistent (Cawyer & Friedrich, 1989; Fink, 1984; Reynolds, 1992; Sorcinelli & Billings, 1993; Turner & Boice, 1987; Weidman & Stein, 2003; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). As I planned my interviews, I decided to focus on the narratives before, during, and after the transition from graduate student to first-year, tenure-track assistant professor. Before detailing the process through which the participants and I met, and how I proceeded with the research, I want to review the methodological approach I adopted in this study.

Methodological Approach

I approached this study of new tenure track assistant professors in the communication discipline not as “an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (Geertz, 1975, p. 5). In contrast to orthodox scientific methods, which seek objectivity, theoretical abstraction, generalization, and measurement validity, interpretive approaches attempt to understand the emotional

complexity and unique aspects of lived experience by focusing on intersubjective construction(s) of meaning. Interpretive approaches, including ethnography, life history, and narrative emphasize knowledge as socially constructed and intersubjective (Adams, 2008; Bochner, 1994; Ellis, 2004; Krizek, 1998).

In addition, interpretive methods acknowledge the human aspects of research encounters, where individuals come to know each other and to admit each other into their lives (Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997; Tillmann-Healy, 2003). Interpretive researchers challenge the traditional hierarchy of the active researcher and the passive respondent, by characterizing the interviewer/interviewee relationship as a social encounter, collaboration, and friendship. Both the interviewer and the interviewee are positioned within the field of study, thereby impacting the situation under examination. Interviews appear as conversations between individuals, and emotions and ever-changing lived experiences come to the foreground (Ellis, 2004; Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997; Krizek, 2003; Miller, 2002; Mishler, 1991). The experiences of both the interviewer and interviewee become integral to the process. Each is a participant in that process. This acknowledgement necessitates an understanding and commitment to reflexivity by the researcher.

Although I came to each participant as the “investigator,” I recognized that they are the experts on the first year of teaching and researching as tenure-track professors. They are the individuals who transitioned from positions as graduate students to first-year, tenure-track assistant professors. They are the ones who have stories to tell. Yet, whenever we act as researchers inquiring into human activities we are telling the stories not only of others, but also of ourselves (Steier, 1991). The interpretive, socially situated

nature of interpretive research necessitates that the interviewer contemplate the effects of his or her own personal attitudes, values, and expectations on the research process. A commitment to reflexivity encourages the interpretive researcher to understand his own experiences in relationship to his participants (Ellis, 2004; Krizek, 2003).

Thus, the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is collaborative. Both are participants in a co-constructed research process. As Chase (1996) notes:

I think we need to remind ourselves as well as prospective participants that narrative research is a contingent and unfolding process, the results of which we cannot anticipate or guarantee. An informed consent form cannot possibly capture the dynamic processes of interpretation and authorship (p. 57).

Narrative research is interpretive since stories are interpretive constructions (Bochner, 2001, 2002). Storytelling involves and implicates both the speaker and the listener during the process of inquiry. In the narrative research interview, stories are shared, created through conversations in a relational context co-created by the participants. Both the interviewer and the interviewee guide, halt, interrupt, encourage, and otherwise influence the discussion and the stories being told. The interviewer is unequivocally part of the process, and therefore is also subject to scrutiny (Gudmundsdottir, 1996; Josselson, 1996; Steier, 1991). Therefore, reflexivity was a necessary component of the research process as I negotiated my role boundaries as a researcher, a doctoral candidate, a “job hunter,” and simply as an individual.

I will return to the implications of these reflexes practices later in this chapter in the section on ethnographic practices. Next, I want to turn to the procedures I used to acquire participants, and to carry out the research, including the collection of participant

autobiographies, the interactive interviews, and ethnographic practices (Bochner, 2002; Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Ellis, 2004; Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997; Goodall, 2003; Krizek, 2003)

Why Request Narratives

As suggested in Chapter Three, I narrowed my study to first-year tenure-track assistant professors in Communication for several reasons. First, tenure-track assistant professors in their first year are involved in various socialization processes at institutional, college, and departmental levels. Second, studies of first-year, tenure-track assistant professors range over a variety of disciplines, and I wanted to hear the narratives of individuals in the discipline that is closest to me. After all, I am working toward the position they currently occupy, and the insights they provide are not merely an academic exercise, they are personal. Finally, the few studies on Communication faculty that exist tend to overlook the rich data and the emotive aspects of lived experience evoked in stories. Upon deciding to focus on first-year tenure-track assistant professors in Communication, I broadened my approach to include two succinct yet related research activities: collecting narratives and conducting interactive interviews.

Participants. In November of 2006, I began discussing this project with my advisors, various people in my department, and with individuals at academic conferences. I explained that I was hoping to interview individuals who had just completed their first year, or were just starting their second year, as tenure-track assistant professors in communication. I settled on a participant number between six and eight. I did not desire a large number of participants. A smaller number was crucial, as I wanted to hear and analyze the in-depth stories of how these individuals coped as they transitioned from

graduate students to first-year tenure-track assistant professors in communication. By contacting department chairs, graduate program directors, and graduate students I knew in communication departments, as well as colleagues who preceeded me into positions as first-year tenure-track assistant professors, I was able to gather the names of twenty-three possible participants for my dissertation using both convenience and snowball sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In April and May 2007, I contacted each perspective participant either through telephone, email or face-to-face at conferences. The following is a copy of one of the initial contact emails.

* * *

From: Andrew F. Herrmann
Sent: Tuesday, May 08, 2007 11:09 PM
To: xxxxxxxxxx
Subject: Dissertation Project Request
Dr. XXXXXXXXX,

I'm writing to you because your dissertation advisor was gracious enough to provide your name to me. I am getting ready to do dissertation research this summer on the life experiences of new full-time faculty in our discipline.

The research process itself entails two parts and is not going to be time intensive on your end. The first part of my research entails you recording an hour answer to one prompt: "Tell me about your first year experience as a new tenure-track assistant professor." The second part of the research agenda would be a follow-up interview based on the answers I've received from all the participants. This would take approximately three hours. I am in the process of getting myself organized so the first stage of research

can be completed by the first week of July.

I am being purposely vague. I want the stories I collect to be spontaneous, without my undue influence on what you'd like to include in your first year narrative. I hope you will consider offering your time and your story for this project. Please feel free to contact me through either my email address or my cell phone, if you would like to participate, or if you have any other questions about this research project.

Sincerely,

Andrew

* * *

The selection process lasted approximately one month. Out of the 23 possible participants, I received positive responses from eight participants who agreed to take part in my study. By mid-May, I had a complete list and decided to begin the research process with these eight participants, not knowing if all would remain with the project to the end. This turned out to be a fortuitous decision on my part, as three participants did not complete the project. One participant traveled to Asia during the summer, and I was unable to contact her again. A second participant dropped out of the project, noting in an email, "I am concerned that despite assurances that you will do your best to keep my identity secret, my fellow faculty members will discover my identity, which may have consequences for my career." The third participant dropped out of the project for reasons unknown to me. With five participants remaining, I contacted one more first-year faculty member in late May. He agreed to participate.

Since I wanted to keep the participants' individual voices distinct, I dedicated one approximately 30-page chapter to each faculty member's narrative. In those chapters I

will provide more information about the participants, and specifics will come from the participants themselves as a result of their autobiographies and interviews. Here I provide preliminary demographics for each participant in chronological order by interview date.

Deborah. I had never met Deborah before starting this project, although I did recognize her name from National Communication Association panels and presentations. I initially contacted her dissertation advisor, who provided me with a number of possible contacts. Deborah is married and in her late twenties. She and her husband have a young son, who was born while Deborah was writing her dissertation. At the time of our interview, Deborah was ABD, and therefore had not yet graduated from the large university in the southwest, which had been her graduate school home. She is currently a tenure-track assistant professor, teaching conflict communication at a comprehensive university in the South.

Frank. Of all of the participants, I have known Frank the longest – approximately seven years. Frank and I have attended numerous conferences together and have many mutual friends in the academy. He is currently pursuing his doctorate at an institution in the West. He is single, in his early thirties, and lives by himself. At the beginning of this project, he taught Organizational Communication, Leadership and Public Speaking courses for a university in the Midwest. Like Deborah, Frank failed to finish his dissertation prior to starting his first academic position, thus maintaining a precarious ABD status.

Harrison. I knew of Harrison from his presentations at regional conferences. However, Harrison and I met officially at a conference after being introduced by a mutual friend, who knew about my dissertation project. We discussed the project briefly, and

Harrison provided me with the names of more possible participants for the project.

Harrison is a single man, who currently lives on his own. He graduated from a university in the Midwest, and now teaches undergraduate and graduate classes on gender and culture in communication at a university in the same region. He is involved with numerous student organizations on campus and publishes frequently.

Jo. I have been an acquaintance of Jo's for a number of years. On the recommendation of one of my dissertation advisors, I initially contacted her in January 2007. We discussed the project in more detail during a face-to-face meeting at an international conference in May. Jo is married, with no children. She currently teaches Health Communication and related qualitative research courses for a university system in the Southeast.

Aaron. I first met Aaron at a regional communication conference when he was the respondent to a paper I presented on a panel. At that time he was in the middle of the second semester of his first year as an assistant professor. When I told him about my dissertation project, he expressed interest in participating. We discussed our various organizational communication projects, our recent research, and our academic lives in general. Aaron graduated from a large university in the Midwest. He now researches organizational communication through qualitative methods for a comprehensive university in the southeast. Aaron is in his early thirties, and although he has never been married, he is committed to and lives with his partner, who works at the university in an administrative capacity.

Gabe. Although I had not met Gabe before beginning this project, I had seen him present a paper at a National Communication Association in 2006. I was given Gabe's

contact information by his dissertation advisor, who also happens to be Deborah's advisor. He is in his mid-thirties, is married, and has a "tribe" – his term – of children. He currently teaches courses on globalization, economics and rhetoric in the Midwest.

I want to stress that at the time I made contact with these participants, each was a full time assistant professor at their institution. I mention this now, because *one participant's faculty position changed to a contract position as the research unfolded*. Rather than eliminating him from the research, I decided that his experience might add to what we know about first-year faculty experiences.

Tell Me the Story...

I collected autobiographies from new tenure-track assistant professors in communication initially through a technique used by Bruner (2004). As he noted, "We were interested in how people tell the stories of their lives and, perhaps simply-mindedly, we asked them to do so... We told them that we were not interested in judging them or curing them, but that we were very interested in how people saw their lives" (p. 700). I asked participants to take one hour and audiotape the story of their first year experiences. I gave them one prompt: "Tell me the story of your first year as an assistant professor." This gave participants the freedom to decide what events they believed applicable to their experiences, without the interference or interruption of an interviewer or structured interview protocol at the preliminary stage. Since my participants lived in various parts of the country, I sent them packages through the mail, which included two copies of the IRB forms (one for them to sign and keep and one to return) as well as the recording media of their choice, and an SASE with appropriate postage. With these, I included a personalized

letter re-explaining the project. The following is an example of the email I sent to each participant.

* * *

Dear Dr. XXXXXX,

I am writing to express my thanks to you for volunteering to participate in my dissertation research. The purpose of this study is to inform you of the procedures I intend to follow in my study.

As you may remember, I am focusing my research on the first year experiences of new tenure line faculty in the communication discipline. My research will be conducted in two phases. In the first phase, I am asking each participant to tape record a one-hour response to the following prompt: “Tell me the story of your experience during your first year as an assistant professor.” This prompt is adapted from Jerome Bruner’s method for collecting autobiographical narratives, which is essentially what I am asking you to record, that is, your first year autobiography as a faculty member.

You may prepare notes before turning on the recorder, but you should not use a script, since my research is restricted to oral histories of the first year. After you turn on the recorder, please continue to tell your story without interruption until one hour has passed, then turn the tape off. In other words, please complete the story in one uninterrupted session lasting approximately one hour. It is important to me for your story to be as spontaneous as possible and to reflect your own voice and storytelling style. I am being purposely vague regarding your story’s content, as I do not want to unduly influence on what you'd like to include (or not include) in your first-year story.

I need to receive your recordings prior to holding my face-to-face interview with

you. There are several ways you can get these to me in a timely fashion. If you have a digital voice recorder, I can send you a cd-r (with the appropriate return postage) on which to burn your narrative, which you can then mail back to me. If you have an old-fashioned tape recorder, I can send you a tape. Finally, if you have a computer with a microphone, you can record directly into your computer and burn that to cd-r as well. Please let me know and I will send out the appropriate items and two copies of USF's IRB form. Please sign and date both copies, and return one to me with your recording. I would like your recorded narrative no later than June 1, 2007.

Obviously, I will need you to provide me with your full contact information including mailing address, telephone number, fax number, etc., so that I can send out the tapes, cd-rs and the IRB forms.

The second part of the research agenda will be a follow-up interview based on the narratives I've received from all the participants. We will need to set dates ahead of time so I can make the proper arrangements to come visit you whether by car or plane and in some instances, both. I am in the process of getting myself organized so that the interviews are completed by the 15th of July

I am also in the process of preparing a possible third phase of this research project that would bring some of us together as a focus group at this year's National Communication Association Convention in Chicago. My advisor is NCA's First Vice President and is going to attempt to get a location and time for this to happen. At this point in the process, however, I do not have any more information.

If you have any questions or concerns, or know of anyone else who would be interested in this project, feel free to contact me, either via email or my cell phone

number. Once again, I want to thank you for volunteering for this project and look forward to hearing from you soon about your recording needs, if there are any.

Sincerely,

Andrew Herrmann

* * *

Responses

I received all of the recorded autobiographies via mail by the first week of August 2007. This was well behind my original deadline of June 1st, proving that the best plans can go awry. As such I had to revise my initial plans of performing the follow-up interviews in July 2007. Interviews dates were changed to begin in September.¹ Five participants recorded their autobiographies on cd-r, and one was recorded on mini-cassette. I sent these autobiographies to a third party for transcription. I received hard copies of the transcribed autobiographies, totaling 181 double-spaced pages within ten days. I read them while listening to the original recordings in order to fill in any blank spots or unintelligible sections, and to correct any misspelled or mistaken information. While listening to and reading the autobiographies, I made notes on the transcripts, using grounded theory/constant comparative method to code and categorize (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

I turned to Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory for a set of guiding principles that could inform an investigation of the recorded autobiographies. Their strategy entails identifying possible themes, categories, and concepts that emerge from the texts and then connecting these with theoretical interpretations. According to Charmaz (2003), coding in grounded theory (also called the constant comparative

method) “is at a two-step process: (a) initial or open coding forces the researcher to begin making analytic decisions about the data, and (b) selective or focused coding follows, in which the researcher uses the most frequently appearing initially codes to sort, synthesize, and conceptualize large amounts of data” (p. 319). When using the constant comparative method, I analyzed the data and developed themes to the point of saturation (Charmaz, 2003). Saturation occurs when data analysis leads to no new themes or categories being established. I analyzed, categorized, and coded the participants’ recorded autobiographies using the constant comparative method (Creswell, 1998).

Listening to the recordings while reading the transcripts allowed me to hear what each participant emphasized. It was at this point I provided pseudonyms for each participant, the individuals they mentioned by name in their autobiographies, and past and present universities to help protect their identities. Most importantly, careful listening and reading helped me determine what particular personal issues I could pursue in follow-up interviews.

Interactive Interviews

I conducted participant interviews based on two sets of data – the autobiographies and previous academic research on new faculty socialization. I derived general, between-case questions, that is, questions dealing with themes that are common to first-year tenure-track assistant professors’ experiences. I also derived questions from the grounded theory method I applied to the participants’ recorded autobiographies. Like the questions used from the literature review, these are between-case and appear in many of the autobiographies. These between-case questions include:

Socialization Processes: What types of assimilation and socialization processes did the institution provide? From your point of view, were those processes effective or not? Which institutional domain (department, college, or university) provided the most useful information and/or best processes for socialization? What were the effects of professional organizations (i.e., National Communication Association) on socialization? What discourses surrounded the conversations regarding tenure eligibility?

Transitional Identity: What differences do you see in your life as an assistant professor compared to when you were a graduate student? What surprises did you face as you began your new position as a faculty member? What tensions, if any, did you face between work and home, teaching, research, and service? How did you attempt to balance research, teaching, and service? What has been the biggest challenge you faced when transitioning to a faculty position?

Advice: What advice would you give a doctoral student about to go through this process? What advice would you give your department, your university, and other professors about hiring a new professor? What advice could you offer to doctoral student as they begin their job search?

Epiphanies: What were the biggest accomplishments and the biggest disappointments during your first year? What surprises did you confront as a first-year professor? What epiphanies or similar understandings did you realize during your first-year?

Finally, I derived a second set of questions from each of the faculty autobiographies. These questions were specific, within-case questions, that is, these questions were particular to that participant's first-year tenure-track experience, e.g.,

Deborah's interesting relationship with her dissertation advisor; Gabe's concerns about finances, etc. Since these themes are individualized rather than general, I reference them in the written narratives.

Using these guiding questions and themes, I conducted follow-up face-to-face narrative interviews with each participant that lasted three to four hours, which I digitally audio taped. However, it must be noted that I did not use every question from my guides, because narrative interviewing, as with other forms of qualitative interview techniques, "requires flexibility in using, adding to, deleting, or in other ways changing the substance or order of these questions" (Warren & Karner, 2005, p. 124). The use of narrative interviewing permitted me to interview fewer people for this project for various reasons (Ellis, Kiesinger & Tillmann-Healy, 1997; Kiesinger, 1998). First, the rich accounts provided in the open-ended nature of the interviews gave participants the opportunity to tell and retell their stories. Second, the participants and I are well-versed in – and have personal experience with – many facets of academia, including research, publishing, conferences, and attendance in doctoral programs. This common understanding allowed us to probe deeply into questions about socialization, academia, and their lived experiences. Finally, I was familiar with their first year autobiographies. Using narrative interviews allowed the participants to expand upon their lived experiences as told in their autobiographies, leading to a deep and personal understanding of the transition from doctoral student to full-time tenure-track assistant professor from the participants' points of view.

In order to make the participants as comfortable with the process as possible, I scheduled the interviews at times and locations convenient for them. Throughout

September 2007, I criss-crossed the country by plane and car to meet them. The interviews took place at sites within their local communities. The interviews with Aaron, Gabe, and Jo took place in their offices on campus. I interviewed Deborah at a local café. Frank and I interviewed in his dining room. I shared a meal and interviewed Harrison in his university's cafeteria. I completed all of the interviews by the end of September. All the transcripts of these interviews were completed by mid-November. In total I amassed 462 double-spaced pages of transcription. Finally, my research also included ethnographic practices that served to enrich descriptions of the field, and reflexive understandings of myself as researcher (Ellis, 2004; Goodall, 2000; Krizek, 2003).

Ethnographic Practices

Portions of this research are ethnographic in a traditional sense (Hobbs & Wright, 2006; Van Maanen, 1988). I went into the field, spending time at airports, driving through unknown towns and cities, and visiting a variety of campuses. Ethnography provides descriptive details and visceral understandings of cultural and organizing practices, and submerges the researcher in the experiences of the inhabitants living their daily lives (Goodall, 2003). Ethnography places the researcher into the site of research (Krizek, 2003), and I considered the entire enterprise, from the moment I left my apartment until the moment I arrived back in my apartment, as part of my field research. While in the field, I took extensive condensed notes, which I expanded subsequent to each trip in the field.

As I mentioned previously, part of this reflexive activity was to constantly remind myself that the participants are the experts of a process I hope to encounter soon and have some understanding of, but have not lived through or experienced. This dissertation topic

is not merely academic, but personal. I was enmeshed in the interview process. As such, I expected to use the interviews introspectively to better understand myself as well as the participants. “Introspection is actively thinking about one’s thoughts and feelings; it emerges from social interaction; it occurs in response to bodily sensations, mental processes, and external stimuli as well as affecting these same processes” (Ellis, 1991, p. 29). This dissertation is not only about institutions of higher education, new faculty, and socialization. It is also about me and people like me – those on the threshold of entering a career in academia. Therefore, certain sections of this dissertation are autoethnographic (Ellis, 2004).

Autoethnography, according to Ellis (2004), “refers to writing about the personal in relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple levels of consciousness” (p. 37). Autoethnographic approaches and texts are a resonant, significant province of interdisciplinary research (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992; Goodall, 2000). Autoethnography challenges researchers to produce texts that are implicitly author-centered and engaging to readers. They invite readers to cross the threshold actively into perspectives where life is sometimes absurd, comic, and tragic (Bochner & Ellis, 1995, 2002). Autoethnographic texts are evocative, personal, vulnerable, and “showcase concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness” (Ellis, 2004, p. 38). I am – and have been – asking questions about my future as an academic for a number of years. To examine myself, I used autoethnography’s “systematic sociological introspection” (Ellis, 2004) throughout this project by journaling my inner thoughts and dialogues, including fears, dreams, potentialities, setbacks, challenges, and triumphs. These autoethnographic sections are

particularly important to understanding me – not just as a researcher – but as an active participant who thinks and feels while in the process of researching. I became an object of self-study. The ethnographic research was paramount to writing up this research constructively and reflexively.

Writing It Up

In a story...the word becomes flesh.

Robert Coles, *The Call of Stories*

As Polkinghorne (1995) wrote, “The researcher is not simply producing a description of an action but is writing a history” (p. 23). In the narratives that follow, I represent these young professors’ personal narratives as told to me. I wanted to tell the story of each participant in a way that allowed me to honor their voices and represent themes both that crossed cases and were idiosyncratic to the particular participant. I desired to give readers a feel for the research process, the interviews, my travels, my thoughts and reactions, and the campuses and surrounding areas where the research took place. I wanted to show the dynamics and activities of the process, including other characters and situations to evolve and come into play. In a similar fashion to how Goodall (1994) positioned himself as a detective solving mysteries, I position myself through the lens of the traveling interviewer.

In writing up these stories, I selected the plot from each case, by re-listening to and rereading the transcripts from both the autobiographies and the interviews. I crafted these stories from all our interactions, from the initial contact, through their recorded autobiographies, to the interactive interviews. In some instances a participant would retell a story they told during their recorded autobiography. During the interviews, I let the

participants speak for long periods, as I wanted each participant's voice to be heard relatively uninterrupted. Occasionally, I did interject and tell stories of my own as a part of the natural ebb and flow of the interviewing process. If the autobiographical version of a story was richer and more detailed than the interview version, I used the former, in keeping with my desire to present lush descriptions of the emotion and challenges as these individuals transitioned onto the tenure track. In some instances, the autobiographies contained relevant stories we did not discuss during the interview, and I included those. I desired verisimilitude, to be true to both the autobiography and the interview to make a single story that reflected each individual's particular story.

The narrator's voice is mine. I used ethnography and autoethnography to frame, detail, and set up the scene for each chapter. Each chapter then proceeds into the interviews. At times, participants' students or fellow faculty members interrupted the interviews. During these moments, I turned off the digital recorder and took short notes. I later expanded these notes, and I have included these sections as vignettes within the narrative interviews. When appropriate, I also include my own emotional reactions to some of the situations, conundrums, and dilemmas faced by the participants. I included my emotional reactions consistent with the layered account approach (Ronai, 1995). I concluded each chapter with a reflexive accounting of the interview itself, that included how I felt about what the participants told me, what I learned about challenges I am likely to face as an academic, as well as concerns about my travel schedule while doing this research. The following six chapters represent self-contained accounts of my interactions with each participant in the project. I wrote these narratives in the ambiguous space between fiction and nonfiction (Krizek, 1998), noting "in the interests of telling a good

story, it is permissible to omit details that have no bearing on the tale, but it is not permissible to make things up” (Goodall, 2000, p. 123).

I start with my flight west to meet Deborah, ruminating on the intense travel for this leg of the trip, which will bring me through five states for three different interviews. I used ethnographic practices and dialogue throughout the chapter to move the reader through each scene, beginning with the initial dinner with Deborah and her new colleague Sarah. At times I break up the dialogue with my own thoughts and voice, using italics to represent my reactions. The story continues as Deborah and I go to the café for our interview. At this point Deborah discusses the as yet unresolved struggle with her dissertation advisor. She opens up about being an ABD, and her feelings of being trapped, unfinished, and unable to move on. I end this section thinking about being ABD at this stage in my career, and how necessary it is for me to finish this dissertation, even though I had barely started the research process at the time.

Traveling into the Plain States, I meet Frank who has a unique and unhappy story. As someone I’ve known for several years, I am shocked that one of the first things he relays to me is his questioning if academia is the place for him. He is struggling with severe identity issues, was dropped from a tenure-track position to a contract faculty member, and had not completed his dissertation. I am shocked by the transformation he has gone through since I saw him at the 2006 NCA convention one year ago. I also reflect on my feelings of discomfort and guilt, as I stay at his apartment, writing my dissertation and applying for tenure-track positions.

I next travel east to meet Harrison, finding myself on the road in a rental car with a dead cell phone, miles from where we are supposed to meet, with panic setting in.

When Harrison arrives, I am shocked at his appearance. He introduces me to two other new faculty members, and they take stock of my situation as a job-hunting, dissertation writing doctoral candidate. Soon afterward, Harrison and I walk down to the cafeteria for lunch and the interview. Throughout this interview, I reflect on what pains we put ourselves through as qualitative researchers and how enthusiastic Harrison appears in his position.

After spending three days home in Tampa, the next flight took me north where I met Jo in her office for our interview. We were interrupted a few times as Jo had multiple commitments that needed her attention. These interruptions proved beneficial. I got to meet the chair of the department and one of the organizational communication faculty members. These encounters serve as vignettes, as my position changed from interviewer to that of doctoral candidate looking for a tenure-track position. These breaks also gave me the opportunity to wander around and observe the students and the campus. After returning and finishing our interview, I close this section with reflections on the episode and the three-hour drive through the mountains to meet Aaron, the next participant.

Aaron's story begins with my own thoughts and activities on my arrival at the hotel that I will be staying in, and the people I met on the way. Following the introductory section I tell of my meeting with Aaron, beginning with our walk to his office to discuss the university, the city, and his partnership. In the interview, Aaron exhibits an excitement for his new position and details many of the material changes that occurred as he transitioned to a faculty member. Also during the interview, he challenges my own thoughts about what I thought was the worst thing that happened in one of my classes – a fight. Finally, we go out for lunch and have a discussion about sports, good

food and the upcoming NCA convention. The chapter ends as I drive to the airport and catch my flight, pleased that I have only one more interview to complete.

The last participant chapter begins two days later with my arrival in the upper Midwest to meet Gabe. I arrive on campus and get lost in the maze of buildings. After meeting Gabe, we head up to his office and begin our interview, where he discusses the difficulty of publishing and the boredom and loneliness he finds in the academic life. We are interrupted by two of his colleagues who provide an enlightening and humorous look into the department's culture. Once again, in vignette form, I am introduced as a person on the job market, which reminds me what a small world our academic community is. The chapter ends with my same day flight home and the exhaustion of having completed six interviews in 13 days.

In the following six chapters, I take the reader into the lives of these faculty members. From the hours of interviews, autobiographies, and the ethnographic and reflexive notes, I crafted the stories that represent my interpretation of events and the lived experiences as told to me by Aaron, Deborah, Frank, Gabe, Harrison and Jo. I invite my readers to share the emotions of this experience and more fully understand the academic life that each faculty member lives and tries to make sense of their struggles and epiphanies.

Following these chapters, I discuss the similar themes in each story. In particular, I look at the success or failure of organizational socialization processes, the distinctive differences between being a faculty member as compared to a graduate student, the strategically ambiguous nature of the processes for tenure, and how various discourses of

power and feelings of powerlessness or agency problematize relationships and constructions of the academic self.

Chapter 5

Deborah: Stuck in the Middle

My bed was uncomfortable last night. I slept in a fleabag hotel, which combined with the long flight last night helps explain why I am discombobulated. I spent today on campus, a campus different in both setting and student population from the ones I've attended. The campus feels compressed, as if they squeezed too many buildings into too small a space. A few students wander around campus, and it seems unusually quiet for a Wednesday afternoon. Is this because it is an inner city university? So was Saint Louis University, my alma mater. Of course SLU was a private school with a lot of money, while this is a public university. It feels like a commuter school, with many students living off campus.

Last night Deborah, my first participant, called me to confirm our appointment for dinner, and asked if she could bring her colleague Sarah, who is a brand new professor. At first I wondered why she would want to bring a comrade, and then it dawned on me - safety. She's a young woman agreeing to meet a man she's never met before. For all she knows, I might be a sociopath. "Sure thing," I say, "Bring Sarah along."

I leave campus and drive in a little downtown area, with antique stores, small shops, and quaint brick homes. I don't see the restaurant. I turn around. I turn around again. As I drive, I think about what Deborah recorded in her autobiography. She's a tenure-track assistant professor, but has yet to finish her dissertation. She and her

dissertation advisor have a difficult relationship. Deborah's been battling mental and physical health issues. I want to explore these topics with her in the interview. The restaurant passes by the corner of my eye as I drive past it. Damn!

I pull a u-turn into the parking lot. I walk through the door, and look for Deborah, whom I've never met. I've only seen her picture on the university's website. I slide up to the bar and order a diet coke. I talk to the bartender briefly about baseball, college football, and my travels. I look at my watch. The time Deborah and I set to meet has passed. I look around realizing that directly behind me at a table is a young woman with short brown hair, wearing a purple university T-Shirt from her alma mater. Nice that she gave me a recognizable sign. How did I miss it?

* * *

I walk up to the table. "Deborah?"

"Andrew?"

"Yes," I say, "Don't now how I missed you. I've been sitting at the bar for about 15 minutes."

"Really? I've been here just about that long. We must have walked right past each other."

As I take a seat across from her, I notice three menus spread across the table in front of us. One must be for Sarah. Deborah and Sarah attended graduate school together. Deborah was hired here one year ago, and Sarah was hired this year, also on a tenure track line. As if reading my mind, Deborah says, "She'll be here shortly. I just called her. This is typical Sarah, always behind schedule. In the department, we call it "Sarah-time,"" she laughs.

“I was wondering something. Your *alma mater* has a position open this year. Do you know Tom Hammett? He’s currently a graduate student there.”

“No, that name doesn’t sound familiar.”

“I’m not surprised. He just finished his first year. He told me he went out for lunch the other day with Barbara Belew, his committee chair, who also happens to be the chair of the search committee. She asked him whether I was applying for the open organizational communication position.”

“Oh that’s good news. If a chair is asking about you, especially at a Research I university, that is a good sign. And if they are asking, then others will be asking too. Are you going to?”

“Absolutely. I’d be a fool not to apply.”

“Let me give you a quick piece of advice. When you go, make sure you are well-rested and that your presentation goes off without a hitch.”

“Well, I’m just starting with my dissertation’s follow-up interviews, so I don’t know what kind of job talk I’d be prepared for right now. However, I’ll have everything I need to start writing in less than two weeks and then I’m writing, writing, writing.”

“The presentation can make or break you. And be prepared for the questioning. I’ve sat in on those presentations and some of the questions are really out of left field and very hard. I’ve seen people present well and then get flustered and flabbergasted during the question and answer period. They will ask you a couple of softball questions, then just when you think you are really doing well, someone will throw a real curve.” Deb glances outside through the window behind me. “Ah, there’s Sarah.”

“Nice to meet you,” I say standing to greet Sarah, a woman about thirty, with shoulder-length blonde hair, as she slides into the chair next to Deborah.

“I’ve been talking with Andrew about interviewing for jobs,” Deborah says.

“Oh, you are on the job market?” Sarah asks quietly. I nod, as I sip my diet soda.

“Hmm. That’s a hard place to be,” she says, “working on your dissertation and job hunting at the same time. It is hard to sustain your momentum to do both. I found that when I was applying for positions, I kept thinking, ‘I need to work on my dissertation.’ And when I was writing or proofing or reading for my dissertation, I kept thinking, ‘I need to be looking for a job.’ It almost made me crazy. I’m happy that’s over, though I still have to finish editing my dissertation.”

* * *

I’m appreciative of the advice on the job application process, but I’m not ready to process the advice. I am not prepared to think proactively about presenting my research in front of a room full of professors and hiring committee members. There’s too much dissertation work for me to do. I still have classes to teach, cover letters to write, convention presentations to prepare. And I need to have some preliminary results to present. Those are a long way off. It feels like my world is moving so fast.

I look at Sarah and Deborah and think about how young they are. I’m envious that they are both full-time tenure track assistant professors. It’s as if I am in some sort of space-time warp. Why am I concerned about this “age” thing? Many people start new careers in their forties. Academe will be my third career. I am beginning to feel that it is the category “student” that makes me feel out of place at my age. It is more than that. When I was taking classes, I was often the oldest person in the room, surrounded by men

and women in their twenties. In class, a fellow student said, “We have to stop the proliferation of white, middle-class, heterosexual normativity.” People glanced at me, like I was a disease that needed curing. “Hey! Don’t look at me,” I said laughingly at the time. “I’m a broke graduate student, just like you!”

As we eat, we discuss my project and Sarah’s dissertation and the ins and outs of living in a new city. We talk about the people we know in common. Sarah mentions she knows Eric Eisenberg and Jane Jorgenson. The communication discipline feels like a small community. Everyone seems to know everyone else.

* * *

“So Deborah, are you done with your dissertation?”

“Not yet, I’m still ABD.”

“Well, I wasn’t anticipating talking to ABDs for this project, but I think it will be really interesting to hear from people whose first year was complicated not only by all the academic stuff required by their new position, but also by having to complete their dissertation.”

“I’m not done either,” Sarah says, “and I have a hard deadline to meet. I’ve got to run. I’m going home to write. It was nice to meet you.”

After Sarah leaves, Deborah tells me about an independent coffee shop where we can have our interview. “It’s a better place to talk,” she says as we get up to leave.

I arrive in less than a minute and park on the street. “We could have walked that block and a half,” I think to myself. As I stand outside waiting, groups of young people saunter in and out of the café. After a few minutes, I begin to wonder what happened to Deborah. She calls and says, “I drove right past it. I’ll be there in a couple of minutes.”

When Deborah arrives, she apologizes profusely, as we walk up a few steps and into the café. It is brightly lit, and full of mostly young college-aged patrons. I spot two open tables, and we walk across the hardwood floor to the one further back, which looks like it will be quieter than the one near the front door.

The table is draped with a red and white-checkered tablecloth. As we look at the two-sided menus, a young brunette comes up to our table, “I’m Katie. What can I get for you?” Deborah orders a decaffeinated tea. I order a Milky Way, which according to the menu contains “espresso, steamed milk, chocolate syrup, caramel syrup and whipped cream topping.” As I am setting up my recorder, our drinks arrive.

“That looks amazing,” Deborah remarks.

“Indeed. It might keep me up all night.”

* * *

“Let me start with something really simple. You mentioned in the recording of your first year, that this was the place you wanted to go to for your first position. How did you know that?”

“There were a few reasons. One was that my thesis advisor, Paula Brenton, was the dean of the graduate school where I got my M.A. In addition to being the dean, she was my boss. I was in recruiting and admissions there for a couple of years. She hired me for that position. There’s nobody in the world I admire more than Paula. She really is an amazing person. There is nobody who meets this woman who doesn’t think she’s absolutely amazing. She was here before as a professor. Then she left my old school to come back here as dean of the college. One of the things she told me was, ‘Well, when you finish your Ph.D., look me up and I might have a job for you.’ And we kind of joked

about it, though I never seriously thought about it. Then this job came across CRTNET. I thought, ‘Wow, it’s Paula!’ I know Paula and I know that she wouldn’t go to a place – and she certainly wouldn’t go back to a place – if it wasn’t a good place. And we had talked about this university before when I was working for her, so it really seemed like a good thing.”

“So it was an ‘inside job,’” I say.

* * *

That could be good for me, because I know so many people, including well-known professors, search committee chairs, and departmental chairs in the discipline. Then again, how many positions are inside jobs? And I certainly don’t know have connections to deans.

* * *

“There’s more to it than that. I’m very close to my family here. All of my family and my husband William’s family live one state over. The other jobs I got offers for were in California and Southern Georgia. Very far away. I had an unofficial offer from a third university, but I didn’t want to go there either. My field – I’m organizational communication and conflict – there seems to be a lot of potential for working with that here. Additionally, Paula set up a graduate certificate program in conflict mediation when she came here. I completed a graduate certificate in conflict mediation in my M.A. program and I felt like there were probably a lot of opportunities with me for that. And that’s kind of panned out. So there were just a lot of things, and it just felt right. I’d been looking and saw that ad. I thought, ‘Okay, I think this is it,’ especially because they were looking for someone specifically for conflict, and that’s not an area that a lot of

departments seek out. It's not as formalized as the subdisciplines like interpersonal or group or organizational. So, while my degree is organizational communication, I've always seen conflict as my specialty. It just seemed to be such a good fit on a lot of levels."

* * *

Her story seems simple compared to mine. 'I got the job I wanted.' I've been reading CRTNET and the NCA job postings for weeks, and I don't see an easy job hunt in front of me, even though I haven't started the application process. I'm envious of her. I'm afraid. I don't want to end up in some god-forsaken backwoods. I've targeted nineteen positions thus far. Few of them are what I consider my perfect fit – a Research I university in an urban area. Most either are at universities that I am unsure of, or at universities in places I don't want to live. I'm a city boy at heart. What will I do if perchance I end up living in the countryside with none of the amenities a city has to offer? No theatre, no concerts, no museums. Or, possibly worse, in the middle of nowhere working at a small liberal arts school, teaching a 4-4 load, with no time to do research? Research is my passion.

I hate having so little control over this process. I haven't sent out any application packets yet, or written any cover letters, or examined all of the postings online. I start writing cover letters for positions tomorrow, so when I return home from this trip, I can put the first application packets in the mail. It is only the first week of September, but I feel like I'm already behind schedule. I push those thoughts out of my head, before they drive me mad, and turn my attention back to our conversation.

* * *

“How prepared were you to teach? The way things work at USF, I got a chance to teach a bunch of different classes. Did you feel prepared to go into the classroom by your doctoral program?”

“I felt very prepped, but in a lot of ways I wasn’t. I’d actually taught quite a few courses. I’m fortunate and unfortunate. I got pigeon-holed into teaching Interpersonal Communication in my graduate program, which is actually a fairly prestigious course for grad students to teach. It’s a mass lecture. I’d have 120 students each semester. I taught it seven times, which is pretty much unheard of.”

“That’s a lot of interpersonal.”

“Part of the issue was there were only two graduate students qualified to teach it. The other one was qualified to teach something else that *nobody* was qualified to teach. So, there weren’t a lot of options. I taught an impromptu speaking course, Public Speaking, Group Communication. I felt like I had a range. I taught small classes and then the mass lecture classes. I didn’t have quite as much variety as a few others, but I had good quality stuff. I felt very confident about what I’d done in those courses and always had very, very high evaluations from faculty and from students. I felt good about that. I felt very prepared when I got here. Then, after I was here, I think I realized that it’s just a different world of teaching here.”

“How so?”

“This isn’t yet a Research I university. Teaching is much more important here. It would be commonplace in my graduate program to just give multiple choice tests,

because those are easy to grade. Here, that's not the norm by any means. And they very consciously think about teaching. There were things I was doing in the classroom in my graduate program that were very innovative. And here, some of those are the norm. In some ways I felt like I fit in. I felt like, 'Okay, these people really are thinking and putting as much into their teaching as I am.' I do feel like I got a good experience in my graduate program. The dissertation aside, I feel I did have the absolute best education available in my field. It's just different. The expectations are different. Here it's more consistent with my philosophy of teaching. At the same time I think it challenged me a lot more and in some different ways than I'd been challenged before. So, I think I was prepared, but then not, just because I had to be pushed in different ways than I had been before."

"Talk to me a little bit about your public speaking class. You mentioned in your recorded autobiography it's unique and different, but you didn't explain to me how it was different."

"When I arrived here I felt like I had no idea what was going on, "Deborah admits. "Public Speaking was a strange class. Most of it was based on interpersonal communication. There were two weeks of class at the end of the semester for students to prepare for their speech, then they gave a speech, which if they passed, they passed the class. If they failed it, they failed the class. So, 80 percent of the public speaking class is interpersonal, but to pass or fail depends on this speech."

"How many speeches?"

"Just the one."

"Wow."

“They’d never had a course director and different faculty members were overseeing it at different times. I’m under the impression that there were times when there was nobody overseeing it, and it was just the instructors doing their own thing. And so, it had kind of morphed into this *thing*. I think people enjoy teaching interpersonal, and so it got more and more interpersonal and so they chose books like that. Right now we use Julia Woods’ *Communication Mosaics*, which is very interpersonal and a little of group, and a little chapter on public speaking. Interestingly, the department chair was under the impression that they were covering more than they were in the course. I could see the difficulties in my course evaluations. My course evaluations were much lower than I have ever gotten. And it was just that course.”

“I had bad evaluations the first time I taught Family Communication” I say quietly, “It is a 4000 level class. I’d never taken a family communication course. The person who taught it had left, and so I ended up assigned to it.”

“Wow!”

“Anyway, at the time I didn’t really know all that much about teaching a class at that level. Did you ever feel like that?”

“Yes. Another teaching adjustment was assignment expectations. For me, it wasn’t that big of a shift but, in a way, it was. We have in our department, and our chair made it very explicit to me, they expect the students to work out a presentation, to have a case study assignment, and to have a paper. Now, as a matter of course, I have presentations and case study assignments in my courses. So I thought, ‘Okay, I’ll just do what I’ve been doing.’ The papers were different because in grad school, and especially in a Research I school, you’re told, ‘Think, when you assign something, about how much

time it's going to take to grade. Don't assign anything that will take time to grade. You are here for your research first and foremost.' So this was a new thing for me. It was interesting to be told what to do. Even as a grad student creating a course, I was never told, 'You need to have tests or assignments.' It was, 'Go teach interpersonal.' I wasn't even given a book. They let me choose my own. I had total autonomy."

"That's been my experience too at USF, except for Public Speaking. I liked the autonomy, but it did make new preps stressful."

"It was kind of interesting, but again it didn't really bother me because I didn't feel like it was that different than my own philosophy of teaching."

* * *

I'm struck by the idea that new professors are told what assignments are necessary in the classes they teach. I'd never thought about teaching and assignment constraints on full-time faculty members. This is the first time I've heard this and it seems odd to me, given that new professors have spent years preparing themselves to teach in the discipline. Strange.

* * *

"I want to ask you about your first days on campus. All universities have some kind of orientation for new faculty. How was yours?" I ask.

"We started orientation a week before classes, the faculty orientation week. It was really crazy. There was so much to do. We were constantly going. I didn't know what was going on. We just moved from one time zone to another, and it seemed like I didn't even know what I was doing. They were just shuttling me from one place to another to another. There was one saving grace. We had another new faculty member in the

department, Dr. Tara Fripp. It was her first year out of graduate school as well, and we got along great. Her husband, who also has his Ph.D. in Communication, started here as an instructor at the same time. Not on a tenure-track. So, the three of us went together to all of the orientation sessions and meetings. It was really nice to have people to attend those things with. It was less uncomfortable. I really get along very well with both of them. So, even though that made it better, it was still a rough couple of weeks.

“That week and then for the next two weeks, about twice a week, I had after hours parties that I had to go to. There was party after party after party. We had to go to a party at the president’s house and at the dean’s house. We had a party for the new graduate students. I mean, I can’t even remember all the parties. There were so many of them and it was so hard. Those are a lot of the immediate obligations that I wasn’t prepared for. And to be honest, I don’t remember much of the orientation at all. There was too much happening.”

