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Intrinsic motivation is not enough: Exploring the decision to pursue promotion to full professor

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INTRINSIC MOTIVATION IS NOT ENOUGH: EXPLORING THE DECISION TO PURSUE
PROMOTION TO FULL PROFESSOR

By

Margaret Roberts

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INTRINSIC MOTIVATION IS NOT ENOUGH: EXPLORING THE DECISION TO PURSUE
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By

Margaret Roberts

DEDICATION

To my family who has cheered me on throughout this journey. To Duane, Kali, and Melia, thank you for your unconditional support and for never complaining when I disappeared for classes, projects, research, and writing. Also, to my parents, Ralph and Donna Valdez, who have always encouraged me to learn and grow.

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Lastly, to my participants who entrusted their candid and sometimes painful career stories to me, thank you. My hope is that through this collaboration you have clarified some of your own decisions about pursuing promotion to full professor and that the findings from this study will provide others with insights that might help them along that journey as well.

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION IS NOT ENOUGH: EXPLORING THE DECISION TO PURSUE PROMOTION TO FULL PROFESSOR

Abstract

By Margaret Roberts

University of the Pacific
2022

The academic career path for tenure track faculty in most four-year universities in the United States allows those who earn tenure to make an individual choice about whether to pursue promotion to the rank of full professor. Limited research exists on the intrinsic motivators that individuals possess and draw upon to push past obstacles or challenges they encounter along their academic career journey. This study explored the role of intrinsic motivation in the decision of tenured associate professors to pursue promotion to full professor. Using a basic qualitative research design, this inquiry involved two in-depth interviews each with seven participants. Data analysis followed a thematic approach to make meaning of the participants' thoughts and elicit findings guided by the research questions and the framework of career motivation theory encompassing three constructs: career resilience, career insight, and career identity. The findings from this study show both intrinsic motivations and external influences that are at play in the career decision process and illustrate how the tenured university professor's career is a journey rife with obstacles that intrinsic motivation alone is insufficient to navigate. The implications of this study suggest ways to better support tenured faculty who aspire to promotion to full professor and offers advice for faculty who find themselves pondering this career decision with limited guideposts to direct them.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The question of whether to pursue promotion to the rank of full professor likely swirls in the minds of many tenured and tenure-track faculty within the postsecondary academic community. The answer is not simple, and the decision process is both complex and unique to the individual. A professor contemplating this decision considers both internal and external influences. While the motivation to climb the proverbial corporate ladder has been studied by psychology scholars, management experts, and career development professionals for decades, the same cannot be said of ascending academic ranks within institutions of higher education. This study explored how intrinsic motivators influenced the decision by tenured associate professors to pursue the rank of full professor.

In this chapter, I discuss the background of this topic and prior research that explored faculty rank advancement and barriers to achieving the rank of full professor. In the third section, I describe the problem further, noting that multiple scholars highlight a lack of research focused on the progression of mid-career faculty to the rank of full professor, as well as my own discoveries that little research explores intrinsic motivation in relation to this topic. A discussion of the theoretical framework and the proposed research questions guiding the study follows the problem statement. A description of the methodology of the proposed study is next and the chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the significance of this study and the researcher's positionality.

Background

In a university environment, “a hierarchy of academic levels distinguishes one professor from the next” (Thompson, 2022, *The Different Professor Ranks*, para. 1). The assistant, associate, and full professor ranks differentiate the experience levels among tenure-track and tenured faculty from the beginning of an academic career through the mid-career and later stages of faculty careers. As a faculty member accumulates experience over time, promotion in rank serves to recognize an individual’s contributions to scholarship, teaching, and service to the institution, as well as their wider academic discipline.

Scholars have analyzed various aspects of faculty career advancement with notable work in the areas of success factors of high achieving academics (Gladwin et al., 2014), career choice decisions (Lindholm, 2004), gender and sense of agency in career advancement (Terosky et al., 2014), and paying your dues before going up for full professor (Gardner & Blackstone, 2013). Each of these studies explored a different aspect of faculty careers focusing on a particular stage of development (entering, early, or later advancement) as a snapshot in time without a wider view of the career lifecycle. Multiple authors have noted the lack of research on progression in academic careers (Gardner & Blackstone, 2013; Gladwin et al., 2014; Lindholm, 2004; Terosky et al., 2014). Gladwin and colleagues (2014) identify a number of studies published in the 2000s which largely focused on “specific aspects of academic life,” (p. 28) including gender obstacles faced by women, prioritizing work-life balance over advancement, and expectations of faculty engagement in service within university environments.

Existing research exploring the path to full professor typically looked at external influencers and whether these inhibit or enable an individual to advance. Using the framework of socialization, Gardner and Blackstone (2013) isolated several external factors inhibiting

advancement to full professor. The researchers uncover common obstacles to attaining the rank of full professor to include a lack of a formal, structured mentoring system for junior faculty, vague guidelines with no clear timetable to guide the process and limited professional development opportunities to prepare associate professors for promotion to full professor (Gardner & Blackstone, 2013). In a separate study, researchers at UNC Charlotte implemented a faculty advancement initiative strategically designed to create mentoring relationships that paired junior faculty with tenured senior faculty (Buch et al., 2011). These researchers “found that when associate professors (male or female) reported having a mentor, they were significantly more likely to perceive that there were incentives in place for seeking promotion and that promotion criteria were clear” (Buch et al., 2011, p. 44).

An ongoing conversation exists about faculty development and career advancement in both higher education and general online sites, including *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and Slate.com. These essays and blog posts opine on similar narrow concerns of gender inequality (Basken, 2016; Mason, 2013), faculty disengagement due to institutional practices (Beauboeuf et al., 2017), and imposter syndrome impacting women, underrepresented minorities, and oppressed groups such as the LGBTQ community (Anonymous, 2017). Another complicating factor raised in the literature is the question of whether to pursue administrative leadership roles and when. Efforts to protect untenured junior faculty from heavy service or administrative activities until after tenure has been granted may be feasible in a large research-oriented institution but less likely in a smaller university environment where faculty with leadership qualities are often tapped for key roles (Dezure et al., 2014).

Description of the Problem

A review of the scholarship on faculty careers dating back to 1989 shed little light on the role of intrinsic motivators in the progression to the rank of full professor. Mann (1989) explored differences in individual faculty members' goals over time (e.g., the rank of faculty, years in service). In an unpublished literature review, Pardee (1990) highlighted four major motivational theories developed by Maslow (1954), Herzberg (1959), McGregor (1960), and McLelland (1984) which relate to motivation, job satisfaction, and achievement and the importance for administrators to explain motivation and job satisfaction within the educational workplace. The work by both Mann and by Pardee identified important aspects of faculty professional advancement, yet still did not address how intrinsic motivators influence faculty regarding pursuing the full professor rank.