“That’s a lot of parties,” I say quietly.

“I felt like some of those first-month obligations made the transition a little rougher because moving is tough on a family anyway, but when you add those additional stressors of time apart onto the family, that makes it much more difficult. My husband came with me. He moved for my job. He didn’t have any friends yet. He didn’t particularly like his job. My son was in daycare for the first time ever. So, not only am I having to get used to missing him, he has to get used to me being away for eight hours a day. On top of that, some days I was gone until well after he went to bed a couple of times a week.

“But once I got through that first month, that first semester went well. It was a lot of fun for me. It’s a shift in lifestyle to go from being a grad student to being a faculty member. One shift is the type of classes you teach, and another is the responsibility you feel you have to have for students. You are no longer primarily the one on the receiving end of academic responsibility or mentoring. You are now the mentor to new students. It is a big change.”

“One of the differences between teaching as a graduate student and an assistant professor is you get to teach graduate classes now. Did you encounter any problems or dilemmas when you first started teaching graduate classes?”

“I think my biggest mistake was in my graduate course last spring. I was teaching the graduate conflict course. I put the syllabus and the packet together and I took it to the department chair to review. He didn’t insist that I do that. I felt that since this was my first grad class, I should have somebody look it over. He had me cut my reading packet by at least half. I trusted him. So, the class ended up having these two textbooks and a reading packet half size of what I intended. I still felt like it maintained the integrity of what I wanted to accomplish, so I was okay with that.

“Also, certain faculty members had given their grad classes a lot of leeway. There were faculty members that never met on campus. The faculty and students met at a coffee shop to have class. This group of students then came into my classroom, for my very first graduate course, and I had a lot of authority challenges and that sort of thing. All of this is context. Then, a week or two ago, I got my course evaluations back. They raked me over the coals for being too easy, for *not requiring enough reading*.”

“Really?”

“Yes. And I thought, ‘*What the hey?*’ We have a faculty member who’s very full of himself. He’s a nice, nice guy, but he’s one of these people that has to prove that he’s smarter than everybody all the time. One of his ways of doing that is he works the students to death, papers every single week, tons and tons of reading, and best that I can tell, he’s very charismatic in the class. He’s all lecture. *This is not me.* I conducted the class like a seminar. I think because of the way I conducted the class, it felt easier to them because I wasn’t up there saying, ‘This is what you need to know.’ It was more of an exploratory discussion based on the reading. They had him the semester before, so they’re coming out of his class and into mine. I think they felt like comparing my class to his class. They had been indoctrinated into his way. So, I think that was my biggest mistake. I look back and I don’t know what else I could’ve done. Honestly, I don’t know that if I had it to do over again I would do anything any differently, because I think I did the best I could with the information I had. If I’m going to have to go one way or the other, I think I’d rather it be a little too easy than too hard on them. I was trying to figure out exactly where to fall.

“Plus, we frame our program as applied. So, knowing that we were taking such an applied approach, and based on what everybody told me, I thought, ‘I do need to scale back the readings.’ And so, that would be the one thing I kind of regret. At the same time, I don’t know how I would fix it. That caused difficulty for me. I think the class was not as thorough as it should have been, but that was the advice I got.”

“So will you teach it differently the next opportunity you get?”

“Interestingly, I’m teaching that same course next semester, but it’s going to be crossed with the conflict communication certificate. Paula is going to teach it

concurrently in weekend format, which I'm super excited about. I'm sitting in on it with Paula, so I can observe what she does. And that's really good for me, I think. For a lot of people, if you sit in it makes you feel so vulnerable because you think the other person thinks you have no idea how to teach. But, you know, I think anybody in our department wouldn't mind me coming into their classroom and just observing if I wanted to. So, I mean, it's been good for me especially on the heels of getting the course evaluations back in time to make sense of what happened. And she's been real good about it. We're setting up a meeting time to talk through it all and everything. So, it's been good. Everything else really went – other than adjusting to that basic course, it went very, very well, I felt.”

“There's something you said earlier at dinner that I thought was interesting. You said something along the lines of coming in with someone else makes it a lot easier.”

“Yeah. Tara, the other new faculty member, who came in the same year as me, is tenure track also. We're both young women, though she's a few years older than me. We have very similar ideas, philosophies of teaching. She does pedagogy research, a very different sub-field than mine, but we just clicked well, really quickly. And her husband, too. They're both great people. He was hired as an instructor, a non-tenure track position. And it was really helpful coming in with them because it helped me make sense of things. It made me think, ‘Okay, am I really observing what I think I'm observing? I don't know what to do with this information.’ If I don't feel like I can ask somebody without looking stupid, I have somebody to ask. It's just a social support that I had, and I think it made all the difference in the world for me. It really did. It's not like a misery loves company thing, its a ‘we're in this together, trying to figure out how we're doing this.’ Plus, what's been great about that is then we can share what we've learned, the implicit rules we've

learned, and pass them on to other new people. And that has really helped out Sarah in the month that she's been here."

"That makes sense. Can you talk to me a little about your dissertation, because you were supposed to be..."

"Done," Deborah says flatly.

"What's been the effect of not finishing? Has that done anything in the department? What have the conversations been like? Do your colleagues talk to you about it? What's it like going through this?"

"I would say I'm really depressed and down on myself. In fact, I'm clinically depressed." She starts laughing.

"Does this have to do with the dissertation?"

"Absolutely. In fact, I went to a new psychiatrist. He said in addition to the generalized anxiety disorder and depression that I've been diagnosed with, he said it all boils down to an adjustment disorder. It's all about the dissertation. *All of it*. And I think that's true. I do. Here's the interesting thing – I've had very low pressure from the department. They've been fantastic. All of the pressure has been me on myself. I can't help but worry about it, partially because of the anxiety disorder. My chair, whatever his thoughts, he's been fantastic with me about it. He's offered me resources. He's been willing to do whatever it takes for me. And nobody has ever treated me like a second-class professor because it's not finished. They have taken me on as one of them.

"However, I do feel a difference because one of the norms of the department is that they make a big deal out of 'the doctor.' Passing each other in the hall, 'Hey Dr. Smith. Hey Dr. Jones.' Even on our nameplates on our doors, 'Dr. This, Dr. That,

Deborah.’ And even in our promotional literature, they list the professors, ‘whatever Ph.D., whatever Ph.D., Deborah.’ Nobody’s ever said anything to me about it, but I know in my head that they hired me to be a Ph.D., you know? And so I know that, at some point, I’m going to be held accountable for having that Ph.D. and I need to get it done. And I have even asked my chair outright, ‘Am I in danger of losing my job?’ And he won’t give me a straight answer. What he does tell me is, ‘Deborah, I would tell you if I thought you were really a problem. I don’t bring it up to administrators. If they ask, I tell them that you’re coming along on it. You’re trying hard, all of that kind of stuff.’ We had this conversation as recently as August, so I really don’t feel like – it hasn’t been communicated to me, or that I’m in imminent danger.”

“I see.”

“But just logically, how does that work? I’m putting the mental deadline on myself to be finished writing by December. If I can be finished writing by December, *oh my gosh*, that would be amazing. But part of it is me. I was supposed to be done before I got here. Then I had weird things that happened with Harriett, my dissertation advisor. And so we had deadline after deadline after deadline after deadline, and every time it comes and goes, I’m not even a chapter ahead of where I was before.”

“How is that relationship working out with your dissertation supervisor as you are trying to get your dissertation done long distance?”

“Its still very much in flux. And that is as much my fault. In fact, it’s probably more my fault than Harriett’s at the moment. In July I didn’t teach. I felt like I had the month of July to really work on the dissertation, make lots of progress. Harriett moves to a new university that’s half way across the country on July 25th, so she was pretty busy.

And moving is tough, I know. I had a talk with her I think at the end of June. And she pretty much told me, ‘You can write as much as you want, but it’s going to be mid-August before I can give you any feedback.’

“And so I went to the chair of my doctoral program, and I said, ‘This is what she said, and I don’t know what to do.’ And he asked how far along I am. The thing is, I don’t have a lot of finished chapters. I’ve got pieces here and there of all the things. It’s just a wild goose chase. I’ve got a lot of pieces, but I’ve got to get them together. And so he asked me exactly where I was and I told him. I’ve been very open with him about this, as open as I could possibly be. And he said, ‘Well, do you think if you had it on your own and you could get a draft together?’ ‘Oh, I think I can have a draft and the whole thing together by the end of the month.’ ‘Well, what if you propose to Harriett that you just do the draft by the end of the month and let her look over it and then understanding that you may have to make lots of changes, but at least you’ll have something.’ ‘Yeah, great idea! Great idea!’

“So, I called her, and I proposed this idea to her, and she blew up at me. Absolutely exploded. ‘No. I have never worked that way. I’m not going to start working that way for you. That is not how this works and I’m not going to let you get by with a sub-standard work just because you need to get done. You’re going to have to do just as good a job as anybody else.’ She just went on this rant. *Incredibly hurtful*. ‘If you’re panicking – good. You should be panicking. You’re in a position that is really bad and it’s all your fault. And, you know, there’s no reason why you shouldn’t be, and frankly I’m not going to make up for your inadequacies.’ It was really painful and hurtful.”

“My God.”

“It was eye-opening for me, because to this point I’d been telling myself, ‘She’s Harriett. She knows what she’s doing. She hasn’t gotten to where she is by accident. I may not like what she has to say, but she has my best interest at heart.’ And at this point, I realized this relationship is about control as much as anything. In reality, it’s an abusive relationship. Regularly I would get off the phone with her and cry. Really cry. I cried the whole way to campus. I’ve been in my department chair’s office crying about this. I’ve been crying with Sarah about this. I’ve cried when talking to the chair of my doctoral program. I’ve been crying about this more than you could imagine. It’s amazing I’m not crying now because I can’t talk about this without crying. I can’t.

“Sarah had been telling me, ‘Just switch. Switch advisors.’ If I change advisors, it’s going to take me even longer because the dissertation is going to have to fit another advisor’s vision. On the other hand, when Harriett’s vision is shifting between every conversation we have, I might as well have a new advisor. I finally reached the point where I thought, ‘I do need to change advisors.’ I knew exactly who I could change to, who I could recruit from my committee to be my new advisor. I thought it would work better. I was feeling really upset, but also optimistic about the possibilities.

“So I went to talk to my doctoral program department chair and he told me, ‘No, do not change advisors.’ That crushed me a little bit. I understand why that’s a problem from his perspective. I understand why, because when you’ve somebody who should’ve had their dissertation done over a year ago, and they’re suddenly wanting to change advisors, and you’ve got to explain that to the administration, and there’s all the paperwork, and all of that, I understand that that’s a problem. He told me, ‘Deborah, I know she is clearly abusive. There is no doubt about that. But I think you just have to

take it. She wants to know this is a painful process for you and so you need to let her know that it's painful.' And you know what? Next email I sent her, I talked about how difficult and how much struggle it is, and she really responded well to that. It was amazing."

"She wants to feel your pain."

"Yeah."

"Well, she wants to hear about it anyway."

"Yeah, she wants to know I'm feeling pain. But if you think about who she is, she was the *first* full-time tenure-track female faculty member at her university. *At her university, not her department.* And so I'm sure she felt a lot of pain. This has been a real trouble for our relationship. First of all, we have different working styles so that's been a struggle. She insists that I work on her terms, even though it's not the way I work. I like to work as I go. For example, she likes to read everything ever written on a subject and then synthesize it all and write it out. I work as I go. I'll go through a million drafts, but I get a better picture in my head that way. I can't read everything and then figure out how it all pieces together in my head like that. That's just not the way my mind works. I tend to work more in bursts.

"Also, I felt like our relationship was really strained when I had my son. She was very supportive throughout the pregnancy. I took my comprehensive exam a month and a half before I had him. I joke that my son is never going to go to grad school because he's been already. But the moment he was born, it was constant in every meeting, 'You need to get more daycare. You know, you're spending way too much time with him. You're not spending enough time on your dissertation. You need to be spending eight hours a

day on your dissertation. I don't care if you have to go in debt. You got to do whatever you can do so that you're not spending so much time with him and you're working more.' I didn't appreciate that. I felt like she was dictating the way I should parent. And you know, frankly, in the grand scheme of things, when I die I'm going to be more concerned about my son than I am about this Ph.D. And that's my choice and I know that choice has slowed me down because I don't work on weekends. I work 40 hours a week and the rest is my time to be his mommy and he needs that. And so I know it slows me down. And I don't work a lot in the evening, because that is my time with him. And so yeah, those choices have slowed me down, and I'm willing to accept that they do, but I'm okay with that. She has never been. And so it has been constant on me about this.

“So, getting back to your original question, ‘How has our relationship survived her leaving?’ That was our last interaction before she left. The plan was that I would analyze all the data for this chapter, then put together an outline to send to her by mid-August. She would edit it, or give me feedback, then I would write it up. Well, I started analyzing away and then I came upon this issue that I couldn't resolve on my own. I needed her feedback. I emailed her about it, and she took three weeks to get back to me. I understand she was in the middle of a move, but I did not expect her to wait until two days before classes began before I finally got a response. As a result, I stalled out, because it was a very crucial element of my analysis.”

“Yeah, but as I recall from your tape, there have been things here that prevented you from finishing as well, right?”

“The first week of class I had a car accident. It injured my foot, my knee, and my back, and did \$9,000 of damage to my car. It was a fairly serious wreck. I'm in physical

therapy three times a week now and still need doctor's appointments here and there for it. In addition to that, I've been getting onboard with a psychiatrist. My mental health issues have always been treated through other physicians. I just realized over the summer I really needed somebody specializing in mental health to help me with these things. It took me forever to get into a psychiatrist. At first, I was going to a doctor and going to a psychologist. They told me two separate things and they were whackos. So, I switched to a psychiatrist and that's been really good. So I'm trying to deal with all of this dissertation stuff and trying to manage these mental and physical health issues. The sheer number of appointments I've been going to, I mean, I have not had time to work on the dissertation. I just have not had time. And then I think I'm just making excuses. 'You're just making excuses for not working.' But then I also think, 'Any reasonable person would have difficulty with this.' Then I think, 'Harriett wouldn't buy it.' She would tell me it's a cop-out. She would tell me I've been slacking and I need to get with it. And so, I haven't talked to her or corresponded with her since I thanked her for her feedback on that part of the analysis. I've got to get that outline together and get it to her fast. I really do because I can't afford to fall any further behind. It's very frustrating. So, like I said, I don't know how the relationship is going to work because we haven't really communicated much."

* * *

As she talks, I grieve for Deborah. Yet, I feel lucky to have the mentors I have, from Alain Brönniman to Bob Krizek to Art Bochner. It is honest mentoring. They push me, challenge me, and expect me to stretch my ideas and ability. It is not just business. It is also personal. They are my advocates, promoters, and my allies. Importantly, I need to

be done with this dissertation, and I want it to be a project that I am proud of. But, I do feel the pressure as I prepare my cover letters. The constant reminders, from Art and others, that I am applying for jobs ABD and therefore am at a disadvantage isn't helping – even if it is true. It adds to the pressure I feel, about writing, teaching, looking for a job. I don't feel I'm ready to look for a position right now. I feel the unready amateur. The ängst I am riddled with, as I go through this dissertation process, tempts me to try Prozac, Xanax, or Zoloft. I've heard they can help you calm down, but also help you concentrate. I'll never go that route though. I'm not a fan of psycho-pharmaceuticals. More than that though, I don't want to be where Deborah is, tortured by an unfinished dissertation.

* * *

“Now, okay, as graduate students we hear stories about what it takes to get tenure, right? So, when you had your interview, how did they lay that out? Was it clear, you need to have this, this, this?”

“No. It was not clear.”

“Is it clear now?” I ask.

“The dean, Paula, has a program for new faculty members that they go through and in a meeting she told us that pretty much if we have three refereed publications at tenure, that's generally what's expected. I believe Sarah might have actually been told that explicitly during her interview. In fact, one of the differences between when I arrived and this year when Sarah arrived is that she has been given much more precise information. The ‘hard deadline’ she mentioned at dinner? That wasn't set by her

dissertation advisor. That was set by this department. She has to have that dissertation finished by the end of the academic year. So, I know what's expected, I think."

"Is Sarah getting more explicit information because of the situation you and the department are in?"

"Maybe. I don't know. I do know the bar is changing. They just told us during pre-session this year that they need one more Ph.D. program to go up to the next research classification. And I was like, 'Ugh!' A lot of us were actually. It will mean more research. I think we're now research intensive and it's going to be research extensive, maybe. I'm not exactly sure about how all of those categories work. I don't know that they're trying to get to Research I, but they're trying to move up. The university hasn't always had the best reputation, so it's an effort to fix that. The college that our department is in has been a research leader all along. So, basically I don't know how much change is in the works for us. I really don't."

"How has the department handled this delay in your progress?"

"I am concerned about the tenure clock. I really am because I do know in the third year, traditionally, there's a thorough review and they pretty much tell you, 'Yes, you're on track for tenure,' or, 'No, you're not.' And so, I'm two years in and I don't have a dissertation finished. How on track can I be really? Our chair is very – 'Just do it. You just get it done and you do it.' That's very much his philosophy. I'm very open about my mental health issues because partially I feel like he needs to know what's going on with me and to know what I'm dealing with. Part of it is I feel like there's stigma associated with it and there's always going to be, unless people who are intelligent, successful people say, 'You know what? I'm dealing with this, too.' And make it okay. So I tell him

about it and he thinks it's writer's block. And he gives me all this writer's block advice. He's trying to help. He really is. But he just doesn't understand. And if you've never dealt with depression or anxiety as a disorder then you wouldn't understand. So he tries, but he's like, 'Just get it done. Just get it done. Just work every day. If you just work every day, sit down in front of a computer every day, work will happen.'"

"He sounds like a self-help book," I chuckle. "One written by Ken Blanchard or Zig Ziglar. And that's not bad advice if you're just procrastinating, and you're not writing, and you can't get yourself scheduled."

"Yeah. Meanwhile, I sit in front of the computer and I do try and open up the file and I cry. I just can't work. And so I'm seeking out help to try to assist me with that and I feel like it's going better – I really am very optimistic about it. I am. But it's going to take some time to get there and I know that I don't have much time to spend. I think constantly about the tenure clock. Paula has mentioned that it's possible for me to add a year to the tenure clock since I haven't finished. I don't know that my chair would be too happy about that. In fact, here's something interesting. He's explicitly told me not to talk about my dissertation with the dean even though we have this personal relationship. I feel like she's the one person that could mentor me, but I'm being told not to take advantage of that. That's hard because she knows me as a worker and as a student. so she knows that I'm not a slacker. I feel like she is the person who could help me if I needed it. Even though she'd be very open, be happy to work with me, I feel like my boss would get angry if he knew I went around him and went to her for help."

“At least you are dealing with it. The other person in my study who isn’t done – I’m going to be talking to him soon – drinks basically a half a case of beer every night, because he can’t bring himself to look at his computer.”

“Mm-hmm. And I can identify with that. I can. I can see how you would be driven to that. But the frustrating thing for me, I think what compounds things, is when people kind of brush it off and they think, ‘Oh, this is dissertation stuff. It’s supposed to be hard. Everybody deals with it.’ And I know that. I do know that’s true, but I also know that obviously my brain works a little differently than other peoples’ or I wouldn’t have these disorders. And it’s not one disorder, it’s multiple disorders and I don’t want those to define me, but they do define this dissertation process for me. And so, I really struggle. I don’t know what to do with that.”

“It sounds as if you’re trapped in a strange loop, a kind of a paradox. Alright, you have all this anxiety over your dissertation and then you can’t do your diss—“

“Yeah, which increases my anxiety.”

“— creates more anxiety, which inhibits your ability to work productively on your dissertation.”

“That’s exactly what’s going on. I finally came to the realization that that’s really what’s going on. I think my first semester, I knew I had already been diagnosed with depression and anxiety over the summer, but I don’t think I bought it originally, but I was willing to do it, because I wasn’t sleeping.”

“Right. I have a lot of trouble sleeping,” I say while ordering another Milky Way, with an extra shot of espresso.

“I thought, ‘Okay, what’s going to help me sleep. I’ll do whatever it takes.’ And that semester, first of all, I had a whole new slew of data that I had to go off and collect. I had to do that. But I didn’t get where I wanted to be by the end of the semester and I thought, ‘Oh, I just let myself get too caught up in my teaching and too caught up in new adjusting.’ And it wasn’t until last semester that I really felt like I started falling apart. I realized that I wasn’t using, you know, I wasn’t *accidentally* getting caught up in those things. It was because I couldn’t deal with the pressure of the dissertation.

“And I learned that my chair does not appreciate you questioning that ‘Just do it’ approach, because that is very much his approach. That bothered me a lot and it became more bothersome because in the spring semester, when my anxiety disorder went out of control, I felt so overwhelmed. I was barely keeping up. I felt like I could barely do anything. It was the most awful, out of control feeling – unlike anything I’ve ever experienced. I changed my anxiety medications, but they take a good six or eight weeks to kick in. Meanwhile I’m just barely keeping afloat. I wasn’t making progress on my dissertation because the anxiety was overwhelming. I started to break out in anxiety rashes on a regular basis. Things just weren’t very good. I discovered that I had TMJ [Temporo-Mandibular Joint], a jaw condition, which is aggravated, sometimes caused, by clenching of the teeth as a result of anxiety. In fact, my TMJ got so bad I spent a week and a half on a liquid diet because I literally could not move my jaw enough to chew because of the pain. I still can’t eat anything crunchy.

“So, anyway, it was a really rough time, mostly revolving around job stress and the dissertation. I made an appointment with a psychiatrist, because I felt like I need a mental health specialist to help me with getting my medication worked out. Hopefully, I

can get off of it at some point, but that's not going to happen soon, so I'm really going to have to finish up this dissertation without that help. I'm a little worried about that, which increases the anxiety, which increases the other symptoms, and you know, snowball effect."

"Have things changed over time in the department?"

"I feel like that first semester, everything was rosy and it was fantastic. And in fact, I told my friends at NCA. They were like, 'Yeah, I like my job. There's this and this, but it's okay.' I literally could not think of a negative to say. I loved it. I'm sure they thought I was a big fat liar, you know? Just making it sound good, so I sound good."

"Speaking of jobs, you were on the hiring committee, and I was wondering how that changed your perspective, if it did?"

"It was very hard for me, because the finalists were Sarah and Tara's husband, both of whom I adore. I wanted to recuse myself, but my chair would not let me. It was agonizing and I was angry about it, though I didn't voice that. I felt that this hiring process really opened my eyes: whose opinions are important, and that really there are a lot of things that are merely said. They want it to look good and democratic and all of that. But in reality it boils down to one person – the Chair makes the decision. I can live with that. What I can't live with is being lied to about it – or not even lied to – because I don't think he was deliberately lying. I think he really thinks he's being democratic, but he also very much controls the way decision-making happens and there's no question about it. I mean, when he wants something, it's in your interest to agree. And I learned that in that process. That was very eye opening for me. It's been kind of a hard thing for the other new hire and for me. I was talking to Sarah, because I'm kind of jaded about a

lot of stuff as a result of that experience. I know when I'm told, 'Well, maybe you should think about this,' that means I better do it. You know, and it's very top-down.

"Luckily, in my Ph.D. program our course director, who was the department chair's wife, made that expectation explicit. She said, 'Nobody's going to tell you this so I am.' Nobody was there to tell me that last year. And I was involved. I did everything I was supposed to and all of that. I think it was a very defining moment for me when I was asked to share my opinion, and then I'm kind of scorned publicly in a faculty meeting. That makes me really wary of what I say. The problem is that he values democracy or the appearance of democracy so much, that he won't let you fly under the radar. He will not allow it. So, this is really problematic for Sarah because she asks, 'Well, how is this fair and democratic? What am I supposed to do? Just suck up all the time and be a yes person?' I would say the most interesting thing is learning how to negotiate working with a boss who really likes to be in control. *Oh my gosh*, there have been *so many* examples of the control coming out that don't directly affect me. It's just kind of opened my eyes that that's something I've got to think about actively as I do my job."

"I see you're putting your organizational communication knowledge to work."

"Oh yeah. Yeah. I am strategic in the things that I will make a big deal about and the things that I won't. I'm very concerned with supervisor management, you know, because I think I need to manage that relationship with him. And so—"

"Managing the manager. Managing your manager."

"Exactly. And he would be horrified. He would. So, we're in a situation where he's the only one with seniority who is willing to stand up and take a stand on things. And so, really it's up to him to say whatever he wants. So, we have a lot of rules – you

know, not rules but expectations about professionalism that are not typical of departments. You know, we have to be very mindful of our – we can't be too familiar with our students. We're not allowed to put things on our doors. So things like that that are peculiar. I mean, pretty much if he decides we get tenure, we do. If he doesn't, we don't. So, you choose what battles to pick and in the grand scheme of things, tenure is something on my doorstep. There's not much of a choice there. Sarah is still just riled about this concept. She's very, very upset with it. You know, academic freedom and all that. I totally buy it but, when it comes down, I've got to be practical. I want tenure."

"A top-down management approach. That seems a bit uncomfortable."

"It becomes more uncomfortable, especially when our graduate assistants and interns are really told – there was a big to-do about this – they were told they have to call us 'Dr.' or 'Mrs.' We have no 'Misters.'"

"No Ms.?"

"I think Ms. would work but it has to be a title like that. It's awkward to walk in the lab, 'Hi Mrs. So-and-So. How are you doing?' It's supposed to be a sign of respect, but to me it's reinforcing the fact that I'm not finished and that I'm somehow lower on the totem pole than the others. I don't think – they've never projected that on me – but that's what I feel every time somebody says it. So, that makes me uncomfortable."

"But over all, I am pretty happy. Teaching is more important to me than research. I wouldn't have taken this job if I was unwilling to do research. I just don't want my life run by it. So, I like the fact that research keeps me up to date in my field. I think that's important because as much as I love the faculty where I got my Masters, I don't think all

of them were very up to date. Oh my gosh, they didn't even know what structuration theory was. I mean..."

"Oh no. You're going to give me a headache if you start Giddens now," I say laughingly.

"I know. But I think it is important to be up to date, and research helps me stay on the ball. I think that's an important component but it's not my primary component. To me, it's a vehicle for being a better teacher. So, that's just my take, whatever it's worth."

"It's your take, and you know what? You're off the hook. We've been talking for almost four hours."

"Really?"

"It's almost 11:30."

"Okay. Now turn that recorder off."

* * *

We talk for another fifteen minutes about rumors and innuendos in the discipline. Who is moving to another university? Who didn't get tenure? Which top of the pack doctoral student made a drunken ass out of herself at the latest conference? Who was turned down by a book publisher?

After we leave the café, I get back to the motel just before midnight. I keep thinking about Deborah's liminal position and all the power plays and games in her life. Her dissertation advisor not only lives in the everyday world of her work, but also lives in Deborah's head, constantly nagging her, questioning her, abusing and berating her. It seems to me dissertation research is difficult enough without having an advisor putting the screws to you, being inflexible, demanding that your research styles match. Looking

at our advisor-student relationship, I know Art and I have different working styles. Art seems to work methodologically, patiently, on a relatively fixed uninterrupted schedule. I think better when I see my ideas on paper, so I work in bursts, sometimes not writing at all, other times writing six out of seven days a week. We also have different research agendas that overlap for this project. We are comfortable with those differences.

Her advisor questions her parenting choices, and her dedication to her dissertation. What does that say about the gender equality that academia continually espouses for women in corporations, for-profit businesses, and government agencies? Do we believe what we say, or are those expressions of emancipation not applicable in academia? Shouldn't we be in the lead on these issues, practicing what we preach?

Then there is the manner by which power is articulated in the department. Assigned assignments in classes? I've not encountered that at USF except in the public speaking course, of which there are over thirty sections and thus requires unanimity to assure fairness to students. More disturbing to me is what Deborah called the appearance of democracy, when there isn't any. What negotiations will I have to balance if I am in a department that makes me do a certain thing, assign certain projects? I am not a 'Yes man.' I am more like Sarah. I bristle at authority and authoritarianism. It is one of the reasons I decided to embark on this career in the first place. Have I been misled? Is the university just like any corporation? I like the idea that I could have some freedom to choose what and how I could teach and what I wanted to research. Has the freedom I expected become subordinate to the academic capitalist discourses where outcomes, evaluations, and productivity are predominant? How do these issues tie into the fact that her university is trying to become more prestigious?

And finally, why can't Deborah use the dean as a mentor? I realize that normally mentoring falls outside the responsibility of deans. Could she have found another mentor? The university could have connected her to a mentor during orientation week. And if the orientation was as useless as Deborah said it was, is there something that would make it better? According to what I've read, many for-profit organizations have successful organizational socialization processes. It seems to me that universities ought to as well.

As I get ready for bed, I trip over my computer wire and break it. Dammit! I need to get a new cord. My flight north to my next interview is at seven in the morning. I'll need to be at the airport around five or so. I debate whether I should sleep or not. I decide to chance it. A few hours will be better than none. As I drift off to sleep, I feel thankful my advisors are nothing like Deborah's.

Chapter 6

Frank: Back to the Beginning

I feel exhausted. This leg of my trip started at 5 a.m., and after a detour through Memphis, I arrive at my destination airport at 11:30. I tried to reread the transcripts of my next participant's narrative on the plane, but my eyelids wouldn't stay open. I napped instead. Now I am going to hustle to get prepared. Luckily, although I am meeting my next participant Frank today, we aren't scheduled to do the interview until tomorrow. That should be enough time to reread the transcripts of his recorded autobiography, and look over the questions I thought about asking him in the interview.

I exit the plane, grab my bags from the baggage claim area, and walk to the Budget rental stand.

"Mr. Herrmann, we don't have any more economy cars here. I can upgrade you for the same price to either a minivan or a Mustang."

"You need to ask?" I joke, as I start signing the paperwork.

"One silver Mustang. It will be in spot 18."

Once on the road, I finally understand what people mean when they say cars 'purr.' As I drive, I call information for the Apple Store so I can replace my cord.

"I'm sorry, we don't carry those anymore. You'll have to order that online."
Same thing happened to me two years ago in Urbana. What a pain. Heading north, I call Frank, my next participant.

"Meet me at my building. You can park along the street."

I jot down directions as I drive. "Got it. See you in about an hour."

"Just so you know," he begins, "I hate this. I think I'm going to have to change some things in my life soon. I don't think I am getting anywhere in academia, just spinning my wheels."

What the hell?

I've known Frank for seven or eight years. I met him when he was an M.A. student, three years before I started my M.A. program. In some ways I wanted to emulate him. I looked up to him. He went to one of the best universities in the nation, with one of the premier communication departments. I followed his example. Our universities and research agendas are different, but he's always been a step ahead of me. Until now. He's not done with his dissertation, so in his second year he's been reduced to a one year contract as an instructor.

We shake hands and he gives me a tour of his office, his department, and the brand new communication building.

"I have to meet a student here and then get my lecture ready for Organizational Communication tomorrow."

"That's fine. I'm starved."

"Let me take you to the cafeteria."

I eat chicken for lunch, while reading the college newspaper. I notice that all the college newspapers are talking about the same things: student safety, illegal music downloads, and budgetary shortfalls. I've been lucky with the weather during my travels so far. It's a beautiful day, as I wander around the campus looking at brick sidewalks, cobblestone streets, and the red brick clock tower. A typical Midwestern college town.

After telling him about my computer cord, Frank takes me down to the student center. Even though my computer is almost six years old, I am surprised they have a cord for it. "You'd be astonished," says the store manager, "how many students trip over their cords when they're drunk." We laugh at that.

Two hours later we visit his one bedroom apartment and I get myself set up to sleep on an air mattress in the living room. We go out to a martini bar for drinks and cut loose, listening to a jazz band. The bar owner introduces us to two beautiful young women. As I'm flirting, I notice Jason seems on edge. "What's up?" I ask.

He says flatly, "I had them both in my organizational communication class last semester."

I decide this isn't the right time to pursue the topic of teaching, considering how venomously he spoke about his students in his recorded autobiography. But I can't help thinking about what he said: hating his position and despising his students. During a phone call over the summer he said, "There's this handicapped girl in my class, who is just a pain in the ass. Sometimes I want to push her crippled ass down the fucking stairs!" This is not the same man I knew three or four years ago. I let him drive the Mustang back to his apartment. It is the first real smile I've seen on his face since I arrived.

That night, as I sleep, the air mattress leaks.

The next day, I wake up, my back twisted in knots. As I stretch out my back, I ponder whether there's something else going on. I'm beginning to feel that Frank resents me. Here I am sitting at his dining room table surrounded by papers. I am writing personalized letters of application for jobs, hoping to get a head start. I'm looking over

the transcriptions of the autobiographies, writing expanded fieldnotes, and the autoethnographic parts of my dissertation. Does he resent that I am going gung-ho, doing what he was supposed to be doing – and is supposed to be doing – finishing my dissertation?

* * *

“You said you’re thinking about quitting.” I say, breeching the subject immediately, when he walks into the room.

“Sometimes, usually around Sunday, I think, ‘I did shit this weekend.’ I got a lot of crap to do and I have not even prepared for my classes. I really don’t feel like I’ve accomplished anything. That’s usually when I feel trapped and it sucks. I’m abusing myself. I need to get the hell out of here. This is a dead end. Everyone else is doing just fine. All the signs say this is not for me. But it’s a mind game. It’s a mental game. Sometimes I think maybe my head’s not in it. And for me it’s one of these deals where grass is always greener. I can’t figure shit out.”

“What can you not figure out?” I press.

“Well, first of all, I don’t like my position at the university. It feels insulting to me. I’m now *the* business end of the university. I’m one of the waterwheels. I’m a grade and student processor. I’m just cranking out grades to students. I hate it. I haven’t looked at my FCQs, or whatever you want to call them, the evaluations from students for my spring semester. To put it very bluntly, I’m witnessing or I’m getting a glimpse of the business end of academics. That is processing students, processing grades, the stuff that makes education possible. I’ve been thrown in the trenches, teaching a 4-4 load, and then from that perspective I feel boy, I’m really building my CV. Look at all these classes I’m

teaching. Look at this teaching experience. But at the same time I'm really probably not leaving a positive impact upon those students."

"Do you think that's because undergraduates just aren't interested or prepared or...?"

"They're not. They understand my stance on theory, but they don't really care about it. A big problem is I don't take a hard stance on anything and they don't like that. They think I'm a flip-flopper. I'm a Kerry. They're not going to vote for me. The students here, they want very specific things. They want you to stick with them. They don't want you to hem and haw. They want straight answers. I have no straight answers. They treat me as if I should have been teaching this class for 20 years, and I could probably pull that off. I could probably say, 'We're going to do this and we're going to do it this way only.' You know, sit down and shut up."

"Is this the leadership class?"

"Yeah, but this goes across all the other classes. Not in Public Speaking. Public Speaking is kind of formatted, everything's cool. The leadership class is probably the worst class. Today I was like an auctioneer. I was speaking so fast. I was thinking, 'Get out of here. I want to get out. I want to get the fuck out of here. I want to get the fuck out of here fast.' One problem with that class is I dislike the material and have had a hard time teaching. I don't know what to do. I'm watching the 'agony of defeat' on a hi-light reel in slow motion, and it's me walking again and again and again into that class. It's agonizing. I put together an activity and immediately I feel it's a sham and they know it. I try to talk to them and I feel like it's a sham. It's tough. Some students are respectful. Some students seem to like me. But the vocal ones – it's almost like they hate me. I think

they despise me. That shouldn't bother me. I should say, 'Fuck them.' Some advice I get is, 'You should fuck them, man. Fuck them. Screw that. Don't put up with that shit. Tell them to go to hell. Tell them – you could just walk out of the class. Do that. Don't put up with that.' That's not my style, though. I'm not a disciplinarian and I don't think I should have to be. I don't like the emotional labor some of these classes are entailing."

"Ok, so let me ask you, since you've gone right into talking about teaching. Do you feel that graduate school prepared you well enough for classroom teaching?"

"They prepped me for *a* classroom," Frank says.

"A classroom?"

"A classroom. Not the classroom I'm in now. It's different from what I ever expected – different culture, different type of student, and different classes. You know, they prepped me to teach a big theory-big ideas type class. They encouraged me to instill that value, and I like that approach. But here, that approach fails because the students aren't doing their part – caring and reading and coming with interesting ideas. If they're not interested in the material, I can't make them any more interested in the material. I can't sit there and hold up pom-poms and say, 'Ra-ra-ra!' I'm not going to. That's not my style. If they're not coming here to learn or engage or just talk about the stuff, then it's not going to happen. Nothing's going to happen. And it's really a bummer. And the only feedback I get from students is, 'We need to be in a circle. That'll encourage talking.' Yeah, right."

* * *

Big theories and big ideas. Isn't that what graduate school instills in all of us? We study particular theories, eventually narrowing our research to focus on the specificity of our dissertations. I get frustrated in the classroom too, but I change and adapt as necessary. Isn't it part of our job to inspire the students to care? Why can't he?

* * *

“What about interactions with students outside the classroom?”

“I forced all my students to visit me last semester. One student wrote to the chair of the department recommending I get removed – fired, because I was such a terrible teacher. Afterwards, she came into my office and it was the funniest thing. It was disturbing. It disturbed me because I knew she didn't want to be there. She had this fake look on her face the whole time. It was the shortest talk I ever had. I was just going through the motions. I'd done this conversation with a number of people. She didn't want to open up. She didn't want to talk about anything. She just wanted to get the fuck out. And I thought, 'Oh, that was disgusting. That was the most disgusting conversation I ever had. It was dirty.' She was a very unpalatable human being. She was highly opinionated and totally fucking fake. I didn't like that at all. Usually if students come see me, it's for a good reason. Usually a student gives a shit. Students who don't give a shit don't show up. I get to the point where I tell my students in class, 'You know why you're failing this fucking class? Because you don't give a shit. You're failing yourself. You can't blame anyone but yourself.'”

“Do you get advice here as far as teaching, what to do, how to go about it?” I prod.

“I get emails encouraging me to improve my teaching. So I went to this teaching workshop, you know. ‘How to teach to a large lecture. How to use examples in teaching.’ Totally boring, totally useless to me. I would show up and think, ‘What the fuck’s the point of this workshop? These aren’t the problems I’m having in my classrooms.’”

“I guess the first year’s teaching was a bit different than you thought it was going to be?”

“I didn’t know what to expect, but I didn’t expect to get so much flack from students consistently. I wasn’t ready for fall classes, which was my fault. I didn’t do anything to prepare for classes. I said, ‘Oh, fuck it.’ The last week before summer was over I thought, ‘I should get going on this syllabus.’ These were brand new preps, never taught the course. There are some very talented students. They’re talented. They think, ‘I’m going to use my communication skills to get a job or to become an actor or an actress or to be a musician.’ And they’re good at that stuff. Plenty of them. They’re thinking in terms of ‘what are my job prospects’ and never in my life have I run into so many students who were content to be technicians. They know human resources. They know very specific kinds of assessment procedures, and I’d ask these students about that stuff and they’d just spit it back. ‘Boom, boom, do this, do that, do that. Do a 360 review.’ I don’t know a fucking thing about that shit, right? I can’t grade on it. It looks good. Good, professional, very good. Very professional. A+. Since I have no idea what the fuck they’re dealing with, I could mention human resources or human relations as a movement, from the paragraph that covers it in an organizational communication book and that’s about it. I mean that’s me thinking I should know it all.”

“We can’t know everything,” I empathize.

“Right, but it’s the immensity of student ignorance that is killing me. When I first started teaching that leadership course, I was using examples from *Henry VIII*.”

“Nice.”

“I used fucking *Henry VIII* and we were watching *A Man for All Seasons*. And then it’s like, crickets. Chirp, chirp. Chirp, chirp. They’re clueless on history. They’re more, ‘Okay, let’s all hold onto this rope here. Now, this rope represents X. Okay, and how you see the tug and pull of the rope.’ They like that kind of bullshit.”

“It sounds like the teaching transition took you by surprise.”

“Yes and no. In my first semester, I taught two Public Speaking courses back to back in one day. Then, I’d run home, eat dinner, and then run back. I had about an hour to do that. Then I taught a night leadership class. Doing that in one day, at the end of the day, I really felt like I reached the limit of my physical ability to teach. And it would carry over to other days to the point where I’d be teaching public speaking and I’d go blank. I’m having moments of silence and I’m supposed to be saying something, but can’t remember what, because I’m just fried out of my mind from teaching and lecturing all day. It was driving me nuts. I did the same thing again the spring semester. I’m getting paid better than in grad school, but now I’m teaching four classes. I’m teaching and grading in all those classes and I have no other people to draw upon. Well, I do have people to draw upon but I can’t quickly adapt their stuff. It’s not like we’re working with the same books or issues.

“I had a graduate student in the leadership class who totally tanked. I could tell she was totally checked out. I was always friendly to her and always asked her questions. She was always friendly to me. She did a presentation at the end of class, and she got this

loud ovation. Some students said in the course evaluations, 'I learned more in that one session than I did all semester long.'

“‘You little fucks. You pieces of shit,’ I thought. And if I could sum it up in my own misogynistic terms, it’s these little bitches, women, professionally minded women. I just rub them wrong. Yeah. I get a lot of prissy, stuck-up, never had to fucking deal with shit in my life people in my class. The area is not hyper-rich but to explain it, the kids show up in Beamers, it’s high school kind of stuff.”

“So they are exurban, wealthy people living outside the city?”

“Yeah, they’re exurbs for sure. They’re very affluent and obviously just fucking nothing in their world is their fault. They don’t like it. Once, one of the athletes was in the back of the room. He rolled up his jacket, leaned his head back on his jacket, and fell asleep, with his head propped against the wall. One of my advisors once said, ‘I don’t teach to that. I teach to the people who are looking at me and who are interested.’ And a lot of people can do that, but for whatever reason it just gets under my skin. That makes me think I don’t know if I’m built for this shit.”

“Well my students aren’t that much different than yours,” I say. “I’m at a huge university, right? A lot of the classes are taught by graduate students. You know, because the fulltime faculty are teaching their—“

“Teaching their graduate courses?” Frank interrupts.

“Yeah, and then their specializations. Eric’s teaching Communicating Leadership. Art’s teaching Close Personal Relationships. Lori’s teaching Family Communication. In some ways I feel like I gypped some of my students. One of them literally had me for Public Speaking when I didn’t know how to teach Public Speaking. Interpersonal when I

was learning how to teach it. Organizational when I was learning how to teach it. And Group when I was learning how to teach it. There were some students who I had all the way through. Just before they graduated I told them, ‘Listen, you have taken every class that I’ve taught. You’ve taken them the first time I’ve ever taught them.’ And they asked, ‘So, we’re like guinea pigs?’ ‘Yeah, kind of.’ And although I’m excited to have had all this teaching experience, I don’t know if they learned anything. I know they did, but I sometimes question my aptitude for teaching and reaching the students, you know what I mean?”

“Yeah. I’m in the same shit. Some people go to Iraq. I came here.”

“This is your personal Iraq?”

“Yeah,” Frank says quietly looking down at the table. “Actually, if I survive I’m going to have PTSD for sure. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I look forward to Saturday and Sunday because I don’t have to see their faces. All those faces and those students I’ve grown to despise. It’s all over the place. And it’s covered behind makeup and pretty clothes and professional dress and bullshit. It’s bad. It’s bad in the leadership course for sure. I think I do Organizational Communication better than the leadership course. The problem is people take both those courses in one semester and to me it feels virtually the same. I situate it in business. I situate it in an organizational setting. And so the classes are similar.

“I really don’t want to put the time in classes because when I do, I’m disappointed with the students for not really caring. And when I don’t put time in, they’re disappointed with me for looking like a flake. I can’t find that nice middle point in teaching. A colleague asked me how I was doing. I said, ‘I’m fucking tired. I’m really fucking tired.

I'm exhausted.' I emailed him later and said, 'Don't think I'm bitching.' Sometimes I never felt more alive in my life – it's like I'm bipolar. It's iffy."

"You are working with graduate students now, something I have no experience with. What's that like?"

"Interesting and frustrating. It's a different ballgame. I'm a hard ass. I kind of – I feel like I'm a dick, or I come off as a dick. Well, just in the one case where I flunked a student, but I had to. She had a piece of shit writing for her comps. I said, 'What the fuck is this? Who the fuck do you think you are? You're going to graduate? This is ridiculous. Do this again.' That's how I felt about it. But at the same time, when it comes to the conversation with you and that student, it is just a matter of how conversant you are. I wonder, do they give a shit about what you know, who you are, how much more you know? If they don't respond to it, you're talking to a brick freaking wall. I think, I was kind of a hard ass and I was probably being a hard ass because I was overcompensating for how insecure I felt about everything else."

* * *

"Let's back up for a minute. What's going on with your dissertation?"

"I was thinking of a theme for my first year out of the Ph.D. program, which I have to put in brackets or put an asterisk next to, because I'm not done with my dissertation. That's part of the problem with my first year. It was a real bummer. I really didn't do a lot and for the most part I felt alienated from most of my colleagues. They act nice and they smile and they talk to me but they're into their own things, you know? They have work. They have families. Many of them are just having families. I felt alienated and I can't blame it on anybody in particular. The circumstances, I think, most

departments are under, well they feel pressed for time. They feel pressed for resources and they need people to fill slots and in some ways I feel like I'm not a good filler."

"Do you feel -? "

"I feel I don't have a research identity, because I'm not doing any research aside from reading a bunch of books and commenting on them and making notes to myself on how this is going to fit into my dissertation at some point. I say to myself, 'I'll do that tomorrow,' and I never get to it. So I have hundreds of pages of notes and writing, commenting on where it's going to fit into my dissertation. I don't know if I'll ever get back to it. It's kind of getting out of hand at this point. My identity conundrum began the Spring semester before I left my graduate program, which is where I got my Ph.D., or where I'm planning to get my Ph.D., eventually. When I was no longer in classes, I felt that I lost my cohort. I felt I lost a certain common ground, a common conversation. Complaining or discussing what was talked about in class with cohorts. Oh how I do miss that."

"I've noticed that since I started working on my dissertation. Actually, it started when I began my qualifying exams. Even though I am still part of the department, I feel isolated in some respects, but I try to keep that connection" I say.

"Yeah. Also, I'd say that there is a different departmental culture here as opposed to my graduate program. In my graduate program, they tried their hardest to get people to come together weekly to meet, to talk about someone's research, present research, to grow by keeping the conversation going. That's missing completely here. While there are faculty meetings, my impression of all the faculty meetings put together and my impression of my service commitments were that they're just something on paper and

how much one is actually committed is really up to the person. You know, it's not policed by anyone and I guess part of that goes to our chair, who most people would say is, he's not a very aggressive person. He's mild mannered, a hands-off type of leader, which I think most people prefer in the academic profession, because everyone has their own thing going and they prefer to be left alone."

* * *

Yes, it is true that I want to be left alone when I am doing my research. I know it can be isolating. However, I make an effort to stay connected to my peers in the department, even though I am not taking classes and do not travel to campus everyday. We call each other. We discuss the dilemmas we are facing with our research or our writing. We attend baseball and basketball games together. We meet for coffee and conversations, or go for drinks on the weekends. It takes effort, but it keeps us grounded so we don't feel like we are going it alone. What I'm hearing is that all this becomes more difficult once you leave the safe confines of graduate school.

* * *

"It seems to me most people do their research alone. You want to do research, don't you?"

"I would prefer research. Yeah," Frank sighs. "But at the same time, what am I doing in research? I think, 'Yeah, I'm going to do this, I'm going to that.' I have ideas down on paper. I'm going to do all this great stuff, but really and truly I haven't done shit. And the days when I'm psyching myself up, I go sit down and start writing and I think, 'Where do I fucking start? Where do I start?' A couple of weeks ago I started writing. I wrote for about 15 minutes, got fed up, quit. So, I've been trying to trick myself

into writing the dissertation. What I mean by ‘trick myself’ is I’ll get inspired reading something, and I’ll start writing. Start writing, start writing, start writing, and flesh it out, flesh it out. I got my citations right there as I’m reading the book and I’m in my notes and I’m doing that and it’s good. I feel like there’s so much. It’s forcing me to move faster than I want to move. I feel I need to be in a position where I can move leisurely, or at a pace I feel comfortable with. I’m working through it and the problem is I push it off till the last minute and I feel rushed and I freak out again. So, I pigeonhole myself into working on the dissertation at times that don’t feel right. I keep telling myself, ‘No, first thing in the morning, I should get up and work on the dissertation, not the last thing in the day,’ which is the way it’s been panning out. So, maybe that would help, but chances are, it wouldn’t.”

“Does your attitude toward your current position have to do with your dissertation or something to do with your new organization?”

“It’s dissertation work. It’s me looking at people finish. It’s me...”

* * *

I can feel his stare, even as I am looking down making a couple notes. What if this happens to me? I don’t want to be in that position. Hating my station in life, disgusted with myself, venomous toward my students. What could have been done to help him? What was ineffective, not only in his graduate program, but in his new position?

* * *

“Hey, don’t look at me,” I apologize. “I’m not done yet.”

“Yeah. No, it isn’t you in particular. It’s me looking at people being successful, publishing, doing whatever. I’m sizing up whatever perceived competition there is and

going, 'Oh, fuck. I'll be damned.' That would be another component of my first year. I have no work ethic, absolutely no work ethic. What's really deterring me from finishing anything including my dissertation is this sense that I have no future in academics. I have absolutely no future and that's not a new revelation. I used to think I did, but I'm having grave doubts. And I think that is because I feel like this position is below me. I've tended to avoid conversations with friends and family and peers, because most of them revolve around one goddamn thing, 'How's your dissertation coming?' Everyone asked that and I've gone so far as to avoid every single wedding invitation I've gotten. When I applied for this job I pretty much scrapped the dissertation ideas that I had at the time. So, I'm kind of at square one in some senses."

"Sounds like a real struggle you're having."

"Finishing my dissertation is not going to improve anybody's life one iota. I don't feel it's improving my life, although I do feel ashamed and I do feel a sense of obligation to finish it. I've been saying for the past year and a half, two years now, 'I'll get working on that tomorrow. That'll get done tomorrow. But I've got some drinking to do, got some thinking to do, got some reading to do right now. I can finish that damn thing tomorrow.' When I force myself to work on it, I squeal and squirm, write a little, walk away frustrated."

"That's understandable," I empathize. "I'm frustrated and I'm only part way through the process. It's hard work, teaching when you aren't in the mood to teach, reading when you don't want to read, and writing when you don't feel like writing. But that's the grind of the academic life. My advisor told me working when you don't want to is one of the most important qualities to become a successful academic."

“Perhaps that says something about my fighting with not having an identity. I’m trying to find my identity in academics and I’m not finding it. I’m frustrated by that. My dreams are about finishing my dissertation and living an ironic life in academics. Perhaps I’ll finish out this year and begin applying for jobs like a normal person outside of academics. Or, and this is the ironic state, finding a job at a junior college and then writing important papers. That is a big middle finger ‘fuck you’ to all those people who think you need to be at some hotshot university to write a hotshot paper. I want to constantly be an exception to what I perceive to be rules, but there really aren’t any. I’m dodging and chasing shadows. There’s really no reality in my life.”

“But you definitely thought you did have a future in academe at one point. I remember when you were on the job market.”

“I hated going to NCA and overhearing everyone talk about the job interviews they’re having. I went to NCA and I hadn’t had one response back from any of the places I sent my stuff to. No one wanted to fucking talk to me at NCA. It was fucking shitty. I went to the meat market.”

“The meat market?”

“The NCA Annual Job Fair,” he explains. “I don’t know. First, I feel like a goof in a suit. I didn’t really feel comfortable. It wasn’t my cup of tea. I had some decent conversations with people. I went to one of the booths and I had a really great conversation. I said, ‘Let’s sit down and talk about your program. I’ll tell you what I do. I’m here to practice. My areas of interest might not fit your program, but let’s just have a conversation. I want to feel this out. This is my first time.’ They said, ‘You did a pretty good job, thank you.’ They’re friendly people. I went to other tables and talked to people.

But it didn't work out. That's okay though. I didn't network well. My dissertation advisor pushed me to network, but I really didn't. I was really kind of intimidated by that.”

“So, it's the grapevine that people create on the way.”

“Very much so. Most people say, ‘Hey, let's work on a paper together. Did you see this call? I think we have a great idea, and this is an opportunity to do this.’ I don't know if that NCA bullshit about everyone being involved is really there. I think its people having either an advisor or other people they've met through their own drive, their own volition. They've established a network that allows those kinds of conversations to occur.”

“Research conversations?”

“Research conversations, teaching conversations, open position conversations. However, if you're someone floating around hesitant to go up and shake hands with people or introduce yourself and begin selling yourself on the spot, I'm thinking the job fair was a pitiful attempt to have a net for everyone else. It was NCA's attempt to create a space for people looking for jobs, and people who are looking for employees or new hires.”

“Let's delve on this for a minute. After all, you went to one of the top universities, with tons of well-known faculty, and serious young up and coming scholars. So what happened there? Did you not network while in your graduate program as much as you wanted to?”

“I think I did as much as I could. But no, I don't think enough. I think I proved that I'm smart enough. I proved that I care about research. I care about ideas. I care about talking about them. I think I've done my share of demonstrating leadership roles in

classrooms, leadership roles among the graduate students as an opinion leader. So, I kind of saw myself in that kind of capacity through the course of my years there. I wouldn't say that translated well once that context was gone. As soon as I moved here I had nowhere to practice that anymore so I disappeared. I miss those days because there was a limited sense of responsibility and perhaps you could get away with stuff, but you had someone to talk to about students or whatever and that's gone. So, that transition was rough and I'm still reeling from that. I still do miss being in class. I miss a group of people who were all fretting over getting a paper done in time. And some of those eminent scholars wouldn't give me the fucking time of day. I don't think Ph.D. programs do anything – I don't know if they should even do anything – to prepare you for that transition out. I think it's probably the responsibility of your advisor or people on your committee or some other mentor. I've tried that a little bit here and there. When I was in my graduate program I tended to think that I was in the faculty's way asking for that kind of advice. Perhaps in some cases I was. And the job hunt is just a big sink. It's a black hole. Nothing will escape from it."

"Really?"

"Nothing's going to escape the gravitational pull of writing all that crap or doing all that crap. I basically lost a month or so doing the application process. Lost a month of dissertation time."

"So how did you find this position?" I ask.

"I think one of my Master's committee members knows someone here. And that was that. It was one of the connections. I think it was my second phone interview. I was prepared for it after having failed a phone interview with another university. The other

university was looking for a one-year position. ABD but Ph.D. preferred and I choked through that one. I'm not used to getting up at 8:00 in the morning on a summer day. I was not ready for that. I was screwed. I was done for. I was just a mess. It wasn't a very good interview. The phone interview here, however, was much better. It was almost the same format. It's an odd experience, because I didn't know how many people were in the room listening to me talk over the speaker phone. The interviewing process is so disconnected from when I started actually working. I mean it seemed a mere formality. It seemed like everything went well and when I was done I thought, 'You know what? I hope I don't get this job. I want to get the job but I hope I don't, too. I'm 50-50 here because something tells me that I need to stay here and finish my dissertation, and not run off and get a job.' I went into that mode, 'I need to go get a job.' I thought applying to positions would motivate me to finish. No, it took away time for me writing my dissertation."

* * *

I've heard that before. Art has mentioned the same thing. He's right. It takes lot of time. I spent this afternoon holed up at Frank's desk, looking through the job postings and writing cover letters for the application packets I am going to have to make when I get home. And how many letters did I get done in those five hours? Two. This doesn't feel very promising. At this rate, I'll be finished with the first round of the application process probably sometime in November. That's two months from now.

* * *

"That period was not as fruitful as you would have liked. What else seems different?"

“I guess the transition out of the Ph.D. program into the job was rough. It was rough for me because I had no stable points in my life. No stable reference points in my life. I only had myself. I’d look in my mirror and see me, which I didn’t like seeing most of the time. I had no stable reference points in my life like some people do. A lot of people come in or leave Ph.D. programs. There’s spouses or significant relationships. Some people are parents. Some people are giving birth, raising children, finishing dissertations, getting jobs, all in one year. And then there’s me, raising my inner child. I remember telling one of my advisors, ‘Raising your inner child takes a lot of work.’ It also involves the geographical move as well.”

“Moving from place to place, like when I moved from Saint Louis to Tampa at first?”

“Yeah, I remember you hated it.”

“I did,” I agree. “You remember what I went through. I quit my information technology job and moved halfway across the country to Tampa. And then just as I was starting to get settled, I received that phone call from my fiancé breaking off of our engagement. It was – emotionally – the most difficult time in my life. That’s why I wrote about it” (Herrman, 2007).

“I remember. I probably lost a year of my life. It was nutty. Picking everything up, putting everything together. I didn’t really want to move out. It was just a pain in the ass, so I pushed it off. I was cleaning and picking up stuff from 7:00 in the morning day before I left until 3:00 in the morning the next day. I remember the last chore I did was scrubbing the walls of my shower stall and I was just delirious. I was dizzy and my head was spinning. And I came upstairs and my roommate was hanging out playing a video

game, watching *Van Wilder* and he was just chill. So, we ordered a pizza and it was like 3:00 in the morning. I ate some pizza. I got to go to bed. I got to get up at 5:00 in the morning and take off. So, I got my hour and a half sleep, picked up the few things I had left, packed them away, grabbed my cat and my plants, put them in the giant truck. I towed my car, which made it a white-knuckle ride for 12 hours. No, for 14 hours to St. Louis, and then my dad says, ‘Okay, quick, let’s get your car off. I want to tow this and it’ll be easier for you.’ But I couldn’t – I was going to fall over – from driving so much. My equilibrium was wiped. And then I finally got a good night’s sleep and we left the next morning and I was here by about 3:00 in the afternoon. So, two days of nonstop going.”

“I found Saint Louis and Tampa to be very different cities, geographically and culturally. Once you moved here did you find it different?”

“Indeed. It was me floating in space, entering a new job, and wondering about what it is I’m going to be doing. I don’t know the terrain. It is strange moving from a city that is the exception to every rule in the United States. I’m moving here, the bread and butter of everything that the Republican campaign banks on: ignorance, fear of God, and the protection of guns. The greatest articulation of politics here is, ‘I’m going to drive my Harley and have an American flag poking off the back. I’m going to make a lot of loud noise and bother people. This is my American dream, my American way of life, that must be secured from some abstract terror threat.’

“So, the transition between the two places was rough. I survived it. However, I tend to stay inside, listen to music that makes me feel okay and drink my beer alone. I go home sometimes, watch a little TV. I was playing arcade or video games on my computer

for a while. Got burned out doing that, would sleep, watch movies and drink. I did drink a lot. I still am drinking. I was drinking when I recorded the narrative for you. It's a thing I do at around 5:00-7:00 and until I go to bed, which is around 12:00. Not heavy drinking. Anyway, Ph.D. programs do not have any standards for helping you transition into your next stage, and that's something you really have to figure out and its kind of tough."

* * *

That's not a lot of drinking? I recognize the pattern. My father used to drink like that when I was growing up. Later on in life, my brothers and I concluded that he was a functioning alcoholic.

* * *

"You spoke about the interviewing process a little, and I'd like to know about your first experiences on campus. When you first got here, did they have an orientation for you to go to?"

"Not too much that I remember. I met with different people. I met with the dean and I was taken over to the media design program, different things like that. I was worn out that second day. I was falling asleep standing up. There's not much I remember from that process. I also didn't get a good sense of my colleagues at first. It seemed they had already established their own group and, while I was accepted, I felt like an outsider pretty much from the start. In my attempts to try to fit in, I didn't want to make it seem like I was trying too hard, like I was going to go out and get a whole new wardrobe and part my hair if I could part my hair the same way as somebody. You know, as if to try to fit in that way, using a front, trying to completely mimic someone else, which I think is a

bunch of crap and I prefer not to do that, and I guess most people would also prefer I not do that or mimic them anyway.”

“You felt like an outsider?”

“I felt like they had established a community – a culture – into which I didn’t and don’t fit. I spent most of my time with one of the adjunct professors, Dr. Smith. She had finished her Ph.D. and was trying to publish, which she did. She had two publications moving through. She got one while she was here and we talked about it. But in the end, she ended up not getting a job in academics. She finished out her year as an adjunct. I hung out with her most. We tended to meet for coffee in between classes. She had a really irreverent attitude towards students, which I enjoyed. She was smart and she was a reformed quantitative researcher. We had good conversations and I thought, ‘Here’s someone I could hang out with.’ And we did. She’d come by and we’d go to the coffee shop. I really enjoyed that moment of the day. But most of the conversations I’ve had here are very simplistic. When I’ve had an opportunity to speak about what I do, or my thoughts on something, I think they think I’m a windbag. I look around when I’m speaking and I see the subtle hints that say, ‘Could you cut it short now please?’ It is uncomfortable.

“It didn’t help that when I got here, my office was God-awful,” Frank continues.

“It had no window and a sliding door and it was a really depressing greenish grayish drab with the wonderful lighting that comes with flickering florescent lights. I had this heavy steel desk from the 70s on this green gray dreary floor. I didn’t really hang anything up and I had a couple of books scattered about, but the whole place was bare because I didn’t spend a lot of time there.

“I remember walking in the building before the first faculty meeting and running into a peer and just talking very briefly about what to expect at the meeting, since the new dean was going to be there. I made an authentic comment, ‘I hope I’m up to the dress code,’ or something to that effect. She says, ‘Oh, just tuck your shirt in.’ She kind of wrote it off as, ‘Oh, you know us, we don’t really dress up here anyway. Tucking your shirt in is us dressed up.’ I walked into my office and it just dawned on me. ‘Do I dress like a slob? Am I a total slob here?’ I never dress up. There are holes in most of my clothes that I wear every day. My shoes are ripped up, too. They’re old beat-up tennis shoes. All of a sudden, it all just fell on me like a ton of bricks, that I’m just a big slob. And really every fiber of my being said that maybe I don’t belong here. I kind of slumped into my chair in my office and laid my head on my desk for a few minutes, and I was pretty depressed for that moment. I wanted to run away. I wanted to run away if I could, but I couldn’t. There were only about fifteen minutes left before the meeting. I went into the meeting and of course the dean asked everyone what we did. He cut me short because I began to get interested and talked outside of the paragraph that most professors put up on their website, or on their CV, or their elevator speech. I began talking outside of that parameter and he cut me off, which leads me to believe this whole windbag thing I was thinking about earlier. But that being said, that was a low moment for me just because I really felt like I didn’t belong.”

“Hasn’t anyone tried to help bridge that gap?”

“One of the faculty told me, ‘Most of us came in at the same time and we’ve been here a while. I guess we’re set in our ways. It’s always good to have young people come in. It feels good to have young blood in the department.’ It was her attempt to say, ‘We

appreciate your presence and this is me accounting for the differences between us and the lack of communication and the awkward silences between us.’ There is an awkward silence. Within the first few weeks, another faculty member and I ran into each other and he said, ‘Hey, you know, when things die down, I’d like to invite you over to my house for dinner sometime.’ I said, ‘That’d be great.’ I never did get that invitation. I don’t want to say he didn’t really want to invite me or anything like that. I didn’t want to press him and say, ‘Hey, what about that invitation to dinner?’ It just seems kind of odd. I guess I just feel if I would have gone over there, I really would’ve felt out of place. I really would’ve felt like, I don’t know, like a kid, like someone who doesn’t belong.”

“What kind of social life do you have outside of the university besides you and I going drinking last night?”

“Almost nil. It picked up a lot. I mean, I got a friend. He’s getting ready to leave though. In a year, he’s getting ready to leave. He’s friendly. Nice guy. But I didn’t initiate contact. He initiated contact with me so we hung out. Worked out. Interesting conversations. Fun guy. Likes to watch movies.”

“So it is definitely different culturally and –“

“Yes. And I have this really unwarranted elitist sense. I think, ‘Hold on a minute. What’s this university known for? It’s not known for its Department of Communication.’ I’ve only heard one of the faculty members’ names. I didn’t know any other names. It’s not that they haven’t published. It’s just I never was interested in their research. So I feel like I’m jumping into a group of people that are talking about much different things than I. They have no interest in my health and technology research, and I have no interest in what they’re doing. I probably don’t have that much respect for what they’re doing,

which is probably unfortunate and it's probably leading me to some other problems I'm having.

“One of my peers from graduate school found a hot job. And I think that she feels that she fits in. I don't have that same sense of fitting in here. I've never felt like I fit in a lot, you know like if we had some common ground. Here, we work apart. I don't know what other people are thinking about or how they're thinking. So, that part of the transition is rough. I've had kind of a love-hate relationship with the community as such. It's the group mentality. I tend to look into these things probably too much and I see a lot of people just buzzing with buzz words. Everyone's talking the same talk kind of performing their identity in similar ways and I find it phony.”

“Have you talked to the chair at all about your circumstances?” I ask. “You're in this situation between having your diss – well, not having your diss done.”

“No, I haven't talked to him about it. When I was interviewed for the job I told them I would be done. I didn't lie. I thought I would be. Recently, he asked me if it's done and I said, ‘No, it's not done yet.’ He asks, ‘How much do you have done?’ ‘I don't really know. Not chapters. I've written a lot but I haven't put it under chapter headings.’ I mean he asked the tough questions. And I have no fucking clue. So, he probably thinks I'm a total loser. So, I don't know. He's a hard read. I don't know what to expect from him. I don't know. My feeling is he's probably – I don't know – maybe that's unrealistic, but maybe he's not happy with me. But I don't know if he really cares, you know?”

“You're going to have a review I would imagine eventually, right?”

“Eventually.”

“And how is that going to work? How is the review going to work because—“

“The review might happen if I’m here for four years and they decide that I’m worth keeping on. I know people are coming up for review. I talked to our rhetorician, and he said, ‘I’m getting reviewed and it’s not a slam dunk. I might be here.’ ‘Yeah,’ I said, ‘That sucks.’ I’m considering either at the end of this semester, at the end of the year, saying, ‘I’m not going to come back. I can’t do it.’ So, that review – pssh! I don’t think it will be a favorable review considering he’s already brought me into his office once for abysmal evaluations from students for one of my classes.”

“So what are you going to do?”

“I don’t know. I’m just having more anxieties about my dissertation again. The kind of dissertation that could be, but isn’t. Once again, the lack of motivation. If you feel you have no future, then what you’re doing in the present has no bearing. I have no sense of what my immediate goals are, since I have no future goals or future orientation. I wouldn’t say I’m depressed and that I’m suicidal. I’m far from suicidal. I’m too much of a chicken shit to do something like that. But I am within the range of killing my career, which I’m in the process of doing by sitting on everything I’ve ever done and not trying to push it out into publication. I read. Some of it pertains to my dissertation. I scribble down notes, things I might want to do in the future but do I do any of them? No. I actually make future plans for tomorrow and then I don’t do them tomorrow. It’s amazing.”

* * *

It’s getting more and more uncomfortable. Tomorrow I leave for the other interview, and I will not see Frank again on this leg of my travels. I thought he was having serious trouble about his liminal position, stuck between the academic Scylla and

Charybdis. Frank is living my greatest fear, getting so close to the end, but never finishing. Caught in a position where moving forward is impossible while trying to balance writing a dissertation and the requirements of a full-time faculty position. He kept talking about being alone. Does the academic life need to be a type of solitary confinement? No wonder he drinks.

Deborah and Frank. While Deborah might be in this liminal space, and has all her physical and mental health issues, I think she is a better shape than Frank is. She's not blaming other people. She is not blaming her department. She is not blaming her students. She is taking some responsibility for her situation, as difficult as it is, particularly with her dissertation advisor. But Frank? He doesn't take any responsibility for his position, even though he mentally assents to the idea that he doesn't prepare to teach and doesn't care about students. He has no prospective narrative. It is no wonder he cannot move forward.

When I awaken the next morning, Frank is already gone. I lock up as I leave, and head down the highway for my next interview. I like Frank, but I hope the next participant is having a better time. I need something uplifting.

* * *

October 22, 2007: I received an email from Frank.

"I just resigned my position, effective at the end of this semester. Time to review where I am and where I'm headed – and finish that damn dissertation. See you at NCA."

Chapter 7

Harrison: Happily Overworking

Consulting my map, I realize there is no fast, easy way to get to my next destination. As I drive on the two-lane state road I'm impressed with the soft September sunshine, rolling hills, and quaint houses, all of which could easily make beautiful bed and breakfasts. After two hours, I finally reach the interstate. I hit the gas and let my mind wander. I think about what Harrison told me in his autobiography. He loves his position, but he is working too hard. He's on many committees, taught year round, and is getting ready to teach a class in the winter intersession as well.

Suddenly, I realize I passed the exit 15 miles ago. I am supposed to be at the university in about five minutes. I hop off the next exit and turn around. I quickly call Harrison's number from my cell phone. His voice mail picks up. "Harrison. It's Andrew. I messed up and I am going to be late. I'm going to break innumerable traffic laws to get there as soon as I can." And with that, my phone beeps...and dies. I hit close to 95 miles an hour in the Mustang as I fly down the highway. "Not good Andrew. Not good." I pull into the university parking lot directly in front of the student union. I note the sign that says, "Parking by permit only." Whatever. I don't have time.

I walk up the path toward the student union and consult the campus map. There's the building. Not far away. I half-walk, half-jog to the sandy brick building. Walking through the double doors, I hit the third floor elevator button immediately. I walk around corner after corner, after corner down the corridor. The building seems much larger

inside than it did on the outside. When I get to the Department of Communication, there's no one at the front desk, so I walk down the back corridor on my own. There's his office. I knock. No answer. Did I miss him? Did he decide that this researcher is an ignoramus and therefore this is not worth pursuing? I plug my phone into an outlet in the hallway, letting it charge. I hope Harrison hasn't tried to call me back. I am frustrated with myself. I pull out my laptop, and write him a quick email. Maybe he's at home or someplace else on campus, and will get this.

Then I notice the nameplate next to the door adjacent to me. It's Raquel – one of the people who originally wanted to be part of this project, but then backed out, concerned that her identity would be compromised and the repercussions that could follow from that. OK. This is awkward. Do I say "Hello?" Do I just ignore her? She doesn't know I am here. I stay in the hallway and say nothing. Approximately ten minutes later, although it seemed like an eternity, Harrison comes down the hall. I'm shocked. He looks horrible. His slim frame has exploded outward in every direction. He appears to be about 30 pounds heavier than he was when I saw him six months ago. His face, framed by his wavy brown hair, looks pudgy. What happened?

** * **

“Hi Andrew,” he smiles as we grasp hands. “Sorry I'm late. The meeting I was in took longer than it was supposed to. I told you that I was squeezing you in between two other meetings, but the meeting that was supposed to happen after this one has been cancelled. We can make up some of the time for my lateness then.”

“Are you kidding Harrison? I was fifteen minutes late. I missed the exit and ended up in boonie-town. I thought you decided I was a clown, and there was no way you were going to meet me if I was that late.”

We laugh at that. He notices I look at him a little funny. He laughs. “Remember, besides the gender stuff, I do full participant research into support groups about overeating and losing weight.”

“That’s right. I forgot that part of your research agenda.”

“This is the last time, though. My doctor said that I cannot keep doing this to my body. I think I’ve gained and lost anywhere between 30 and 40 pounds each time I’ve gone to do fieldwork. Each time it gets harder and harder to lose the weight.”

As we go into his office he says, “Don’t mind the mess. I’m rearranging.” I pick up a book off his desk, *My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student*, by Rebekah Nathan.

“That’s one of the books we read in our departmental reading club. Every month or so, the faculty read the same book and discuss it.” He points out a number of the books: *What the Best College Teachers Do*, by Ken Bain. *The Courage to Teach*, by Parker Palmer. *Life on the Tenure Track: Lessons from the First Year*, by J. Lang. “This has been profitable, because it keeps us faculty connected to each other. It gives us some common ground and experiences, and the opportunity to talk openly about what we are supposed to be doing here.”

“I’ve read the Lang book,” I say. “In fact, it was a crucial part of my dissertation proposal.”

“I bet it was. It’s really good. Insightful.”

Hearing laughter, I follow Harrison out into the hallway and around the corner into Raquel's office. Raquel is sitting behind her desk. A young blonde is sitting on the beige couch across from her. Harrison introduces me to the two women. They too are new professors, who came in during the same year as Harrison did.

"Hi Raquel," I start. "I'm the guy who keeps forgetting to take you off my dissertation email list."

"Don't worry about it," she says. "You have more important things to do, and I just ignore them." Everyone laughs. Then Harrison introduces me to Lisa.

"Andrew's also on the job market this year."

"Oh you poor bastard," Lisa says. "I don't envy you at all."

"Yeah, I'm keeping busy. Busier than I thought I would be."

"You'll be delirious by the end of this semester. Keep your head up. Keep your eye on the ball. You have to really schedule yourself, or you will fall far behind."

"You are getting funding for this travel, right?" Lisa asks.

"Nope."

"What? You are living on a stipend. What are you, some sort of masochist?"

Everyone starts laughing. "Next time you should look into grant money for travel."

"I have no idea how to do that. That is one of the things missing from my doctoral education. I haven't had time to look into that stuff, and I have no idea how to go about it. But I'm beginning to see how important it is."

"It's getting even more important. All of us are in the process of writing grants for all sorts of projects. You have to get external funding. You are crazy and a masochist."

"Oh I know. I'm in academe." We start laughing again.

“What about your advisor?” Raquel asks.

“I don’t know what his expertise is when it comes to that. I haven’t asked. Other things seem more important to me anyway, like getting the diss done. I’ll get by. Things work out, even if I am in a demented panic at this time.”

“That’s too much stress,” Lisa says flatly. “You should try to get some funding, by hook or by crook.”

“I’m gonna rob Bank of America if I don’t get this travel grant,” Harrison says laughing. “You ready?” he asks, turning to me. I nod, still laughing.

After saying good-bye, Harrison and I head down the stairs to the cafeteria for lunch. As we walk, we talk about the life of a first year.

* * *

“You came to this university with three others, right?”

“I came in with four. Well, I’m number four,” he says as we walk down the stairs.

“I’ve noticed everybody who came in with somebody or somebodies does a lot better than people who don’t.”

“I would imagine. What’s interesting is this year the people came in with four or three and I don’t think they’re bonding quite like we did, because we were all in the same office last year. Two of us who came in together do gender research, so that helped as well. Though they are still wondering what my gender research is all about. Watch your step.”

“I was wondering,” I begin, sidestepping a small pile of sheetrock, “Is this building being refurbished? I saw some electricians or maintenance people walking by earlier.”

“Yeah, a little bit. The part that I’m in now, it got built in November of last year, so it’s actually new. We got here and they said, ‘This is so embarrassing, but you four have to share an office.’ Initially I was annoyed by it, but then it turned out to be really cool. It was kind of like being a graduate teaching assistant. I think that made us into good buddies because we would always see each other. It would be time to go home and instead of being in our own office packing up alone we’d see each other and say, ‘Let’s go get a beer.’ So, the bonding kind of was a situational thing. But they’re good people.”

“Back in the office you mentioned the book reading club, which helps people stay connected. What do you remember about the university’s orientation?”

“Nothing really. I signed up for a 401(k), picked my health plan, signed other paperwork. They gave us a full campus tour, pointing out different buildings and the like. No great shakes. I honestly don’t remember much. Me and the other new people did a lot of hanging out together.”

We slide through the cafeteria, picking out sandwiches, salads, and pouring ourselves diet Pepsis. Harrison pays for both our meals. As I go to protest, he furrows his brow and says, “Uh-uh. You’ll be doing the same thing for graduate students one day. Keep the money running down to the ones that follow.”

“Thanks. Yeah, those two women seem like really good people. They are hilarious. You are the first person I’m interviewing that has a finished dissertation. When did you actually finish your dissertation?”

“August 13th that’s the date I have to say,” Harrison laughs. “If it weren’t done then my contract would automatically revert to a one-year non-renewable contract. If I wanted to stay here I would have to reapply and go through the whole re-interview

process. Or if there were no tenure track lines available, then apply for an adjunct type position or staff position.”

“Pretty strict deadline for that.”

“Yeah, you don’t want to mess around or miss your dissertation completion date at all.”

We sit at a long flat table with a Formica top. It looks like any ubiquitous college cafeteria. Chick-Filet. McDonald’s. Chinese food. Pizza. There’s a large flat screen television blasting MTV-U, the closed circuit music channel just for colleges and universities. I guess someone has to pay the bills.

“I’ve interviewed some people who aren’t done and the one guy is really bitter. In your autobiography, you said they have a really good program here to get people over the hump in their contract.”

“Oh no. I guess that wasn’t too clear, probably my fault. No, that was my graduate school. Yeah. They wanted faculty to start, and they would take a chance on ABDs. They would assign a faculty member to that ABD and say, ‘You need to meet with them once a week. Make sure they get done.’ And they’ve never had a problem with getting someone finished.”

“Really?” I ask.

“Not that I know of. Most of them finish by December although they have a full year.”

“They should implement that in more places. That sounds like a good idea to get them tenured. You mentioned something to me at the last Central States Communication Association Convention about the conundrum where many institutions and people say

that they're actually for gender studies, and are doing gender studies, but they're actually not. Have you run into that here? What have been the implications of that?"

"Not too many here. It's more of a disciplinary thing, I think. Well, first, there's a lot of gender people on the market. It is a competitive year to be on the market. When I was on the market I think the biggest thing I learned was people would say, 'Oh, you do gender! I do gender, too.' And then they would say, 'I like to look at how men and women are different.' I would tell them a little bit about what I do, about gendered performance and queer studies which isn't radical really, and they would comment, 'Oh! Well, that's kind of post-modern, isn't it?' 'Not really.' I think people think they're doing gender and they're not, which is a personal observation. But then in terms of the politics, I think if you teach gender communication, Julia Woods' text book is about as radical as it gets, which to me isn't very radical. I'm not saying post-modern queer theory should be taught in every class. However, here they're actually so supportive it hurts. I mean in a good way, like the song '*Hurts So Good*.'"

"Really?"

"Well, you remember when I presented that paper at Central? The one part when I was up there and said, 'Here's a trend in movies that we ought to stick to.' The person who, for all practical purposes, is my boss, says, 'Yay! I'm so proud of you! That's fun! Do your sex talk.' I thought that was a pretty exclusive paper. I know at my graduate school they would've said, 'Well, you might watch some of the language you use.' Even though it's not my language, it's the language from the movies. So, that kind of conservatism, I think is especially prevalent towards gender research."

* * *

I watch as Harrison takes apart his two grilled chicken sandwiches. He tosses the top of one bun and the bottom of the other bun to the side. He puts the remaining pieces together, in effect creating a double-decker grilled chicken sandwich. I know this routine.

“South Beach diet?” I ask.

“Yeah,” Harrison nods as he takes a big bite.

“I was on it this summer and lost forty pounds,” I say. “I was too sedentary while doing my writing. Anyway, where you went as a graduate student was more conservative than here?”

“Yeah. They never stifled me or censored me. I think it’s a good thing. They always warned me that this could be perceived this way or that way. I had a mentor there. One of his favorite sayings was, ‘Well, imagine if Fox News got a hold of it. What would they have to say?’” We start laughing.

“I don’t know what they would say. Probably it’s boring because it sounds exotic. My students like it,” Harrison says. “Students like it.”

“I’ve seen you present and, to be honest, you’re better than 90 percent of the people who read off of their papers, you know what I mean?”

“Thanks. I think it is the performer in me. You know, that’s something that me and the new people have in common. I don’t know. I think a lot of the reason we got our jobs is charisma.”

“Really?” I ask.

“Because our department is super energetic. It took me ten seconds to realize, ‘Oh my gosh, these are the movers and shakers of the campus.’ You met them just now and

the way they're full of life and bouncy and instantly friendly. There's no awkwardness at all."

"And giving me shit immediately."

"Exactly! That's our department," Harrison says smiling. "So I think when they interviewed me they thought, 'Oh, well this kid can be fun.' They didn't just say that. Obviously you had to have a track record and all that kind of stuff. They wouldn't hire people if they said, 'Well, we don't think we can get them tenured.' But I think playing well is a big part of the department here."

"Playing well. Not playing. That sounds political. Is that normal playing politics like that at this university?"

"No. No. There is very little politics here. For example, our chair has to turn down people for committee work and say, 'My people are already doing too many committees.' A lot of times we aren't on committees through the official channels. We get put on committees because somebody's met us and we talk about something and they say, 'Oh wow! Well, there's a committee on this. Would you do it?' So, they never have to say, 'We've got 19 slots open and so your department needs to fill five.'"

"Because you were already doing it?"

"Right. Right."

"Oh, that's a good way to do committees, I would imagine, rather than being stuck on a committee where you don't normally have any interest and it's just a service slot line on the CV."

"Exactly."

“One of the reasons I got so interested in this research project is because much of this research on new faculty socialization is statistical. That’s pretty much the way they handle socialization literature. And so I thought, ‘Yeah, but what’s it like?’ ‘What’s it like on the other side?’ It’s funny the way I can see this thing metaphorically. It’s like the old Jewish temple. You had that veil and only the high priest was allowed to go in the inner sanctum. Well, as a graduate student, I’m out here. I can see you walk into ‘the temple’ so to speak, but I have only a general idea of what it might be like from the inside. What’s it like once you make that positional change? I mean, you’re teaching graduate classes now, which has to be a lot of fun and quite a challenge at the same time.”

“I took to the graduate thing fast. I didn’t realize this until I was done with my first semester. The thing I like about academia, I always thought it was teaching and it still kind of is. But, I do think research is my passion now and I have teaching as a close second. I like to discuss ideas behind my research. And so in an undergrad class, I can’t really get into that. They try and it’s great. They learn these new vocabularies and whatnot. But in the grad classes, I would say, ‘So, what do you think about this?’ And they would critique it and would talk about it. I quickly learned what I like doing is having these grad classes, that combination of the teaching and the research. Starting in this spring, I teach all graduate classes. It is going to be pretty hard to find some place else to take me away from that, because it’s a pretty cool setup.”

“How many students do you have in those classes on average?”

“About ten. I’ve got 14 in one right now and it’s quite a fat class. But they cap them all at 16. Undergrad classes, they cap them at 24. I usually get that and then about a third of them drop.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. I have a reputation as a seriously tough teacher.”

“I’ve got that, too. As a matter of fact, one of my students told me, ‘You know Mr. Herrmann, we like you because you’re kind of an asshole.’ I guess it’s because I’m tough and got rid of all the students who didn’t want to put effort into anything. They had to leave my class by about the third week because they were clobbered already. You know, I’ve taught two classes a semester. The biggest class I taught was 40. It was an organizational communication class. I got whooped on that semester. I wasn’t ready for that.”

“That’s pretty big. And you were on your own?”

“Yep. We pretty much teach everything on our own at USF. I’ve been fortunate because there’s been such a turnover at USF recently. I got to teach Public Speaking, Interpersonal, Family, Group, and Organizational. So I got to teach all those classes, which was good, but doing all those preps wore me out.”

“That’s what’s killing me right now.” Harrison says. “I’m doing three new preps right now. And it sucks.”

A young woman in a blue oxford shirt and khakis interrupts us. She asks Harrison if he will be at a student event later that evening. After she strolls away, Harrison says, “There’s a lot of young people on campus. We all kind of stick together.”

“Is she faculty?”

“She’s actually a staff member.”

“I’m assuming this university is growing.” I say.

“Mm-hmm. Their projections say it will grow by ten thousand students by 2020, which is a lot. It’s grown about nine thousand students in the past 5 years. It used to be like a community college. It’s only 35 years old. It used to not be here. It used to be up on a hill somewhere. Then they said, ‘Well, let’s try a university and see how that works.’ And so they opened the university with the idea that if the university failed, it would become a jail or a prison. So, you look over there, you can see the big watchtower. Oh, we can’t see it from here. I’ll show you on the way out. So they built that watchtower, and they built one other building and they said, ‘This is going to be the university.’ And then they had to hire people and luckily for them it was in a year when the market was super-tight in academia because of the first Iraq war and everything.”

“I’ve heard that USF was supposed to be converted to a prison if it didn’t work, but as far as I know, that’s just rumor. Nine thousand students in five years. That’s a lot of change in a short period of time, don’t you think?” I ask.

“Yeah. You still find a lot of people who have been here since day one, and they hate the growth. Like this guy in mathematics one time asked me, ‘What do you do?’ I said, ‘I research da-da-da.’ He goes, ‘Well, you researchers are what’s wrong with this school!’ and stormed away. He was totally pissed off. I thought, ‘What the hell is up with that?’ So we – my cohort and I – started joking and laughing. ‘We researchers are what’s wrong with this school.’ We come to find out later from another young faculty member in the mathematics department, that he went to her office personally and he said, ‘You know, your teaching is the only thing that matters here and don’t you forget it. We’re

teachers and so you can go publish all you want but you're a teacher.' That is not the story I get in my department. They're happy I go and do research. 'That's what we want. That's why the university's growing.' So, there's this division, the old guard versus the young guard."

"I was trying to describe to somebody these changes in academia, "I say. "I did an informal survey so to speak. I asked some senior faculty members, 'Did you have to publish as graduate students?' And they said, 'What the hell are you talking about?' Bud Goodall, he graduated around 1980, told me that's when the first pressure to publish as a graduate student started. He said now it's ridiculous. And one of my committee members was telling me he was just working away and then he got called into the dean's office. The chair was there. They shook his hand, and basically said, 'Congratulations, you have tenure.'"

"I couldn't even imagine that," Harrison mumbles, his mouth full of food.

"It's not like that now. Do you know what you need to do to get tenure? Were the requirements explicit?"

"No. They don't have a written policy and some have suggested that that's to prevent them from being sued. No written policy equals nothing set in stone. But we have something called an active scholar policy and so if you get a certain number of publications in a year, then you get a teaching release. Since they're giving me a teaching release, then that means I'm on track. The other thing is we have annual reviews. In January of last year, we had to put together a folder for our first semester. When I was putting it together, I kind of made a deal with myself personally. Actually this thought process started when I was finishing up as a graduate student. I'm an activist, so I said to

myself, 'Okay, you can have all your fun with activism you want in grad school. And then when you go to work as a professor you'll take the activism down and you'll funnel your activism into your research.' So, the way I look at it now is my research line is activism. It is activism to help people free themselves from psychic prisons and relationships. At least that is how I resolve it with myself. And so I still do things like independent studies. I did an independent study with some undergraduate students so they could get a safe zone program started on the campus, and I loved doing that. It was a good bunch of students to work with. So, that's kind of activist, but I started focusing on getting published."