Faculty development and achievement from the individual professor's lens was studied across all three ranks (assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor) using a career life stage conceptual framework in a large research university study (Braskamp et al., 1984). Multiple studies acknowledged a lack of research on progression in academic careers to the rank of full professor (Gardner & Blackstone, 2013; Gladwin et al., 2014; Lindholm, 2004; Terosky et al., 2014). Gladwin and colleagues (2014) identified several studies from the early 2000s that explored gender obstacles, work-life balance, and service expectations.

In an inquiry of faculty career challenges, Baker et al., (2016) focused on career development at the individual level and at the career stages of assistant, associate, and full professor, an approach the authors acknowledged was more commonly applied in settings outside of higher education. The findings of this study, drawn from a survey of more than 500 faculty across 13 liberal arts college member institutions of the Great Lakes Colleges

Association, presented valuable insights on challenges faced by faculty as they advanced through career stages. However, the authors stressed “in both research and practice, little attention has been given to the needs of faculty members in the mid-career and late-career stages” (p. 28). A similar concern was asserted by Baldwin and Chang (2006) a decade earlier in their discussion of strategies to support mid-career faculty who they described as “largely ignored in higher education policy and practice” (p. 28).

In reviewing scholarship dating back to 1989, the existing research includes dozens of studies that focused on external barriers to advancement, yet none that explicitly analyze the internal motivators that influence the decision of tenured faculty to pursue promotion to the rank of full professor were found at the time of this review (December 2021). My study attempted to address this gap in the research.

Theoretical Framework

The existing research on faculty development and career stages is useful in evaluating potential constructs for analyzing this issue including agency, socialization, and motivation. Qualitative approaches, primarily using individual interviews, were common among several of the studies identified in the analysis of existing research. A similar qualitative approach was critical for this present study to explore the ways that intrinsic motivation influenced the decision to pursue promotion to full professor.

The framework used to shape this study is London’s (1983) career motivation theory, a multidimensional model with constructs of career resilience, career insight, and career identity. London conceptualized the theory as one that focuses on the individual, both in terms of internal characteristics and decisions. The components embedded within each construct of London’s model informed the research questions and guided the data analysis by applying these concepts

to the context of the career decisions of higher education faculty. Concepts embedded within career identity include the self in relation to job, organization, or profession, and “needs for advancement, recognition, and a leadership role” (London & Noe, 1997, p. 63). Goal setting and self-awareness of an individual’s strengths and weaknesses with respect to goals are present in the career insight construct (London, 1983; London & Noe, 1997). The career resilience construct (London, 1983; London & Noe, 1997) includes adaptability, self-efficacy, achievement motivation, and tolerance for risk.

Purpose of the Proposed Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how intrinsic motivators influenced the decision of tenured university professors to pursue the rank of full professor.

Research Questions

There is a clear gap in the research on how intrinsic motivators influenced the decision of tenured faculty to pursue the rank of full professor. This study explored intrinsic motivation by answering the following research questions:

1. How do tenured associate professors describe their motivations for pursuing an academic career?
2. In what ways do tenured associate professors explain how they have persisted through any obstacles encountered in their professional careers?
3. What are the ways that tenured associate professors explain how intrinsic motivators have influenced their decision to pursue advancement in rank?

Description of the Study

This study used a basic qualitative research methodology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to explore the intrinsic motivations of tenured associate professors across a range of disciplines within private, not-for-profit university environments where an emphasis on teaching was core to the institutional mission. The study involved seven participants to provide adequate data for the

development of themes to answer the research questions. A purposeful sampling strategy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was used for recruitment and selection of participants who fit the inclusion criteria, which included being eligible for and intending to pursue promotion to the rank of full professor.

Interviews incorporating open-ended questions elicited rich, narrative responses regarding participants' career goals, aspirations, and how intrinsic motivators enabled achievement or non-achievement of stated goals (Braskamp et al., 1984). Two interviews with each study participant allowed for in-depth exploration of the very personal and complex subject of an individual's academic promotion and tenure journey. Thematic analysis using Saldaña's (2016) manual coding methods followed the data collection.

Significance of the Study

Achievement of full professor rank is not the only measure of a successful faculty career. Productive, engaged tenured associate professors may find great satisfaction in their contributions at this rank, and choose to pursue a wider range of faculty service or administrative leadership roles within the department, school or university, as well as engage in activities outside of their professional role. Understanding what motivates these valued contributors within their departments, schools, and institutions is equally important to enable these organizations to design faculty development programs that serve the needs of an often-ignored mid-career tenured faculty population (Baker et al., 2016; Baldwin & Chang, 2006).

While scholarship on topics of faculty achievement, promotion and tenure, and faculty career advancement is generally strong, several scholars concede that existing studies have failed to address the issues of mid-career or associate professors (Baker et al., 2016; Baldwin & Chang, 2006; Gardner & Blackstone, 2013). A better understanding of how intrinsic motivators

influence individual career decisions about advancement in professorial rank can contribute to improvements in faculty development programs. Addressing intrinsic motivation earlier in the faculty lifecycle, when intentional strategies can have a more far-reaching impact on an individual's academic career, could mitigate what Beaubeouf and colleagues (2017) described as a midcareer malaise that can lead to disengagement.

Researcher Positionality

I entered academia in 2002 following a decade in the business world and brought with me a corporate ladder-climbing perspective of advancing in one's career. Early in my own career, I earned several promotions based on performance. When I felt I could no longer advance within a particular organization, I would seek opportunities elsewhere to pursue the professional growth that I desired. As I began to observe the nuances of career advancement for faculty within the university environment, I became curious about what motivated an individual's decision to pursue promotion to the rank of full professor.

My role within the university as a career services director is embedded within an academic unit. In this role, I teach a one-unit career seminar course that is part of the professional school's required core curriculum. I enjoy positive and collaborative relationships with many of the faculty within the school. In this context, I hold an emic perspective, or insider's view (Bhattacharya, 2017; Jones et al., 2014), within the organization as a member of the school's staff. Simultaneously, I observe what is occurring from an etic perspective (Bhattacharya, 2017; Jones et al., 2014), that of an outsider, as I am not classified as a member of the faculty. A delicate balancing act is required to straddle these two perspectives within the culture of my present organization. Similarly, as I approached this dissertation study and engaged participants who are tenured faculty and members of the academy, I realized that some

may view me as an outsider. Having worked closely with faculty for almost two decades, I drew upon that insider perspective to build rapport and trust with participants in my study.