"Did you publish as a graduate student?"

"I had three publications under my belt, which is not bad, but it's just not what I envisioned for myself. I wanted to publish more than that. So now I'm playing the publication game more. First of all it took more time and effort than I thought it would in terms of getting stuff published. It's a lot of time and effort. I would send something off and get these letters back for revise and resubmit. I heard this piece of advice: 'Publication is persistency, it's not talent.' I don't buy into that wholesale. I've developed my own personal policy. I send out something to get reviewed and it gets a reject or a revise and resubmit. If one reviewer has a beef with it, I kind of ignore that. But when the second person has a beef with it, I fix it. And I guess I'm kind of getting off topic."

"No. No," I say. "This is really good. This is good for me. This is actually good for people who are struggling to get things published, right? I mean, part of this research, part of this end-product, is going to be for graduate students so they know what the heck is going on. That's my hope."

“That’s important, but what I’m getting at here is something else. When I went up with my appointment folder, by that point I had nine things that were either accepted or in revise and resubmit. So I got my mid-year evaluation letter back and it read, ‘You’re doing an excellent job.’ I was obviously happy with that. But, this was the first time I felt any kind of tension with my colleagues. Another one got, ‘You’re doing an excellent job,’ because she had. But another one had on her letter, ‘You’re doing an adequate job,’ or something like that. I didn’t want to show my letter but they insisted. ‘Okay. Fine. Look at it.’ I thought they were all the same, and they weren’t. It was awkward.”

“Oh boy. Why didn’t they send those letters to you at home?” I ask.

“No idea. And another junior faculty member, who wasn’t in our little clique of new folk, he came around and said, ‘Well, the letters were worded differently this year.’ Like he was telling us something we didn’t know. And he actually thought, and in fact he said – and this is the only negative feedback I’ve gotten towards publishing from within the department – ‘You know what? You’re doing too much research and too much publishing, and that’s going to be bad. They’re not going to give you tenure.’ Which is horseshit. No one’s going to say, ‘We’re going to not give you tenure because you’ve published too much.’”

“I’ve never heard that.”

“No. He said something to the effect of, ‘You’re going to look like you’re an outsider and da-da-da.’ Honestly, he seems like he has sour grapes. Not only towards me, he was like that to Lisa. He started rolling over her with that kind of crap, too. Plus, he gets close to the line of sexually harassing her. He knows the line, but gets very close. He creeps her out. He creeps me out. We’ve actually grown to resent him. Everyone else in

our department thinks our research is great. 'Awesome, that's what we want.' Our department chair says, 'I'm a proud poppa!' 'This is awesome!' and 'Yay! You're doing exactly what you're supposed to do when we hired you.' 'Wow! We've got a great team.' Then there's this ass-hat and he says, 'Well, nobody likes you.' Whatever."

"So you are really pushing out the pubs. Are you competitive?"

"We had a thing called 'Pub Club.' We got this poster board and we wrote down, if you get a publication acceptance in this kind of category, you earn this many points, and so on, and so forth. So Lisa and I were competing against each other, trying to see who got the most. And the person who had the most points won a new pair of shoes of their choice." He chuckles to himself.

"That's a cool way to be competitive, but not asinine about it. Is Lisa a publishing machine, too?"

"Yeah. Here's the difference between me and her. She's going all big guns out. She works hard and she's gotten these pieces to sheer perfection. She's sending them to the top tier journals. My attitude, for what I want to do – well, I ask myself, 'Do I want to get in these big journals?' Not really, so I went smaller scale or for book chapters. So, if you look at our vitas, it makes me look like I do a little more than her because I've got 26 different lines of publication on my vita and she's got two. But if you look at what she's got in the pipeline, and the way that'll all play out, I'm pretty sure she's going to have six international or national level publications. And that's great. It's a different approach or a different way of doing things. Her goals have to be different than mine. They have to be. She does traditional family quantitative research, so her outlets are different than mine. I still try to find ones that are competitive and that are good and that people will read. I

have to go to boutique outlets, but I always think, 'I want someone to access my work.' And I don't care if they hate it. I don't care if they love it. I just want them to be able to respond to it and say, 'You F'ed up,' or, 'Awesome,' or, 'I'm not sure.' I can respond to that."

"Right."

"But that's the thing Lisa and I have in common. When we set up Pub Club we took into consideration her type of research program, my type, and said, 'Okay, how can we work that out?' But going back, this guy comes along saying, 'Well, people don't like that and I'm going to complain about it.' And I thought, 'It doesn't hurt you, ass-hat. Just go do your own work and leave us be.' That's probably as much as I should say about that. But if you look at his vita, you think, 'Dude, you've been here for four years and that's all you've got. And you're here giving us advice? Maybe you should go and get your first publication.'" We start laughing.

"You're onto something about the difference between graduate school versus faculty competition," I say. "Ed and I got thrown into this. We are not at all in competition in terms of our publications, because we do totally different things. He does gender research and communication theory and I do organizational research and communication theory. There's no overlap. The thing that's been so weird as graduate students is we've been in competition for funding at our school. He won a \$6,000 award for the summer."

"I saw that on his Facebook page."

"Good for him, right? Well, he didn't tell me. I found out otherwise. When I saw him, I said 'Ed, congratulations! That's awesome. Dude, why didn't you tell me you won

six grand?’ And he put his head down a little and said, ‘Well, because I know you applied for it, too. It sucks that it can’t be set up as a win-win situation. I was kind of embarrassed about it. I’m not trying to be in competition with you. It’s just the way the system works.’ I began to wonder if as a faculty member there’s that same sort of embarrassment.”

“It’s hard. That’s the truth,” Harrison says. “I had a nemesis in grad school and we’re actually very good friends now. We just saw each other at a conference. We both ended up in the same region and we hug each other and are happy to hear what’s going on in each other’s lives and all that, but when we did grad school, we were competitive. And I tell you what, I would always make sure she knew about my successes and she would do the same to me.”

“Really?”

“And it wasn’t always me going in and saying, ‘Hey, guess what?’ We would find other channels to make sure that people knew. And so when I got elected to be the vice chair for a part of NCA, I told people who I knew would go tell her. She would do the same thing. She’d get appointed to a committee at the university. Here’s the thing that we finally figured out though. She does traditional political research. I do gender research that’s sort of experimental with a traditional foundation. And so we do totally different things. She’s gunning for administration. She wants to be an administrator someday. I think she wants to run a university, and that I couldn’t imagine. I would feel like I was selling my soul to the devil. One day, somebody said, ‘You two need to figure out why you don’t like each other. This is silly.’ So we talked about it. I admitted my wrongs and she admitted her wrongs. Here’s the funny thing. It was all outsiders. The people that hated her would turn to me and say, ‘Well, Harrison, doesn’t that bother you?’ And then

the people that didn't like me would go to her and say, 'Well, you know he's going to do this.'"

"Sounds ridiculous."

"Yeah, and that experience helped inform my research. In my research program my big argument is a lot of relationships would be okay if we just didn't have external forces to screw it up or pressure them or tell them something was wrong. And so I guess that's living proof because now we're buds."

"So there's no competition once you get through graduate school?"

"This is something Lisa and I have talked about. If you have success, it's hard to know how to share that success. I just won an award at a recent conference. So Raquel, the brunette you met, she knows, and I know, and no one else knows. This morning I asked myself, 'Well, should I go tell?' I decided not to say anything about it. How do you tell people you won this? You don't say, 'Look what I won!' or, 'I got great this or that.' I don't know. I feel like that's weird. But then here's the flipside to that. The ass-hat I was telling you about, he's negative towards successes in the department, but he will brag about the littlest thing. I think now that the new group is in maybe that charade has fallen. Ed, I think, is a good example of this. Why isn't Ed saying, 'Yeah, I did this and that's great?' I know there are other people who do as much as Ed."

"Right," I agree.

"So, there seems to be this kind of shame for some people when it comes to success. I don't know. It's awkward. I wonder if it's institutional or if it's – I shouldn't say just institutional. I think cultural, academic culture has something to do with that. I'm assuming you and Ed like each other, right?"

“Yeah.”

“And Lisa and I like each other, yet sometimes we don’t tell each other about our successes. I think we are afraid the reaction we get isn’t going to be what we were expecting. I think that’s true especially concerning publishing and funding and research.”

“I’m having a lot of fun doing research. It’s been a little nutty and I’m ragged today, but so far, it’s been awesome. You know what I mean?”

“And that’s what I want my life to be.”

“I thought it was funny. You emailed me at 2:00 in the morning earlier this week. I think the last email you sent me said, ‘They’re trying to kill me.’ What have you been doing? What do they have you doing that you were here that weekend?”

“I was at the conference. I got back Sunday. Actually, I got back Saturday and then went drinking with my coworkers. And then got up the next morning about 10 AM and just kept working and working and working. I asked for a lot of it. They were looking for someone to do curriculum council here. I asked how much time it would take up and they said, ‘Oh great! You’re perfect! You’re perfect!’ I wasn’t volunteering, but it happened.”

I start laughing at this.

“Here’s my big weakness,” he says, continuing, “I told you I was going to give up activism. I’ve given up community activism, but if I see a hole, I want to fill the hole. For instance, they’re trying to get a women’s studies program started here. So they will say, ‘You know, a lot of people are interested in it. They’re just busy.’ And I say, ‘Okay, I’ll give time for that.’ Someone will suggest, ‘Well, you know, there’s this program. You should do it.’ And I’ll say, ‘Okay.’ And my philosophy before has been, I’ll make time.

But I think I'm out of time to make. I really think it's filled up. I'm on six committees. But some of it is, it's just so flattering especially to young faculty members."

"That seems to be a common dilemma, the attempt to do too much the first year. Plus you mentioned your gender performance and ethnographic work already. What's been the reaction to that work?"

"Well, there's a professor here and he's against anything performance oriented or that kind of thing. I'm teaching in our winter intersession. I'm teaching a critical ethnography course. This is an example of departmental support I was talking about earlier. He's a really respected guy in our department who has a national reputation, probably the biggest reputation of anyone in the department. He's a textbook author. That's his claim to fame. He said, 'You know what? I've seen bad experiences with critical research in the past. A lot of the people that do performance or critical studies tend to be the type of people that I don't appreciate, and they're negative, and they start trouble. But I'm willing. I really want to see what happens with this and I want to see what you bring to the table.'

"So, for this class I got a grant. We're getting a van and we're going down to a Katrina ravaged city, and we're going to do three research projects as a class. We're going to visit where this paper mill shut down. The men are leaving the city to go find work, and the women are alone and they feel like they have no support network. So we're collecting narratives about how people feel the social support is working out there. How is it playing out now that men are leaving the community? We're going into the school system. The teachers are quitting. I got trained to do organizational audits so we're going to do a culture audit, just like I would with a consult job. This is what I would

recommend. This is what I think. This is the approach you should take. And the third thing we're doing is, and this is the one I think is probably the sexiest, we're putting together a video ethnography. I partner with a community agency there, and they're going to try and do the traditional type video-like documentary. But I'm getting ten cameras, and I'm giving these ten cameras to citizens in the community and saying, 'Go off and get your story or get other peoples' stories.' It's not us going and collecting the stories. It's the people of the community who are going and getting their stories and coming back. So when we put the film together, we'll have all of that.

"Teaching in the winter intersession is another thing that takes up my time. How much time do you have to do this class? The way it's set up now, I get out December 20th. I'll go home to see my family to celebrate Christmas, come back here around January 1st and January 3rd we leave. January 11th we come back and then January 18th the new semester starts. So, that's why I'm burned out. I did stuff over the summer, too. So, that's why I told you I'm going to die. Here's what I'm happy about. In the Spring, I only have to teach two classes."

"Because you have the release?" I ask.

"Right. I'm thinking by the Fall of next year I'll only have to teach two classes, too. So, that's good. If you keep publishing and advising grad students here, you get buy-outs and that kind of thing. I even have a grant, so I don't know how much I'll be teaching. I always want to be involved with students even if I'm not teaching. It's my rule. So like with all of my grants, I write in the student component."

"You seem to want to make sure students are always involved and want them to actively participate."

“Yes. One of the downsides to this campus, I think, is that a lot of people are here for the right reasons, but they see education in a way that I don’t think is healthy. They think they’re here to get some kind of vocational skill. If I’m teaching Communication Theory for instance, they’ll ask, ‘Well, what’s the practical side of this?’ I’ll say, ‘Well, you know, with the coordinated management of meaning we’re talking about how in a relationship, there are different responses for a different thing and it could go one of many different ways and then...’ They’re like, ‘Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. But how is that any kind of practical approach?’ And I said, ‘Well, if you’re in a business situation for instance.’ And they’re like, ‘Well, no, I want something I can use right at the job.’ I say, ‘Well, this isn’t Votech. You know, you’re in a liberal arts program and while I appreciate practical aspects, if you can be a deep thinker, if you can approach things from a different perspective, then that’s probably going to be better.’”

“I run into that attitude, particularly in my Organization Communication classes,” I begin. “They want to know how they can ask the boss for a raise. They want to make everything in the business world more efficient, more productive, more economical. They think they’re going to be CEOs when they step through the bachelor degree door. How do they get their employees to work for them harder and better? So I changed the course a bit, and focus not on organizational communication, but on communicating as organizing. I think stressing it as an activity, as a verb, helps my students to understand more of the complexity of what ‘doing’ an organization is.”

“That’s a good approach I think. That’s like the class I’m teaching in the spring called Organizational Culture and Identity. And people don’t think that fits with what they know about me, since I teach lots of gender courses. Students will look at it and

they'll go, 'Everything else seems to fit but that.' I say, 'Well because I love language so this makes sense because culture and identity are based on relationships in many ways.'"

* * *

"Oh boy," Harrison sighs, his eyes fixed behind me. "Here comes that damn guy again. He's the first person to pick a fight with me on this campus."

"He picked a fight with you? He's a student?"

"Staff. He runs the resident assistantships or something. One of the committees I'm on makes sure gay people get their fair shake on campus. It's a great committee. I'm glad the university has it. Almost instantly I was plucked for it because there are not many open faculty members here. He came in one day and said 'Well, you know, we want your group to help sponsor this talk back session for students.' Being honest, I said, 'We don't know if professors are coming back at 7:00 at night for this.' We just didn't see it happening. He got up on his hind legs a little. 'Well, you need to be supportive because if you look at the things that are coming out of that group, it's not good. We've got to shut it down.' He starts going after this group.

"Someone then asked what the group was doing, and he says, 'Well, they've done one thing during the past year and that was a drag queen show. Those drag queens are just vicious and they do bad things that set a bad example. And so we're going to shut that down. We're going to blah, blah, blah.' And so he's pitting a student talk back session against this drag show and is trying to attack the dignity of the drag show.

"I played dumb, which is one of the nice things about being young. You can act stupid sometimes. So I just started. 'Well, hold on. I guess I'm just confused. What did the drag queens do to you?' And he said, 'They tried to claim that they represent me.' I

asked, 'So, they're going around saying that they represent you personally? I'm just confused.' He said, 'Well, you know, I am a gay man. And I just don't like them speaking for me, because that's not what I am.' I said, 'Okay. Well, I'm a gay man, too. I guess I'm just confused, because I've seen the drag show and I don't feel like they represent me, but I'm not upset and I don't want to shut it down. I guess I don't understand what you are getting at.' He spits out two names and asks, 'Do you know these two people?' I said that I didn't know. He said, 'They're students and they are trying to live normal lives and they are in a fraternity and they do not want *that* representing them, and I don't either.'

"I said, 'Well, I guess we have a difference of opinion. I'm not trying to pick at you, but I think that if you don't like the drag show that says more about you than it does the drag show.' Then he said, 'Well, you know, these students are useless.' And that set me off, 'I'll tell you another thing. You keep talking about how they've not done anything during the past year. I went to about half of their meetings last year. These students are motivated! They're trying to get things done, and it's tough! It is tough to be a gay student on campus and I think they need support, and if the drag show draws attention that's great!' So he says, 'But they need to do something else.' 'They do other things. They put together the single biggest protest on this campus last year. That's one thing.' And then he left. Everyone started laughing coming up to me saying, 'Oh my gosh, we didn't know you had it in you.' I'm usually sweet and cuddly, not 'Grrrrr!'

"At first, I was playing dumb but come on, it's internalized homophobia on his part. He can't handle a drag show so he's trying to shut it down. He's a freaking low-level administrator, too. That's uncalled for. If anything, he should say, 'Promote the drag

show,’ or, ‘Let’s have a talk back about how drag queens represent queer communities.’ Not stifle it. I call him ‘Little Bush.’ So that was the only conflict I got in on campus and I don’t care.

“One of the important things, like I mentioned before, is staying in touch with the students and still being activist. Don’t get me wrong. I love my graduate students and I mentor them, but being a supportive faculty member happens outside of the classroom too. It’s important for the students to see that, especially when it comes to gender issues.”

“You look a little distracted,” I say, noticing his pauses are unusually long.

“Sorry. I am a little. That meeting that was cancelled. It was cancelled last minute. It was about the grant for the trip we are taking over winter break. We were supposed to meet today. I have to choose my students soon, and so we were supposed to hammer out the details and try to figure out how much money we have, how much more money I need to get, that kind of thing. And so I’m applying for a \$7,500 grant and a \$2,500 grant and I think they’re almost sure things, but I wanted to chat with her about it. No biggie. It’s not like I have far to go, I live across the street from the university.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. When I walked up, I was walking from my house. I just moved there. It’s nice. Oh, and I want to show you the turret.”

* * *

As Harrison and I walk back to the car he points to a building under construction. “That is going to be our new building. It is sponsored by a big telecommunications company. That has interesting repercussions on the research we can do, I think.”

“Think so?”

“Sure. Let’s say I want to do research on the communicative practices of pedophiles. Not that I’m promoting pedophilia. But what kind of questions will I be subjected to?”

“This pedophilia research, brought to you by the telecom industry.”

“Exactly, so it makes you think in terms of what kind of research you can do, or want to do, and some research, by nature, then is shunned. No corporation wants to be seen as sponsoring research such as that.”

When we get to my car, we shake hands. “I’ll see you at NCA?”

“Yep. I’ll be there, all suited up and trying to get myself a job.”

* * *

As I leave the campus I pass what should have been a prison watchtower. I can imagine a rifle clad security guard up top. Except now he’d be watching students and professors. Perhaps the provost, the deans, and the president are up there right now, watching diligently, putting the concrete panoptical structure to good use.

As I pull onto the interstate, I think about the changes this university is going through. It will have grown by approximately 20,000 students in about fifteen years. That’s phenomenal growth, but is it good? It is becoming more research oriented, and the divide between teaching and research is visible among the faculty, according to Harrison. What effect will that have on older faculty primarily interested in teaching, rather than research?

The drive back to the airport takes almost two hours. I keep my eyes on the road, but my mind is back at the university. Harrison said that competition was different once you become a faculty member. Yet he is competing for grants, the ‘Pub Club,’ and is

constantly comparing himself with Lisa, Raquel, the 'ass-hat,' and the professor from the mathematics department. So far, my other participants have done the same thing. Is this the way we find out who we are, how and where we fit as academics, rather than official socialization processes provided by the universities we work at? I was reminded again that the orientation provided by the school was relatively irrelevant.

More personally, what kinds of punishment do we ethnographers put ourselves through to do our research? Harrison's is eating and dieting. I'm flying and driving all around the country to interview new faculty. I'm throwing myself into the pit at punk rock shows. Harrison's killing himself to travel over winter break with a class. And for what? Are we crazy?

With some remorse, I hand the keys of the Mustang over to the Budget car rental employee. I just completed three interviews in four days. In the airport I check my bags, find my seat, and continue writing cover letters on my laptop.

Chapter 8

Jo: The Changing University's Effects

Originally I was going to drive north for two interviews, but couldn't do it. Jo pinned me down to one day only, a Wednesday. Then she left for a conference. Since I teach on Tuesday nights, driving a few hundred miles to meet her is out of the question. The trip is relatively care-free, despite the stopover in Atlanta. Luckily, I've been to my destination airport before, and know my way around. I grab my rental car – a Toyota this time, not a Mustang – and head to the campus.

I find myself gazing out the window at the mountains. The more traveling I do, the more I miss them. It's becoming an obsession again, like it was in my youth. I miss the hiking, biking, and camping. The leaves aren't changing color yet, but that cannot be far off, even if it is almost 90 degrees today. I could live here. Then again, I've said that about a lot of places I've lived, and I know it is just fantasy most of the time. I was definitely spoiled growing up in New Jersey. Within thirty minutes, I could be swimming at the beach, hiking in the mountains, or slam-dancing in New York City.

During the half-hour drive, I think about what Jo told me in her recorded autobiography. She had a fairly stable position working in the healthcare field throughout her graduate school experience. She doesn't want to move again. Her university is growing and demanding more from professors, and that is affecting the way she does her research. Rather than doing longer ethnographic research, she's doing more quantitative work. She said she can get more publications that way. I think that's a

shame, not only because it has made her change her research, it also means we may miss hearing and experiencing the storied lives of patients and healthcare practitioners.

I park on the second floor of a concrete slab of a parking garage. I walk up some brick steps, and across a concrete courtyard with picnic type tables and benches. Students are chatting, reading, and eating in the sunshine. Reggae is playing in the background. Sounds like Bob Marley. I find Jo's building, which comes across like a monstrous square creature with a gaping mouth cut through it. It looks like it is simultaneously eating and vomiting entire classes. I enter the gaping orifice and climb the stairs, another morsel of meat feeding the ravenous monster. I walk down an inner corridor, and find Jo in her office, her blonde hair shorter than when I last saw her at a conference last May.

* * *

“We’ll have to split this interview into two parts,” she begins. “I have to meet with someone in just over an hour about a research grant project.”

“Ok, then let’s get right to it. Tell me about your transition from a doctoral student to a full-time professor. What have you found interesting?”

“Part of what’s been interesting in this post graduation transition is the transitioning of my relationship with other students like you and professors. For example, my advisor and I have co-authored a couple of pieces together. It’s been quite an interesting transition to become a colleague of hers rather than a student. She is awesome to work with either as a student or as a colleague, but that’s been kind of interesting – to play with the renegotiation of that relationship. It was flattering the first time she asked me to co-author a piece with her, because we always read stuff by other graduate students

she had co-authored with. It was flattering to be put in the ‘former student who co-authors a paper with her’ category. So, that was neat. Now that I’m on the other side of it, my relationship with other former students of hers has changed to be more collegial, which is interesting. Yet, I still feel very much like the student when relating to you or other graduate students. So, it is interesting to experience that transition. My graduate school mentor tells me I’m doing too much. I’m like, ‘You think?’” she says laughingly.

“What else have you noticed about the transition?”

“It’s been interesting getting used to being called ‘Dr.’ It’s kind of cool. We have an issue about that. There’s a cultural thing here, because pretty much all of the lecturers are women and so they are ‘Mrs. So-and-so.’ The students seem to think that if you’re a man you’re a ‘Dr.’, but if you’re a female, you’re a ‘Mrs.’ The culture here is not to call people by their first names, so students called me ‘Mrs. Copeland.’ I am always correcting them, that it’s ‘Dr. Copeland.’ The other female professors and I work very, very hard to socialize students to understand that we worked hard for these Ph.D.s and we deserve to be called ‘Doctor.’ There seems to be a gender inequality related to that. So, that’s been an interesting thing and that’s made me get used to being called ‘Dr. Copeland.’”

“That reminds me of what one of my thesis committee members used to say,” I say chuckling. ““You can call me Dr., or you can call me by my first name. But you can’t call me Mrs., because it took me a lot more time and effort to get my Ph.D. than it did to get married.””

“That’s funny! I was at a doctor’s appointment this morning and she called me ‘Mrs. Copeland.’ I almost corrected her, because to be called ‘Dr.’ has become a second

nature thing. But that's interesting and that's kind of neat and cool and maybe the newness will wear off someday, but it sounds nice now."

"What were your first days on campus like? Did the university provide some orientation activities for you to attend?"

"The orientation was just disorienting, and I didn't know anything. During orientation week on Friday, we had our first faculty meeting. I had been getting emails from them all summer. Some of the emails I had gotten had given me the date for the faculty meeting, and most of the faculty meetings were going to be on Fridays at noon. But this first one was going to be Friday at 10:00am. There was going to be a faculty meeting for all faculty from 10:00 to 11:00, and then a faculty meeting for graduate faculty from 11:00 to 12:00. I had a palm organizer and put it in my palm. Two weeks before I moved, my car got broken into and my briefcase got stolen and my palm got stolen. I ordered another one from the company. I ordered a refurbished one because I didn't want to pay for a new one because it was under the deductible. It started dropping appointments.

"So, long story short is that my Palm wasn't working and it dropped all of my appointments, and this faculty meeting got dropped off of my calendar. I remembered there was a faculty meeting. All week I'd been meeting the faculty. We all said, 'See you Friday at the faculty meeting,' but nobody ever said the time. I never thought to ask, because I was positive that I knew the time. So, I made a big deal about this being my first faculty meeting. It was my first official thing, the Friday before classes started. I made a big deal about what to wear. You know, don't be too professional, but don't be too casual. Get there at the exact right time, just a little bit early, but not too early. And

certainly don't be late. Don't want to appear too eager, but you have to get there a quarter of.

“I walk into the room and everybody's already there and they're already talking like they'd been meeting. It was kind of creepy, until I realized I got there at the end of the meeting! The meeting started at 10:00 and not 12:00, like I'd thought. Oh, that was absolutely the worst feeling in the world! *I'd missed my first faculty meeting.*” She starts laughing.

“So, ever since then it is this big joke, ‘Go ask Jo what time the meeting is.’ It was very embarrassing, but funny looking back on it, although it wasn't funny at the time. So, they still tease me. They'll start to say, ‘What time is the meeting?’ And they'll say, ‘No, don't ask her. She doesn't know what time it is.’ It was awful.”

“That's a fairly rough start to a semester at a new university,” I say laughing.
“Everybody's gone through an orientation. You remember much of it?”

“Yeah, sort of. We had a human resources session where we learned all about benefits and stuff like that. I did attend fewer things than I had intended to, because I was just overwhelmed. There was one thing I remember concretely. The university convocation was early that week. I attended that and got to hear the new chancellor give his speech and sat with a couple other faculty members and got to know them. There were some teaching workshops I was going to attend and ended up not attending, because I was just overwhelmed and didn't need one more thing to do.

“Everything – the move, buying the house, starting a new position – was just so stressful. I felt so stupid and so unprepared. Then classes started and for that first class I was so scared. I stood up in front of the class and started teaching, and that I knew how to

do. I didn't know anything else. I didn't know how to get out of my house, I couldn't figure out my neighborhood, but I knew how to teach. All of a sudden the familiarity came back to me. I remember what a wonderful feeling that was. Something felt familiar. I could get up in front of a class and that felt familiar. That was the first positive thing. Things really started feeling more normal, but it was quite distressing at first."

"Sounds like teaching alleviated some of the pressure," I say.

"Some of it. People will tell you that it's really hard to get acclimated. A number of people told me that. But it's really hard to remember how difficult it is. You forget how difficult it is getting acclimated to a new place. I did say that teaching felt familiar, but I had a terrible first semester and I was really shocked when I got my evaluations back from the students. They were the lowest that they had been ever in my teaching experience. All the seasoned teachers told me that is normal for the first semester, and it's really just getting acclimated to the students."

"Now that you have brought up teaching, how did your teaching schedule come about?"

"The head of the department is wonderful. He let me decide when I wanted to teach. I told him I wanted to teach Health Communication one night a week in the evenings. He thought that was a great idea. I thought it was a great idea. But there were things I didn't know at the time. What I didn't know was that all the students that wanted to take Health Communication had taken it with the other professor. The other health communication professor had taught it both semesters the year before, and then again in the summer before I arrived. There were very few students in the health communication class I taught. Most of the students that took that class didn't want to sign up with me

because they knew her and loved her. I was an unknown. They had signed up for it because it was a night class, and they were working full time. They were not interested in health communication at all. They were taking it either when they got off work, or some of them were bartenders, and were going to work after the class was over. They thought they would sleep through class.”

“I’ve taught many night classes and I’ve run into some of the same problems,” I note. “The people who work during the day are frazzled. And the young students seem to just want to go out to their local watering hole, or go home and watch *Lost*, or whatever. How big did you say that class was?”

“Classes are capped at 35. I had 14 students. One never showed ever. Well, he showed once and then showed up later to tell me that he had been turning in assignments all along, even though I had never seen his face. So basically I had a class of 13 students. Over half of them didn’t want to be there or were not interested in the material. It was not a good experience for me, or them. One guy came in, settled down like he was going to hunker down and sleep. I had to ask him to sleep at home rather than in class. It was not a fun experience.”

“So even though you got comfortable knowing you could teach, that class seems to have been bust.”

“That was quite a learning experience for me. I also taught research methods.”

“I noticed you have the Frey, Botan and Kreps on your bookshelf.”

“That’s the one. I taught it using the exact same book, teaching it the exact same way as when I was a lecturer. But these students just couldn’t do what I was asking them to do. It was too hard and they were freaking out. It was quite a learning experience for

me to know what level to teach at, and what to expect out of students. I had to make some adjustments and make my classes a little easier. I love my students now, and I get anywhere from good to incredibly good evaluations, but it was quite a learning experience.”

“So was your initial teaching schedule a 2-2?”

“I started off on a 3-2 teaching load. I now have a 2-2 teaching load, which is great. I always teach research methods, which I decided I love to teach. I tweak it every time I teach it, which is fun even to do that. I’m experimenting with my students’ minds and they don’t even know it. They whined about this, and whined about that, and they had to go on field trips, and whined about that. I took them out of their comfort zones, which affected my teaching evaluations. But because I have to write up a thing for my yearly evaluation, I was able to say, ‘Well, I took them out of their comfort zone,’ which I want to do as a teacher. That causes issues with evaluations and so I was able to kind of cover that.”

“My evaluations are pretty low whenever I teach a new class. I think it is because I am learning the content and learning how to teach. And every class is a little bit different too. Some students are really hard working, but some...”

“My students are great, most of them. A lot of them are first generation college students. Their parents never went to college and so they value the college education, which is quite refreshing over teaching where I taught in graduate school, where the students feel entitled to be handed a grade. There are very few grading discussions and I pretty well nip those in the bud with a lecture called, ‘I am not a point Santa Claus, so don’t ask me to give you extra points.’”

“The point Santa Claus?” I ask.

“That little thing is in my syllabus, and then I give them a lecture on that my first day of class. I say, ‘If you don’t want to hear this again, don’t ask me to give you points at the end of the semester.’ This past semester in one class, a student asked me if I rounded up and I said, ‘You don’t want to hear my point Santa Claus lecture again, do you?’ The class went, ‘No, no!’ So, I kind of nip that in the bud. Generally the students work hard. They may bother me a lot for help, which is interesting. I’d rather have them bother me for help because they’re trying rather than to whine and don’t try. The head of our department is incredibly supportive. I had a student complain to him a semester or two ago about his final grade. The head of the department supported me 1,000 percent, so I really have no complaints.”

“I had some grading issues at one point,” I sigh. “My chair was very supportive as well. In fact the entire department was great. Coming from the corporate side, where everything is about productivity, that was a new experience for me. Refreshing. You mentioned teaching undergraduates. I know you are teaching graduate students as well too, right?”

“My graduate classes are always great. I’ve taught healthcare narratives for a graduate class. I’m trying to give my students a good learning experience, especially the graduate students and the adult learners. Many of our graduate students work full time and are also M.A. students. I try to give them some hands-on experience, but it is just an incredible amount of work for me, so I’m working on streamlining the teaching process. I’ve got lots of good ideas. We’ll see if I can do them. It is new, but great.”

“How has it been working on graduate students’ committees?”

“We, of course, we don’t have Ph.D. committees. We have M.A. thesis committees. And I had a student that I told could defend her thesis proposal over the summer. And the entire faculty had good intentions, but there aren’t enough of us, and people aren’t going to make something like that a priority. It took a long time to schedule. We started scheduling for May, and the student was actually unavailable for a while. It was I think, July or August before we were able to get it on the calendar. Once people get away from the university, it’s just hard. So that was a challenge. We got her through though.”

“Good! Are there plans to have a Ph.D. program here at some point?”

“I was told when I interviewed that the university had a five-year plan to become a Research I, and the department had a ten-year plan to have a Ph.D. program. On a day-to-day basis, I think that we’re on track one day for those, and then another day I think we’re not on track at all. I don’t know. I hope so. I would very much like to see a Ph.D. program. I don’t think we’ll see it with an emphasis in organizational communication because that would cannibalize the Organizational Science Ph.D. that we are very much an integral part of.”

“Right.”

“I would love to see it in health communication and the university’s really big on interdisciplinary Ph.D.s. All the new ones that are premiering are interdisciplinary. I don’t know. I hope so. That would be the only downside about staying here if they didn’t do one. But on the other hand I don’t know that, in the scheme of things, it would be a huge big deal. We badly need another communication Ph.D. in the state university system here. I don’t know that we’re going to get one. I have a lot of Masters students that I

would love to send them someplace, but they're not in the position to leave the state, you know? So, we need one. I think that our best bet is probably one in health communication or public relations. I think the PR focus is international and they're starting a Global Studies Ph.D. and I think that international PR may join with them. But on the other hand, we're wondering, 'Is there any way we could have an international focus to health communication, global health?' But we're going to have to find an angle and we're still at the very beginning stages of trying to find this angle. We're going to have to find an angle. We can't just do a Ph.D. in communication. We're going to have to find some interdisciplinary focus or some international focus or something, because it not only has to be approved by the university but it has to be approved by the Board of Governors in the state."

"Sounds like you jumped right into this."

"No. Not really. Like I said earlier it is all new. I want to reemphasize *everything* is new in your first year. The first time you give a test, where are the scantrons? What's the policy? At my graduate school scantrons were provided. One place I taught, the students had to bring their own scantron sheets. Here they provide scantron sheets. So, what's the policy on that? The teacher evaluation scantron sheets that I had as a graduate teaching assistant only had four questions for my students to answer. Here the students have five questions to answer, and that's just good to know. You need to know these things, and getting used to email and stuff like that. Things you wouldn't think to ask about, like technology. We've got the ability to log on to access all our files. Not only email files, but all my files on the server. I can access them all from home so when I work from home, I can access any file. Theoretically speaking, any software I use at work

I'm allowed to check out from the library and load on my computer at home. I should be able to do any work at home so that's really good. I am having trouble with SPSS. I'm learning new software, I think my doctoral program had Blackboard."

"Mine does."

"We've got Web CT here. We were thinking Blackboard would just merge with Web CT. They haven't merged yet, and so it's learning new software and learning new procedures, and learning what I'm allowed to do and what I'm not allowed to do, and learning what I cannot do. My first year they funded me to go to five conferences – which by the way is way too many. Don't ever do that."

"I'm going to four conferences between now and next May," I say laughing. "I know I'm nuts, but it is one way to meet other people from our discipline and people outside it in sociology and psychology. That's one of the reasons I like the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry conference so much. It's very interdisciplinary."

"We are very interdisciplinary here. Here's a story for you. In the second week of my first semester, I was invited to do our first colloquium. I presented some research that was related to my dissertation. In that colloquium there were two people from two other departments and both of them invited me to be involved in some research projects they were involved in. That led to some interdisciplinary research, which has led to about six or seven publications, a couple of NIH grants, and some huge research projects and research opportunities. It was serendipitous and incredibly good, and I made some good friends around campus also. I joined a lot of things here and the university is very into interdisciplinary collaboration. They have an academy of qualitative research and I'm sort of on board with that. They've got an academy of health services research and I am

on the board on that. There were some teaching circles that were supposed to offer support and stuff for teaching. I missed a couple of meetings and they dropped me off the list, which was fine because it turns out I didn't like the other people that were in the group anyway."

"I remember that when I got to USF they had a mentoring program for the new graduates students. They paired us up with graduate students further along in the process to help smooth our transition. You've mentioned the newness of everything and some of the orientation days. Did they have mentoring program for you when you got here?"

"They did and do. One of the things the new dean did was institute an official mentoring program. She invited senior faculty from different departments to mentor junior, new faculty from other departments. I elected to join that and got assigned a mentor from the Philosophy Department, a woman who did a lot of stuff with bioethics. I think she's going to be, has been, and will continue to be, politically a really good person to know. As a mentor, however, she's been awful. We only met a few times. She travels around the world. She's got an endowed position and is very important and very powerful and very nice, but probably very neurotic and overdoes and is overstressed and overtaxed.

"The few times we did meet, she spent the entire time talking about how much she was doing. We never actually talked about me, or my issues. But, I think from a networking point of view, she'll be a good person to know. It hasn't been a mentoring thing, frankly. I got some really good mentoring from a woman in my department who was a senior female faculty member. She just left last month to be chair of a department at another university. She befriended me and we became friends, started doing stuff

together, and started exercising together. On an informal basis, while exercising, she gave me an incredible amount of advice. I consider her to have been a very important mentor to me. The chair of our department helps if you ask him for help.”

* * *

I am reminded of my peer mentor when I started the doctoral program. Very nice person, but she was a doctoral candidate and done taking classes. She was on campus only two days a week to teach. We never got very close. The times we did meet were often accidental. She was also getting ready to apply for tenure-track positions and was extremely busy. She had to take care of her major commitments. I was not one of them.

* * *

“Sounds like you have an encouraging department.”

“We have a very collegial department and we all work very, very hard to keep it that way. There’s not enough support staff, so we have to really support each other. We’re a stepchild department, and we’re the largest department if you count majors and minors. With majors and minors together we have 1,500 students. So we have the second lowest number of faculty lines in the college, and we’ve got probably the lowest number of staff in the college.”

“I’m assuming that that’s one reason why there’s a line for a new faculty member.”

“No. We had not had a new line in – four years? Three years? Someone did not get reappointed and this is the line that’s open. The nice thing here is that if you don’t fill a line, you don’t lose it. This line has been open for a couple of years, because the first year they decided they needed a senior scholar and there were no applicants. Last year,

they opened it to junior scholars but only quantitative ones. We brought in three. One we really didn't like, the other two we offered jobs. By the time it moved through the system, they had already accepted other jobs. So, this year we're saying it can be qualitative or quantitative. We're trying to raise the visibility of the department, crank it up a little bit so that we can have more people decide this is their first choice of places to go. We know we're wonderful, but we're kind of a secret. People don't know we're wonderful," she says smiling.

"Jo, you've mentioned some of the research you've been working on, and some of the publications as well. What do you need to get done if you want to get tenure?"

"Tenure. The teaching bar is interesting because I don't yet know what the minimum cutoff is. The new dean keeps saying she wants us to be teacher-scholars, which means we have to be good teachers and good researchers. The implication I get is that teaching has to be adequate and your research better be very good. But again, that bar keeps getting raised. So, we'll see. As far as publications go, when I was hired I was told that maybe about one publication a year is good, and any publication is a good publication. I have one conference that I go to every year that always publishes proceedings. So, when I got here I was told any of that was good.

"Then, the new dean came in and now any publication is not a good publication. I heard her say in a meeting, 'If it is not going to be in a nationally known top tier journal, don't bother to submit it.' The new dean has raised the bar, and I have heard that it's closer to one and a half or two publications a year. Not only that, but by the time we're up for reappointment, we are expected to have submitted for one outside grant, and by the time we're up for tenure, we're expected to have received one outside grant. So, the bar

keeps getting raised as we're moving towards it and that's kind of distressing or stressful. However, I feel like I'm in pretty good shape."

"How so?"

"Andrew, you know my area is narrative ethnography, but I'm doing a lot of NIH grant type research where I'm actually doing some quantitative stuff. I've got a piece that's already been sent for publication that's a quantitative validation. It's like a matrix of a measurement scale interestingly enough. So, I'm doing more quantitative stuff than I had done before. I've already gotten some outside funding. It's not large, but it's enough to count. I've got seven publications out for review. I came in with a bunch. I have ten publications right now. That includes a couple of proceedings and some book chapters. Now they're being negative about book chapters. I've had, I think, one journal publication, two book chapters, and five qualitative encyclopedia entries published since I've been here.

"I'm really not concerned about it, but of course I'll feel better once I get the letter that says I'm reappointed. I'm not going to count my chickens until they're hatched, but we're all kind of stressing about that. Tenure and reappointment are the big words for a couple of reasons. In part it is because we have this new dean who's raising the bar. We got a brand new chancellor who's also raising the bar. Partly because we're moving to Research I, so everybody's raising the bar. I do a lot of research with people in Health and Human Services, which is nursing and public health and social work. They have a brand new dean also, who's raising their bar. The year I came, two people did not get reappointed. So, all of a sudden we have these departmental narratives on how it is possible to not get reappointment. That'll freak a group of people out. Still, two close

friends of mine who were brought in the year before me just got reappointed. They have fewer pubs than I, and no outside funding. So, I think if they got it, I will. But it's a situation that's stressful."

"Well, you said you had some things in the fire."

"I do. I actually have 20 things."

"It sounds like in the quest to become more respected and competitive there are a lot of changes happening, not just in your department, but university wide."

"This is the story of my life. In everything I've ever done, the year that I came along they decide to make it harder. Then they decide after that year it was too hard, and they'd make it easier again. When I was an undergraduate, I took Music Appreciation. The year I took it they decided they wanted to make it a hard class. I took it for an easy 'A' and I barely passed. So, this new dean came onboard. Finally, she's in her third year so she's able to implement some stuff. She's implemented these really tough reappointment and tenure requirements. The college will decide it's too hard, and so they'll relax them. But *my year* got to be really hard. Eventually, the college will decide it's too hard. And I'm on that committee actually. That's my college level service. And we're looking at the requirements and I know we're going to decide that it's too stringent. And so, they'll relax them."

"Note to self: follow – come after you," I laugh.

"Yeah. That's exactly right. Or before me. That works, too!"

* * *

It is time for us to take a break. Jo has a meeting with another professor with whom she is doing research. "Let's meet back here in about an hour," she says as she locks her office door. I wander outside and sit in the sun. It is beautiful today. My stomach reminds me that all I've had to eat today was a bagel. That was over six hours ago at Tampa International Airport. I get coffee and a Caesar salad, at a small glass-encased café near the library. The café is packed with students, and I grab the last remaining seat. As I eat, I open my laptop to check my email. No dice. There's no wireless Internet on this campus. I wait in the café for about 35 minutes, until one of the free public computers opens up. I check my mail. There's a note from Aaron, asking if we are still on for our interview on Friday. I shoot him a message back. "Absolutely. I wouldn't miss for the world." I head back to Jo's office. Rather than continuing the interview, however, she walks me into a small room that looks like a faculty lounge. What are we doing here?

* * *

"This is Andrew Herrmann," Jo begins. "He is doing his dissertation on the socialization of new faculty in our discipline. He is also on the job market and knows about our open position."

"Oh that's good," the chair says, shaking my hand. "It is nice to meet you. How do you like our campus?"

"I like it. I think it is really beautiful."

"I do too. So, soon to be Dr. Herrmann, tell me a little about your research."

Oh shit. I think. Impromptu interview. And I begin. “One of the concepts that I’ve always been interested in is how people make sense of things. I’ve always been enamored with Karl Weick’s ideas on sensemaking and how that plays out in the creation of our identities. The other theoretical part is how we use narratives to create our sense of who we are and who we want to be.”

He nods, but says nothing.

“But our identities are also relationally based. So what I’m doing in this research is looking at identity during the transitional phase when graduate students make that leap to first-year tenure track assistant professors.”

“So how far are you in your project?”

“I’m performing the last three interviews this week.”

“When do you honestly think you will be done?”

“I have given myself a hard deadline. Two of my committee members go on Sabbatical next year.”

“Sound like *they* have given you a hard deadline,” he jokes. “What have you learned so far?”

“Two things in particular, though this is very preliminary,” I start. I am fudging and hedging. “First, that when departments hire more than one person at the same time, the new faculty members seem to transition more easily and adapt to the culture and pressure more readily. Second, that there is no way I am not going to finish my dissertation, because from what I’ve seen it is a personal and professional disaster. Oh, and third, that tenure is a moving target, an amorphous thing which drives the untenured

full-time faculty nuts.” Everyone laughs at this. “And there’s one other thing, but it has to do more with the universities themselves than with the faculty, though it impacts them.”

“What’s that?”

“So far all the universities I’ve visited, except for one, are changing and expanding their facilities, their student bodies, and their missions to become more research oriented.”

“Will you publish this as a book or an article?”

“I am not sure yet. I’ve thought about it as a possible book for Jossey-Bass, Sage, or Left Coast Press. However journal articles may be the way to go.”

I hope my answers made sense. After all, I am still in the early stages of my research and don’t have anything substantial to say yet. I’m relieved when they boot me out so they can have their meeting.

* * *

Jo introduces me to a tall African-American man, who she says is “our organizational scholar.” We introduce ourselves and he invites me into his office to talk. I sit in a comfortable chair across from him, and glance at his bookshelves. His telephone rings. “Excuse me. I have to take this,” he says, picking it up. I can tell immediately it is a student asking about class. I continue scanning his packed shelves of books. *On Organizational Learning. Nigger. Race and the Invisible Hand. Writers on Organizations. Race Gender and Work.* “Ok, I’ll see you then.”

“So your main research focuses on socialization?” he asks, as he cradles the phone and turns to me.

“I am more interested in sensemaking, narrative, and personal identity. This dissertation happens to frame those three aspects within the contexts of academic socialization. I’ve looked at sensemaking in other areas, such as how participants in an online discussion board make sense of communication from the companies in which they own stock, as well as gender discourses and identity. I tend to use Weick a lot, because he is a bridge to systemic, cultural, and personal identity issues.”

“So it isn’t socialization?”

“Well I am interested in socialization,” I continue, “but I am interested in it because of its impact on identity. That’s also the reason I am interested in the Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect construct, as well as what happens when peoples’ positionalities in an organization change, like when they are promoted, for example.”

“That’s interesting, because I am particularly interested in identity in organizations as well. I look particularly at race and have been using Orbe quite a bit. Are you familiar with him?”

“Orbe and the outsider-within dilemma, where one is a part of an organization, and hence within, but an outsider because of gender, race, cultural background, etc.” *Is this a test of my knowledge? Is all of this a test? I feel like I am taking one of Eric Eisenberg’s exams from the intro class.*

He nods.

“I used that as part of my thesis, looking at these particular investors within that framework. Yes, they are investors, but they do investing differently than most. Their analysis and techniques are considered outside the mainstream.”

We talked for another fifteen minutes, until I saw Jo go back to her office. With a hearty handshake, I took my leave, thinking, that wasn't so bad Andrew.

* * *

“Well, those were impromptu job talks,” I state as I walk back into Jo's office. I click the recorder back on.

“Yeah,” she says looking up from a stack of papers and turning to me. “That's a good thing. It's good practice for you.”

“Speaking of which, did you go to the NCA job fair that they have every year, where--?”

“I attended. I walked through. I guess it was NCA. I walked through. I never had scheduled interviews through that, although I did have interviews at NCA, but they were outside of that. Places I applied to said, ‘Let's have an interview at NCA.’”

“Right.”

“I walked through those because they had fliers and stuff. I don't recall getting anything of use out of that.”

“You're not the only person who said that to me. Everybody that I know has said, ‘I had interviews separately with the departments that I had talked to and called me back.’”

“I had three or four NCA interviews. One was a *wonderful* phone interview. I'm on the speakerphone with the committee there, and they are telling me that they are a 50 percent research and 50 percent teaching institution. At the same time they are telling me that the teaching load is 4-4, and that I would only be required to publish a few things. I wouldn't let them get away with that.”

“Sounds more like 75 percent teaching.”

“Right. I called them out on it, and they almost literally hung up on me. The chair of the search committee said to me over the phone, ‘I guess this interview is over. Goodbye!’ I wasn’t going to let them try to sneak one by me.”

“That’s pretty funny.”

“Oh. I have another one. I went to this particular city in the South. I wasn’t much interested in living there, until I got there. Loved the place. I was kind of excited. It was an interpersonal job. I thought the interview went real well, but I ran into one of the guys like the next day. We chatted for a second and he said, ‘Well, good luck with your job search.’ And I thought, ‘Ew, that’s a bad sign.’”

“I’d say.”

“I never heard from them again,” she says laughingly “And I realized later that I talked about health communication the whole time.”

“No!” Now we are both laughing.

“Yes! I had thought it went well and then I thought later, you know, I talked about health the whole time.”

“I’ll have to remember to remember what positions I applied for where.”

“Definitely. Of course I was working full time at the time, and I had to be careful not to clue in my employer that I was looking for another job. You know, and I was in a weird thing. I couldn’t let them know I was looking because they were writing me into grants and if I decided to stay, I needed to be written into grants, or I had no job. I had to be selective about where I applied and how many jobs I applied for because I couldn’t be going out on interviews right and left. So, I had to be real, real selective about that.”

“You know, it’s funny you say that because that has a parallel to when I was at SLU. I was working there, and I was getting my Masters. Then it was the NCA in Miami where I was cruising for Ph.D. programs. I wasn’t sure if I wanted to go on, or if I just wanted to keep doing information technology work. I figured I’d have my Masters in May, so maybe I can get a little bit more money or whatever.”

“Right.”

“And when I got back from NCA, I thought, ‘Yeah, I’m going to apply.’ I told my committee members. And when I told them I said, ‘Listen, nobody else needs to know. Nobody in the administration can know, because I have a performance review coming up and, you know, raises are based on those. If they know or even think that I’m leaving that goes down the tubes.’”

“Exactly. Exactly.”

* * *

“When I walked in, you were looking over tests.”

“Yeah. No A’s. No, there were no A’s. 87 was the highest.”

“Disappointed?” I ask. “Not disappointed?”

“No. I generally grade too easy. So, when I have a quantitative objective score that lets me lower some grades a little bit, that’s just fine by me. My grades tend to be too high. They’re turning in literature reviews. If they’re bad, I’ll grade them hard. But when I’m subjectively grading, I tend to be too easy. That’s just my personality.”

“I do that. I did that especially in Public Speaking.”

“Give me a reason to lower it a little bit. I’m not worried. I had a whole section in class where I go over literature reviews and annotated bibliographies. I have a whole

lecture on writing in APA style, and how to write a literature review, because they have no idea.”

“How did they take to the whole lit review thing?” I ask. “I made a fatal error because I did not know my undergraduates didn’t have to take a methods class. So, I was teaching Family Communication and the big assignment was a literature review. It was a disaster. Well not a disaster, but a hell of a lot of extra work.”

“These students tell me they’ve never had it, don’t know anything about it. I’m willing to teach them from a point of view of zero knowledge, but they’re graduating seniors. This class is a requirement, and it stays full. They can’t get it until they have senior status. We can offer four sections of it or we could offer eight sections of it and fill it. So, by the time they get it, it’s too late for the information. In my evaluations, I get ‘Wish we had known this two years ago.’ I quit assigning papers in my other classes, because they don’t know how to do them. I cannot assume that they know. So, I’ve just given up. I’ve done other assignments instead.”

“Is that be--?”

“It’s because we have the most number of majors and minors, and the least number of faculty in the college. In order to teach the methods class here, you have to have a Ph.D. So, 40 percent of our classes are taught by adjuncts, but there are almost no adjuncts qualified to teach this class. It is an odd situation.”

“Everyone here seems so nice. Is this a fairly laid back department?”

“Oh yeah. Everyone’s always late for meetings. It’s very laid back, very young, very relaxed.”

“So, the culture of the department is distinctly different than what they’re trying to do as far as the culture of the university?”

“No. There’s a culture of professionalism where they want us to be held to a pretty high standard of scholarship and teaching. But then there’s the culture of how you live your day-to-day life while you do that. People are pretty casual about coming in, going out. This is probably typical of a university department, an academic department where people come in when they feel like it. We keep office hours, but other than that we can come in or not. I work at home a lot mainly because we’re a communication department and people like to talk. And so if I want to get stuff done, this is not the place to be.” She chuckles and continues. “Professionally, I would characterize this as a group of very engaged, productive professional-level scholars. We have a impressive faculty, people that either have done very impressive things, or people who are working on doing very impressive things.”

“One of the things Art told me about jobs was, ‘You got to think. Do you want to be in a university where you are the only person doing qualitative research or do you want to be at a university where you are among peers?’ I think that’s a really good question. When I worked in information technology I was the Macintosh go-to guy. I was overwhelmed. I don’t know if I’d want to be the qualitative go-to guy.”

“My only consideration was, do they respect what I do?” Jo says. “And when I was brought in, we had two, three, probably four or five quantitative people. At the moment, we’ve only got two quantitative people left. And so qualitative people are kind of overtaking the department and we want a balance, which is why they kept trying to fill that organization communication line with a quantitative person. We really have a

shortage of quantitative people right now. And for some odd reason, they're having trouble filling that, which is just strange."

"That is pretty odd," I say. "I'm in this liminal space, and you've probably been there, too. I submit things to NCA or to other conferences, right? I do organizational research and it's qualitative. So, this year I didn't get anything in to NCA because I submitted my autoethnographic and qualitative pieces to the organizational communication division. I can only assume they were thinking, '*What in the hell is this?*'"

"Health communication is the same way. I think that what you've got are people holding onto some old paradigms, and they're holding on very tightly and those paradigms have got to change or they're going to die off. And it is just the health communication people, and the organizational communication people."

"It is in interpersonal communication too," I note. "I have no way of knowing what they thought of my submissions, because all they gave me were those number rankings, which don't help at all. Was it the wrong fit? Was I not clear? Tell me something, please. Just give me a few sentences that give me a clue. I know that if I had submitted it to the ethnography division, I'd probably be presenting. I am a little irritated, because I am going to be on the market and would have really liked to strut my stuff a little at NCA. But I got nothing."

"Right! We had several people here that got nothing accepted. I'm on a panel that John Mark put together. If it wasn't for John Mark, I wouldn't have anything to present either."

“I only squeaked in because they’re having a pre-conference seminar on the workplace, so I submitted a reduced draft of my lit review on academic capitalism. How we now talk about students as ‘customers’ and students as ‘clients.’ On the flight here, I was looking at my evaluations. ‘He needs to let us know exactly what we need to get an A.’ Okay. This is coming from the same student who I’m sure asked me throughout the semester, ‘Is this going to be on the test? Do we have to take notes on this? Do we have to pay attention to this movie? I can’t sit in the back of the class and nap?’ And yeah, I saw you roll your eyes.”

“Yeah. Absolutely. Students as consumers,” Jo half mumbles. “Students love that concept. ‘You’re working for me.’ ‘Umm, no!’ Students as consumers. Here’s my response. ‘You know what? The more you ask whether something will be on the test, the more likely it is going to be on the test.’”

“Is that your response to them?”

“No. I never say that directly. That’s my behavior. If I think students are sleeping through a lecture or a particular day when a lot of students don’t show up, that material is much more likely to be on the test. I think I should reward the students that show up and pay attention.”

“You’re kind of like me then. I will always in every class talk about something that isn’t in the textbook. I will always give various personal or professional in-class examples that later show up on tests.”

“Oh, yeah. Half of my test is on stuff from lecture. Ok, I’ve got my second meeting in a few minutes.”

“Your mentor might be right,” I quip. “You are doing too much.”

As I pack up my computer and my digital voice recorder, Jo comes back into the office with a coin. “This is a parking token,” she says, placing it in my hand. “Hand it to the parking attendant as you leave and you won’t have to pay any money. I remember how broke I was as a graduate student, and you’ve been doing a lot of traveling.”

“Thanks, Jo. I’ll see you at NCA.”

* * *

After handing in the golden colored token to the attendant, I drive off campus and make a wrong turn. I turn around and head down the highway. No worries, though. My next interview is one state over and is not until tomorrow afternoon. I decide to take a smaller, less hectic scenic route. I’ve spent too much time on boring highways and love to drive the byways into the mountains. I do miss the mountains.

I think about what Jo said about being “Dr.” I wonder. “Dr. Herrmann,” I say aloud to myself. There wasn’t that much of a change in status when I finished my M.A., at least not at first. I was still the ‘tech guy,’ the ‘Mac guru’ at Saint Louis University. I had the same clients, the same customers, the same peers, the same bosses, and the same mentors. When I moved to Florida that changed. I was no longer the “graduated with distinction” individual. I was no longer the “I can fix anything” computer guy. I became new as my surroundings became new, as I became storied in a new context. I became “doctoral student.” I won’t know about the “Dr.” experience until I get there.

I’m beginning to believe there is something about teaching that stabilizes these new faculty members in the midst of the chaos. This was certainly true for Jo. I chuckle to myself as I think about Jo’s mentoring experience. Comically, even though they had an institutionally implemented mentoring program, this one failed. Perhaps it was just Jo’s

bad luck getting the mentor she received. Or perhaps the people assigned to be mentors to the new faculty aren't trained to be mentors. Maybe they do not know the struggles the new faculty are facing or how to help them. Should senior faculty even be mentoring the new assistant professors? The academy has changed since many senior faculty were on the tenure track. Are some senior faculty too far removed from the day-to-day realities faced by the new professors? Perhaps mentors should be chosen and assigned from a pool of faculty who just received tenure – people who are closer to the process. These are the questions I hope my research can help with.

One feature of these universities is truly beginning to bother me. Here's another one that is attempting to grow, to advance, to progress, to get to the next step. They are striving for one more doctoral program to become a Research I university. The requirements for tenure change right in the middle of the game. That's like changing the rule in the fifth inning of a baseball game to "Two strikes and you're out." That does some interesting things to faculty evaluations. What was once a good publication is no longer a good publication. If it is not in a top tier journal it does not count. This must be a systemic disorder; some kind of socially constructed internalized sickness that we perpetuate on each other and on ourselves. If we are living in a postmodern world, why do we define and construct progress in the academy through the lenses of modernity? "More research is better." "More Ph.D. programs are better." "More publications are better." "More respected outlets for publications are better." Is this modern idea of progress a self-reinforcing cycle that is overtaking academia, and if so, is there anyway to stop it, to ask, "What are we doing to ourselves?" What a stressor.

Still, I want to apply for this position, even if there is almost no possibility of a Ph.D. program in Organizational Communication. A 2-2 teaching assignment, with time to do research in a beautiful area would be great. Even better, everyone seemed happy to be there, including the chair, the org com guy, and Jo.

I slide a CD into the car stereo. Depeche Mode's synth-pop vibrates the car, I decide to hop off the highway. I head south to my fifth interview. I drive along a two-lane highway, passing ramshackle homes, old farmhouses, and fields full of cows. The country air fills my lungs with the scents of freshly cut grass, hay, and manure.

Chapter 9

Aaron: Colleagues Are the Difference

I arrive on the campus at approximately five in the evening. One more interview on this trip. After consulting the campus map, I park my car in the visitors' lot and put change in the meter. Since the interview isn't until tomorrow, I decide to head to the library to check my email. I walk downhill on the sidewalk, see the large concrete building, walk up the stairs, enter, and follow the signs to the computer lab. I plug my cell phone into a socket next to the black IBM computer. I have three emails. Two are spam. The last is from my transcriptionist telling me she received the two cds containing Frank's, Harrison's and Deborah's previously recorded interviews. She says they will be ready by the end of next week. That's good news indeed. On the way out, I stop by the coffee place and order a nonfat Laté, with an extra shot of espresso, my usual drink.

I am lost in thought as I wander around the hilly campus, snapping pictures with my cell phone. The view is pristine. The students appear to be wealthier than the ones in Tampa. They are walking around with new video iPods, the just released iPhones, digital video cameras, and dressed in the latest that upscale shopping centers have to offer. I observe that the students are mostly white. I stop by a fountain and watch the sprays of water wisp in the breeze. By the time I get back to my car, four hours have passed. I have a ticket.

After the short drive, I check into my motel. This room is nominally sufficient compared to the fleabag hotel I stayed in a week ago. I wonder how truckers like my

father do this for a living. Tedious drives on the interstates. Lackluster motels. Everyday, one sees new places and faces that start to seem the same. I order a pizza and chat with my motel neighbors, who are also waiting for pizza. "You want to come to a strip joint with us later on?"

"No thanks. I am gonna eat my pizza and crash." Strip joint? I haven't been to one of those in years. Not that I have anything against them, but I don't like spending what little money I have on unrequited stimulation. Nearest I've been to a strip club in years is Amy Pinney's (2005) performative writing. After I eat, I fall asleep immediately.

The next morning, Aaron calls. "I'll be standing on the corner near the library." I pick up Aaron and he directs me where to park. I push coins into the slot of the parking meter. "We have three hours, which should be plenty of time," he says.

"No matter," I reply. "Hey, you shaved off your beard."

"Yeah. Summer is too hot. I was hoping you'd still recognize me," he laughs.

I note again how beautiful the landscape of the campus is. Beautiful maples and oaks, whose leaves have not yet begun to change, sit along the rolling hills. The air is warm, but not uncomfortable. As we walk, I decide that I am going to apply for the open organizational communication position here. Aaron gives me a tour of a couple of nondescript buildings filled with classrooms. The campus is still, though not quite abandoned on this Friday afternoon. When we reach his office, Aaron sits in his chair across from me. The lighting is fairly dim. He has shelf after shelf of books lining one wall. Behind him is a large window.

** * **

"When did the relationship between you and this university really begin?"

“It started when I heard from Leland Norris that they were interested in me as a candidate for their job. Also, being an organizational communication scholar, I certainly know some of the theoretical stuff about when socialization starts, but really the relationship started when it was reciprocated by the university. That came in the form of a phone call from Dr. Norris, when I was a graduate student. I think it was a late morning phone call if my memory serves me correctly. I was in my graduate office with one of my really good friends. It was cramped. There was one phone line for five of us, and two computers and our desks. The phone rang and my friend answered the phone, and she said, ‘Yes, he’s here. Hold on just one second.’ I looked over and stopped. She looked at me and she shrugged like she didn’t know who it was. But she knew that I was applying for jobs. I remember her getting up, and she shut the office door so it was a little quieter, and you couldn’t hear the noise in the hallway.

“I got on the phone and it was Leland. He said, ‘This is Leland Norris and we’re interested in your application and we’d like you to come down for an interview.’ This was in mid to late October, mid-October I think. As Leland was telling me this, I’m getting more and more excited. This was my first phone call I’ve gotten about jobs. I put my hand over the phone and I mouthed that to my friend. She was excited and she was jumping up and down. We went through and talked about interview dates and I obviously ended up going on the on-campus interview. So, even the first contact was a memorable experience. I remember I shared it with my friend and she was excited for me, at least as excited as I was about getting a hit after sending out twenty-some-odd applications all over the country. It’s great that somebody responds and somebody who’s seen your

application says, 'Hey, this guy's all right.' So, that was exciting and I remember sharing it with my friend in the graduate office."

"I can't wait to get that call. How long was it between when you made first contact and when you visited the campus?"

"From there we worked out details about the trip and whatever else. The thing that made this university unique was that they moved really early on their jobs. I got a phone call in mid-October and I came for my on-campus interview the first weekend of November of 2005. So this was two and a half weeks before NCA. It was really early. I hadn't finished sending off all my application packages yet, and I was already getting a response. So that was exciting. It made me feel like I was one of the more competitive people on the market. I don't know if I was, but you never know with jobs, and how academia works, and the politics that go on behind the scenes. You just never know, until people start responding, whether you are competitive and you are a good candidate, and the work that you've put in is valuable and people are going to notice. So, we worked out the details over the next week or two: flights and the airport, and reimbursements, and who I will talk to, and what my practice teaching session will be. We worked out all those details. First weekend of November, I came for my interview.

"I flew in on a Sunday. I got into the closest airport, about 45 minutes away. I got in around a late dinner time. Leland picked me up at the airport. We talked about how he'd have an orange shirt on so I would know who he was. I told Leland I would travel in a pair of khakis and a blue sport coat and a white shirt. I said, 'I'm sure I'll see you but should I not, here's what I'll be wearing so you can find me at the airport.' He said

jokingly, 'It's not a very big airport. I'm sure we'll run right into each other. I'll meet you at the exit of the terminal.'

"Sounds like everything went smoothly through this whole process."

"Yeah, well, when I was leaving for the airport, I brought my change of clothes with me. I didn't want to wear them in the car ride and then wear them on the plane. I figured I'd look like a mess when I got off the plane. I went to the bathroom at the airport and I went in the stall. I planned on changing my clothes. *I don't have my sport coat.* I left it hanging by my door in my apartment. When I landed, Leland actually commented. He said, 'I thought you said you were going to have a blue sport coat.' I laughed and said, 'Oh, I was hoping you wouldn't notice. I actually left my sport coat hanging next to my door in my apartment.' I said, 'Hopefully that's not a sign of how the rest of the weekend will go.' He laughed. We got a kick out of that.

"The rest of the interview was on Monday, which went pretty standard. I met various faculty members, had lunch with a few people, met one of the associate deans, did my research presentation, in which I used my dissertation work among other things. I had a teaching demonstration. I was able to pick the topic, which I appreciated. So, the rest of the day went kind of as planned. I met the chair. One of the things that ended up becoming a key factor in my decision on whether to come here or not was the whole process. That decision emerged over the course of the day."

"So there wasn't anything that made you think twice about wanting to come here."

"One thing. Only five people showed up for my research presentation, and one of them wasn't in my department, one of them was a director of an interdisciplinary Ph.D.

that we have. That made me nervous. That made me question. At home, when I got a little bit of separation from the place and the people, all of a sudden, I thought, ‘Five people came to my research presentation.’ The inability for me to get a solid answer about things like number of publications for tenure, started to weigh on me more too. It became a more serious factor in my thinking. Over the course of the next couple of weeks, of course, I got requests for interviews at NCA. This was the NCA in Boston. I was walking through the mall to get from one hotel to another, and I ran into Leland in the mall. We saw each other. We stopped to chat for a minute. Leland said to me, ‘Hey, how’s everything going? Are we still on your list? Are you still considering us?’ I must not have a good poker face, because I responded, ‘Yes, I’m still interested,’ and he read me and he knew something was wrong. So, he called me out on it. He said, ‘Uh-oh, what’s wrong? I saw you hesitated. Something’s going on.’ I had, in essence, been busted. I said, ‘Well, yeah, I have a few questions.’ I said, ‘It’s not that there’s something wrong but I do have some more questions.’ He said, ‘Okay. What do you want to do? Let’s meet later today. Let’s talk about it. I’ll be happy to.’

“So, we worked out a time that we could sit down and talk. Later, we met in one of the hotel lobbies. We went and found a place where we could sit down and chat. I very openly and honestly, but also very strategically worded this. I was purposely not trying to be antagonistic. I didn’t say, ‘Here’s what I think is wrong with how my interview went.’ I wasn’t attempting to be critical at all. I was trying to put the burden on me. ‘Here are the questions that I still have.’ Things like that. I was very careful in my wording because it’s not like I had written them off. I just had some concerns. I mentioned to Leland all of

the things that I've already talked about, the tenure thing, the attendance at the research presentation thing. Leland's answers are what convinced me to come."

"How did his answers satisfy you?"

"We talked about the makeup of the department, the timing of my interview. There was lots of stuff going on that particular week, which is why some people couldn't attend my presentation. It was at a time of the day where a lot of people have classes. So, he answered my questions. Leland's answers are what convinced me to come. I asked him questions about tenure and promotion, and he gave me much more concrete answers about the number of publications per year that I would need, as well as how the work that I've already done factors into tenure and promotion decisions. I had four publications and one pending when I got this job. He talked to me about how those publications would factor into a tenure decision. I really felt like his answers were upfront and honest, and that's what sold me. My position was if they can't be honest with me about the answers to questions that I deem are significant, then it's not a place for me to work. It's not where I want to be. It's not where I should be. I didn't feel that he would spend that time with me if I wasn't the person they wanted. I felt like I was then in control of the situation a little bit. I knew I'd have something coming so I could assess my new offers, my new interviews, in light of the probability that I'm going to get an offer."

"So you had this position fairly locked up around NCA. That's a long time between the interviewing process and taking the position. Let's talk about that."

"After I took the job I really didn't have much contact for a while, other than things like house hunting, talking about when I was going to get there, things like that. I really didn't talk to them much until we got here in mid-June or so. There wasn't much

contact between myself and the university in the time period, and this would have been in early 2006.”

“You said ‘we got here.’ You brought someone with you?”

“You know, I have a significant partner. We’ve been dating for four years and we’re basically married but not married.”

“Aaron, did you get the job here and then she negotiated one herself or how did that all work?”

“That’s a good question. We met in graduate school. She was a Masters student when I was a Ph.D. student. So, she started and finished her Masters before I got done. When she got done, she got a job in the East and she ended up working there for a little more than a year. And the plan was that she was going to move where I got a job because she liked her job, but wasn’t that thrilled by it. So, anyway, we had talked about that. I was going to look for jobs in the East but, as you know, you’re limited. There are five or six big schools there, but only a few that have Communication programs and some of them I’m not probably eligible for as a qualitative scholar. Like, I’m probably not going to get a job at Maryland because they’re a pretty quantitative program.”

“Yeah. They’re doing quantitative work and political rhetoric.”

“Right. So, you know, not every school works. And you know how it goes. So, she and I agreed to see where I end up, and she’d probably come where I’m going to go. I got the job here and it worked out that her supervisor was going to keep her on and let her work from here. She worked for a really small firm with about five people, and her leaving is a significant blow to that organization. So, she had some leverage. They were basically going to rent her an office space. And she really needed to have health

insurance, due to some continuing issues. It ended up that her boss was not that good of a person to work for and, at the time, her boss kind of lost his mind and flipped out. I think he had serious psychological issues. I think he was crazy. He gave her a hard time about how she was going to move down here for my job and how could she as a 20-something supposedly liberal, feminist, educated woman, how could she possibly make the choice to come down here for me? And she was like, 'Are you kidding me? The whole idea of being a liberal, educated, feminist woman is that I can make the choice for myself.' And this guy just didn't get it. It was awful."

"Sounds like it."

"And, you know, we ended up deciding that the stress that she was under at work just wasn't worth the price. She basically quit and was going to come here and find a job and she ended up finding this grant position on campus. So, we actually just got kind of lucky."

"That's a good story," I say.

"Yeah. If she didn't get a job on campus, we were going to have to probably get hitched just for health insurance, which is an absolutely atrocious reason to get married. We didn't really know what else to do. We're not married more for political reasons. As a couple, she and I are not happy with gay marriage issues in the country. So, this whole thing even added more stress to our situation, because now we were contemplating getting married for a reason that you absolutely should not get married for. We imagined ourselves saying to our gay friends, 'Well, we're going to get married out of convenience because we need health insurance even though you can't get married.' So, luckily it

worked out that we didn't have to take advantage of that aspect of our heterosexist society.”

“Wow! I haven't gotten any story quite like that one.”

“She basically said, ‘I think in the long-run, it's better for the both of us if you get the job that you want,’ and we worked within that structure. And I don't feel like that I imposed that on her. We came to that decision collectively and it ends up that it worked out really well for both of us. She's got a really good job that she enjoys, doing basically the same work she did but without all the insanity. But my God, the move was crazy.”

“Yeah, when I moved to Tampa, it was a struggle.”

“Yeah. It was bad, Andrew. I mean, the whole transition process is, you know, it's stressful enough trying to finish school, you're trying to finish your dissertation, make your committee happy, everything else. And then on top of it you add the stress of buying a house or possibly buying a house, right? You're moving in this new place you don't know. You're trying to bring somebody with you or decide whether that's the right decision for you. You got to move. I mean, man, the stress of that summer, you know, a year ago roughly this time, summer of 2006. Oh my God, I don't ever want to live that again. And it is just the worst. It was just the worst.”

* * *

For a moment, I think about how the future would be vastly different if I had gotten married in 2004. I was supposed to get married right after I moved to Tampa to start the doctoral program. My fiancé ended our relationship promptly after I moved. It took me a long time to understand how to be a single man again (Herrmann, 2007). I

wonder, now that I am almost done with my Ph.D., how much more difficult it might be to make the transition if I was going to move a family, rather than just myself.

* * *

“In some ways, I’m actually kind of happy it’s just me,” I blurt out.

“Yeah. Every new factor you add to it just complexifies it even more,” Aaron says emphatically. “And one more thing. You realize when you start negotiating that having your dissertation done is serious business. They are not screwing around. They’re going to have to drop you down to a lecture position or whatever, and you’re going to be teaching more classes. I think in a lot of ways, they see it as if they made the wrong choice and it reflects badly on the department. So I understand why they want your dissertation done. Man, I realized quickly that that is not something to be screwed around with.”

“What were those first days on campus like? How was the orientation?”

“After I got here, finally meeting the other new faculty member was exciting. The first time I met him and his wife, it was exciting to see this other new guy because our department is fairly small. The other new hire and I are numbers 10 and 11 for our department, so another new person is a significant part of the department, and it was exciting to meet him. It’s kind of cool to see the other new guy right out of school. I was thinking, he and I are going to have some stuff to work on, like having another former graduate student to kind of bounce ideas off of and that sort of thing. Anyway, there was an orientation. I went to a few of the informational things, but mostly I was busy setting up my house.”

“Tell me a bit more about the transition period from being a graduate student to being Dr. Nologo, a full-time faculty member on the tenure track.”

“One of the most significant things in the transition period from graduate school to your first job is there’s a real and palpable and material difference in how you’re treated as a graduate student to how you’re treated as a faculty member. It’s not that I was treated poorly in my graduate program. I don’t think that’s the case at all. There was a day I was sitting in my graduate school office and I was checking my email. An email pops up from my new chair asking, ‘What would you be interested in teaching in the Fall? You can maybe do this class or that class or whatever.’ That was kind of a symbolic slap in the face. ‘Wake up, that you’re not a graduate student anymore!’ I couldn’t get over the fact that somebody was *asking me* what I wanted to teach. I must’ve told ten different people that story, graduate students mostly. ‘You’re not going to believe what happened to me today. My new department chair emailed me and asked me what I wanted to teach. They asked me when I wanted to teach.’”

“Dramatically different than in graduate school?”

“The way the courses were distributed in my graduate program was you got a memo in your mailbox that said you’re teaching this and this at such and such time. Here you go. They did ask for some feedback. They asked what classes you had taught before, and they did take some of that stuff into consideration during my graduate program, but ultimately, you got a memo that said, ‘Here’s your classes. Here’s when it is. Here’s what rooms they’re in. Have fun.’ It was the unwritten rule that you didn’t go complain about it, because if you did you were going to get worse classes in the next quarter. So you took what you were given and you went with it and that was it. So, to be asked and to feel like

I could say, ‘You know, I think I’ll teach this methods class, and I’ll teach two sections of that so I have one less prep.’ To be able to say something like, ‘You know, I’d really prefer to teach at 10am and 11am instead of early in the morning.’ I mean it was just culture shock.”

“That’s darned symbolic of the transition.”

“The other very similar incident that happened was that I got an email from our discipline librarian. She says, ‘Hi. I got your name from your chair. We want to make sure that you’re ready and able to be up and running as far as your research goes as soon as possible after you get here. So, in order to do that, please let me know if there is anything that you would like the library to buy for you in terms of resources.’ I wrote her back. ‘What do you mean is there anything I want the library to buy for me?’ And she said, ‘Well, if you need any books, or if you need any journals, or if you need anything, let me know and we’ll make sure that we’ll get them for you.’ I read that response email and I thought, ‘Is this is a joke? They’re going to buy me whatever I want from the library?’ She said, ‘Anything you want. If you want books, you need journals, you need videos.’

“So, I sent her a list of stuff. I sent her about 30 journals. ‘These are the journals that I use on a regular basis, that I think that the library should have.’ There were maybe one or two that they didn’t have, but they subscribed to or got them in the database or something. They had almost all the books that I needed. Even some of the people, some of the theoretical stuff, the philosophical stuff that I’m interested in. I told them, ‘Look, you should have everything ever written by such and such people.’ I listed out seven or eight different people that I’m particularly interested in, or that are significant as far as

the communication discipline goes. She replied, 'Oh yeah, we have this one and this one and this one. We have everything they've ever written. Somebody else, we have about half their stuff but I will find the other ones.' I mean, they bought it all.

"Again, I told my graduate student friends. 'You're not going to believe this email I just got.' My friends were just astonished. 'Oh! You're so lucky. I can't wait till I'm there, till I get done and people are asking me this stuff.' It's just such a significant event. It was a little bit of a shock the first time a student came to my office and asked me if I was Dr. Nologo. I was like, "Yeah, I guess that is me." That still kind of cracks me up a little bit. I find it humorous. I'm not a big one for titles. I tell my students they can call me Aaron. If they want to call me Dr. Nologo, they can but they don't have to. It's still always a little bit of a shock when I get called Dr. Nologo." He starts laughing and continues. "You'll see when you get a job and, you know, when you get a tenure line position and somebody actually cares. I don't know what USF is like as far as how graduate students get assigned to classes. Now, I don't like teaching at 8:00am. I don't have to teach at 8:00am. Nobody makes me."

"Man that will be nice!" I say laughing. "I'll appreciate that. I am not a morning person at all. Tell me how has the teaching been going? You taught 2-2 last year?"

"Yeah. My normal load is 2-2."

"And this year now you're on 3-1?"

"3-1, but that's a fairly special circumstance. There's really myself and another faculty member who are best equipped to teach our qualitative research methods class. So, she left for another school, which means her section needed to be covered, because there was already like 15 or 17 people registered for it."

“Right.”

“So, the chair came in and asked me if I would pick up that class in exchange to do one in the spring. I said, ‘Sure, I’ll do it.’”

“So that’s the position that is open?”

“Yeah. Actually, yeah. It’s a replacement line. It’s not a new line.”

“How was the adjustment to teaching here?”

“It was just great to do something on my own that was an advanced and upper level class where I got to deal with communication majors, who kind of have the background in theory. So that was great. In my second semester, I got to teach what will probably be two of my bread and butter classes going forward. I teach Introduction to Organizational Communication and Qualitative Methods. That was *a dream semester*. The fact that I got those two – I was ecstatic when I got assigned those two classes – because those are two classes that I’ve been wanting to teach since the middle of graduate school.”

“You were talking about this on the walk over, and so let me pick your brain about that. You were talking about the students here. And you said they’re really high quality students.”

“They are fairly intelligent. They continually impress me. Which is great as far as I’m concerned.”

“Yeah? Good papers, study habits?”

“I mean, of course you have your students who can’t write and, you know, you’re going to get some of those no matter what. But the really good students are really good. Let me give you an example. And again this is not atypical but I have an honor student,

Departmental Honors. In order to get Departmental Honors, you have to contract so many classes in the major, which means you have to approach a professor and you have to do some, not extra work, but some kind of deeper, richer work. So, you might read some original text or something like that. You have to do that for a certain number of classes. But in addition to that, you have to do a three-semester research project.”

“Wow.”

“So, this one student in particular approached me. He had an idea. He and I get along. He’s like, ‘I’d like to do my Departmental Honors contract with you.’ ‘Sure. Let’s talk about ideas.’ He’s interested in democracy issues, which is kind of where he and I met up. He also is interested in journalism stuff. So, we start talking about things. I’m talking with another colleague and this other colleague has an idea to write an essay about Stephen Colbert. There’s lots of people talking about Jon Stewart right now, but so far Colbert hasn’t made it into the journals. I’m talking to this student and it turns out, he is a big Stephen Colbert fan.”

“Ahh!”

“I start talking to him. ‘Well, what can we do with this?’ It was this really exciting conversation. I could see the light bulb go off. ‘I can get course credit for writing about Stephen Colbert?’ And I said, ‘You bet you can!’ So, we start talking about that and then we start talking about what theoretical frames we can use to analyze Colbert and what he does. We start talking about Baudrillard. We spent last summer reading two Baudrillard texts and a bunch of articles that use Baudrillard, so he can write this research paper. They have to basically write a conference paper as the honors contract. And when I say a conference paper, I mean it has to be a legit conference paper. This isn’t your average

undergraduate, 'I'm going to do some cute little statistics and I'm done.' I mean, they have to write a legit conference paper that can be submitted to NCA or wherever. And this project, with my help, this project is publishable.

"That's tremendous."

"That's good for me," Aaron continues. "That's good for him. He wants to go to graduate school. What a great opportunity. There seems to be more people like him, like this particular student, which is exciting for me. I can find the best undergraduates, and I can work on stuff with them, and that's good for me for getting tenure. That's good for me for getting my name out there, and I can help them if they want to go to graduate school or whatever. You know, I would have never envisioned publishing with undergrads. The good students here are really good. I've told this undergrad, 'There is no way, when I was your age as a senior in college, that I would be reading this stuff, thinking about these issues. I wasn't anywhere near as intellectually curious as you are. So, you know, you've really got something here. You can really go a long way if you want to work on these ideas and polish up your writing.' I told him, 'You're basically golden. You're better than I was when I was 21. There's no way that I was doing this stuff.' So I can help guide that process, but it's exciting for me to see somebody at that age who wants to write, who will take the time to read Baudrillard. Give me a break. I mean, that's phenomenal."

"It took me until I was 30 years old to pronounce his name, never mind read and understand him. Of course, I was a total slack-off as an undergrad," I laugh.

"I was too. He doesn't get everything. You know, even I don't. You're not supposed to get it all with Baudrillard and I tell him that, you know? He's writing now."

We're not reading as much, but when we were doing our weekly meetings I'd tell him, 'Just read. Read it once. Read it twice. Find sentences that are interesting that you think you could use, right? You don't have to get it all, but find those nuggets of good information.' So he'd come with stuff underlined, and he'd say, 'Can you--? I don't really know. This seems like it's important but I don't really know what it means.' And I'd go, 'Man, I don't know what Baudrillard is talking about here. The guy's crazy, man!'" We start laughing.

"Tell me about it," I say. "That honors contract is different than just teaching a regular undergraduate class. How has that experience been?"

"I think part of the difference in why I'm so engaged with our undergrads is that I'm teaching only in a major, right? I don't have to teach Public Speaking until it's coming out of my ears anymore. I don't disparage my old school, because that really wasn't the case when I was dealing with the students in a major. When I taught the major specific classes, I was much more fulfilled in the classroom. Here I'm only doing majors. I'm doing upper-level classes. I think that makes a huge difference, you know. I think that makes a huge difference."

"Yeah, I've noticed that myself."

"I was so impressed with the students in our discipline. I'm always looking forward to seeing them again and teaching disciplinary material to them. I just feel like my first year went really well. I think that the feedback I've gotten both formal and informal from students and from my colleagues leaves that impression. I think they're fairly happy. I haven't gotten any feedback that says that anybody thinks they made the wrong decision in hiring me, so that's exciting. I've had a couple of people tell me that.

They've pretty much told the other new hire and myself pretty straight up, 'You guys were both of our first choices and we got you both and we're really excited about it.' That's just flattering to hear. That leaves you feeling good about what you're doing and where you're at, that people want you to be here. Not only that but they think you were the best candidate for the job and they're excited that you took it. That just makes you feel good as a colleague."

"It sounds like you and Leland really developed a good trusting relationship."

"It's been great. Leland's been a great resource and he's one of those colleagues that makes me say, 'I could see myself here for a while.' I'm not going anywhere, but he's one of those people I would enjoy working with for 10, 15 years, 20 years. He's on our department personnel committee. And he's nothing but hopeful, answers questions, makes himself available and he's just a nice guy to boot. We'll go off to lunch and we could talk about football. He makes fun of me for being a Bears fan, and I make fun of him for being a Packers fan."

"I'm a Cowboys fan."

"I don't want to talk to you either. Get out!" he mocks, as we start laughing.

"Leland's just a really good colleague in general. I really think it's true. It's hard when you're on your side of the fence, being a graduate student looking for a job. It's hard to get into that mindset where you – and people will tell you this when you're searching – when you're looking for jobs, they'll say, 'If we hire you, we want you to get tenure.' You know, and that's really true, I think, at a good job."

"This sounds like a very supportive department."

“They want you to get tenure and I really believe that here they want me to. I have to do the stuff they need me to do. I got to publish. I got to be in the classroom. They want me to do that, and they will provide whatever resources they can to help me get tenure. And that trickles down to that interpersonal level where the senior faculty in our department ask, ‘Oh Aaron, how are your publications going? Let us know if there’s anything we can do.’ They come observe your teaching and give you really good feedback. Things like that. So, it even trickles down to the interpersonal level. I’m really happy with the senior faculty here.”

“It’s interesting you say that. As you can imagine, my literature review is full of socialization research. I’m doing this research because socialization research is mostly quantitative. Art Bochner put it this way, ‘That’s the most boring thing I’ve ever read,’ I say laughingly. “It is true though. You don’t get to hear the stories. And what you brought up about it is interesting. I didn’t see that in the literature on academia. They want you to succeed. Nobody talks about that. It seems to be left out of the equation.”

“I don’t think that’s the case everywhere. Some of those big jobs scare the daylights out of me. You hear a third of the people get – only a third of the assistant professors get tenure. That scares the crap out of me and that was one of the most attractive things about this job for me. I didn’t have to jump into a Ph.D. level program and be expected to guide dissertations, because frankly, I don’t think I’m ready yet.”

“Yeah,” I agree. “I look at some of those position announcements on CRTNET, and I think, ‘Well, cool, but do I want to do that to myself?’”

“I think I need another year or two to get my own stuff going before I’m going to be ready to manage somebody’s dissertation. I really like this job because I get a lot of

the big school resources without the big school pressure. They expect me to publish and I think I've done that. I think my annual reviews reflect that they're happy with what I've done, but damn, I still don't see myself being able to guide somebody's dissertation. I'm just not to that point yet. I applied for those jobs and I'm kind of glad I didn't get them."

* * *

"What are your main stressors and objectives at this point in your career? How clear-cut are the tenure requirements, if they are clear-cut at all?"

"Not clear-cut, but I do have a good idea what it takes. Pre-tenure, you got to publish. I don't have the stress of the big jobs, but that's what they want to see. That's what they want. I think you have to be good in the classroom. If I was a horrendous teacher, even if I published 15 articles in five years, I don't think I would get tenure here. At another place, I probably would. I think here you have to meet a minimum standard in the classroom and then you have to publish. The classroom stuff comes easy for me, so all I have to worry about is writing. That's what I need to focus my attention on. You're right if you mean that you never get fine, clear-cut answers about tenure requirements. I have a good sense of where I need to be. I think that number is somewhere in the ballpark of eight articles or so, eight to ten. Somewhere in there depending on the quality of those publications."

"Eight to ten in--?"