Tenure-track professors advance from assistant professor to associate professor with the opportunity to seek promotion to full professor if they choose within the academic faculty rank system of tenure in a given institution. Working in a private, teaching-focused university, I observed that not every faculty who achieves tenure ultimately seeks promotion to the rank of full professor. Faculty of all genders, backgrounds, and ethnicities hold the rank of associate professor for the post-tenure duration of their academic careers. These observations in the university setting gave rise to my curiosity regarding the factors that influence decisions about pursuing the rank of full professor. I became interested to understand whether intrinsic motivation has any bearing on one's decision to seek promotion to full professor.

What I have most often observed of tenured associate professors within the institution and academic unit where I work daily is a high level of commitment to student success by these faculty. Their service contributions within the school and across the university are considerable and their care for students obvious in their commitment to student organization advising and other activities. I hold the highest esteem for these colleagues and have often wondered why their impact is not rewarded with promotion to full professor. Through this dissertation journey I have learned that such promotions are not awarded simply on an individual's merit, but through a more complex system of peer and institutional evaluation. Each tenured faculty member will decide whether to pursue promotion beyond the rank of associate professor.

Summary

The decision to pursue an academic career is not one taken lightly given the considerable amount of effort required to progress along the tenure track. A review of the existing research on

faculty development, career advancement, and progression through the professorial ranks at a university level exposed a hole in our understanding of the internal motivators and drivers that enable one to advance to the rank of full professor. Many different aspects of faculty careers are analyzed in multiple studies conducted over the past three decades. The focus of these studies runs the gamut of topics from gender obstacles and work-life balance concerns to institutional faculty development practices (or lack thereof). Numerous scholars have lamented the absence of research focused on issues and challenges of mid-career faculty at the associate professor rank (Baker et al., 2016; Baldwin & Chang, 2006; Gardner & Blackstone, 2013; Gladwin et al., 2014; Lindholm, 2004; Terosky et al., 2014).

This study aimed to explore how intrinsic motivators influenced faculty career decisions as participants navigated the post-tenure years. The findings of this research might inform new approaches for supporting early and mid-career faculty who aspire to advance to the full professor rank.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Sound the alarm! “Tenure is dying,” bemoans an emeritus professor in a Forbes article published as the global pandemic initially spread across the United States (U.S.) (Vedder, April 2020). If we are to accept Vedder’s premise that tenure is dying, we could stop reading. I challenge that we cannot accept this to be a foregone conclusion. Higher education today is in turmoil in response to numerous forces that include a global pandemic, downward trends in enrollments, mounting financial pressures on institutions of all types (“How will the pandemic change higher education?”, 2020), in addition to documented shifts away from tenured and tenure-track faculty in favor of a non-tenure-track and contingent workforce of educators (AAUP, 2018).

Data on faculty hiring indicate a trend toward greater reliance on non-tenure-track appointments (AAUP, 2018), which critics point to as partial evidence of the neoliberalism of the present state of U.S. higher education (Tight, 2018). Although both public and private U.S. universities and colleges operate like businesses managing profits and losses (Seal, 2018), the traditions of academic freedom and shared governance which are embedded within the tenure systems persist. While there may be pros and cons worthy of debate, the merits of tenure in the academy were beyond the scope of this present study. For the foreseeable future and to uphold the academic mission, universities and colleges will continue to hire full-time faculty who are expected to fulfill their respective institutions’ expectations of research, teaching and service and promote them through the ranks from assistant professor to associate and full professor. This study focused on tenured faculty who had not yet achieved the rank of full professor.

Approaching the topic of the future for tenured faculty from an optimistic lens, this chapter explored the historical and present-day status of faculty and tenure in higher education. General motivations to pursue the career path of a university professor follow, as well as the extrinsic and intrinsic motivators that support or impede faculty advancing through the faculty ranks. In addition, I reviewed the literature on the theoretical framework guiding the study to analyze emergent themes of intrinsic motivations that propel tenured professors to the rank of full professor.

Faculty and Tenure in 21st Century United States Higher Education

In the United States higher education environment, faculty are the primary purveyors of knowledge within the complex and diverse system of post-secondary educational institutions. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics categorizes faculty as post-secondary teachers who instruct students in a variety of post-high school academic environments (BLS, 2020). In the U.S., these institutions include four-year public and private colleges and universities, two-year community colleges, professional and vocational schools. Because the focus of this dissertation centers on faculty career progression to full professor rank in a private, four-year university environment, this review of faculty in higher education will also focus on this segment of the industry.

The type of faculty positions that exist in four-year private universities have expanded beyond the traditional full-time ranks of assistant (pre-tenure) professor, and tenured associate and full professor. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) defines faculty appointed off the tenure track as “contingent faculty” (2003). The population of contingent faculty, which can include both full-time positions as well as part-time or adjunct instructors and lecturers on short-term or continuous contracts, also referred to as non-tenure-track (NTT) (Kezar & Sam, 2011), has grown in recent years to more nearly three-quarters of the total

population of university faculty across the U.S. higher education system (AAUP, 2018). These contingent or NTT positions typically do not enjoy the security or protections afforded to tenured and tenure-track faculty in the same institutions (AAUP, 2018). A brief review of the history of the tenure system and how it supports faculty for whom it was designed provides additional context about the challenges for those not members of the tenured or tenure track faculty within an institution.

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) codified the U.S. academic system of tenure in the early and mid-20th century. In a document titled “1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure” (1940 Statement) the AAUP detailed policy statements agreed upon by various committees defining and refining the need for, purpose and policies of academic freedom and tenure beginning in 1915 and continuing with revisions and endorsements as recently as 1970 (AAUP, n.d.). The 1940 Statement has served to “promote public understanding and support of academic freedom and tenure and agreement upon procedures to ensure them in colleges and universities (AAUP, n.d., pg. 14).” The AAUP 1940 Statement further explains that to fulfill a commitment to the common good, institutions of higher education must create an environment where the pursuit of truth in teaching, research and learning are preserved. Academic freedom is essential to this goal and tenure, or the earned permanency of a professor’s position, creates a level of employment stability that makes the profession attractive to qualified individuals (AAUP, n.d.).

Endorsed by more than 250 academic associations, including the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the 1940 Statement explained how academic freedom and academic tenure should operate within individual institutions or educational systems based on a set of agreed upon principles (AAUP, n.d.). Three key principles of academic freedom relate to

an individual faculty member's choice about research topics, the freedom to discuss their research subject in the classroom, and an expectation they will not be censored by the institution (AAUP, n.d.). These elements are designed to create freedom of inquiry, exchange of ideas, and knowledge production without fear of retaliation (Miami AAUP, 2017). Principles supporting the tenure of professors outlined in the 1940 Statement as "acceptable academic practice" (pg. 15) include providing appointment terms in writing, limiting pre-tenure probationary periods to no more than seven years, extending academic freedom protection during the probationary period, and practices regarding terminations (AAUP, n.d.).