"In five years. By the end of my fifth year. That's where I think I need to be. So, you know, I don't know. I have five pieces that I want to have either out, or close to being out by May. Or significant parts of them accomplished. So, really in the coming spring semester, I'm going to be cranking stuff out. That's another nice part of, I think,

the difference from grad school. You're taking every class project that you write and trying to work and take it as far as it'll go. Now, I can think, 'Okay, here's the four things that I want to do this year.' And I figure if I write four things a year and half-hit, I'm good. That's the way I'm looking at it. And I think I write better than half-hitting. If I shoot for four a year, to get four things under review a year, in five years that's 20 pieces if everything hit. That'll get you tenure at the best school wherever. That will get you tenure at the University of Pennsylvania. If half hit, then I'm about at ten and I'm fine. The good thing here is that they don't only really want the top tier journals, like at a Research I school. Here, there's a little more flexibility. I can publish in *Southern Journal of Communication* and *Qualitative Inquiry*. Quantitatively, they see them as equal pieces. Plus, I can make the argument for a *JACR* (*Journal of Applied Communication Research*) piece, right? There's a 96.5% rejection rate at *JACR* so that's a huge piece."

"And like me, you do qualitative work, so it takes longer," I interject.

"Yes, and I think here they also are fairly conscious of quantitative stuff versus qualitative and rhetorical stuff. They know that it takes longer to get a qualitative piece up and running, collect the data, get it under review. They see those differences. So, whereas a quantitative person might need ten, right – if we're only counting beans here – they might need ten. I can probably get away with seven."

"Right."

* * *

Eight publications in five years. That's about two publications per year. That sounds like a Research I publication record to me.

* * *

“I’ll find out in four more years if they see those differences. But I think they do and what they say is that they do. They see those differences.”

“Is that your big review, in year four?” I ask.

“Until tenure you get annually reappointed. I had to apply for reappointment after I’d been here for four weeks, which is hilarious,” he says, laughingly, “I don’t have my portfolio or I’d show it to you, because it’s actually working it’s way up the chain of command.”

“Uh-huh. I’ve noticed that a number of school are doing the annual reappointment process, rather than the third year review.”

“That’s interesting. Here you get this big white folder, a huge like four-inch binder and it’s got all these color-coded tabs in it. You have to put things in there, and that’s your reappointment folder. And eventually, at the end of your fifth year, that’s your tenure folder. So, you basically give them this stuff that got you the job. I gave them my teaching feedback from graduate school, but now, this year, they want to see feedback from your own students. They want to see that you’re establishing yourself here.”

“Teaching evaluations,” I sigh. “Some of my evaluations are pretty bad. I had 40 students in my Org Com class in the fall of last year. I was not prepared for that. That was the class that a fight broke out in.”

“I remember you talking about that at Central.”

“The fight actually happened the week before NCA. There was NCA, and then Thanksgiving. By the time I got back three weeks later, there was a week left, and then it was finals. So, there was no way to reconnect. It just turned out —“

“You got a great story for your interviews!”

“What?” I’m jolted and pop upright.

“When they ask you, ‘What’s the worst thing that’s happened to you in class and how did you manage it?’ I think, with that kind of story, however you managed it, you’ll come off looking pretty good.”

“I hadn’t thought of that! I’ll need to reframe that in my own head. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome,” he says smiling.

“Okay, so we talked about research and we talked about publishing. Service!”

“Yeah. It is one of those things here. You just need to do some stuff, you know? I don’t want to say it is not a big deal, but it is not really a big deal.”

“What kind of committees are you on here?”

“My first year, I was, along with our other new hire, our Co-Library Liaison. The librarian that manages all the communication study stuff, she would talk to us about what books we wanted and what journals we needed to have. So, that was one. I was on the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. That was pretty fun. I was on the Undergraduate Admissions Committee. I’m on the Job Search Committee. Over the summer, I was on the Lecturer Search Committee. And then I’m also on our Faculty Advisory Committee. It basically helps put forth solutions for problems that don’t fit under other committee work. It’s a general advisory committee to the chair. So, there are only 11 of us here. They need the new people to do those things. It’s nice to have that responsibility. I think they honestly care what myself and the other new hire think and that’s why I am on this year’s search committee.”

“Seems like a lot of committee work.”

“Well, I got advice from a few faculty at my graduate program. There was one assistant professor in particular. His advice to me was ‘Keep your head down and keep your mouth shut at faculty meetings and don’t rock the boat.’ But here, they ask, ‘What do the new people think? Who should we hire, and what kind of job should we hire? What are our needs? What are the issues that graduate students from top ten programs are researching? What should we be looking for?’ I think they really care. It’s not the ‘keep your head down and keep your mouth shut’ attitude.

“They turn to me as an expert who just came from the job market, Aaron continues. “It validates what I think is my hard work. ‘You know what? You’re a pretty good colleague so far and we respect your opinion enough and we want to get more people that are of similar caliber to you, so tell us how to do it. You just came from the job market. You know what it’s like out there. What do we need to say in a job call to get somebody who’s good, who’s going to do the research, who’s going to be a good teacher?’ That’s really validating to have somebody say those things. They might not say them explicitly, but I can see in faculty meetings when we were talking about what jobs we want to ask for in the Fall and they looked at me and the other new guy and go, ‘Okay. Tell us how we do it. None of us have been on the market for four, five, six, years. You guys just came from it so tell us, how do we do it?’ That is flattering to be asked those sorts of questions.”

“One of the things that’s surprising me is how small our community is,” I say. “I have this friend. His committee chair is also the search chair, and she asked him if I was applying for their job. He called me. ‘Yeah, I just had lunch. They want to know if you are applying for the position.’ I thought, ‘What? These people are asking about me? What

the hell?’ I feel like a novice. I don’t know what I’m doing, and I have people asking about me and job applications.”

“The imposter syndrome.”

“What?” I ask.

“That’s what we always called it in graduate school. It’s the imposter syndrome. You’re getting a Ph.D., and you don’t feel like you know what the hell you’re doing. ‘How am I going to get published? I couldn’t crap out an idea that somebody would want to read.’ I still have that. Here, I have one article published out of my dissertation but that’s not enough. It’s a total ‘I don’t think I’m good enough.’ I think all academics might suffer from that, even if they don’t talk about it.”

“I have that too! Speaking of topics academics don’t talk about: we don’t talk about competition very much either. There’s a lot of competition for monies in particular in graduate school. And then job competition.”

“There’s not that kind of competition once you have a job. There’s more cooperation. There’s a core group of people to whom I feel like I can go and ask any question and get a good answer. We have one faculty member in particular who’s edited a leading journal in her field. So I can ask her questions about submissions and the letters that you write to editors of journals. There are people that I can go to as resources.”

“Along with this cooperation was there any particular mentoring program or process?”

“No. But I don’t feel like I had one formal mentor and that’s perfectly fine with me. I’m not a huge fan of assigned mentoring. I think I’m socially capable enough to find out to whom I should ask questions, and who are the people I should avoid. I consider

myself capable enough to figure those things out. That leads me to think about one of the other key things that shocks you in the shift from grad school to faculty. It's the stuff behind the scenes when you see the faculty meetings. You see the curriculum decisions that are made and in which you get to take part. You get to talk about the trajectories of the department in faculty meetings. Do we want to try to do a master's program? We're involved in this interdisciplinary Ph.D. program. How are we going to continue to be involved in that? Making those decisions, talking about those things, you don't see any of that when you're a grad student. That's been interesting – to kind of see the decisions going on, the happenings about who – it doesn't take long to figure out who's doing their work and who really isn't. That doesn't take a long time. You get that stuff on the grapevine pretty early in the time here. So, that stuff all kind of lets you know who are the people that you should probably ask. Here are the people that you may, this sounds really bad, but here are the people you may want to be careful about taking their advice. This might not be the best person to find out about how you do research or whatever the case might be. I don't know all you guys at USF – if you do similar stuff like we did in graduate school with colloquiums about job searches.”

“Yeah. In fact we have one coming up in a few weeks,” I note.

“Faculty would get up and tell stories of graduate students that lost jobs because they were acting like an asshole in the lobby of the conference hotel. Here's a story. Two years ago I was at Central. I was hanging out with some people and I was in the hotel lobby. I think I was having a cocktail with somebody. It was in the bar at the conference hotel.”

“Right.”

“I want to be really vague here. There were some graduate students reading a piece from a journal that was a performance kind of piece. They were making fun of it, that it even got published. How is this research? How did this get published? All this stuff. I was smart enough to think, ‘This is bad news. I should not be sitting with these folks.’ Some of the people I knew, some of them I didn’t. But I was smart enough to say, ‘I got to go.’ It was a bad situation. I said, ‘That’s it.’ I finished my drink, excused myself, and went up to the hotel room. Not half an hour later one of the guys I was rooming with came up and said that the Central States President came over to their table and berated them for making fun of this other scholar.”

“Really?”

“Yep. And I thought, ‘Wow! Am I glad that I left!’ I am glad I was not sitting there when that happened. Stuff like that, word gets around. It was bad news, man. And just—“

“The President of Central?”

“Yep. Came over to this table of people at the bar and basically yelled and berated them for making fun of somebody’s published piece publicly.”

“It must’ve been loud and obnoxious.”

“Yeah, they were. It was bad and I could not be happier that I left. All I thought was, ‘Man, I hope nobody saw me sitting there.’”

“Smart move. We are a small community.”

* * *

Small community. That does worry me. I’ve gotten some strange looks from people when I’ve told them I am examining the experiences of first-year tenure track

professors in our discipline. One person told me explicitly, "You might want to give job talks on your more recent published pieces that aren't a critique of academe and assistant professorhood before you become part of it." Said another, "That is gutsy and dangerous. You know we don't like to look at ourselves." I'm not taking that advice. What am I supposed to do as an organizational communication scholar at an interview, talk about my 'disengagement' or Kierkegaardian dialogue? That might be safe, but I don't think it would help me land an organizational communication job.

* * *

"Yep. It goes the other way, too. Doing good work spreads quickly. So, it's both ways. It's small. It's really bad if you're a screw-up. It's a small community, but it's really good if you do good work, you know? Speaking of which, how are you going to handle confidentiality during this?"

"It's funny," I say, "I don't really consider these 'interviews.' They are more like conversations."

"That's how I view interviews too. In fact, you are a good interviewer."

"Thanks," I say, somewhat embarrassed. "I'm using aliases for you, as well as the rest of the participants. I am eliminating all the distinct references to the schools, changing spouse and partner names, names of other department members mentioned, advisors, and graduate schools."

"I thought so, but just wanted to double-check."

* * *

After our interview, we go to a local BBQ restaurant and both order ribs. They are tangy and messy, but absolutely delicious. "I love this place," Aaron says. He tells

me that although this is a pretty small city, on football Saturdays 80,000 people descend on the town. We chat about my dissertation and about the upcoming submission deadline for the Central States Communication Association Convention. I hope I don't look too much the slob with BBQ sauce all over my hands.

"I got a parking ticket yesterday, and I'm wondering if I should pay it."

"You're in a rental car, right?"

"Yep."

"Well don't go around telling people I said this, but there's no way to trace you."

"So I shouldn't pay it?"

"I didn't say that. Reach your own conclusion." Laughter.

** * **

I drop Aaron off in front of his building. I feel exhilarated that he called me a very good interviewer, considering this is my first big interview project. Everything else I've done has been ethnography or discourse analysis. The two-hour drive to the airport is slow going. Traffic is stop and go on the highway. I get to the airport without time to spare, check my bag, run to the gate, and find my seat.

I sit in my tight airplane seat with my computer in front of me. As I work on cover letters, my mind drifts. I want to be happy in my position, like Jo, Harrison, and Aaron. I want to go to a place with the resources to get the research I want to write about done. I've set my goals high. Am I setting myself up for disappointment? No, I've got the academic goods, including six publications. Sure the job hunt won't be easy. It never has been, but I'm confident everything will fall into place.

Aaron said he could get away with seven publications for tenure. In order to hit seven publications in five years, he is aiming for ten. Therefore he is writing and submitting twenty. That's four submissions per year. That definitely sounds like a Research I institution, rather than a department mulling over whether they want to have an M.A. program. That's nuts. How does 'the imposter syndrome' play into that? Does his department feel the need to overdo, to overcompensate? Does he? It seems this is not just happening on the individual level, either. What's the driving force for all these institutions pushing to become like Research I universities, or to become Research I universities? Where are the boundaries? What's wrong with being a good comprehensive university that doesn't aspire to become a Research I?

I am awakened by the announcement that we are about "to start our decent into Tampa." It will be good to be home. In two days, I do one more interview. It is a 2,600 mile roundtrip flight, up and back. It's a killer pace, but I am going to get this done. And I'm learning so much.

Chapter 10

Gabe: Academia is Boring, Lonely and Weird

The leaves are changing and I take some pictures as the plane comes down to land. This is a small airport. Four arrival and departure gates. I have nothing with me, but my computer bag. I take a few more photos, waiting for the paperwork on my Ford rental car. I stretch, and my stiff body groans from the 1,300 mile flight. The thirty minute stopover in Chicago was not enough to get my land legs back. It is 55 degrees and overcast here on this September day, a distinct difference from Tampa this morning, where it was almost 80 degrees when I left at 4:30am. As I head out to get the car, I throw on my leather jacket. The cool breeze feels good. I'm happy this is the last interview, and will be in-and-out. No hotel, no long drive, no extended trip to multiple cities or states.

The road into town feels like a washboard as the car rumbles and bumbles down it. I still need to stretch. My legs feel rubbery, and I'm hungry too. Food will have to wait. Doing these interviews has involved too much travel in too short a time. Including the airport stopovers and final destination, I've been to eleven cities in less than two weeks. I've racked up almost 7,000 frequent flier miles, and about 1,000 miles on road in rental cars. I need to meet Gabe, do the interview, and be back at the airport for the evening flight home.

I park the car, dig through my computer bag, find some coins and feed the meter, which seems to be an ongoing dilemma. Who carries change anymore? I walk into the

building and follow the signs to the Department of Communication, but get lost. I've never been in a complex like this. All the buildings are connected, and I feel like a retarded rat running a maze. I can understand the reasoning though. It must be god-awful cold up here in the winter. Any further north, I'd be in Canada. I call Gabe and leave a message on his voice mail, telling him I can't pinpoint the department and that I am sitting in the library. I wonder if he forgot about the interview. As I'm checking my email, my phone rings. Its Gabe.

* * *

“Are you still at the library?”

“Yeah. I'm afraid that if I move again, I'll get lost.”

“Good,” he says lightheartedly, “I'll be down in about five minutes.”

When I see Gabe, I remember how tall he is. He towers over me. As we walk to his office he laughs, “You aren't the only person to get lost in this place. What makes it really confusing is that the second floor of one building, can connect to the next building's third floor. And sometimes, when you walk outside to get to a building, you aren't on the ground floor, you are actually on another building's roof.”

“Really?” I ask as we walk through double-doors.

“In fact, we are on a roof right now. As far as the logistics of this campus, that takes a long time to get used to.”

I look at the 'ground.' What look like the bricks of a walkway, are actually roof tiles, patterned to look like a walkway. Weird. I struggle to keep up with Gabe's gait.

* * *

“What would you say was the biggest challenge you faced when you arrived as a first year professor?” I ask, as we settle in his office, a room surrounded by books on economics and communication. His desk is a mess of paper stacks, more books, and journals.

“I suppose the first thing is that nothing prepared me for the *sheer boredom* of being a professor. I don’t think I can overstate that point. It was probably the most acute feeling of my first year as a professor. I spent a lot of time bored. I suppose that’s perhaps the biggest most unexpected thing about being a professor – the loneliness and the boredom. I won’t say drudgery, because I don’t look at my job at all as drudgery. You come into a new community of people and some of them have been here in the department for many, many years. They were teaching in this department before I started high school. So there’s a wide disparity in terms of people’s experience. There are a couple of the young professors in the department who’ve only been teaching a couple of years. They finished their Ph.D.s while I was in graduate school. I felt that I shared a lot more in common with them, but there is still a sense where we are working on our own projects.”

“That sounds similar to the last two years of graduate school,” I say, “when we primarily work on our dissertations.”

“Unlike in graduate school where you actually have a cohort, as a faculty member you don’t really have that. You don’t have a sense of that. You don’t have colleagues that you know really well. Instead, you have colleagues that you’d like to get to know better, but there are all kinds of time constraints. There’s difficulties, schedules, families, children, and there’s no real time set aside professionally to get to know people in the

workplace in a way that there is sort of built into graduate school. In graduate school you don't have to make time to get to know people, because you're spending a lot of time in classes with them and you're spending time in office hours. You share an office typically with another graduate student. You go out to lunch with them all the time and there's really a sense of belonging to a group, a camaraderie that's just, in many ways, totally absent or is a totally different paradigm. Now you're shifted to this realm where you have to grow up and you have a real job. But the real difference is that there's no natural cohort. There are no people precisely suffering with you."

"Does this include, or should I say, exclude other untenured faculty?"

"Well, there are other untenured faculty. In my department, there's a lot of young faculty, but there's a sense that they're already ahead. They're a couple or three years out and they're already figuring things out and you have to go it alone. That was one of the more difficult things. There was more boredom and more downtime that I had to fill that I didn't experience as a graduate student, because there were more people around as a cohort then, and because the teaching load as a faculty member felt somewhat lighter and the connection to the community was all but nonexistent. You have to build it all anew. That's been a struggle. I think that being an academic *is boring* and it *is lonely*. I suppose that's part of what attracts me to it. Not that I like being bored, but I like to work on my own."

"The academic life that we've chosen seems isolating, but at the same time we get to study the things we are interested in. After all, in what other occupation could I study Kierkegaard and organizational communication?" I ask.

“Right. That’s been one of the great benefits of being an academic. There’s relatively little managerial oversight in your life. You do have to fill out this form once a year and you’re never sure if it’s enough, and you don’t know how to make it look like it’s enough, and you don’t know where you stand between now and tenure, so there’s always some pretty strong anxiety about it. But having said that, for the most part, day to day, day after day, week after week, month after month, semester after semester, there’s not that much from the top down that people bother with. The real drudge of the thing was the boredom and loneliness. I was not prepared and I don’t know that anyone could have prepared me for it. I guess I always knew that it was an aspect of being an academic and an aspect that had a positive side because it enabled me to do what I wanted to do. But it wasn’t until the first year that I saw acutely the negative side. You don’t spend a lot of time with other people the same way you do in graduate school. That diminishes when you become a faculty member. It becomes more a professional agreement between you and the university that you work for. It’s no longer your *alma mater*, which of course is Latin for ‘dear mother.’”

“Right! Even moving from SLU to USF, it took me a long time for me to become a Bull. I was a Billiken for a long time after I moved.”

“I don’t identify as you would with your graduate school or the school mascot. Are you a Bull, a Bulldog, a Tiger, or a Billiken? This is a place where I work. I don’t identify with the feelings that you experience as a student. You don’t really feel like your association is the same, and it’s not. So, there’s real difficulty and a real challenge in trying to negotiate what it means to be a faculty member who could just as easily accept a job and leave and go somewhere else. That feeling of identification with the organization

you work for, and that sense that you belong to something that's really important, and that you have objectives that you're working towards, well, that sense is totally different. There's so much more autonomy involved here. What's the objective? I get tenure here? Okay, well, yes, I get tenure. So, I guess I get tenure here. But do I want to have tenure here? I don't know. I don't know that yet. How do you know? Of course, a part of you, the sick part of your head says, 'Yes, you got to get it. You want it. You've got to get it. It's good for you, for your career, for your future.' But there's another part of you that says, 'My gosh, this could turn out to be a really long and boring life. Twenty-seven years, thirty years, forty years teaching in this place, or teaching in a number of places.'"

"Now that I am applying for positions, I am worried about that too," I say. "I am afraid to not be successful, but perhaps even more, afraid to be successful in the absolutely wrong place. That is, if it is even possible to be successful in the wrong place."

"It's a more delicate negotiation in ways that I hadn't anticipated. You get here and you think, 'I guess I'll go for it. I got no other choice. I was lucky enough to get a tenure-track job, I might as well shoot for tenure.' But I don't know. What are you missing on the way? People are dying. Flowers are blooming. There are all kinds of things to do outside of your office that you'd rather do. It is a complicated thing and it's a negotiation that you have to enter into. Is this where we want to be? Is this what's best for us? Your livelihood is writing, overcoming those rejection letters to publishers or whatever else."

"You moved your family over a thousand miles, right?"

"Yeah. It was 1,200 miles. I think during my first year, I absolutely felt more broke than I was as a graduate student, which is complete irony for me because I was

expecting pretty much the opposite. Moving sunk me. It was a big move, new school, new neighborhood, new climate. You got a heating bill. You got to buy sweaters. You got to buy jackets. You got to buy gloves. It was all across the board. It wasn't just one little thing, you know?"

"You mentioned in your narrative that you had four children when you moved."

"I had four children at the time I moved. I've got five children now."

"Oh, congratulations."

"Thank you," he says leaning back in his chair, laughing. "It meant moving a tribe. Six of us plus the dog, you know, make seven. You're outfitting an entire family for a new climate basically right away. Plus, we bought a house, which at that time, housing costs were really high and salaries weren't. That's one of the big things, too. I mean, in terms of what I study personally, I know that what we hear about inflation is lies. They're telling us lies. Everything costs more because they don't include..."

"They don't include health insurance. They don't include housing prices," I chime in. "I forget. There are other things they don't include."

"Exactly. They discount food and gas because they claim that stuff fluctuates too much. It's bologna. So, I know for a fact that that stuff is inaccurate. You apply that to everyday life and there isn't a match between the money coming in and the money going out. So, the first year, that was most intense. Now it's not as bad as it was. Hey, how do you know about economics?"

"I got into it while doing my masters thesis on stockholders," I smile. "It was like I had to learn an entire new language. Anyway, you're the third person who brought up that whole moving thing, and how expensive it is. But you are the first to talk about

economic sacrifices one may have to make as an Assistant Professor. It's interesting to me that the single people I interviewed didn't talk about the money at all."

"Yeah. That is interesting."

"I know that I'll be boxing – I'm single so I'll be boxing up my books. I got a little apartment and that'll be it. It'll all fit in a U-Haul. But the married people, or people with significant others that I've spoken to have all said, 'It's crazy. I didn't think it was going to cost that much to move my house.'"

"Yeah. I got an extra month's pay, that is basically what I ended up with, which was nice. I wouldn't say it's generous. It doesn't cover the costs of everything involved by any means. I got the biggest truck possible, filled it full of everything. Some of our stuff didn't fit. So, then you got to make the decision. 'What are we really going to need, what aren't we going to need?' And then you get here and you end up needing half the crap you threw away and you got to go buy it again. Having a family has other implications though."

"How so?"

"I've got friends who graduated to full-time positions the same year as I, who are already thinking about moving to a new job, thinking about sending out applications, changing positions. At the time we moved I had two children that were going – it was their transition summer between kindergarten and first grade. I couldn't really think about changing positions, unless I got dealt a hand I couldn't put down, one I had to play, if that makes sense. Oh, and you have to start paying back your student loans."

"Don't remind me," I groan. "Maybe we should write a book about finances for academics. *Money for the Way Too Smart.*"

“That’s a great idea!” he laughs.

“I think it is really funny that we communication people don’t do economics generally. Funny, as in sad.”

“I think in part, it comes from a phobia that you find kind of acculturated with us in academics. Also, I think, it has to do with the longstanding sort of disagreement in the humanities that probably goes all the way back to Plato, about thinking too much about money, thinking too much about the way things look, about appearances, and how they can be a distraction from the life of the mind.”

“After the 1,200 mile move, what major struggles did you face those first days on campus?”

“Nothing major. Actually, it was all those little mundane things that just about drove me to madness. I didn’t know how to sign on to the Internet and get the grades. I didn’t know when my check was going to come and how much it was going to be. I didn’t feel like I had been communicated with too well on the details of mundane things, squaring away your health insurance options, and your income options, and pay options, and how to work the copy machine. All that stuff is offered either institutionally at the department or in the college. I would say a lot less effort is put into that than is put in to making graduate students feel welcome at a new institution. I don’t know if that’s just an institutional difference or a systemic problem.”

“Just so you know Gabe, you aren’t the first new faculty member who has talked to me about that aspect of the orientation.”

“Makes sense. New faculty members feel like they get less preparation on the mundane details of a professional work life around making copies, and working a new

phone system, and the fax machine, or whatever else. I didn't. You don't know how well your queries will be received by different people you work with. You don't want to appear too stupid or foolishly ignorant about the things that you ought to know. It is not like you're with a group of people coming in so feeling dumb is something you can share. Instead, you just have to do it on your own. It doesn't come naturally to get to know the other faculty members.

“Then again, I suppose one of the traits of being an effective faculty member is just plain doggedness, just if you can endure. But there's also a sense where you want to be part of a community and part of a faculty. I mean, a part of a group of people that share common interests. I still haven't had as many opportunities as I'd like to get to know faculty members outside of work or even in terms of their professional work because I think, and I don't know if this is just true of academics everywhere, but here there seems to be a kind of guardedness about how much you want to share the work you're working on. You want to have it really polished so people don't think ill of you, which I suppose is a virtue but on the other hand, sometimes I think we err too much on the self-conscious side and don't get an opportunity to share as much information.”

“You've started to talk about publishing, but before we get to that, how has teaching changed since when you first started as compared to now?”

“When I first started teaching in graduate school I didn't know what I was doing!” Gabe admits, as he laughs out loud. “That's changed. I feel like I'm much more confident. I can go into a classroom now and talk for an hour and fifteen minutes without even noticing that I've done it, whereas when I first started, it was, ‘What am I going to say? What do I talk about? How do I do this? How do I grade? How do I do any of it?’ I

feel now, a lot of those questions aren't so pressing. It's a totally different feeling. When I first started teaching, I was just callow, inexperienced. I had no idea what I was doing. The anxiety that I felt was very different. It had to do with the content. Now, I don't even think about my teaching. Because of the constraints I'm under, I have to think about it less and less. It has to be less of a worry. If it becomes a major worry, then I don't think I can do what I'm doing. The push to publish is too big."

"Yeah."

"It occupies too much of my energy and it has to. I know it does. I know it has to."

"How much teaching did you do in grad school? Was it a lot or just a little bit?"

"I did a lot. I did more than just about anyone else I knew because I had kids."

"Ahh!"

"I took on an extra class at the community college. I taught at classes at the Department of Criminal Justice and Prisons. I would always teach. I'd take on an extra class here or there if the department would give it to me for the money because, I wanted that money. And quite frankly, it was good money. I wouldn't do it now."

"Right. When it comes to teaching, I've noticed that everybody says, 'Oh, you got to be a good teacher. You got to be a good teacher.' When it comes down to it, you might be able to get away with being an okay teacher."

"Oh yeah, worse than okay. Negligent probably."

"You think so?" I ask.

"I'm afraid so."

"Yeah? You feel like a negligent teacher?"

“No, no, no. Not personally,” he chuckles. “Of course not. All the negligent ones probably say the same thing, ‘Not me.’”

“Ok, you’re not negligent,” I agree, laughing as well. “Were there any surprises when you began teaching here?”

“I get here and I’m expected to start performing the duties of a professor. Well, there was one thing that was disappointing. For one class I had only seven people signed up the first day and two of them dropped. So one class I taught had five students in it. That’s a pretty awkward class to teach. I had never taught a class that small, before or since. I taught two classes. One of them was a class that all the majors had to take. The other was a course that was optional, but that only had five students in it. So, it was a fairly awkward semester in terms of teaching for me, my first semester here.”

“How did that happen?”

“There were comments made. ‘Well, you know, the students didn’t sign up for your section because they didn’t know who you were and there was no advertising for the section.’ I don’t know what I could have done at that point. That was a little frustrating, particularly considering there were a number of majors who needed the credits. Every class I’ve taught since has been full, and I often had to offer overload seats and increase the section sizes. The hard part at first was that class didn’t fill up. I didn’t teach as many people, didn’t get to know as many students as quickly as I might have if the class had been a little bit more full.”

“I’ve had semesters like that. How did the following semester flow?”

“The second semester picked up considerably. I had the opportunity during the first semester to develop a new course on rhetoric and globalization. At the time, I

considered this to be a privilege, so I went ahead with it and developed a course I had never taught. I was encouraged by the department head to do this and was happy at the time to oblige the request, but I may have put a little more effort in teaching than I should have. There's no recipe for how to strike this balance, and that's somewhat frustrating. You feel, coming from a Research I institution like I did, that you have to prepare, you have to focus on research and that's going to get you tenure – research. But then you get a request to develop a new course, and you know that it's not going to hurt you, and it's probably work that needs to be done. So, you do it.

“But back to your question. In the Spring, I had some students who had taken me in the Fall, so that was nice. I had a few repeat students. You get to know the place a little bit better. You have familiar faces in class. That class was really a delight. I don't know, it sort of felt like a blessing from the heavens, because it was a chance to interact with students on a level that I didn't get the first semester. It was a chance to teach a class that was a pure elective, but one that students showed a serious interest in. So, that was positive and I was grateful for that. They showed a willingness and a desire to learn, which was welcome. I felt like I was finally connecting with students on a level that made me feel as if I belonged here. So, that semester was leaps and bounds ahead of the Fall semester. Now I had familiar faces in class. I had students who obviously liked me enough to take another class. I was teaching material that was interesting to me, and that was fairly in line with my research interest, which was positive. So, I can definitely say the Spring semester of my first year was a great improvement over the first semester in terms of getting to know students, getting the feeling that I was a part of something, and that I belong to the place.”

“Throughout this conversation on teaching, the topic of research and publishing keeps leaking out. I know you are working on a book. Why a book and not a series of articles?” I ask.

“My advisor always used to joke that it’s easier to get a book published than an article because the latter takes so long. You go through the process of revising and resubmitting and everything. I think it’s an exaggeration, but it’s an instructive one because it probably is about the same process. It’s a year, year and a half before the thing is in print.”

“It’s funny that you say that. Jay Baglia just wrote a post on CRTNET about the turnaround time of eight, nine months to get an article review. How does that play into what you’re trying to do to get tenure?”

“I think for me, right now publishing is the largest stressor in my life, by far, hands down. I mean, to think about so much writing and spending so much time on it, and in many cases, it is out of your hands. I don’t want to despair because of it. It is a process that exists, right? But it’s very discouraging. Just the whole process of sending stuff in, getting it either rejected, or whatever other continuum exists there.”

“When I get a reject, I think, ‘This is mine. I made this.’ It feels personal.”

“That’s right. Exactly. And hopefully you develop a thick skin about it and hopefully that’s true. But I haven’t found that out yet.” He’s laughing again. “I still take it very much to heart.”

“Yeah. I do, too. I’ve got stacks of rejection letters,” I laughing.

“Right. Right. Right. I can definitely empathize with that. You know, it’s such a rollercoaster though. You feel so good about sending something in and then when it gets

rejected you feel either they didn't understand it, or I didn't write it in a way that was clear enough, or I missed the boat. You don't really know what to do with it. You get a revise and resubmit, you want to resubmit it but you don't know if the work's going to pay off. So, it is sort of a mystery. I'm learning continually. I am filling in pieces of it as I go along. I kind of figured out what the process is, and I think that's more valuable than anything else, I hope. I'm banking on it."

"Sometimes I know I send things to the wrong places. I mean, not at the time. It is impossible to read all journals. I think what sometimes is even harder is when you get a revise and resubmit where two of the reviewers are on exact opposite poles."

"Exactly. Yeah. How do you know that? How do you learn from that? You know, in one instance I had those problems. I sent a piece to a journal and they said, 'This piece isn't good for here. Try this other place.' I sent it there and they accepted it right away with minor revisions. So, I think sometimes it is figuring out who's going to take it, who is going to publish it, who wants it. I think one of the things is that people do want to publish it. There are places out there that exist for publishing. You have to learn that, but at the same time you learn that there's going to be a process here. Nothing I submit is going to be flawless, and I'm going to have to revise it at some point one way or the other. And indeed, I want to. I want it to be as good as it can be before it ends up in print. But I feel like I'm just learning little pieces of the puzzle, in figuring out the whole picture, you know?"

"Absolutely." I say. "So you are researching, writing, and publishing more than before?"

“Yes. I felt like I was still making progress in my research, but I felt inadequately prepared for writing and for publishing. You send your papers out and about 50 percent of the comments you get on reviews are constructive and about 50 percent are either comments about a paper that you weren’t writing, or that you never want to write, and so you kind of get thick-skinned pretty fast, especially when you get one big rip, and you’re rejected and your writing style is knocked from grammar to substance. That was something I had already encountered. I already published as a graduate student in more than one venue and so I had some experience.

“However, I guess taking rejection as a professor, it feels like there’s a different kind of association to it. In graduate school, you feel like you’re lucky to be writing stuff and publishing it. As a professor, a tenure track professor, you feel like you got to get it accepted. The knock against you seems to hurt even worse professionally, for me, anyways. In some ways, the reviews as a graduate student weren’t as harsh. Now you take it professionally in a way that’s more personal. You have to find a way to accommodate that kind of rejection. You honestly don’t know what you’re doing any more than you did as a graduate student, but now you don’t have a mentor. You don’t have an advisor. You don’t have a committee. You don’t have graduate student peers that you can send things to, and they can read it or write on it and comment on it without having to be concerned about the politics of the thing.

“Now, you send an article to a colleague and ask them to read it and you have to be worried, ‘Well, is this in a state that I want a colleague to read it if they’re going to be sitting on my tenure committee?’ You do start taking the rejection more personally. You think, ‘Hey, this has consequences for my professional advancement.’ I feel a lot more

anxious about my ability as a researcher and a writer to get published. I want to publish more important stuff and more regularly than I did as a graduate student. I suppose you feel it more acutely as a professor. You find out here it means something considerably important, significantly important. Again, as I say, there's no real way to know where I stand."

"You mentioned tenure. How have your evaluations gone?"

"I've been fortunate enough to have two fairly positive reviews from the dean and from the department in terms of my progress in the work I'm doing. But for me anyway, whether it's my own personality or whether it's a fact of the system, it never really seems to assuage the doubt in the back of your mind. I was going to say 'that you're a fraud.' It's not that exactly."

"One of the other participants for this project called it 'the imposter syndrome.'"

"Yes! It is the doubt about if you actually know what you're doing. You never quite get the sense that you know what you're doing or that you're on the right track or that you're doing enough. In fact, quite the contrary, I always feel that I'm not doing quite enough."

"I feel that way too, and I have six publications as a graduate student. Well, five published and one in press. How many things do you have in revise and resubmit right now?"

"I've got the one piece, and then I've got another piece that's been accepted but its publication is pending. Then I've got two other pieces that are about to go out by the end of the year. And then I have the book manuscript, which is always ever-present in the back of my mind. And that's another thing nobody tells you, but you quickly understand.

As a first year professor, you're burnt out on the dissertation. I defended my dissertation in March so I was done for a couple of months. I was so sick of the thing I could hardly touch it or think about it in the time that remained. That lasted an entire year. I was just sick of the damn thing! I didn't have much psychic energy to spend on it, so I turned my attention to a couple of other projects. In terms of the dissertation, I just needed a break from it."

"That's how I felt about my thesis. I finished it in 2004, but didn't look at it again until late 2005 to get submissions ready for journals."

"Right. It's odd that you finish a project like that and, in many ways, the completion of the project is fairly underwhelming. You defend your dissertation and you think, 'That was it? That's all there was?' That's not exactly the feeling you expect to have. You feel like you're going to climb a mountain, and you're going to get to the top of it, and it's going to be this exhilarating, liberating feeling, and instead it's kind of like you stepped in a mud puddle. It's not altogether unpleasant, not altogether unexpected I suppose. You think, 'That was all there was to that?' So, I was sort of burnt out on the intellectual life when I started as a first year faculty member. So that was, I wouldn't say disheartening, but maybe a little depressing."

"Obviously you are getting back into the research."

"Yeah. I'm being protected from committee work. That is a good thing because you're able to do your own research. The flipside is that you don't get to know very many people on campus. The dissertation thing is not about how brilliant you are or even how smart you are. In some ways, it's whether you stick around long enough to finish the damn thing. I think that's the model for the whole career. You just stick at it and you

keep working at problems and you have to find that intellectual joy in your research, which I do, don't get me wrong. On the flipside of being lonely is that you're not being, at least at this institution, you don't have the feeling like somebody is behind you, egging you on or making sure that you're showing up when you're supposed to show up and doing what you're supposed to be doing.

"Generally the administration reinforces that,' he continues. "Although again, I got two very positive reviews and I was told that I didn't have much to worry about. That doesn't stop you from worrying after your first year working. So, I guess I would say the first year was also characterized by some uncertainty in terms of your standing and uncertainty about the process in which you're engaged. The people who are evaluating you for tenure did it already, but you've never done it before. So, you don't really know what it takes to get tenure. From your point of view, it's a fairly uncertain feeling and perhaps even a fairly uncertain world."

"That's kind of how I feel, too. And it's even more awkward. I'm in this really awkward space, because I'm job hunting, dissertating, and revising a piece for *Communication Theory*. I'm just sort of out of my mind right now. Does it get easier?"

"In some ways, yes. In other ways, no. Some things for me in my life got a little easier because, well, for one thing, at least in my social networks, people at church, people in the community, people who meet me now, instead of being a student – suddenly I'm recognized as a professor. That's a huge status change. It changes everything about the way people think about you, the way they react when they find out what you do for a living. So that part is in some ways very positive, although it carries

with its own sort of nuances. They're not anything like being a student. I felt like a kid any time I had to tell people, 'I'm a student. I'm going to school.'"

"That's how I feel, and I'm forty-one, you know?"

"Exactly. I was thirty. You feel like you're eighteen because that's what most people think when they think of being a student. You're childish. So in terms of my social relationships, it's changed them in some ways. To prove, or at least to prove peoples' perception of my status whether it's for good or ill. I don't know. I mean, I think sometimes they think you're an egghead."

"My advisor has a second home in one of the Carolinas and when he goes up there people ask him what he does. He says, 'I'm a teacher.'"

"Right. I mean, that's wise. Saves you a lot of hassle probably. I mean how do I explain to people that I research the rhetoric of economics? People's eyes just go blank. They don't even know what I'm saying. I can't blame them, quite frankly. People will get a little bit intimidated or they get your number a little bit and they think they want to show that, you know, they want to bring you down a notch or they keep an eye on you to see if they can prove that you're not so smart. So, it's definitely a different interaction in terms of my personal life. Certainly not with my wife or my children, but people that I meet now, there's kind of this expectation, 'Well, this guy's an academic. He's professorial.' It's something odd, because I think there's a factor in our culture where an education intimidates people. So, that's been something that's been hard to get used to as a first year faculty member. Now, people say, 'Well, what do you do?' It used to be, 'Oh, I'm just a student,' or 'I'm working on a Ph.D.' Now it's, 'I'm a college professor,' and that carries a whole lot of different baggage in the real world. The check is better."

“Now that’s something to look forward to.”

“Yeah, but academics is damned weird. Other people don’t understand it. I got a revise and resubmit earlier this week. I was telling a friend of mine, ‘Well, you know it’s kind of a rollercoaster week.’ He says to me, ‘I don’t think I know what it’s like to have a real job, because the things you go through and the things you describe in terms of trying to get tenure and working on this stuff. I don’t have any of that in my professional life.’ And this is a guy who just accepted a job in Connecticut as the vice president of some men’s clothing store. So, he’s moving out there. This is a well-experienced guy, but his feeling about his career and about how he progressed, he describes in very different terms. But that’s what he said. He feels like he doesn’t have a real job compared to the stuff we go through.”

“Usually people tell us academics to get a ‘real job,’ I note, laughingly. “He said that, really?”

“That’s just a weird thing to say. I don’t know what to make of it yet, but it’s a curious way to express what I think is true, which is that this is an odd field. Academics is a weird field. You study this really, really narrow thing and then, at the end of six years, you look up from your desk and you say, ‘Oh yeah, I need to find a job now. Somewhere else is going to pay me to keep doing this.’ There are so many places and they’re all places you never heard of.”

“I look at the tenure track that’s ahead of me. I’m not supposed to be looking that far ahead. I’m supposed to just be looking at my dissertation. And the pressure to publish on people is absolutely amazing.”

“It is. Yeah. No doubt about it.”

“And I don’t understand. Before I got into academia, I didn’t realize how much movement there is. People moving to new schools. There are three people I heard of just in the last month who left academe outright. So I wonder, ‘What in the world is going on?’ Has academics changed enough to where it’s not the fulfilling calling anymore?”

“Those are good questions and I’m content to leave them open as questions, because I don’t think they’re settled. That was one of the big surprises for me. A friend of mine in graduate school went on the market maybe two or three years ahead of me and took a job, went there, was there one year and then quit. Left academia for good and got a job doing something else. It was a bit of a surprise because he wanted to be a teacher. He wanted to be a scholar. That’s why you get a Ph.D. Maybe that’s not a hard and fast rule anymore and maybe it never was. I think we do romanticize it. We think it might be better than it is. I don’t know.”

“I don’t know about you, but I can’t imagine myself doing anything else.”

“Yeah. I know. You get on the tenure track and you have to imagine it a little bit. In some ways you want to peg all your hopes on getting tenure. In some ways, you want to give it the middle finger and walk away and find something else,” he laughs. “Decide to dig ditches or whatever.”

“Right.”

“But no, I don’t want to do anything else. You got to keep in mind that one of the benefits, if people don’t decide to take this benefit away, and which I think is absolutely necessary to the life of the mind, is time off in the year, to have two or three months off. Not that you work a quarter less, because everybody in academia knows you work 50 or 60 hours a week. It doesn’t matter if you’re doing it in your office or in the library or in

an archive or at home. You're still doing the reading. You still have to keep up. But you can do it on your own terms at least. That whole distinction between your time and work time is obliterated in academia, but that's what's great about it. I don't have to clock in. It's not like somebody says, 'Where were you yesterday at 8:15?' unless you have an appointment you missed. I don't have to account to anyone for my time. In a way, I have to account for it in the end if I get tenure or not, I guess. But at least I don't have to clock in and out, or fill out a timecard. One of the great things about being a scholar is it can pervade your entire existence. When you're sitting there watching a movie, you're saying to yourself, 'What is the device that's being used here on me?' or, 'What's happening in this speech that I'm watching on C-SPAN?' So in a way that's what makes it so exciting and so engaging. It makes people want to do it for little money, because it does have that kind of payoff in another way."

"I understand. I'm a night-writer. I do my best writing once the sun goes down, later in the evening. I worked in business for a long time. I don't miss the morning grind, or my micromanager breathing down my neck."

"You don't have that, so that's refreshing. You can decide which 50 hours in a week you work. But its relative autonomy. Despite the fact that you have to work those 50 hours a week just about all year, even though you're on a nine month contract, you got work to do and to finish, and projects to complete that occupy your time and your attention 12 months of the year. So, and this is going to sound contradictory, you think that you're going to have all this time as a faculty member, but how much of it is time that you can put towards research and writing projects that are exciting and that engage

you fully, your full faculty, and your full effort? I think that's a more complicated question. There is boredom, but then there's not. They're flipsides to the same coin."

"I read somewhere, though I can't recall exactly where at the moment, that the definition of academic freedom is the freedom to work all the time."

"That's good. You feel like you're working as hard as you can and you're not sure you're making a lot of progress. It's one of the things about academic work. It's nice to do something nonacademic: to mow the lawn or to paint something, because you can say, 'Look, I actually did something today.' Instead, I can come in the office and work for four hours in the morning and it feels like, 'All I've done is shuffle papers around, and I haven't really made any progress that's really important to me.' You write for half an hour, 45 minutes, an hour, and what do you have? You cleaned up a couple of paragraphs. You've added a couple of paragraphs. It doesn't look like much. It doesn't feel like much. So, that's another hard aspect here. This career is being able to judge whether you're making progress. Am I treading water? Am I drowning? Am I getting ahead? Well, what does it mean to get ahead? Those are, I think, complicated questions."