Shared governance is an equally important component of the faculty relationship with an institution. Like the statement on tenure, the 1966 *Statement on Governance of Colleges and Universities*, set forth expectations for shared decision-making among the faculty and administrators of an institution and was jointly endorsed by the American Council of Education, the Association of Governing Boards, and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP, n.d.). Shared governance puts the primary ownership of decisions related to curriculum, content and instructional methods, research, faculty tenure and promotion review processes, and co-curricular activities related to the educational experience in the hands of the faculty. In combination with the tenure system, shared governance is key to preserving the "essential elements of faculty work" (Gappa & Austin, 2010, pg. 9).

Postsecondary education in the U.S. has been experiencing a significant shift away from tenure-track permanent faculty hires and toward an increasing dependence on non-tenure-track (NTT) appointments. A report on the changing face of the professoriate funded by the TIAA Institute, indicated 70% of university faculty in U.S. institutions were in NTT positions (Kezar et al., 2016). A more recent report suggests that as many as 73% of faculty across all higher

education institution types are in NTT positions (AAUP, 2018). Some of these positions may be permanent and NTT, filled by a committed instructor who is engaged in campus life. An increasing reliance on part-time contingent adjuncts who may not be eligible to sit on committees increases the shared governance obligations and service workload to tenured and tenure-track faculty who are obligated to do the work in exchange for the privilege of tenure.

Because this dissertation study focused on tenured faculty at the associate professor rank, a brief overview of common practices related to promotion and tenure are relevant for this review. Tenure is a status of position permanency earned by a faculty member on the tenure-track within an institution (AAUP, n.d.). A newly hired tenure-track faculty member typically receives a pre-tenure assistant professor appointment of six years (or not to exceed seven per the 1940 Statement), at the end of which the individual presents their tenure package for review by tenured faculty at the department, college/school, and institution-level. If successful, the faculty member is granted tenure and promoted to the rank of associate professor. Once tenured and promoted, an associate professor may choose to pursue promotion to the rank of full professor. Unlike the six-year pre-tenure period for assistant professors, there is generally no clearly defined deadline when an associate professor must decide to seek promotion or choose to stay in their permanent tenured associate professor position (Gardner & Blackstone, 2013; Mabrouk, 2007).

Expectations and guidelines for promotion and tenure vary by institution and “as a part of larger reward systems, the promotion and tenure process reflect institutional values, aspirations, privileges, and power structures” (O’Meara et al., 2015, pg. 52). A detailed white paper on promotion and tenure best practices developed by the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE, 2014) at Harvard’s Graduate School of Education calls attention

to several key areas that warrant attention. These include clarity of tenure policies related to department process, criteria and standards, as well as the contents of a review package; clarity about what is expected of an individual granted tenure (e.g., as a researcher, colleague, advisor to students, campus and community citizen, etc.); clarity of the promotion policies (e.g., department and institutional expectations, criteria, and process) (COACHE, 2014). As noted by multiple scholars (Buch, et al., 2011; Campbell & O'Meara, 2014), a lack of clear expectations and understanding of promotion and tenure policies can influence the career progression of faculty to the rank of full professor.

General Motivations to Pursue an Academic Career

To understand why academics navigate the path to full professorship it is helpful to review the literature on general motivations for entering academia, the values commonly held by individuals who become university professors, and career goals espoused by university faculty. Common motivations for entering academia include intellectual challenge, passion for research and the freedom to direct areas of research, autonomy and flexibility in structuring one's work, and an ability to influence students (Gladwin, et al., 2014; Lindholm, 2004; Sutherland, 2017). Sutherland (2017) analyzed the perspectives of early career academics and her findings strongly suggested that subjective measures of career success, based upon an individual's values, might not align with the institution's allocation of efforts expected toward research, teaching, and service. A misalignment between personal and institutional values may ultimately cause an individual to find oneself in a situation where external pressures and expectations are in direct conflict with the individual's motivations and goals (Sutherland, 2017).

Appreciating what motivates an individual to pursue a career in academia and their individual career aspirations within the profession informs our understanding of the factors

influencing success in the tenure track. I explored the literature pertaining to both extrinsic and intrinsic factors that contribute to the promotion of faculty to the rank of full professor.

Motivations and Other Factors That Impact Career Progression

The existing research on advancement through the faculty ranks is plentiful in many regards, touching on both external supports which can motivate a faculty member to move up the ranks, as well as negative factors (external or internal) which create barriers to advancement. Prior studies of external support mechanisms that enable career progression have analyzed faculty development programs at the institutional level (Baker et al., 2016; Baldwin & Chang, 2006; Cullen & Harris, 2008; Teroksy et al., 2014) and the importance of mentorship (Buch et al., 2011; Ponjuan et al., 2011; van der Weijden et al., 2015). Social capital or professional networks are additional support mechanisms widely covered (Baldwin & Chang, 2006; Gladwin et al., 2014; Niehaus & O'Meara, 2015; Terosky et al., 2014). Recognition, belonging, and one's reputation within the scholarly community also provide external motivation for professors to seek tenure and advancement within the faculty ranks (O'Meara et al., 2018).

External barriers to advancement experienced by tenure-track and tenured faculty are extensively covered in the literature. General concerns about a lack of clarity in relation to promotion and tenure expectations (Britton, 2010; Crawford et al., 2012; Gardner & Blackstone, 2013; Sutherland, 2017) are addressed. Among the most frequently discussed are work-life and family considerations (Jacobs & Winslow, 2004; O'Meara & Campbell, 2011), an undervaluing of service contributions (Misra et al., 2010; Terosky et al., 2014), and lack of a sufficient pipeline of talent (Britton, 2010). The issue of bullying is mentioned but less covered in the research (Frazier, 2011; Keashly & Neuman, 2010).

Research focused on the impact on specific population segments such as female scholars (Bird, 2011; Bonawitz & Andel, 2009; Misra et al., 2010; Stout et al., 2007, Teroksy et al., 2014) and persons of color (Cora-Bramble, 2006; Frazier, 2011; Ponjuan et al., 2011) is extensive. According to research by Catalyst (2020), a global non-profit think tank on women's inclusion in workplaces, U.S. women in academia continue to be outpaced by men in reaching the full professor rank, comprising only 34.3% of faculty at this rank (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). For women of color the numbers are even starker, with representation at the full professor rank of less than 3% for Asian and Latina female faculty and under 2% for Black female faculty (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Although the intent of this study was not centered on gender or race specifically in exploring what influenced tenured faculty to pursue promotion to the rank of full professor, it is important to note that faculty members are not treated equitably when decisions are made regarding promotion and tenure.

External Enablers That Support Career Progression of Faculty

Multiple external enablers exist that positively influence career advancement of university professors. These include, but are not limited to, faculty development programs, mentorship, and social capital/professional networks (Baker et al., 2016; Baldwin & Chang, 2006; Cullen & Harris, 2008; Teroksy et al., 2014). Baker et al. (2016) stressed that career development of faculty should focus on the individual level and programming design should be rank based with the career lifecycle needs of professors in mind. The presence of one or more of the enablers may provide the external boost that propels an individual to the rank of full professor.

Faculty development programs. Faculty development programs generally refer to formalized programming sponsored by a university to support faculty professional development.

Many programs reviewed in the literature are examples of externally grant-funded initiatives aimed at supporting faculty advancement of women (Bird, 2011; Buch et al., 2011; Niehaus & O'Meara, 2015; Terosky et al., 2014). Other programs address the needs of specific career stage faculty (e.g., assistant, associate, and full) such as new faculty orientation programs (Cullen & Harris, 2008) and those tailored for the tenured, mid-career professors (Baldwin & Chang, 2006). External programs also exist through organizations such as the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity, which tailors their programs and resources for each phase of the faculty journey (NCFDD, n.d.).

Cullen and Harris (2008) demonstrated the benefits of a new faculty orientation program to address the needs of the next generation of faculty entering the academic workforce. The outcomes of the program highlighted the importance for school and department level leaders (e.g., deans, chairs) to communicate clear expectations for promotion and tenure to new faculty from the outset of their time on the tenure track. Baldwin and Chang (2006) go a bit further to challenge senior leadership in higher education to be intentional in supporting mid-career faculty who are “largely ignored in higher education policy and practice” (p. 28) because it is in the institutions’ best interests. Their proposed solution is built upon a foundation of three pillars: collegial support (mentoring, networking, collaboration), resources (information, time, funding, space), and reinforcement (recognition, rewards). In this model, mid-career faculty are engaged in a professional development process that integrates career reflection and assessment, planning and goal setting, and action/implementation to keep individuals motivated for advancement (Baldwin & Chang, 2006).

Mentorship. Whether through a formally structured mentor/mentee relationship or through informal relationships formed through professional networks, faculty are no less in need

of professional support and guidance to navigate the often political, bureaucratic, and complex environments to advance up the professorial ranks (Gardner & Blackstone, 2013). Mentors can “help young academic researchers prepare for (full) professorship” (van der Weijden, et al., 2015, p. 277). In a study of the effects of young tenured professors in the Netherlands, van der Weijden and colleagues (2015) found that structured mentor programs enhanced career satisfaction, self-efficacy, and advancement. In a separate study of a structured mentoring program to advance women faculty in STEM disciplines at a large U.S. research university, Buch and colleagues (2011) found that participation in even one mid-career mentoring program showed promise in improving faculty perceptions that there were incentives and support for seeking promotion.

Using data from Harvard’s Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE), Ponjuan and colleagues (2011) examined pre-tenure faculty satisfaction and perceptions of the key relationships that support faculty in the tenure process. Their findings illustrated the importance of relationships for socialization of new faculty, developing mentor relationships, promoting research collaborations, and supporting faculty through the tenure process. Like the benefits of new faculty orientation programs, this study demonstrated that earlier interventions to support professional development and advancement are important for enabling future promotion success.

Social capital and professional networks. The popular refrain *It’s not what you know, but who you know* became a regular part of the collection of American idioms in the late 1930s (Popik, 2009). This concept rings true in the halls of academia today. Social capital in the context of academia generally refers to the networks or relationships one builds and maintains to facilitate knowledge sharing and boost career advancement. Social capital and professional

networks are valuable for garnering support for promotion and tenure (Baldwin & Chang, 2006; Gladwin et al., 2014; Niehaus & O'Meara, 2015; Terosky et al., 2014). Professional networks, often formed in graduate school and across one's field or discipline throughout an academic career, are found to be of particular importance as enablers of career advancement among women faculty (Terosky et al., 2014).

Echoing the value of external networks, Niehaus and O'Meara (2015) emphasized "In a world where national and international reputation is one of the major ways legitimacies are traded, status provided, and power ascribed, those faculty members with off-campus networks were gaining access to more diverse social capital..." (p. 168). Off-campus networks may play a particularly prominent role for those who do not find research collaborators within their on-campus networks in smaller institutions where the faculty research interests do not significantly overlap within a given department.

Negative External Factors Inhibiting Faculty Career Advancement

Despite the perceived freedom and autonomy of a faculty career, academia is a hierarchal environment in which one's progress is not entirely determined by their own output and evaluation of such. The peer-review nature of a faculty member's portfolio of work in academia imposes external analysis of one's work performance, research quality, and other contributions such as service and teaching. This reality, in combination with other factors, introduces potential external inhibitors that can create obstacles to faculty advancement. Extensive analysis of gendered (Bird, 2011; Jacobs & Winslow, 2004; Teroksy et al., 2014) and ethnicity related inequities (Cora-Bramble, 2006; Frazier, 2011; Gardner & Blackstone, 2013) and work/life constraints (Jacobs & Winslow, 2004; O'Meara & Campbell, 2011) are well documented in the literature. Additional areas which I will expand upon in greater detail are workload (research,

service, and teaching) issues (Baker et al., 2016; Bonawitz & Andel, 2009), lack of clarity in promotion and tenure expectations (Crawford et al., 2012; Gardner & Blackstone, 2013; Sutherland, 2017) and bullying (Frazier, 2011; Keashly & Neuman, 2010).

Workload issues and balancing research, teaching, and service. Operating within an environment that requires its members to meet a pre-determined level of performance (e.g., research productivity, service contributions, and teaching evaluations) to earn the promotion and tenure has a significant influence on how tenure-track faculty spend their time. Braskamp (1984) and colleagues explored the differences across stages of the faculty career cycle from assistant to full professor. The authors highlight that pre-tenure assistant professors have little choice but to focus their efforts on producing high quality scholarship of a sufficient quantity to achieve tenure, and later as associate professors continue high quality research to earn promotion to full professor. Even among full professors in the Braskamp (1984) study, workload concerns were an issue. Nearly three decades later Baker (2016) and colleagues are beating the same drum of faculty challenges across rank. Associate professors surveyed in their study identified the conflicting constraints of workload and increased institutional service and leadership expectations on their individual goal achievement. Under such demands, it is not surprising that workload issues can negatively inhibit career advancement.