"Speaking of making progress, how clear was this school on what you need to do to get tenure? Did they lay it out for you?"

"Yeah. They were as clear as mud. I mean, not at all. Not at all clear. And no, they did not lay it out for me, and no, they still haven't. They've laid it out for me verbally but not explicitly in writing."

"Well, there are reasons for that I'm assuming."

"Yeah. Do I know what they are? I could hazard a guess. The institution I am at is experiencing a moment of growing pains. Not growth in terms of size, but growth in

terms of 'where do we fit in relative to everyone else.' We are changing focus, it seems to me, becoming more research oriented. So, the open question at this institution is whether or not a culture that was primarily a teaching culture can become a research culture. Ten years ago people here were teaching a 4-4 load on quarters. I don't even know how that translates into what we have now, a 2-3 semester. Suffice it to say this was a teaching school."

"I have no idea how that translates either," I admit.

"Everybody who has tenure in our department got tenure under the auspices of a teaching school. Now it's a 2-3 load. Funding for a couple of summers has started. There's the possibility after your third year for a semester of leave to do research. So, there's a change in the culture. There's a change in expectations, but they had to revise the written expectations for tenure so everybody knows you can't just teach and serve on a committee and get tenure. You're going to have to publish. The guy that just got tenure in our department published four or five top articles and a book. That, to me, sounds like a Research-I publication record. Well, that's a sign that the bar has been raised significantly. He's the most recent, but he's the only one who achieved tenure in our department since something like 1991 or 1992."

"Wow!"

"Maybe '94 at the latest. I don't know the precise date, but it was over a decade and a half ago. And so, you're talking about real transformations in a culture here and how much of that takes hold."

"That's a lot of change."

“Yeah, it is. It also means that what isn’t explicit is implicit. So, implicitly I think I know what I need to accomplish to get tenure. There’s no such thing as an objective measure – what you have to do to earn tenure – until you actually have tenure. You know what I mean? We kind of know what it means when you have tenure, but before you actually have it, it doesn’t matter.”

“It sounds like you’re describing the way I think about this. I can see the full-time position and what it’s going to entail but it’s blurry, right? I wouldn’t even know what it would be like to get to sit on a curriculum committee or something like that.”

“Fortunately for me, I’ve been largely protected from that. I’ve served on a couple of small committees which have been mostly a benefit to me. I think that varies from department to department at this school and again from school to school. So, there’s no formula. There’s only you, and whether you fit the place, and whether you want to have it, or whether they want you to have it. I think that’s really what tenure depends on.”

“I’m looking at your desk. I see you’ve got this ‘going-to-get-published book’ that our recorder is sitting on.”

“That’s right.”

“You’ve got a manuscript I bet that’s sitting over there. And I’m assuming that that, too, is a manuscript.”

“And this is a manuscript, and this is a manuscript,” he says, pointing to stacks of papers on his desk. “And that’s an abstract that I just submitted to the Rhetoric Society of America for their conference, which this year is at NCA.”

“The only reason I’m going to Chicago for NCA is because I’m on a job hunt. I got nothing in this year, which was a surprise to me. For the first time ever, I’m on the market and I got nothing in. Talk about disappointing.”

“Well, it goes to show you that this career is a crap shoot. Being on the market is just as much a crap shoot. You can apply to some Podunk school that you think is your safety net and they never call you back. The school you thought would never ever give you the time of day calls you for an interview three days before. So, there’s no way to know. It feels so totally random. So, there’s no way to know.”

* * *

The interview is interrupted by two male faculty members. One is a young scholar, and the older one is introduced to me as the chair of the department. They have a good camaraderie from what I can tell, hanging in the doorway laughing, making jokes about writing songs in lieu of writing articles for tenure. Then it comes up.

“Andrew is here from USF interviewing me for his dissertation on the socialization of new faculty members. He is also on the job market this year.”

“Oh,” starts the chair. “You aren’t interested in Gabe here are you? You are really just scoping out our fair city for a job.”

I start laughing. “There are a lot cheaper ways of checking out your department and this city than flying out here on my own dime. I could have waited for you to fly me up here for an on-campus interview.”

“That’s ballsy!” says the other young faculty member. Now everyone is laughing.

“I know that didn’t come from Art Bochner,” the chair laughs.

“You know Art?” I ask.

“We used to teach together. Make sure you say hello to him and to Eric as well for me.”

Dammit, we are a small community. Between Bochner, Eisenberg, Ellis & Krizek, I’m playing Six Degrees of Separation: The Academic Version. The three men tell funny stories about a recent ‘disastrous’ canoe trip they took in a local wilderness area. We are all laughing as each shakes my hand and drifts out of the room.

* * *

“How can we regain our composure?” Gabe says, still giggling.

“I don’t know. What a hilarious group of people.”

“Oh! I remember what I wanted to say. There’s a little bit of politics behind everything. There’s a little bit of this and a little bit of that. Some people might know something you don’t know. So you open your mouth in a faculty meeting for example, and you might say something, but you’re totally unaware of what the dimensions of the issue are. On the one hand, you want to participate and you want to be able to at least show that you’re paying attention. You want to speak up in those early meetings in that first year. However, your comfort level is not very high, and your confidence is not very high. You’ll say something, and later you realize, ‘Now I understand why everybody reacted funny. Heck, I didn’t know. So, of course my comments sounded asinine. I wouldn’t have said it if I had known.’”

“Ah, politics!”

“These kinds of games are going to be everywhere and they’re a part of it, but you don’t get prepared for that in graduate school. There’s no way around that. There’s no way to catch up to speed. The ignorance remains, and its trial and error and you learn.

You pick up a thing here and you pick up a thing there and you make a little progress in terms of the way the politics of a university department work and the expectations that are required of you either for tenure from the faculty and from the Dean. I've never written a book before. They want me to write a book. Well, I don't know how to do that. I've never done it before. I'm going to try. Sure, I'll give it a shot. So, you play along with the game, but you really don't know the outcome so it's a complicated thing."

"I don't know how to write a dissertation, but I'm writing it."

"It's not that much different than the politics of working on your dissertation while looking for a job. One of the junior faculty that's here with us, it took her an extra year to finish and she had it a lot harder. I think everybody's advice should be "Don't get a job. Don't take a job until you're done." And if you're not going to be done, either try and negotiate that if you're not going to be able to finish by Fall, will they take you in Spring? Or tell them, 'Sorry.' I mean, as crazy as that sounds, I have not met anyone who didn't finish and it turned out well for them. There's just too much involved in it."

* * *

Deborah and Frank's faces flash in my mind's eye.

* * *

"Yeah," I say quietly.

"In terms of the status hit that you take, the perception that, 'Oh, this is not a person who finishes.' You can't overcome some of that stuff. You just can't overcome it. People say it doesn't matter. Yeah right. It really matters. So, you know, that's one thing just flat out. Just get it done in time."

“Every time I see my former thesis advisor, he says, ‘Listen Andrew, the only good dissertation is a done dissertation.’ What he meant by that is when the time comes for me to look for an academic job I’ll have an easier time with a Ph.D. in my hand. Anyway, he started spreading this thing. And so I’m wandering around this conference and people are saying, ‘Andrew, the only good dissertation is a done dissertation.’ That’s all I’ve been hearing for months now. I’ll get an email out of the blue. ‘The only good dissertation is a done dissertation.’”

“Exactly. That’s good advice. I’m trying to revise my dissertation to turn it into a book manuscript. I can definitely confirm that. I look back on it three years later and say, ‘Wow, that really was, in a way, my last piece of student work.’ Don’t leave without having it done. And whatever it takes to have it done, do it.”

* * *

There’s a knock on the door, which then opens a crack. A student sticks his head in and says, “Excuse me Dr. Summers, but I’d really like to take some time to go over this paper with you.”

“This is going to take some time,” Gabe says, sitting up and looking at me.

“I think we’ve covered everything,” I say. “We covered all the questions I had, and to be honest, your priority is your students, not my dissertation.”

“Are you sure? You could come back in about an hour or so.”

“I can’t. I’ll need to be back at the airport by then. We have been chatting for almost three hours. If I think we missed anything once I go through all these notes and transcripts I will call you and ask them then.”

“Deal.”

I get lost walking through the maze headed to the car. By the time I found it, the meter was expired. This time there is no ticket. I stop along the way back to the airport and take more pictures of the changing leaves. After dropping off the car, I realize I left my house keys, and my recorder in the center console. I run back to get them, and head back into the airport. Once on the plane, I put my computer bag and my jacket into the overhead bin.

Another university repositioning itself, and becoming more research oriented. I'm reminded of what Harrison told me last week about his university moving from teaching to research. Gabe didn't talk about the old guard versus new guard as Harrison did, but the implications appear the same – more research and more ambiguity for the new hires, Another faculty member without a clear idea of what it takes to get tenure, as the bar keeps changing. Aaron and Jo are dealing with the changing bar too. What is going on in academics where institutions feel the constant need to move up the ladder, to expand their programs, and be a research institution? None seems to want to go from research to teaching.

I sleep in the airplane, 1,300 miles passing below me. It is almost midnight when I arrive back at my apartment. My legs feel like atrophied marble. No more traveling, I think when my head hits the pillow. No more traveling. Now I need to write. The only good dissertation is a done dissertation.

Chapter 11

The First Year (of Living Dangerously) in the Changing University

In this dissertation research, I focused on the lives of six new tenure-track assistant professors in communication as they transitioned from graduate school to their new universities. Rather than focusing on the managerial emphasis of socialization, I examined socialization through the lens of each individual's stories of their experiences, told to me in life history autobiographies and interviews. I focused my research on how these new faculty members made sense of their experiences during the transition from doctoral student to assistant professor. Their stories showed the ways organizational socialization processes were successful or unsuccessful, how they utilized various tactics to reduce ambiguity, and provided details of the life of the new communication faculty member during a time when higher education is changing rapidly.

I recruited a small number of assistant professors as participants, my goal to produce a detailed and concrete portrayal of academic transition that would provide depth and detail currently missing in most research on organizational socialization of new faculty. This is important as it provides depth and understanding to the research on the organizational socialization of new faculty members. My participants (Deborah, Frank, Harrison, Jo, Aaron, Gabe) and I delved in detail into issues related to "becoming a professor," talking at length about such issues as collegiality, mentoring, moving, supervision, time management, and the ambiguity of evaluation criteria for publishing, research, service and teaching. I begin this chapter by revisiting each participant's story,

then looking at the common themes between faculty experiences. I discuss and question what these stories reveal about issues raised in Chapter One regarding the corporatization of academia, faculty identity, and socialization of newcomers, attempt to find points of connection and conclusions that can be helpful to other new faculty, doctoral students faced with taking a new position, and university administrators hiring for a new position.

The stories my participants told show there is no single path to successful socialization of new faculty members. Each participant experienced the transition from doctoral candidate to assistant professor as a constant, continuous, and challenging learning process full of surprises (good and bad), anxieties, equivocality, triumphs, disappointments and failure. The transition to the new status as a faculty member throws each newcomer's identity into doubt, and each of them undergoes an intense period of reorientation in which he or she adjusts to significant and unanticipated changes and challenges. These activities highlight the sensemaking process as retrospective, in which the new faculty recognize differences, take action, and then interpret what they have done.

Golde (1998) noted graduate students face four general socialization tasks. First, they must grapple with intellectual mastery and the question of "Can I do this?" Second, they must wrestle with the question of "Do I want to be a graduate student?" Third, they must learn about the academic profession and ask, "Do I want to do this work?" Fourth, they face the task of becoming part of a department where they ask, "Do I belong here?" Having mastered their subject matter, learned about the functioning of the discipline, and decided they wanted to be professors, each must now tackle this fourth question, "Do I belong here?" during the first year as an assistant professor.

Being a new assistant professor reframes earlier experiences, including the graduate school experience. It changes the way these individuals look at themselves. For those who navigate this transition successfully, life as a professor becomes less equivocal, their prospective narratives take on a well-defined meaning and shape, making the future full of new promises and possibilities about their work and their academic lives. For those who experienced this period of transition as unfulfilling or as an unending struggle, the future becomes indefinite, ambiguous, and uncertain, though this is not to say that successful transitioners sail smoothly through the transition without anxiety or stress.

As I listened to each participant and reread the transcripts, I found it impossible to discuss the between-case phenomena without first revisiting each individual's story. When I began my research, I anticipated that all of the new assistant professors would have completed their dissertations. However, I discovered that two of my participants had not, and their failure to complete the Ph.D. prior to starting a new life posed unique challenges during this transitional phase in their academic lives. I begin my analysis of academic socialization and meaning-making with their stories.

Deborah: Struggling in the Disempowered Present

Deborah began our interview saying she knew that her current university is the place that she wanted to start her academic career. "It just seemed to be such a good fit on a lot of levels." Yet despite this assuredness, she found herself in the midst of a troubling identity struggle based on two important and interrelated predicaments: a clash with her dissertation advisor, and the manifestation of power in her department.

Deborah, as an ABD, needs to complete her dissertation and therefore must work with her dissertation advisor Harriett. While Harriett now lives over a thousand miles away, she ‘lives’ in Deborah’s head. As Deborah noted, “She’s Harriett. She knows what she’s doing. She hasn’t gotten to where she is by accident. I may not like what she has to say, but she has my best interest at heart.” Battling depression and anxiety related to not finishing her dissertation, Deborah hears Harriett’s voice in her mind. When she doubts herself and worries about her lack of progress, it is Harriett who comes into her mind. “‘Harriett wouldn’t buy it.’ She would tell me it’s a cop-out. She would tell me I’ve been slacking and I need to get with it.” According to Deborah, Harriett went as far as to admonish her for taking her new parental duties seriously.

In Deborah’s story of her relationship with Harriett, she used terms such as “abusive,” “painful,” and “hurtful.” These are many of the same terms that victimized women use when describing their relationships with abusive partners (Lempert, 1996; Mackie, 2007). Similar terms are used to describe workplace bullying. Workplace bullying is the persistent abuse of an organizational member by a coworker, whereby the victim feels powerless, imprisoned, tortured, and confused (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik & Alberts, 2006). Bullying focuses on attacking the person rather than critiquing the person’s work (Tracy, Alberts & Rivera, 2007). Although Deborah never referred to herself as a victim, the story she told about this relationship places her in a disempowered position. Unfortunately, although Deborah took a number of steps to mitigate Harriett’s abuse, by going to her doctoral program’s chair and changing her working style, her position of relative powerlessness went unchanged.

In her new place of work, Deborah also finds herself in a position of relative powerlessness. Although she has a friend in the dean, she cannot go to her in confidence. “I feel like she is the person who could help me if I needed it. Even though she’d be very open, be happy to work with me, I feel like my boss would get angry if he knew I went around him and went to her for help.” She tells how the chair of her department uses his power undemocratically, although he believes he is egalitarian. “I think he really thinks he’s being democratic, but he also very much controls the way decision-making happens and there’s no question about it. I mean, when he wants something, it’s in your interest to agree. And I learned that in that process. That was very eye opening for me.”

This position of powerlessness is reinforced in the department through the use of titles. “I do feel a difference because one of the norms of the department is that they make a big deal out of ‘the doctor.’ Passing each other in the hall, ‘Hey Dr. Smith. Hey Dr. Jones.’ Even on our nameplates on our doors, ‘Dr. This, Dr. That, Deborah.’ And even in our promotional literature, they list the professors, ‘whatever Ph.D., whatever Ph.D., Deborah.’” Deborah, as an untenured new faculty member, believes she cannot challenge the decisions or decision-making processes of her autocratic department chair. She finds herself in a permanent one-down position unable to get the organizational support she needs without placing her position in jeopardy.

The combined powerlessness she described in her relationships with both her dissertation advisor and within her new organization has left Deborah struggling with her identity. Deborah is in a liminal position. Since she has not yet finished her dissertation, she cannot – metaphorically speaking – ‘end the chapter’ of her life as a graduate student and be considered legitimately as a professor. As such she has been unable to author a

coherent narrative to live by as a new tenure-track assistant professor. She remains in flux: not a graduate student, but not yet a professor. This is something she has in common with Frank.

Frank: Self-Doubt and Loathing

Like Deborah, Frank found himself stuck in a liminal situation. As an ABD, he too was unable to author a prospective narrative to live by as a new professor. But whereas Deborah's feelings of disempowerment are developed and reinforced through the relationships she has with Harriett, the dean, and the chair, Frank's struggles, originate in the story he has constructed as an academic 'loser' – an unproductive scholar and an inadequate teacher – which feeds his self-doubt and removes him from relationships with members of his new department. While Harriett lives in Deborah's head, Frank is imprisoned in his own.

Frank's idea of academic success was the one defined in his graduate school and in academic culture generally: locate a position at a Research I university, publish frequently, and achieve recognition through one's program of research (Enders, 2002). The success narrative in academia, observes Rhode (2006), "is a setup for frustration. There are, after all, so many ways of falling short. Academics can be at lesser institutions, hold lesser positions, publish in lesser journals, and so forth ad infinitum" (p. 12).

In Frank's case, this canonical narrative carries with it horrifying consequences. Frank becomes a bona-fide failure in his own eyes. He is disenchanted, disillusioned, self-loathing, ashamed, and angry. Frank noted, "I don't like my position at the university. It feels insulting to me." He feels he is a "waterwheel," and a "student processor," who works in "the business end of the university." He is disappointed in and

hates his students, calling them “pieces of shit,” “little fucks,” “prissy,” “stuck-up,” and other less derogatory names, transferring his own self-hatred onto others.

Frank displays many of the characteristics that are tied to struggling new faculty (Austin, 2002; Boyle & Boice, 1996). Neither he nor his students can meet each other’s expectations. Moreover, Frank seems incapable of readjusting expectations, such as the one his mentor recommends: teaching to those who want to learn and ignoring the uninitiated. Instead, he equates good teaching with good lecture content and blames the students for being unprepared and poorly educated. He is passive, lacking the motivation to improve his teaching. Acknowledging that he went into his first semester unprepared to teach, he nevertheless wonders why his students do not care and cannot connect with how he performs in the classroom.

During our interview, Frank appeared to be authoring an exit strategy, a prospective narrative outside the academy, saying “I have no future in academics.” He also noted, “I have this really unwarranted elitist sense.” His self-justifying elitism inhibits him further from close collegial relationships with other full-time faculty. “‘What’s this university known for? It’s not known for its Department of Communication.’ I’ve only heard one of the faculty members’ names. I didn’t know any other names... I probably don’t have that much respect for what they’re doing, which is probably unfortunate and it’s probably leading me to some other problems I’m having.” The attitude that his position “feels insulting” feeds Frank’s resistance to change, and thus he engages in a self-reinforcing cycle that sustains his misery.

Frank projects his feelings onto others, believing they see him as a failure. Frank believes neither his students nor his fellow faculty members care, so he sees no point in

making an effort to develop friendships. By the time we talked, Frank had already lost a future vision of himself as a faculty member; he had no prospective academic narrative and there is no impetus to change. Frank may have made the right decision when he informed me several weeks later that he had resigned his position to finish his dissertation. That might give him the opportunity to restory his life, but I still wonder if he is cut out for academic life in the climate of the modern university.

Although Deborah and Frank's positions as ABDs make their stories particularly unique, they do share commonalities with other assistant professors who participated in this research. Each of these newcomers were involved in organizational socialization processes at their universities, as well as attempting to make sense of their identities while transitioning to assistant professorships.

Harrison: Compromise and Competition

Unlike Deborah and Frank, Harrison is not struggling with the need to finish an incomplete dissertation. In fact, Harrison described his position in very positive terms. A number of factors helped Harrison adjust quickly to his new organizational situation and helped with the transition from doctoral student to assistant professor. His classes went well during his first year. He noted he made friends with the other new hires in his department rapidly, which was a "forced thing" at first, because they had to work together in the same office while the communication building was being refurbished. They rapidly became friends as well as colleagues.

Harrison noted that his department was very supportive, right down to the senior faculty member who was skeptical of his type of ethnographic and critical research. Interestingly, rather than having a formal mentoring program, the department formed a

reading club. “This has been profitable, because it keeps us faculty connected to each other. It gives us some common ground and experiences, and the opportunity to talk openly about what we are supposed to be doing here.” These factors helped Harrison adjust quickly to his new organizational situation and helped with the transition from doctoral student to assistant professor.

Before I met Harrison for the follow-up interview, he emailed me, “They are trying to kill me,” a metaphor for the pressure and stress of his first year as an assistant professor. He taught his first year without taking the summer off from teaching. He is teaching an intense communication major class during the winter intersession, which involves grant writing, travel, and takes his full effort to coordinate. He is on numerous committees and serves as a mentor to GLBT organizations on campus. Plus, he continues to write, while doing his ethnographic research on weight loss. As he noted, “I think I’m out of time to make,” an admission that he is stretched too thin.

But it isn’t merely the department that is trying to kill him. It is Harrison himself. As he noted, his university does not “have a written policy” outlining what he needs to do in order to get tenure, although he can gauge his progress through the “active scholar policy,” that rewards research and publication over teaching and service labor. It is no surprise then that his energies are focused on publishing, so much so that he redefined what activism means to him. As he noted, “I said to myself, ‘Okay, you can have all your fun with activism you want in grad school. And then when you go to work as a professor you’ll take the activism down and you’ll funnel your activism into your research.’ So, the way I look at it now is my research line is activism.” He has reconfigured his academic career as a GLBT activist into scholarly production to assure he remains on the tenure

track. That is how he reconciles the need to publish with his desire to do activism actively.

Harrison judges his progress toward tenure by actively comparing himself to other new faculty in the department. Although he notes that the members of his department are collegial, he also expresses a tendency to make constant comparison to others, particularly other new faculty members. Paradoxically he stresses that there is little competition in the department, while telling how he and Lisa set up “Pub Club” to keep track of each other’s progress. Similarly, the department itself facilitates this competition through the mid-year evaluations it sends out inexplicably on-campus to each faculty member. The competition in the department is highlighted – at the same time it is rendered invisible – through the silence surrounding success, as when Harrison noted he and his colleagues don’t share their successes openly with each other.

Harrison is the only participant in my study who did not discuss his life outside of the university context. Gabe, Aaron, and Deborah each discussed their family lives and lives outside of the university. Frank and Jo mentioned some of the dilemmas with the geographical move and the new area in which they live. Harrison seems to have completely consented to a vision of academic life on the tenure-track as all-inclusive, allowing no time for anything else.

Jo: Learning the Ropes and Changing Research

When I first approached Jo to participate in this project, she agreed, but acknowledged that she was hesitant to commit due to constraints on her time. When I contacted her for the follow-up interview, she related the same dilemma. If anything, her commitments had grown, necessitating our interview be broken up into two sections.

How did she go from the pandemonium of her first days on campus to being thoroughly engaged in university life?

When Jo begins telling her story, she sounds as if she embodies what Frank (1995) called a chaos narrative, wherein “consciousness has given up the struggle for sovereignty over its own experience” (p. 104). She was “overwhelmed,” and felt “stupid and unprepared.” It was more than working at a new university that caused Jo constant worry. “Everything – the move, buying the house, starting a new position – was just so stressful.” Her university orientation and the mentoring process did not help Jo much during her transition.

Although Jo mentions little about her university orientation, she goes into great detail about the failure of the university mentoring system to fulfill her needs as a new tenure-track assistant professor. Interestingly, Jo made important and fruitful connections on campus through informal processes. She presented a paper during her department’s first colloquia of the year, which occurred during the second week of the semester. After this research presentation Jo met people from other departments who had attended and they initiated joint research projects. Jo also actively sought out opportunities to join various research boards, which led to interdisciplinary research projects. Jo created opportunities for connection. Jo’s initiatives to connect stand in stark contrast to Frank who did not actively pursue connections, and to Harrison and Deborah, who were hired with other new professors with whom they immediately linked.

One of the aspects of the university that Jo mentions, and which makes her story unique, is her recognition of the stories and narratives in the department and the university as a whole. As she noted, “The year I came, two people did not get

reappointed. So, all of a sudden we have these departmental narratives on how it is possible to not get reappointment. That'll freak a group of people out." This narrative of failed appointments combined with the continued stories of the university "raising the bar" for tenure has serious consequences. Jo herself noted that she was not terribly worried about the changes or not getting tenure. However, her storytelling shows that she is indeed one of those anxious people on the tenure track. She notes, "I'm not going to count my chickens until they're hatched, but we're all kind of stressing about that."

Despite saying she isn't worried, Jo seems incredulous that the requirements are becoming more rigorous as she attempts to make progress towards tenure. Some of the book chapter and journal publications she thought would count toward tenure probably will not. What is particularly unsettling is how these university and departmental stories are impacting the day-to-day decisions Jo is making. While her research agenda and background is narrative ethnography in health communication, she is shifting toward doing more quantitative research, which allows her to do studies faster, is easier to publish, and garners more outside funding (Ellis, Bochner, Denzin, Lincoln, Morse, Pelias & Richardson, 2008; Koza & Thoenig; 1995; Morse, 2006).

Finally, Jo tells how she confronted gender bias in her new university, not by the faculty, but by students, although she does not regard them as malicious. She needed to consistently remind students that she is a Doctor. As Jo noted, these are generally first generation university students who have not been exposed to a university culture, where gender plays no part in whether one is Mrs. or Dr. Despite the fact that women and minorities have made significant inroads as professors in higher education, academia remains predominately white and masculine (Clawson & Lieblum, 2008).

For Jo, neither the university orientation, nor the mentoring processes helped her through her transitional period. She took the initiative herself to make connections with various colleagues in other disciplines. Now she is redefining and branching out her research identity to reach the goals necessary for tenure in her changing university culture. Ironically, her research agenda is not so much her own as it is what she perceives others want it to be, and what she feels she must do to achieve tenure. Although Aaron hasn't shifted toward publishing quantitative research, he does feel the pressure to publish as well.

Aaron: Shocked and Awed

Of all the individuals interviewed for this project, Aaron is the one who described in the most personal detail the differences between being a graduate student and a new assistant professor. His story reveals how suddenly his worldview changed, after he accepted his full time position, though he was still in his graduate program finishing his dissertation. As he noted, "there's a real and palpable and material difference in how you're treated as a graduate student to how you're treated as a faculty member."

Part of the difference between Aaron's story and the other participants' stories is the point at which Aaron begins his story of his transition. Rather than the first days on campus, Aaron chose as the starting point the moment the university contacted him about the position. As he noted, "really the relationship started when it was reciprocated by the university," when he received a phone call from Leland, the Search Committee Chair.

Using his job interview as the beginning allowed Aaron to narrate the entire hiring process, including his concerns and his hopes. He shows how an individual can use

both indirect and direct questioning to reduce ambiguity, after an on-campus interview and before accepting a position.

By using that starting point Aaron alludes to the importance of how the department and university dealt with him both before and after he accepted the position. His new chair asked what classes he wanted to teach and when, something not taken into account when he was a graduate student. “That was kind of a symbolic slap in the face. ‘Wake up, you’re not a graduate student anymore!’ I couldn’t get over the fact that somebody was *asking me* what I wanted to teach.” Similarly, he was shocked when the department librarian asked him what books and other resources he would need to get started researching as soon as he arrived. What is striking about Aaron’s particular telling of these events – and something that makes it significantly different from all the other new faculty stories – *is that he shared these stories with other graduate students*. “I must’ve told ten different people that story, graduate students mostly. ‘You’re not going to believe what happened to me today.’” Making sense of the transition from graduate student to faculty member was nurtured through the sharing of these events with others.

Aaron also noted that it was strange to be called “Dr. Nologo” by his students. “That still kind of cracks me up a little bit. I find it humorous. I’m not a big one for titles.” This is an example of the taken-for-grantedness of hegemonic masculinity in higher education. For Aaron’s students, and for Aaron, white and masculine is normative for professors – it is not questioned. Unlike Jo, who works hard in acculturating her students with the understanding that women faculty with their Ph.D.s are “Doctor,” Aaron downplays the title. It is important to remember that this is not a regional difference. Both Jo and Aaron teach at universities in relatively small cities in the South.

Like most of the other participants, Aaron noted how much his university and his department are changing. He stated that he has to be a good teacher, but also that he has to publish approximately seven articles by the time he is up for his tenure review. Aaron claims that his transition was made easier by his fellow faculty members. Unlike many of the participants who had to learn the ropes on their own, his department was supportive. As he said, “They will provide whatever resources they can to help me get tenure. And that trickles down to that interpersonal level where the senior faculty in our department ask, ‘Oh Aaron, how are your publications going? Let us know if there’s anything we can do.’ They come observe your teaching and give you really good feedback. Things like that. So, it even trickles down to the interpersonal level. I’m really happy with the senior faculty here.”

Aaron’s story can stand as an exemplar for new faculty members as they transition from being doctoral students. He was shocked at the change, particularly the way other people treated him. He was able to share his experiences with his friends. Finally, he was able to make sense of his new surroundings with the aid of his new colleagues. All these attributes make Aaron’s story different than Gabe’s. One is a story of collegiality and connection; the other a story of loneliness and boredom.

Gabe: Boredom, Loneliness and Uncertainty

While Aaron’s story shows us the shock of the transition to faculty status, and the awe he felt regarding working with excellent students and his helpful colleagues, Gabe’s story immediately presents one idea none of the other participants in this study mentioned: boredom. However, like Frank, Gabe also mentions the loneliness he feels as

a new faculty member. These two aspects permeate his telling, along with insecurity and doubt about his position.

Gabe has numerous manuscripts in preparation to submit for publication and is in the process of writing a book. Yet, he begins immediately by saying, “I suppose the first thing is that nothing prepared me for the *sheer boredom* of being a professor. I don’t think I can overstate that point. It was probably the most acute feeling of my first year as a professor. I spent a lot of time bored.” With no graduate student cohort to fill in the time “there was more boredom and more downtime.” Feelings of boredom and loneliness were the “biggest most unexpected thing about being a professor.”

However, Gabe understands these aspects in the life of the academic. Historically the researcher is socially constructed to be the person who reads alone, works alone, and writes alone. Picture the mad scientist working by himself in his lab. At the same time he bemoans this boredom and loneliness, Gabe also praises it. “I think that being an academic *is boring* and it *is lonely*. I suppose that’s part of what attracts me to it. Not that I like being bored, but I like to work on my own.” He praises the academic life that has little oversight and is non-managerial driven on a day-to-day basis. Ironically, when his colleagues interrupted our interview, there was a good-humored camaraderie. Gabe’s felt loneliness may be attributable to the fact that most of the faculty in his department have tenure or are well on their way to getting it.

This idea of loneliness opens up an interesting quality identified in Gabe’s story – that much about being a new assistant professor is a mystery, and that he is attempting to put the clues together to learn how to be an assistant professor. He starts with trying to figure out the tenure process. “I would say the first year was also characterized by some

uncertainty in terms of your standing and uncertainty about the process in which you're engaged. The people who are evaluating you for tenure did it already, but you've never done it before. So, you don't really know what it takes to get tenure."

He noted that submitting to journals for publication "is sort of a mystery. I'm learning continually. I am filling in pieces of it as I go along.... But I feel like I'm just learning little pieces of the puzzle, in figuring out the whole picture." Regarding his book manuscript he said, "I've never written a book before. They want me to write a book. Well, I don't know how to do that. I've never done it before. I'm going to try." Gabe is in the midst of figuring out not only what to do as an assistant professor, but how to be an assistant professor, both integral parts of the sensemaking process.

Gabe's story is not only about his uncertainty about the tenure and the publishing processes; it also includes his doubts about his desire to get tenure in general, which makes it unique from the other participants' stories. He noted that professors do not identify with their place of work as students do with their colleges or *alma maters*. He even wonders if he wants to get tenure. "What's the objective? I get tenure here? Okay, well, yes, I get tenure. So, I guess I get tenure here. But do I want to have tenure here? I don't know. I don't know that yet. How do you know?" He went on to add, "It's good for you, for your career, for your future.' But there's another part of you that says, 'My gosh, this could turn out to be a really long and boring life.'" None of the other participants questioned the desire for tenure and the possibility of moving to another position, except for Frank who was in the process of authoring his life outside of academia.

Gabe says he is lonely and bored. Yet at the same time he understands both sides of the boredom and loneliness. They are isolating, but allow him to work on the projects

he deems necessary, when he wants to, free from day-to-day oversight. For Gabe, being an academic is both a blessing and a curse.

Reviewing each of the participant's individual stories reveals the idiosyncratic nature of their individual situations, their institutions, their dilemmas, triumphs, struggles, and victories during their first year as new tenure-track assistant professors. These individual stories help put "flesh on the bone," (Shank & Villeda, 2004) by presenting the rich detailed lives of first year experiences. As satisfactory as these stories are, I now turn to the between case issues, and look at the commonalities and differences many of these new faculty members shared.

Chapter 12

Between-Case Commonalities and Inconsistencies

Socialization, Tactics, Orientations and Mentors

As noted in Chapter Two, organizations attempt to assimilate newcomers across a number of dialectics: collective/individual, formal/informal, sequential/random, fixed/variable, serial/disjunctive, and investiture/divestiture (Van Maanen & Schien, 1979). According to Ashford and Saks (1996) institutional tactics (collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, investiture) and individual tactics (individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, divestiture) have different outcomes. The institutional tactics encourage employee dedication while the individualized tactics develop creativity and better execution. Since recruitment and training of new employees are expensive, and turnover is costly for organizations, many studies on socialization are driven by the interests of management and administration. Organizations attempt use best practices to socialize newcomers, prevent employee turnover, and reduce costs (Miller, Stiff, & Ellis, 1988; Weick, 2004). What these studies do not examine, given their managerial perspective, is how new members experience and draw meaning from institutional socialization practices.

Together or Alone: According to the new faculty members' stories about their experiences as newcomers, the socialization processes they experienced can be categorized as individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, and divestiture. Each of these falls along the individualized tactics that encourage role creativity and higher-

quality accomplishments. This impetus on creativity makes sense, given the loosely-coupled nature of universities, colleges and departments, as well as the notion of academic freedom whereby professors can pursue their particular interests, while simultaneously serving their institutions. Most faculty did not choose how they were socialized. The main phenomenon determining if faculty went through an individual or a pseudo-collective socialization process was serendipitous – whether the department hired more than one faculty member that particular year.

Half of the new faculty members were the only new hires in their departments. Jo, Frank, and Gabe had to rely on themselves to find information about university and departmental policies and information, even down to the “mundane” information regarding scantrons, email systems, and copier use. This may have been particularly acute for Frank. While he made some connections with the people in the department, his two most intimate friendships were with individuals on the periphery – a graduate student and an adjunct faculty member. Not surprisingly, he found himself relatively outside his department’s community of practice, leading to his eventual reassignment as an instructor.

The remaining three faculty members arrived simultaneously with others. Harrison noted that coming in with three other people promoted socializing with colleagues inside and outside the department. “I think that made us into good buddies because we would always see each other. It would be time to go home and instead of being in our own office packing up we’d see each other and say, ‘Well, let’s go get a beer.’” There is an immediate bonding that occurs when more than one person is hired at the same time. Coming in with another new professor also helps newcomers make sense

of ambiguous information and situations. As Deborah explained regarding her compatriots, “It’s just a social support that I had, and I think it made all the difference in the world for me. It really did. It’s not like a misery loves company thing, its a ‘we’re in this together, trying to figure out how we’re doing this.’” Aaron, though he didn’t discuss his personal interactions with the other new faculty, noted he was eager to meet him and was hopeful they were “going to have some stuff to work on, another fresh graduate student to kind of bounce ideas off of and that sort of thing.”

The universities socialized these new professors through individual socialization processes. The professors, therefore had to make sense of and figure things out predominantly on their own. To lessen their uncertainty in their new place of work, the faculty members used seven tactics to lessen ambiguity.

Lessening Ambiguity – The Seven Tactics: According to the organizational socialization literature, newcomers in organizations use seven tactics to reduce ambiguity in their new organizational environments: overt questioning, indirect questioning, secondary sources, limit testing, disguised conversations, observation and surveillance. It appears each person used all these tactics in various combinations. This is true except for overt questioning, which was rarely used, if ever. Newcomers rarely use overt questioning because they are concerned with face maintenance and management (Goffman, 1967). The new faculty did not want to look “foolish,” “stupid,” or “ignorant.” Only Aaron mentioned asking questions directly. “There’s a core group of people that I feel like I can ask any question and get a good answer. We have one faculty member in particular who’s edited a leading journal in her field. So I can ask her questions about submissions and the letters that you write to editors of journals. There are people that I

can go to as resources.” And regarding Leland, Aaron noted, “He’s nothing but hopeful, answers questions, makes himself available and he’s just a nice guy to boot.”

Aaron and the other participants engaged in indirect questioning, a face-saving technique that permits newcomers to ask questions and simultaneously saves face for the newcomer and the current faculty member. Aaron told the story that described the use of indirect questioning in our interview, when he noted that he asked questions to Leland regarding the ambiguity surrounding his interview presentation, publication requirements, and tenure. Even though he asked those questions, he put himself in a one-down position, by hedging. “I very openly and honestly, but also very strategically worded this. I was purposely not trying to be antagonistic. I didn’t say, ‘Here’s what I think is wrong with how my interview went.’ I wasn’t attempting to be critical at all. I was trying to put the burden on me. ‘Here are the questions that I still have.’ Things like that.” He used this face-saving strategy because he was, as an applicant for the position, in a one-down position (Goffman, 1967) rather than a faculty member.

Many of the newcomers used *third parties, or secondary sources*. This generally occurs when the newcomer’s supervisor is not available or when she needs confirmation of her supervisor’s instructions. In addition, new professors used third parties as a face-saving device. None of the new faculty wanted to appear foolish, inept or stupid. For Deborah, Tara and her husband were secondary sources. “If I don’t feel like I can ask somebody without looking stupid, I have somebody to ask.” Aaron noted getting information about who to trust doesn’t take long via the grapevine. The stories of the new faculty members support findings that peers, supervisors and other organizational insiders

are extremely helpful in newcomer socialization, more so than the university orientations, which I shall discuss shortly.

In order to gather information and simultaneously discover their position relative to other department members, the new faculty members continually compared themselves through observation and surveillance. Gabe compared himself to the faculty members ahead of him on the tenure track. Deborah evaluated her position to those of Tara and her husband – who arrived simultaneously with her— as well as with Sarah who joined the department the following year. Harrison evaluated himself with Lisa through the “Pub Club,” and judged himself against other faculty members when confronted by the differences in the yearly evaluations. He also continually compared his academic achievements against those of the “ass-hat,” and older faculty who saw themselves primarily as teachers.

While each of the new faculty used a variety of these seven tactics, these are proactive individual tactics newcomers use to gather information and make sense of their new place of work. On top of these individual tactics, the organizations also attempt to socialize new faculty members through orientations and mentoring practices.

Underwhelmed by University Orientation: Almost all organizations provide new employees with some type of oral and written orientation (Goodall & Goodall, 2006; Jablin, 1987; Jerris, 1993). Formal orientation programs generally provide a congenial welcome, a historical overview of the organization, products and services the organization provides, various policies and procedures, a mission statement and an organizational philosophy. The new employee is also inundated with information about compensation and benefits, including vacation, health and retirement options. Similarly,

the newcomer is introduced to key staff members and departments. More often than not, orientation programs supply the newcomer and the organization a checklist to make certain necessary information is covered appropriately. Organizational socialization scholars and practitioners place a great deal of emphasis on orientations for newcomers, developing various programs and agendas. How do the faculty members themselves perceive the orientations provided by their organizations?

Here again there are differences between faculty experiences of orientation and the supposed high-quality of orientations espoused by higher education administrators (Cawyer, Simonds & Davis, 2002; de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Sorcinelli, 1999; Trowler & Knight, 1999). While all the universities provided some type of orientation, many of the new faculty have little recollection of the process and the information given. As Jo mentioned, “The orientation was just disorienting, and I didn’t know anything.... We had a human resources session where we learned all about benefits and stuff like that. I did attend fewer things than I had intended to, because I was just overwhelmed.” Frank said, “There’s not much that I remember from that process.” Gabe noted, “I would say a lot less effort is put into that than is put in to making graduate students feel welcome at a new institution.” According to Deborah, “I don’t remember much of the orientation at all. There was too much happening.” Harrison said, “Nothing really. I signed up for a 401(k), picked my health plan, signed other paperwork. They gave us a full campus tour, pointing out different buildings and the like. No great shakes. I honestly don’t remember much.” *Collectively, the new assistant professors saw the organizationally provided orientations as generally underwhelming.*

Several reasons for this are plausible. First, the new professors are involved in an enormous amount of change. They all moved to new geographical locations. They spent time establishing new places of residence. For those with partners and families, household affairs often took precedence. Partners needed to find employment, children placed in daycare or school. Similarly, the orientations occur during the period of time (August) that most faculty are preparing for their classes, writing syllabi, and submitting manuscripts for publication before the new semester begins. Given all these activities, including what Deborah called “party after party,” the newcomers’ experience echoes what Lang (2005) said during his own orientation experience – that the information provided in the orientations “pretty much washes into one ear and out the other” (p. 17).

Universities do provide new faculty with an orientation to assist in the socialization process. However, these orientations follow the pattern described by Jablin (1987) and Van Maanen, (1977) as unidirectional, top-down, and information providing. The newcomers are treated like passive recipients of legal, organizational, policy-related information. However, universities attempt to socialize new members through a second and more intimate track as well, a university mentoring process.

Mentoring? What Mentoring? Of the newcomers interviewed for this project five of the six said their universities had no formal mentoring program in place. The universities and departments that hired Aaron, Deborah, Frank, Gabe, and Harrison did not have formal mentoring systems. Aaron preferred not having a formal mentor. He had enough confidence in himself to determine what and whom he needed to know to in order to succeed in his new position. “I’m not a huge fan of assigned mentoring. I think I’m socially capable enough to find out to whom I should ask questions, and who are the

people I should avoid. I consider myself capable enough to figure those things out.”

Deborah’s situation is unique. For Deborah, the one person she might have gone to was the dean, her personal friend. Due to departmental politics she was unable to take advantage of this relationship fearing “my boss would get angry if he knew I went around him and went to her.” It is beyond the scope of most deans to be a formal mentor to a new faculty member. This friendship-dean situation complicates and blurs the role of the dean. How could Deborah use the dean’s experience? Is it proper for either the dean or Deborah to attempt to mediate the department chair’s mentoring relationship to Deborah?

Interestingly, even though Jo’s institution did have a formal mentoring program, the process failed. Her mentor, a senior scholar from another department, was extremely busy, self-absorbed, and unconcerned with the dilemmas Jo was facing. This begs the question – who should be mentoring new faculty? While having a senior faculty member from another department mentor new faculty may be theoretically ideal, it might not be practical for the newcomer’s actual socialization, especially since the “outside” mentor is yet another stranger for the newcomer to encounter.

Universities need to consider or reconsider regarding how mentoring programs are instituted. They need to ask how long it has been since the senior faculty member received tenure, given the requirements for tenure are changing. How far removed from the day-to-day pressures of gaining tenure are mentors? Do they have a reasonable amount of time to mentor new faculty members? Did they get tenure under the auspices of what was once a teaching but now has turned into a research university? Is there a natural correspondence between the mentor’s discipline and the new faculty member’s discipline, for example organizational communication and business management? Is the

mentor just a possible friend with whom the newcomer can vent, or is the mentor supposed to provide advice and guidance?