Lack of clarity in promotion criteria. Workload constraints are compounded by another common concern - the issue of clarity in expectations regarding promotion criteria. Multiple studies point to a perception that publications and professional recognition within one's discipline carry a greater weight in promotion decisions than other criteria (Baker et al., 2016; Crawford et al., 2012; Sutherland, 2017). Several researchers point out that most promotion and tenure guidelines do not explicitly establish a baseline of a minimum number of publications or

types of scholarship considered sufficient for promotion (Britton, 2010; Crawford et al., 2012; Mabrouk, 2007). Britton (2010) analyzed promotion and tenure guidelines documents during her study and found requirements to be “deliberately unclear” (p. 7) and “purposely vague” (p. 8). The distribution of weight associated with research, teaching, and service varies based on the type of institution, yet Sutherland (2017) finds these distributions are not abundantly clear. In an analysis of objective versus subjective constructs of career success, Sutherland (2017) found that research productivity was deemed the most important objective criteria upon which success was determined but “what mattered most seemed to be how *many* publications, and in *which* outlets, not necessarily what was written or what changed as a result of the work” (p. 751).

Beyond the questions of how many and in which type of journal publications are deemed adequate for promotion to associate professor, Gardner and Blackstone (2013) discovered that timing regarding when to go up for full professor is often also unclear which can lead associate professors not to pursue promotion to full professor or being advised against seeking a promotion. Mabrouk (2007) pointed out there is no pre-determined schedule that dictates when an associate professor should pursue promotion to full professor.

Bullying in the academy. Though one of the lesser studied issues, bullying of peers in the academy is a serious inhibitor, which not only affects job satisfaction (Frazier, 2011; Keashly & Neuman, 2010) but might also dissuade an individual from pursuing promotion to full professor or drive someone away from an academic career altogether. Much of the existing research on bullying looks at the issue through a gender or ethnicity lens (Cora-Bramble, 2006; Frazier, 2011; Reybold, 2005). Cora-Bramble (2006) highlights similar findings in her analysis of recruitment, retention, and advancement: “academic minority physicians are less satisfied with their jobs than their non-minority colleagues, more likely to report experiencing ethnic

harassment and racial/ethnic bias, have lower promotion rates, and more frequently report they are considering leaving academic medicine” (pp. 251-252). While the focus of this present study was not intended to focus on external factors, it is necessary to acknowledge the presence of this barrier in an environment that touts diversity and inclusion as a core value of institutions of higher education.

Intrinsic Motivators and Barriers to Faculty Career Advancement

The literature is noticeably less abundant in exploring intrinsic motivators that facilitate career success and/or advancement of faculty. When studied, it is most often in the context of population segments of women and minority faculty populations, specifically African American and Latino faculty. Extant scholarship includes the explorations of internal factors such as career agency and related influencers (Campbell & O’Meara, 2014; O’Meara & Campbell, 2011; Terosky et al., 2014), aspirations and goals (Braskamp et al., 1984; Lindholm, 2004; Mann, 1989), and self-motivation (Gladwin et al., 2014; O’Meara, 2004; Reybold, 2005).

For those aspiring to the rank of full professor, internal factors can also create barriers to advancement. These include characteristics such as determination, grit, resilience, and positive self-esteem, which can help one overcome life or career obstacles. Lacking these traits or other enabling external supports discussed earlier may trigger feelings of imposter syndrome (Clance & Imes, 1978; Hutchins & Rainbolt, 2016), a topic increasingly discussed in the past decade. Much of the literature explores imposter syndrome in the context of women (Clance & Imes, 1978; Fitzpatrick & Curran, 2014) and minority faculty (Griffin et al., 2015; Zambrana et al., 2015). Recent studies are inclusive of both genders (Griffin et al., 2015; Hutchins & Rainbolt, 2016).

Career agency. Defined as “intentional views or actions toward goals that matter” (Terosky et al., 2014, p. 61), career agency is a concept adopted from the social sciences and which a few scholars have more recently applied to the exploration of faculty careers. Terosky and colleagues further describe agency in the context of faculty careers as what one “believes is possible and what she does to move toward those goals” (p. 61). In a similar vein to the age-old question of whether leaders are born or made, career agency is a conditional state influenced by constricting or enabling factors external to the individual. Agency can be boosted by professional development programs, strong networks, and mentors, or squashed by values misalignment, workload (e.g., administrative / service expectations), departmental norms, institutional policies and practices related to family leave and clarity of expectations for promotion and tenure (Campbell & O’Meara, 2014; Niehaus & O’Meara, 2015; O’Meara & Campbell, 2011; Ponjuan et al., 2011; Terosky et al., 2014).

In a study of the departmental contexts that influenced faculty career agency, Campbell and O’Meara (2014) found certain factors to be “predictors of faculty agency” which they labeled “person-department fit” and “work-life climate” (p. 69) and suggest are most directly influenced at the department or school level. The conclusions of this study suggested that higher educational leaders take ownership for cultivating environments - cultures, policies, and practices - that support advancement.

Aspirations and goals. Several common motivations are echoed across the literature that reflect characteristics which both attract and retain university faculty in the academy. Freedom, autonomy, passion for research, and influencing students are most frequently named (Gladwin et al., 2014; Lindholm, 2004; Sutherland, 2017). Lindholm (2004) asserts that while there are similarities in aspects of the work that attracted individuals to the professoriate, there

are generational differences in deeper motivations (e.g., political, social change, or public good agendas, or lack of) for entering academia. Scholars agree that aspirations and goals largely operate at an individual level, change over time as faculty advance through rank, and can be influenced by the larger institutional environment positively and negatively (Blackmore & Kandiko, 2011; Lindholm, 2004; Sutherland, 2017).

Self-motivation. Research on motivation and associated theories in the social sciences are widely cited in general studies of job satisfaction (Pardee, 1990). Scholars exploring motivation in the context of faculty careers connect motivation and related traits such as self-determination, self-responsibility, and self-reliance as strategies a faculty member should employ to counter the external challenges outside of one's control, which are inherent in the academic environment (Braskamp et al., 1984; Gladwin, et al., 2014; Lindholm, 2004).

Intellectual curiosity. Research interests and the associated intellectual curiosity that attract individuals to an academic career may be a strong intrinsic driver contributing to promotion in rank. Tien and Blackburn (1996) analyzed research productivity relative to faculty rank to better understand what motivates faculty to publish. These scholars argued that existing measures at the time were insufficient to determine whether extrinsic or intrinsic motivation measures could accurately test research productivity drivers at different stages of rank but determined that years in rank was a more appropriate variable than simply focusing on rank (e.g., assistant, associate, full). In this study, and a follow-up study (Tien, 2000), the researchers conclude that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations drive research productivity. In a more recent analysis of the factors that contribute to an active research agenda and consequently higher productivity and performance, Mantikayan and Abdulgani (2018) concluded that one of the important intrinsic motivators is satisfying one's intellectual curiosities.

Imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome was originally defined as a phenomenon of high achieving women who “do not experience an internal sense of success” (Clance & Imes, 1978, p. 241). Hutchins and Rainbolt (2016) found that imposter syndrome affected faculty at different stages of their academic careers and in different contexts. For some faculty, imposter syndrome presented itself as a lack of confidence in one’s discipline, specifically one faculty “described his imposter experiences arising from being an associate faculty ‘for too long’ and not feeling good enough to progress to the next faculty rank” (p. 10). Women in their study “spoke more (compared with men) about imposter concerns achieving tenure and promotion...and worthiness to be an academic” (p. 11).

Theoretical Framework

Multiple theoretical frameworks showed promise for a study of intrinsic motivations that influence career advancement decisions of university faculty. I considered the work on grit by Duckworth and colleagues (2007), which looks at the combination of resilience, ambition, and self-control in pursuit of long-term goals, as one possibility. Another possible option with potential applicability for this study was self-determination theory developed by Deci and Ryan (2008), which considers motivation on a continuum of “autonomous motivation and controlled motivation” (p. 182) involving varied levels of motivations that are both extrinsic and intrinsic. Ultimately, London’s (1983) career motivation theory, a multidimensional model with constructs of career identity, career insight, and career resilience, was a better fit to explore the breadth of intrinsic motivators I sought to understand.

In his original conceptualization of career motivation theory, London (1983) applied the aforementioned constructs in analyzing the behaviors of individual managers. He described career motivation as “the set of individual characteristics and associated career decisions and

behaviors that reflect the person's career identity, insight into factors affecting his or her career, and resilience in the face of unfavorable career conditions” (1983, p. 620). The combination of characteristics embedded within each of the three constructs of London’s (1983) theory provided a framework around which to craft a qualitative study to understand how individual faculty think about their own motivations for career advancement. Career identity encompasses how an individual relates their self to the job, organization, or profession, and “needs for advancement, recognition, and a leadership role” (London & Noe, 1997, p. 63). Career insight centers on goal setting and the individual’s self-awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in relation to said goals (London, 1983; London & Noe, 1997). The career resilience construct, further validated by London and Noe (1997), relates to an individual’s adaptability in changing or unfavorable situations and consists of concepts of self-efficacy, achievement motivation, and risk-taking tolerance.

Like much of the original research conducted by London (1983) and later in collaboration with Noe (1997), the scholarship on career motivation theory has focused on quantitative studies, including much of the recent work using this theory (Agha et al, 2020; Lin & Chen, 2020; You, 2020). A handful of qualitative studies explore what drives individuals to advance careers including Hancock and Hums (2016, 2015) who looked at the goals, expectations and development/advancement of NCAA Division 1 athletics administrators using other career development frameworks. Achuff (2018) applied London’s (1983) career motivation theory to her dissertation study of Christian schoolteachers. During the period of my dissertation research, I found no specific studies which positioned career motivation theory as the framework for analyzing the intrinsic motivations of university faculty pursuing advancement to the rank of full professor. Adapting the constructs and embedded components within London’s theory into a

qualitative study provided a set of career motivation characteristics to help understand whether intrinsic motivation was a major driver for the participants of this study.

Summary

The path to the rank of full professor within the four-year university environment is not an easy road. Tenured faculty who seek recognition of their contributions to the institution and academy by pursuing the rank of full professor are affected by both extrinsic and intrinsic factors, which can hinder or help their progress toward this end. It is important to acknowledge that numerous external (or extrinsic) factors such as the challenges relating to gender and race, workload, and bullying in the academy, or positive supports including mentors, social networks, and faculty development programs, influence the career decisions of academic faculty. Using basic qualitative research design, I applied career motivation theory as a framework to better understand how intrinsic motivation influences the decisions of tenured associate professors to pursue the rank of full professor.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The question of whether to pursue promotion to the rank of full professor likely swirls in the minds of tenured associate professors within the academic community. The answer is not simple, and the decision process is both complex and unique to the individual. A professor contemplating this decision takes into account both internal and external influences. While the motivation to climb the proverbial corporate ladder has been studied by psychology scholars, management experts, and career development professionals for decades, the same cannot be said of ascending academic ranks within institutions of higher education.

Existing research has failed to explore the role that intrinsic motivation plays in a tenured faculty's decision whether to pursue promotion to full professor. This study explored how intrinsic motivation influenced decisions to pursue promotion to full professor by answering the following research questions:

1. How do tenured associate professors describe their motivations for pursuing an academic career?
2. In what ways do tenured associate professors explain how they have persisted through any obstacles encountered in their professional careers?
3. What are the ways that tenured associate professors explain how intrinsic motivators have influenced their decision to pursue advancement in rank?

This chapter discusses the basic qualitative research approach, methodology, research design, and methods, which include the participant selection strategy, data collection and data analysis that guided this study.

Approach

Qualitative research is designed to answer questions of how, what, or why, thus it was the most appropriate choice for this study because of the emphasis on using words and stories to derive meaning and understanding (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). Existing research has used a qualitative approach to explore issues related to faculty development topics (Baldwin & Chang, 2006; Cullen & Harris, 2008; Teroksy et al., 2014) and external factors that impact decisions across faculty career stages (O'Meara & Campbell, 2011; Stout et al., 2007). A qualitative approach allowed me to explore how intrinsic motivators contribute to faculty member's decision to seek advancement to the rank of full professor among tenured faculty in the university setting. As the researcher, I embraced a constructivist view of qualitative inquiry (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell, 2007; Jones et al., 2014) to understand a "complex human phenomena" (Jones, et al., 2014, p. 13).

While it may not be a simple task to separate intrinsic motivations from external influences that affect decisions along the trajectory of one's professional academic career, this study sought to do exactly that. The goal was not to measure difference or significance of intrinsic motivators in quantitative terms. Rather it was to make meaning of participants' thoughts (Teroksy, 2010) about how intrinsic motivation played a role in their decisions and actions of whether to seek promotion to the rank of full professor. This qualitative study allowed me as the researcher to gather data through in-depth interviews, produce insights and meaning using a thematic analysis approach (Saldaña, 2016), and present findings with rich descriptions drawn from the individual experiences and thoughts of my participants.