Tillman (2001) offers a comprehensive definition of what a high-quality mentoring process entails. An excellent mentoring experience is a process within a contextual setting; a relationship between a more experienced individual; a means for professional networking, counseling, guiding, instructing, modeling, and sponsoring; a developmental mechanism (personal, professional, and psychological); a socialization and reciprocal relationship; and an opportunity for identity transformation for both the mentor and the protégé (p. 296).

While mentoring is ideally a good practice, it can become inappropriate, be poorly implemented and be dysfunctional for the newcomer. Faculty mentors might be pulled from a pool of freshly minted tenured faculty in a corresponding discipline. This way the mentor possesses the immediate knowledge of the tenure track experience. Likewise, the mentor and new faculty member should share some common interests and language and thus, ideally, expand the conversation in their respective disciplines.

Despite exposure to all these individual and organizational programs, orientations and practices, new faculty still struggle with the changes in their identity as they transition from doctoral students to full time faculty members. A lot of time and energy is expended to create orientations and mentoring programs for new faculty members, and one of the outcomes of their relative uselessness is the lack of institutional loyalty from faculty. Each of the new faculty mentioned professors who moved from one university to another. As Gabe noted, “I don’t identify as you would with your graduate school or the school mascot. Are you a Bull, a Blue Devil, a Roadrunner, or a Billiken? This is a place

where I work. I don't identify with the feelings that you experience as a student. You don't really feel like your association is the same, and it's not. So, there's real difficulty and a real challenge in trying to negotiate what it means to be a faculty member who could just as easily accept a job and leave and go somewhere else."

Faculty members *go through* orientation, but *actively use* the seven tactics to make sense of their new identity and their new organizational positionality. Yet it appears that the *latter* are often more successful than the former for the actual socialization of these new members. What accounts for the problematic nature and relative uselessness of the organizational aspects of socialization? I believe one big challenge for the new faculty is the loss of their graduate school cohort and the need to develop a new cohort. This loss was particularly acute for two of the faculty members in this study: Gabe and Frank.

Cohorts and the "Academic Subject"

Unlike in graduate school, where one is surrounded by fellow graduate students, new faculty now, in the main, have to go it alone in their new departments. Two of the faculty members mentioned the disappearance of their graduate student cohort as a deeply and personally felt loss. Frank noted, "When I was no longer in classes, I felt that I lost my cohort. I felt I lost a certain common ground, a common conversation. Complaining or discussing what was talked about in class with cohorts. Oh, how I do miss that."

Gabe sums this aspect up: "In graduate school you don't have to make time to get to know people, because you're spending a lot of time in classes with them and you're spending time in office hours. You share an office typically with another graduate

student. You go out to lunch with them all the time and there's really a sense of belonging to a group, a camaraderie that's just, in many ways, totally absent or is a totally different paradigm." Aaron noted that as a graduate student he shared an office with other graduate students, including a "very close friend," with whom he shared his stories about finding his tenure track position.

Although Frank and Gabe mention this loss of cohort directly, other new assistant professors intimate this loss or express gratitude that a new cohort developed quickly. Deborah is happy she has a new cohort, saying she and her two new colleagues "went together to all of the orientation sessions and meetings. It was really nice to have people to attend those things with. It was less uncomfortable." Harrison was happy with his new cohort, and because his building situation demanded it, they found themselves in a similar situation as graduate students sharing offices.

The idealized version of graduate school and a cohort described by Frank and Gabe is not necessarily romanticized. Even when coursework ends, doctoral students maintain a cohort as they work on their qualifying exams, their dissertation proposals, perform their research, and write and edit their dissertations. However, Frank's and Gabe's intimately felt loss of their graduate school cohort can be attributed to the feelings of loneliness, boredom, and the loss of belonging they are experiencing as new faculty members. The other faculty members developed new cohorts fairly fast – Aaron with Leland, Harrison through his shared offices, Jo through her colloquium contacts, Deborah with the other new faculty and Sarah. They do not dwell for long periods on their graduate school experiences, and the loss of a cohort. Rather they dwell on the challenges and opportunities their new positions as assistant professors afford them.

However it isn't just the loss of – and the slow development of a new – cohort that may lead to the separateness these faculty feel. The discourses surrounding academia and the way 'the good academic' is constructed within these discourses also plays a significant role in a sense of loss. The hallmarks of modernity – rationality, logical reasoning, individualism, the search for objective truth, the belief in making progress – are all hallmarks of modernism (Saul, 1992; Bauman, 2000), and “the university was a central organization for modernism and the professorate were key figures in advancing modernist premises” (Tierney, 2001, p. 358). Many scholars understand that knowledge is a social product that has personal, political and social consequences that shape the way individuals think about and act in the world (Eisenberg, 2007; Ellis, 2004; Foster & Bochner, 2008; Foucault, 1980; Gergen 2001a; Herrmann, 2004, 2008b, 2008c; Holmann Jones, 2004; Santoro & Boylorn, 2008).

However, when it comes to the construction of the academic subject, the modernist assumptions and practices still hold sway overwhelmingly. The academic subject remains individualistic, separated, and specialized (Becher, 1994; Kekäle, 1999). The culture of individualism in academe supports autonomy, distinctiveness, differentiation, a unique scholarly reputation, intellectual isolation, and the lack of face-to-face interaction (Bennett, 1998; Palmer, 1988; Wood & Johnsrud, 2005). The competitive values of academic professionalism lead to individualism, in which faculty care primarily about tenure and their stature in their academic discipline (Bennett, 1998; Wood & Johnsrud, 2005). As Tompkins (1996) lamented, “The dynamic intellectual exchange one might have imagined would be taking place among distinguished scholars frequently fails to occur because everyone is too busy doing his or her own work” (p.

186). Academic culture upholds this notion of the lone researcher by implementing certain financial and other rewards that are primarily based on publishing, research and grant-writing, despite the espoused values of teaching and service commitments (Melguizo & Strober, 2007). This reward system encourages competition and the ideal of the academic as a solitary entrepreneur, rather than a spirit of community (Tompkins, 1996).

Yet paradoxically, these discourses and processes also lead to aspects many academics desire – privacy, independence, and academic freedom. Despite the solitariness brought about by the individualistic tendencies in academe, new professors enjoy the freedom and privacy they have to pursue the variety of research and teaching that interests them; the elasticity they have in establishing their schedules; and the generally loose ties they have with their institution, academic departments, and their colleagues.

* * *

All these new faculty members, whether feeling the loss of a cohort or not, are faced with distinctive challenges in their new universities. While socialization literature discusses tactics used by both newcomers and their organizations, there are two important aspects that are unique to the academy: the classroom and tenure. The classroom is the arena in which these new faculty members felt most familiar, while much of the rest of their environment was new and chaotic, and while the university attempts at socialization felt fruitless to them. Even though these faculty members initially struggled, the classroom soon provided a stabilizing force. Tenure, on the other hand, defined in

strategically ambiguous terms, led to anxiety, stress, and worry for new faculty. I will look at these in turn.

Teaching as a Stabilizing Force

Despite the general claims that new faculty are unprepared for classroom teaching (Adams, 2002; Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Boice, 1991; Lee, 2001), one of the most interesting aspects of the transition for the new faculty is how teaching helped them find equilibrium. While they had to learn a new culture of a new university and department, familiarize themselves with a geographical locale, and were still ‘learning the ropes,’ they found the classroom as a place of relative stability. In their stories, most of the faculty members mentioned classroom teaching as familiar and soothing when they began at their new university. It was in the classroom that these men and women began to feel grounded, and exert some control over their situations.

Deborah, despite her psychological and physical challenges, found her pedagogical principles and her philosophy of teaching matched those of the department and that overall she did “very well” in the classroom setting. Similarly, Jo succinctly noted, “I stood up in front of the class and teaching I knew how to do. I didn’t know anything else. I didn’t know how to get out of my house, but I knew how to teach. All of the sudden the familiarity came back to me. I remember what a wonderful feeling that was. Something felt familiar. I could get up in front of a class and that felt familiar. That was the first positive thing.” Similarly Gabe noted, “When I first started teaching in graduate school I didn’t know what I was doing! That’s changed. I feel like I’m much more confident. I can go into a classroom now and talk for an hour and fifteen minutes without even noticing that I’ve done it.”

Aaron said, “It was just great to do something on my own that was an advanced and upper level class where I got to deal with communication majors, who kind of have the background in theory. So that was great. In my second semester, I got to teach what will probably be two of my bread and butter classes going forward. I teach Introduction to Organizational Communication and Qualitative Methods. That was *a dream semester*. The fact that I got those two, I was ecstatic when I got assigned those two classes because those are two classes that I’ve been wanting to teach since the middle of graduate school.” He was just as enthusiastic working with individual students on honors contracts, with specific research agendas. Harrison who started teaching graduate classes immediately said, “I took to the graduate thing fast. I didn’t realize this until I was done. The thing I like about academia, I always thought it was teaching and it still kind of is. But, I do think research is my passion now and I have teaching as a close second. I like to discuss ideas behind my research. And so in an undergrad class, I can’t really get into that. They try and its great.”

This is not to say that everything went well with teaching, particularly in the first semester. As much experience as each of these new faculty members had teaching classes in their graduate programs and elsewhere, they were often surprised by student expectations in the new university. Deborah, after reading her student evaluations, found that her students thought she was an undemanding teacher in her graduate class. Aaron was impressed by the quality of students in his classes describing them as “fairly intelligent” and who “impressed” him. Frank experienced the agonizing sting of student evaluations, including some that recommend he be terminated. Jo, who had a great amount of teaching experience, was surprised by her students’ reactions. “I had a terrible

first semester and I was really shocked when I got my evaluations back from the students. They were the lowest that they had been ever in teaching. All the seasoned teachers told me that is normal, first semester, and it's really just getting acclimated to the students." After she made adjustments to her teaching, Jo said, "I love my students now, and I get anywhere from good to incredibly good evaluations, but it was quite a learning experience." For Gabe, one of the oddest experiences was having a class with merely five students. "That's a pretty awkward class to teach. I had never taught a class that small, before or since. I taught two classes. One of them was a class that all the majors had to take. The other was a course that was optional, but that only had five students in it. So, it was a fairly awkward semester in terms of teaching for me, my first semester here."

The expectations students had for them shocked the new faculty members, and they made significant adjustments in line with the processes of surprise and sensemaking (Louis, 1980; Weick, 1985). In fact, each of the faculty members noted that teaching in the second semester was easier as they adjusted to the expectations of the students. They changed their teaching to accommodate the different types and sizes of classes, and saw familiar faces from one semester to the next. Although research has suggested that new professors feel their students are unprepared, in general the faculty in this project did not share that opinion, nor did they themselves feel inadequately prepared to their roles as teachers. Despite the initial challenges, teaching and the classroom setting in general was a stabilizing force for all of the new faculty members.

Scholars continue to proclaim that new faculty are ill-equipped, unqualified and unprepared to teach when they begin their lives as assistant professors (Adams, 2002; Austin & McDaniels, 2006). Overall, however, these faculty members' stories convey

their collective acumen and preparedness when entering the classroom, as well as their ability to make adjustments to their teaching practices. I wonder if there is something unique about the communication discipline that better prepares future faculty to teach – while they are still graduate students – as compared to other disciplines.

If the classroom provided a place of relative sanctuary in the midst of equivocality and uncertainty for the faculty members, tenure presented a distinct challenge. In all cases the processes and requirements necessary for tenure were not clearly demarcated. In fact, departments tended to define tenure in strategically ambiguous terms. This open-endedness leaves individuals to determine how to best perform their duties as faculty members. The strategically ambiguous nature of tenure and its implications are the subject of the next sections.

Strategic Ambiguity, Power and the Tenure Process

In 1984, Eisenberg (2007) outlined the benefits of strategically ambiguous communication in organizations. Following Eisenberg, and before defining the concept of strategic ambiguity, I want to examine the standard way theorists and laymen generally perceive communication. “Good” communication is seen as effective, open, clear, and concise. Ambiguity, equivocality, and uncertainty are considered problematic and need to be resolved through effective communication. Almost thirty years later, these perceptions of “good” communication still proliferate (Clampitt, 1999; Gillis, 2006; Kramer, 2004; Shankarmahesh, Ford, & LaTour, 2004; Simmons, 2002; Stephenson, 2002). According to Eisenberg (2007), strategic ambiguity is defined as “those instances where individuals use ambiguity purposefully to accomplish their goals” (p. 7). Embracing the virtues of strategic ambiguity questions the standard litany that clear and open communication is

necessary in all situations.

In certain respects, appreciating the uses of strategic ambiguity is akin to understanding simultaneity and dialectical tensions in discourses that are fluid and intricate, that do not allow for monologic and solidified meanings (Bakhtin 1981; Herrmann, 2008a). Rather, meaning is interplay, unfinalizable, and multivocal. Similarly, strategic ambiguity permits organizational communicators to agree in the abstract and preserves the plurality of voices and interpretations in organizational discourse. As Eisenberg reiterated, “I still find that too much certainty, not too much ambiguity, is likely to kill you,” (E. M. Eisenberg, personal communication, October 21, 2002).

For Eisenberg, strategic ambiguity in organizations is necessary for organizational success and is positive in four distinct ways. First, it promotes *unified diversity*. It fosters “the existence of multiple viewpoints in organizations. This use of ambiguity is commonly found in organizational missions, goals and plans” (2007, p. 8). As an example, an educational institution’s vision statement that asserts it will be the “best Jesuit university” is ambiguous enough to be implemented by information technology services and the speech communication department, although they will use different strategies and tactics in an attempt to achieve that goal. Secondly, strategic ambiguity helps to *facilitate change in interpersonal relationships*. Third, strategic ambiguity *facilitates organizational change* by enabling shifting interpretations of organizational goals. Finally, strategic ambiguity *maintains positions of privilege* through task-related and interpersonal communication because ambiguous statements can be plausibly denied more easily than clear statements.

The use of strategic ambiguity is related to issues of freedom and power. In one study, strategically ambiguous communication increased creativity and individual feelings of freedom in a hospital (Miller, Joseph & Apker, 2002). However, the authors also found “strategically ambiguous discourse may be used to privilege those in power by examining how organizational members’ responses reified the firm’s existing power structure and perpetuated a system of control” (p. 197). Similarly, despite one design company’s use of strategic ambiguity to generate freedom and ingenuity, employees understood the environment as paradoxical and constraining, and were essentially unaware that their responses to this situation naturalized, reproduced and strengthened organizational control (Markham, 1996). In examining contracts between organizations and employees, Bernheim and Whinston (1998) established that both parties often leave some verifiable aspects of performance strategically ambiguous giving both the employer and the employee freedom to excel, and recourse if they do not. In her examination, Clair (1998) revealed Big Ten universities used strategic ambiguity to “privilege the interests of the dominant groups by encouraging the bureaucratization, commodification, and privatization of sexual harassment” (p. 118).

The relationship between strategic ambiguity and the tenure process is an important aspect to the lives of the first-year Assistant Professors in this study particularly with regard to the anxiety it produces. Although the new faculty understand the canonical narrative of progress in the academic career – from graduate student, to tenure-track assistant professor, to tenured professor, to associate professor, to full professor – within this narrative, the requirements for gaining tenure are communicated in strategically ambiguous terms, particularly in regard to research and publishing.

Tenure as Strategically Ambiguous: “They don’t have a written policy *and some have suggested that that’s to prevent them from being sued. No written policy equals nothing set in stone.*”

“So, the bar keeps getting raised as we’re moving towards it and that’s kind of distressing or stressful.”

“Not clear-cut, but I do have a good idea what it takes.”

“The people who are evaluating you for tenure did it already, but you’ve never done it before. So, you don’t really know what it takes to get tenure. From your point of view, it’s a fairly uncertain feeling and perhaps even a fairly uncertain world.”

“They were as clear as mud. I mean, not at all. Not at all clear. And no, they did not lay it out for me, and no, they still haven’t.”

“No it wasn’t clear...I know what’s expected, I think. I do think the bar is changing.”

According to five of the assistant professors, the requirements, duties and responsibilities they are expected to perform to attain tenure are not clear. Rather, achieving tenure is a shifting, vaguely defined process that lends itself to multiple interpretations. It is muddy, a moving target, an enigma. In short, the tenure process is defined in strategically ambiguous terms. This undefined aspect of tenure produces anxiety in new assistant professors. They think about it, they are concerned about it, and are stressed and nervous about it.

Why would a department or university leave such an important aspect of Assistant Professors’ organizational lives ambiguous? One answer lies in strategic ambiguity’s positive role in creating unified diversity within organizations. Strategic ambiguity allows

faculty in a department to autonomously set important professional goals, such as their research agenda. The longstanding norms of academic freedom, including the right to research and teach without the need to adhere to a proscribed doctrine (Brown & Kurland, 1990; Fuchs, 1963; Rorty, 1996) are supported through the unified diversity afforded by strategic ambiguity.

The use of strategic ambiguity regarding the tenure process, which is based on the triumvirate of teaching, research and service, is not essentially an unethical practice. Certainly hard and fast rules about tenure criteria, while helping solve the initial ambiguity about tenure, can actually limit the possibilities for and the participation of an academic. One can imagine a new tenure track assistant professor checking boxes off a “Tenure To-Do List” and then doing no more. The ambiguous and fluid nature of the tenure process allows new faculty freedom and opportunity, while assisting their organizations achieve larger goals. While all of these are positive aspects regarding the strategically ambiguous nature of the tenure process, there is a less positive side to this coin: power and the disciplining of the ‘academic self,’ particularly as it concerns research, the predominant measure of faculty success.

Foucaultian Power: Earlier I noted that scholars researching strategic ambiguity raised concerns about power issues. I continue this discussion of the institutionalization of tenure using Foucault’s (1978a, 1980, 1986, 2006) ideas to illustrate how the use of strategic ambiguity regarding tenure operates in a powerful way that exacts a personal cost from new tenure track assistant professors. Foucault’s opus indicates the importance of, and interrelationships between, power and knowledge. For Foucault power is relational, and power becomes apparent when it is exercised. Power does not reside in a

particular person or institution, but lies instead in discourses, practices, and procedures of everyday life (Foucault, 1980). Power is everywhere in social relations, and it is exercised at all levels of an organization through various discourses and multiple procedures.

Foucault (1982) said his goal was “to create a history of the different modes by which in our culture human beings are made subjects” (p. 208). Human beings are made subjects – or socially constructed – through various disciplinary discourses. For example, an individual may be constituted and see herself as a sinner or a saint through religious discourses. Through the discourses of science, and the means by which humans began to be studied – through surveillance, observation, measurement and documentation – the individual is constructed in a particular way, and in fact becomes a subject.

Through these discourses, the idea and ideal of what constitutes a *normal* individual is constructed and becomes the standard against which individuals are judged, fixed (as through psychoanalysis) and/or excluded. Foucault called this disciplinary power panoptic, based on Bentham’s ideal prison, The Panopticon. The Panopticon included a tower at the center that provided an unobstructed view of all the prisoners. Since prisoners realized there was always the possibility that they were being watched, they regulated themselves, rendering the exercise of power by others unnecessary. This surveillance, which Foucault (1993) called governmentality, pervades not just prisons and hospitals, but all social systems. In addition to the management by the state or administration, governmentality also signified self-control, guidance for the family and for children, management of the household, and directing the self. For early Foucaultian organization scholars, the control of the self is seen as the supreme form of organizational

control (du Gay, 1996; Kunda, 1992; Wilmott, 1990). The power mechanisms of personal self-monitoring, along with an emphasis on individualism represent forms of self-discipline that affect every aspect of a worker's subjective existence.

Foucault endeavored to show how the modern sovereign state and the modern autonomous individual co-determine each other's emergence. As Foucault (1993) noted, in order to study power and the individual one must examine both "techniques of domination and techniques of the self." (p. 203) These are the instances, or the points of contact, where the processes of domination people have over each other

have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself....The contact point, where the individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves...Governing people...is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself (p. 203-204).

Discipline therefore is not simply imposed from the outside; nor is it always complete. If it were there would be no place for reflexivity. For Foucault, governmentality is not necessarily negative, but productive. It socially constructs subjects, reality, objects and rituals of truth (1978a). While individuals are constructed and they are subjugated through power relations, they are never powerless. Power relations run through every field, "because there is freedom everywhere" (Foucault, 1987b). Subjects are not deprived of

agency or the capacity to change; in fact, [being a subject] makes them all the more active by extending their reach to include what was assumed to be so

obviously necessary, so natural, so taken-for-granted, that it was inaccessible: their subjectivity, their identity, their sexuality, their bodies (Deacon, 2003, p. 280).

According to some critical organizational communication scholars, institutional power and discipline do not entirely negate an individual's autonomy (Deetz, 1998; Dick & Hyde, 2006; Mumby, 1997; Tracy, 2000). Individuals have the ability through these technologies of the self to reflect upon, shape, govern, and be responsible for their selves within these discourses and resources of power, to transfigure themselves to achieve a definite condition "of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault, 1994, p. 225). In other words, people reflect upon themselves and ask, "What type of person do I want to be?" "What must I do to become the person I want to be?" This disciplining of the self is enterprising, a continual project of self-construction and creation that can be extrapolated to explain how new members of academia draw meaning from the ambiguity of the tenure process. Rose (1998) observes the

enterprising self will make an enterprise of its life, seek to maximize its own human capital, project itself a future, and seek to shape itself in order to become that which it wishes to be. The enterprising self is thus both an active self and a calculating self, a self that calculates about itself and that acts upon itself in order to better itself (p. 154).

The dilemma faced by new faculty in the pursuit of tenure is that the process and requirements for it are defined in a strategically ambiguous manner. While tenure – strategically defined – allows a certain amount of freedom for the new academics, it also

necessitates laboring on specific activities that are prized and rewarded. In the case of the new faculty members, these prioritized activities are research and publishing.

Power and Tenure: Ambiguity in loose hierarchical organizations encourages employee improvisation (Browning & Boudes, 2005; Eisenberg, 2007, Eisenberg, Goodall & Trethewey, 2007; Eisenberg & Witten, 1987). Defined in a strategically ambiguous manner, the process for earning tenure allows new faculty the space and freedom to use power resources and technologies of the self to determine how to fashion a self as an academic subject. Of course, administrative and institutional discipline and power play a part in the process through annual reviews, and student evaluations of teaching, etc.

The ambiguity of the tenure process, however, encourages the new professor to choose for her or himself the type of academic person he or she will become and determine how much service work they should perform, how many articles they ought to publish (including on which topics, and where to publish them), and how much time to put into their teaching. It allows them to ascertain and implement for themselves where and when to “care for the self” (Foucault, 1986) and how much to use the technologies of the self to discipline the self in order to become who they want to be. As in other organizations, strategic ambiguity in the loosened hierarchy of the university and the department encourages some employee improvisation. Yet despite the calls to open-up and expand the requirements for tenure to include such components as mentoring, public service, community involvement and teaching excellence, new faculty recognize the canonical academic narrative that says publishing – and therefore research – remains the prime barometer for tenure and promotion. The demands of tenure defined in this manner

lead new faculty to discipline the self; disciplinary power focused on writing, publishing and research. This stands in direct contrast to previous research suggesting new faculty spend a disproportionate amount of time on revising lecture notes and preparing for classes (Austin, 2002).

While reading their autobiographies and listening to their interviews, one senses the new faculty feel they can *never* be doing too much writing, researching, and publishing. This is because the focal point of the tenure gaining process – publishing – is defined in strategically ambiguous terms. Gabe had at least three manuscripts in process, including a book, along with a number of abstracts and presentations. Likewise, when I visited Aaron in September, he believed he needed eight to ten articles published by his fifth year. He was working to have five papers prepared for journal submission within seven months. For Harrison, publishing was also what he dedicated most of his time to, with nine submissions either accepted or in the revise and resubmit process. He replaced his “activism” with research, which I find unsettling. According to her recollection, Jo also spent much of her time on the publication process, having a journal article, two book chapters, and five encyclopedia entries published. What I found disturbing was that in order to reach her goal, Jo turned toward publishing quantitative articles, rather than her usual qualitative and performance oriented research. However, it is not only the ambiguous nature of the tenure process that leads new faculty members to spend a disproportionate amount of time on publishing. The norms and the canonical narrative of respect and stature in the academy also discipline the new faculty member’s subjectivity.

Publishing is a time-consuming process. Submissions once received go through a thorough peer-review vetting, to assure published articles are of excellent quality, but

“getting into print without long delay is almost out of the question. This is the case just as tenure requirements are stiffening” (Kennedy, 1997, p. 191). This is true across academia. However, as conversations on CRTNET have suggested, and a recent Spectra article by NCA President Art Bochner (2008) has confirmed, the academic publishing process in communication-related journals is more than sluggish, it is prohibitive.

Typically, tenure track assistant professors have their final tenure review about seventy months after they first show up on campus. With an approximate 16-month turnaround time for article publications, faculty members have merely 48 months to meet publication requirements for tenure. This would be of little concern if every article was accepted and published, but that rarely is the case. As Aaron noted, he needs seven or eight publications for tenure (he thinks). In order to accomplish that, he needs to publish approximately two articles per year. To be sure he meets those requirements, he is working on and submitting four articles this year alone. Not only is the number of publications necessary to earn tenure rising, and the time to publication lengthening, but each discipline defines its own hierarchy of publications.

Similarly, each department and university classifies a hierarchy of publications, as Aaron noted regarding the differences between publishing in *Qualitative Inquiry* and *Journal of Applied Communication Research*. All journals, and therefore all publications, are not equal. Most new assistant professors are expected to publish in premier journals. These new faculty members experience what Adams (2008) succinctly noted about his own academic education. “I must work to learn the politics of print, the medium upon which most of my career will rest” (p. 180). The unsystematic and unjustifiably slow

nature of article publishing adds additional pressure on new faculty members, who are already anxious and fretful about life on the tenure track.

Similarly, this emphasis on research and publishing affects hiring, tenure and promotion decisions. Although many elder faculty members did not have to publish as graduate students, they are now demanding that job applicants have publications under their belts before they have tenure-track jobs. “It’s funny,” one student on a hiring committee told me, “although in our colloquia our faculty members said not to worry about publishing as graduate students, the first thing they looked at on applicants’ CVs was their publication record.”

What is the cause of this ratcheting up of the research and publication process these new professors are facing? I believe they are directly tied to and part of the discourse of academic capitalism. Granted, none of the new faculty members mentioned academic capitalism by name. It is, however, a discourse being spoken about in educational leadership research and higher educational research – a meta-discourse that exists above and regulates new faculty day-to-day practices and talk. Academic capitalist discourse is most visibly revealed in the rhetoric of academic prestige.

The Power of the Pursuit of Prestige

Almost every faculty member noted their university was changing rapidly, expanding their student populations, evolving from a teaching oriented to a research oriented institution, and/or attempting to add another Ph.D. program to get to the next level on the Carnegie hierarchy of universities. Jo noted, “The bar keeps getting raised.” Harrison’s institution added approximately 9,000 students in five years and it expected to

grow by another 10,000 by 2020, and is emphasizing research. Likewise, it is causing a rift in what he described as the old guard (teachers) and the new guard (researchers).

Deborah commented, “I do think the bar is changing. They just told us during pre-session this year that they need one more Ph.D. program to go up to the next research classification.” For Aaron this determined the type of school at which he was going to attempt to get a position. “Some of those big jobs scare the daylights out of me. You hear a third of the people get – only a third of the assistant professors get tenure. That scares the crap out of me and that was one of the most attractive things about this job for me.” Yet, as I recently discovered, Aaron’s department is in the process of developing an M.A. program in Communication to begin in the next year or so. Gabe noted his university evolved from a 4-4 quarter load into a 2-3 semester load with a greater emphasis on research. These developments are part of academic capitalism’s pursuit of prestige, discourses that impact the daily practices of the new faculty members.

These academic capitalist discourses regarding productivity, assessment, and administrative authority are implicit in the pursuit of prestige by higher education institutions (Morphew & Baker, 2004). Postsecondary institutions continually attempt to emulate the most prestigious universities, the Princetons, Harvards, MITs, and Stanfords. This “tournament mentality” (Morphew & Baker, 2004, p. 367) is not new. In 1958, Caplow and McGee hinted that the pursuit of prestige would ultimately become a prevailing characteristic of university stature. The ratcheting up of publishing requirements is part of the systematic pursuit of prestige by universities and departments (Rhode, 2006).

One of the big factors in the pursuit of prestige is the scholarly reputation of faculty members. University administrations looking to increase prestige exploit opportunities to move up the hierarchy by both searching outside their university to hire academic “stars,” and through increasing the pressure to publish (Collins, 2002; Geiger, 2002; Rhode, 2006). “Since research and not teaching ability is the primary reputational currency, the influence of the former on promotion and tenure has increased substantially,” Kennedy (1997) notes. “Young faculty, whether as candidates for junior positions or as aspirants at the tenure bar are regularly urged by their advocates to concentrate on research and, if necessary, skimp on teaching” (p. 29-30). This pressure emanates from both faculty and administration “who are trying to raise the status of the entire institution on the backs of a new generation of young people” (Kenneth T. Jackson, as quoted in Wilson, 2001, ¶ 5).

Research production is one principal way institutions contend for dissimilarity in pecking order of prestige (Calhoun, 2006). Research also brings in additional money, large grants, higher quality students, accreditation, and shapes surveys, such as *US News and World Report's* (Brewer, Gates & Goldman, 2002; Calhoun, 2006). Yet, as Couturier (2005) pronounced,

this competitive fervor exacerbates the blurring of the lines as more and more institutions compete for the same prestige, students, and funding. The research university model is considered the pinnacle of prestige, and too many of our institutions are trying to move up the prestige ladder by looking more like research universities and less like the specialized purpose for which they were originally founded. More comprehensive state colleges are offering Ph.D.s and

are placing more faculty emphasis on research and less on teaching. More community colleges are founding honors colleges and offering four-year degrees (p. 94).

Research provides higher education institutions with prestige and recognition. Interestingly Biagioli (2002) dispenses with the idea of research for research sake altogether by using a blatant economic metaphor. Journal publications are “a credit-carrying object” and “academic banknotes” (p. 20). Silver (2003) noted that faculty often used the auspices of research and prestige as the defining measurements of their institutions, whether their universities are research intensive or not.

We academics are complicit in reifying the discourses of academic capitalism. We measure productivity, research, and prestige in economic terms. We allow ourselves to be labeled “knowledge entrepreneurs” rather than researchers, “information delivery systems for students” rather than teachers, “publishing machines” rather than writers. Given that we now often count publications rather than write publications that count, it is little wonder “21 percent of the faculty surveyed in 1969 strongly agreed that it is difficult to acquire tenure without publishing, by 1989 the number had more than doubled to 49 percent, and the need to publish continues to demand more time and energy from new faculty members” (Townsend & Rosser, 2007; Verrier, 1994).

This pursuit of prestige as measured by publications and research trickles down to graduate students as well. As Fox (1983) noted,

In the early 1970s, in retrospect, there seemed to be a quite reasonable understanding that graduate school was a place to become educated. Publication was certainly not discouraged, but it was not stressed to the point of exhaustion

either. We were expected to do a thesis and a dissertation, but intensive additional research and publication was for the most part something to be done after graduate school (§ 6).

From personal experience, I know this to be true. I have published six articles in academic journals. On average it has taken 16 months from the initial submission to final publication. Manuscripts I submitted in 2005 did not get published until 2007. As a graduate student I feel I have to publish to make sure that possible employers would see me as a productive researcher and tenure track worthy. While publishing is important for a graduate student, it is not the do-or-die, “publish or perish” imperative that it is for faculty members. The pursuit of prestige as a powerful discourse at the level of university administration affects the day-to-day activities of the new faculty members, where the pressure to publish and the high regard for research and publishing, far outweigh teaching effectiveness and service commitments.

In this project I examined the life stories and experiences of new assistant professors riding the tenure track, or in Frank’s case, falling off the tenure track. This project also allowed me to examine my own experiences of academic life as a graduate student and look at my future in academia. I will now summarize a few conclusions drawn from analyzing the stories of these first year professors attempting to make sense of their experiences.

Chapter 13

Reviewing the Ride on the Tenure Track

Everything is Different, Including Me

New assistant professors experience their lives on the tenure track as anxiety-laden and demanding. Most begin feeling a deep loss of a graduate school cohort. This loss is accompanied by feelings of isolation, loneliness, and boredom. Relationships at the assistant professor level *are different*, characteristically different than they were in graduate school. Rather than sharing the common experience of “becoming academics” as was in the case in graduate school, new assistant professors are professionals in departments with other professionals, where relationships are based on collegiality. Ironically, collegiality enables and silences. The desire for a collegial atmosphere often means new faculty do not ask questions or share successes with other faculty members in the department for fear of looking either inept or boastful.

Likewise, new faculty encounter a different student body from a different position – that of being a professor. These students often have different expectations, qualities, and cultural backgrounds than the ones they taught in graduate school. They have to, and usually they do, make adjustments depending on their students’ acumen, and the size and type of class (graduate or undergraduate). This period of adjustment generally lasts one semester. New faculty become acclimated to the new student body and make substantial improvements in the second semester.

This transitional phase is not merely marked by the status change and the new relationships they face with colleagues and students. New assistant professors also face challenges outside the university proper. Moving their homes is one such challenge. It is expensive, time-consuming, and physically exhausting, and often includes travel to locate an apartment or house in what will become one's new hometown. Moving also includes a period of adjustment to settle in, securing employment for spouses or partners, managing day-to-day childcare needs, and the realization that reimbursement negotiated to cover the move often doesn't, adding financial strain to their lives they had not anticipated.

An even bigger dilemma challenged and confronted by these new faculty members is time-management. The new professors must also learn to manage their time efficiently and wisely. In graduate school, time is often structured for students through course deadlines for papers, projects and dissertation chapters, as well as the ebb and flow of the academic calendar. Now they must control and manage their own time with little, if any, guidance from supervisors or colleagues. They are solely responsible for how they use their time. "The freedom to work all the time" is also an opportunity to not work at any time, or to work on tangential aspects of being a professor. The faculty in this study shared the premise that they would have to publish to succeed on the tenure track. Publishing is not optional as it was when they were graduate students (although as I noted, that is also changing). Faculty spend a disproportionate amount of time on research. They do not spend nearly as much time on – nor do they worry about – teaching and service obligations. All these challenges and changes are compounded exponentially for assistant professors who have not yet completed their dissertations.

“The Only Good Dissertation...”: Not finishing one’s dissertation before beginning as an assistant professor is an unmitigated disaster. While this is a taken-for-granted assumption within academia in general, the two stories told in this study illustrate the anguish, anxiety, despair, frustration, and shame associated with an unfinished dissertation. Deborah and Frank, as ABDs, are ensnared in both doctoral student discourses and faculty member discourses, which are different and incompatible. This leaves them in a liminal position. Their narratives are discontinuous. The continuity of their prospective academic narratives is continually interrupted, as they are forced periodically to reframe themselves as “students” and deal with their unfinished dissertations, and what it may mean for their future lives as professors.

The new professors with completed dissertations unequivocally expressed the imperative of graduate students finishing their dissertations before taking an assistant professor position. Harrison said, “You don’t want to mess around or miss your dissertation completion date at all.” Aaron noted that not finishing has implications for both the individual and the department. “You realize when you start negotiating that having your dissertation done is serious business. They are not screwing around. They’re going to have to drop you down to a lecture position or whatever, and you’re going to be teaching more classes. I think in a lot of ways, they see it as if they made the wrong choice and it reflects badly on the department.”

In the same vein, Gabe related, “One of the junior faculty that’s here with us, it took her an extra year to finish and she had it a lot harder.” And he added this piece of advice: “I think everybody’s advice should be ‘Don’t get a job. Don’t take a job until you’re done.’ And if you’re not going to be done, either try and negotiate that if you’re

not going to be able to finish by Fall, will they take you in Spring? Or tell them, ‘Sorry.’ I mean, as crazy as that sounds, I have not met anyone who didn’t finish and it turned out well for them. There’s just too much involved in it.”

New assistant professors are immersed in ambiguity. They need to make sense of the strange culture of their new university in the absence of dependable and trustworthy relationships akin to the cohorts and mentors they left behind. They have to speak and act like a professor, not a graduate student, though they have no direct experience of what that means. Some of this ambiguity is reduced through university socialization and through individual tactics of orientation.

Socialization and the Reduction of Ambiguity. These new faculty members experienced university and departmental socialization as individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, and divestitured processes. These processes fall along the individualized features of socialization. Thus, faculty members relied upon their own initiative to find information and reduce ambiguity as they began their roles in their new universities. They used all seven tactics to reduce ambiguity: *overt questioning, indirect questioning, third parties (secondary sources), limit testing, disguising conversations, observation and surveillance*. According to their stories, they used direct questioning the least, and when it was used, they tended to place themselves in a one-down, face-saving position.

These new professors experienced their university-wide orientation and mentoring programs as largely ineffectual or irrelevant. New faculty do not remember the specifics of their universities’ orientation programs, and the only faculty member who was involved in a mentoring program found it problematic and unproductive. There is an

irony here. Universities are attempting to raise their prestige through the scholarship, research, grants, and publication records of their faculty. Yet the orientation and mentoring resources they offer new faculty do not appear to establish any direct connection, identification with, or loyalty to the university per se. The faculty members are surrogates of their university, which demands more production from them, yet they do not feel part of “the university.” Faculty members associate much more closely with their departments, their disciplines, and their communities of practice.

The Impact of Tenure Narratives. Academic discourse typically promotes and reinforces the canonical narrative of the linear career path through the ranks from graduate student to assistant professor, tenured associate professor and professor. In this study, however, the canonical narrative appeared to have been completely transformed into a tenure narrative. *Not one participant spoke of their faculty career path that extended past the point of attaining tenure.* Gaining tenure, however, is a short-term goal in a career that can last several decades. This conversion and contraction of the academic life narrative pressures new faculty members to restrict their focus and projects on short-term goals that will enhance the likelihood of achieving tenure. To use a visual metaphor: since new faculty are so focused on tenure and the requirements for it, they cannot seem to visualize post-tenure academic life. In fact, I suggest that these narratives also promote an outsider-within position. Orbe (1998) defines the "outsider-within" as the individual or group that is a part of the larger group or organization (within) yet simultaneously peripheral to the dominant group (outside). Accordingly, the exclusivity of the “tenure-track” narrative reifies the newcomers’ positions as outsiders within their organizations.

None of these new faculty imagined their lives at the rank of associate or full professor. What is of concern here – and what should be of concern to universities and departments – is the short-sightedness of this storyline: what incentives are being built for faculty to remain engaged in research, teaching, and service after tenure? A narrative centered on tenure disconnects the person from any sense that life as a professor is not so much a career as it is a calling. In effect, this narrative is completed once one achieved tenure and leaves the newly tenured professor with no concrete storyline for the academic life. This can create unproductive tenured faculty members, once the impetus to gain tenure has disappeared. Perhaps this can explain the numerous stories about “dead wood” faculty, a serious problem with no easy resolution (Roenack & Lewis, 2007; Wood & Des Jarlais, 2006; Wood & Johnsrud, 2005).

As communities of practice, universities through their graduate programs and departments provide a grand canonical narrative of “becoming a professor” focused on the plot of gaining tenure. Living within this story, however, is destabilizing and murky for these new professors even though they appear to have some concrete idea of what it will take to get tenure and what sort of progress they are making toward achieving that goal. Nevertheless, these new professors describe their understanding of tenure criteria in a fashion I have referred to as strategically ambiguous, while simultaneously being exposed to the discourses of academic capitalism, which promote the pursuit of prestige and efficiency and maintain and reinforce the anxieties and insecurities of these new faculty members. These two discourses combine to perpetuate a system that demands new faculty members discipline themselves to work harder and faster, to compromise their research agendas, and to sometimes neglect other obligations to further universities

goals to become more prestigious through the scholarship of the faculty. Of course, these narratives and discourses also allow these new faculty members to pursue personal prestige, status, and academic recognition for themselves within their field.

Future Directions

This project, while showing the lives of new professors as they transition onto the tenure track, leaves open the possibility for more in-depth research on faculty lives. One possibility is to follow these new professors as they progress through their third year reviews, gain tenure, become associate professors and eventually full professors. First, will they all make tenure, or will some, like Frank, get derailed from the tenure-track? How do they feel about what life was like on the tenure-track once they have attained that goal? How do their retrospective and prospective narratives change once they've "made it" and are no longer in the outsider-within position? Will any of these faculty members, like Gabe intimates, move to other universities? The opportunity for longitudinal narrative research on these participants offers exciting possibilities.

This research also looked at new professors on the tenure-track at *universities*, most of which were growing and in the process of pursuing prestige in an attempt to rank higher on the Carnegie classification list. As such, these new professors are subjected to the discourses of academic capitalism. However, not all institutes of higher education are universities, nor are all attempting to move up in the rankings. Another possible avenue of research, therefore, is to explore how new faculty members experience socialization at these schools, where the academic capitalistic discourses are not so predominant. Are there distinct differences in their narratives, lived experiences, and the discourses of what constitutes the good "academic subject?"

This project, by looking at the narratives of new faculty, did not examine the socialization processes from the position of academic administration. From department chairs, to deans, to provosts, administrators also are informed by academic discourses. What are the discourses in academia that inform their decision-making when new faculty arrive on campus? What do administrators view as the most important aspects of new faculty members' socialization? How much time do they believe is required to offer high-quality orientation and mentoring processes? A line of research that examines lives nearer to the apex of power would allow a more thorough examination of how discourses constrain and enable the lives of administrators, thereby giving us a glimpse of the flip-side of university life.

* * *

I now believe the question "Do doctoral programs do a good job preparing their graduates for life on the tenure track?" is the incorrect one to ask. Given the complexities of the first year experiences as told in the stories by these new communication faculty members, the more honest question is, "Can they prepare them?" The answer is best summed up by Deborah's response to that question: "Yes and no." They can prepare them as researchers and as effective teachers. What they are unable to do is address collegiality, student expectations, and the change in status when one transitions to a faculty position. While graduate students might *know of* these aspects of life on the tenure-track, they cannot *know them*, until they come to understand them through lived experience. Despite doing this dissertation research on new faculty, I cannot know them either.

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Endnotes

¹Due to the short time between the interviews, the transcription process, and the NCA convention, arrangements for the follow-up focus group could not be solidified. In light of the vast amount of data I had from each participant, I decided to abandon the idea of holding the focus group.

About the Author

Andrew Ferdinand Herrmann graduated in 1991 from Ramapo College of New Jersey with a B.A. in Philosophy. He worked for 10 years in various creative industries including advertising, graphic design, and publishing, all the while reading Kierkegaard. To prove working a full-time position and going to graduate school full-time are not mutually exclusive endeavors, he completed the M.A. program in Communication at Saint Louis University (with distinction) in 2004, while simultaneously working as the College of Arts & Sciences' Macintosh Guru.

Mr. Herrmann immediately began pursuing his Ph.D. in Communication at the University of South Florida. While at USF he taught family, group, interpersonal, and organizational communication. He has presented papers at numerous international, national, and regional conferences. His publications can be found in *Communication Theory*, *Journal of Business Communication*, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, and *Qualitative Inquiry*. He is still a Macintosh Guru.