Methodology

Qualitative inquiry offers multiple design choices to structure research with those most frequently used being phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, case study and basic qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each of these methodologies contains unique characteristics which align to a study's purpose and goals. In a basic qualitative study, the focus of inquiry is on the individual participants and how they make sense of their experiences. A basic qualitative research design is recommended in situations when a researcher's "primary goal...is to uncover and interpret these meanings" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24) related to the phenomenon of interest they are exploring with their study participants. Interviews, observations, or document analysis are typical forms of data collection procedures in basic qualitative studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that basic qualitative research studies have become the predominant choice of researchers focused on topics in education. As my primary interest focused on exploring career decisions and making meaning of how intrinsic motivation influences these decisions for individual study participants through interviews, a basic qualitative research study design was the most appropriate method for carrying out this dissertation project.

I employed an interpretive qualitative approach to explore research questions that focused on how intrinsic motivation influences tenured faculty career decisions to pursue advancement to the rank of full professor and applied the theoretical framework of career motivation theory and the intrinsic motivators embedded within London's (1983) constructs of career identity, career insight, and career resilience to the data analysis process. As meaning was interpreted through coding of data and formation of themes (Saldaña, 2016), I was interested to learn whether these

intrinsic motivators were present in each participant, and if patterns of similar themes emerged across participants in the study.

Methods

Data collection methods in this study involved two interviews per participant with tenured associate professors intending to pursue promotion to full professor. From the information collected through these individual interviews, thematic analysis to identify common themes informed the findings of this study.

Participant selection strategy. In qualitative research, it is not typical to seek a representative sample of a population. A participant in this study was a tenured associate professor eligible for promotion to full professor who worked in a private, not-for-profit doctoral-granting university setting where teaching is core to the institutional mission. A purposeful sampling approach guided the identification of participants for this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The criteria outlined below (Table 1) were used to identify individuals with relevant experiences to address the research questions that framed this study related to how intrinsic motivators influence a tenured faculty member's decision to pursue the rank of full professor.

Table 1

Participant Inclusion Criteria

Tenure status	tenured
Faculty rank	associate professor
Post-tenure status	earned tenure more than five years ago and intends to pursue promotion to full professor
Institution type	private, not-for-profit doctoral or masters granting university with a teaching focused mission

As outlined in Table 1, the participant profile of this study was a tenured associate professor intending to pursue promotion to full professor and who was promoted to associate professor more than five years ago. No specific upper limit of years was relevant because the exact timing of when an associate professor becomes eligible to seek promotion to full professor may vary across institutions and there is typically no deadline for such promotion once a faculty member is granted tenure (Gardner & Blackstone, 2013; Mabrouk, 2007). The type of institution defined in the selection criteria was of specific interest to me because it reflects the same as the institution where I have worked and observed the phenomenon that motivated this research interest. Limiting the institution type to private, not-for-profit doctoral or masters granting universities with a teaching focused mission, while excluding public universities from my study, allowed me to explore commonalities and differences among participants who are navigating their academic careers in similar types of institutions.

In qualitative research the number of participants in a study varies from as few as one or two (e.g., narrative inquiry studies), a few to several (e.g., phenomenology and case studies), and as many as 20 - 30 (e.g., grounded theory studies) as outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018). Seven participants meeting the inclusion criteria were included in this study. To recruit study participants, I employed multiple strategies of targeted outreach to recruit. First, I promoted my study via social media which resulted in two prospective participants who met the inclusion criteria and joined the study. Second, I solicited referrals from my existing network of faculty colleagues at my current institution and from career services colleagues at universities across the U.S., however, this strategy did not generate referrals of any prospective participants. Finally, I conducted independent research of faculty directories on websites of institutions that met the inclusion criteria, scanned the publicly available associate professor CVs, and recruited potential

participants through a direct email outreach campaign. This effort netted eight additional prospective participants. Five of these individuals met the inclusion criteria for the study and agreed to participate. A sixth prospective participant recruited through this direct email outreach was interviewed during the data collection process; however, this participant was ultimately not included in the study because I realized after data collection that they did not meet the inclusion criteria of more than five years post-tenure.

To introduce the study to my existing network of faculty and career services colleagues for the purpose of referrals and to reach out to prospective participants, I tailored a brief email message with a targeted recruitment flyer (Appendix A). To promote the study via social media I used a graphic (Appendix B) and posted on Twitter. The tweet was aimed at academic users who follow high engagement hashtags (e.g., #AcademicTwitter, #AcademicChatter) and who had a high volume of academic topic posts. One retweet of my post was shared by a high profile, verified academic thought leader who at that time had over 45,000 followers. I attribute one of the two participants recruited via social media to this retweet. In addition to using Twitter, I shared the post in academic private groups on Facebook.

An online participant interest form (Appendix C) was used to gauge the fit of potential study participants with the inclusion criteria and to gather basic demographic and contact information. A total of ten respondents completed the interest form and received a personal follow-up email. Respondents who did not meet the selection criteria were thanked for their interest in the study. Respondents who met the inclusion criteria were asked to complete the Informed Consent (Appendix D) and once the consent was electronically signed and returned, I scheduled the first of two interview dates with the participants.

Data collection procedures. Interviews were the primary source of data collection in this study, as the nature of the information I sought to elicit and analyze could be easily collected using alternative methods since only the participants could describe their thoughts, feelings, motivations, and career decisions (Bhattacharya, 2017; Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In qualitative research, there are three primary types of interviews – highly structured, semi-structured, and informal or guided – that vary based on the rigidity of the question wording, order, and conversation flow (Bhattacharya, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I conducted two guided interviews of 45–60-minute duration with each participant to collect information that was both deeply personal (e.g., intrinsic motivations, external enablers, barriers to success) and complex. The use of multiple interviews using a conversational approach provided me as the researcher sufficient time to explore questions of how and why through open-ended questions (Yin, 2018).

Interview protocols focused on open-ended questions are designed to elicit rich, narrative responses regarding participants' career goals, aspirations, internal motivators and drivers, as well as external supports that have enabled achievement or non-achievement of stated goals (Braskamp et al., 1984). In developing a guided interview protocol for interview one (Appendix E), I conducted two practice interviews with two faculty at my institution during a qualitative research course in fall 2020. Neither of these individuals was part of my formal study, yet these practice interviews were instrumental in fine-tuning the semi-structured interview questions. Furthermore, these practice interviews confirmed that a single interview would likely not be sufficient to explore the complex subject of intrinsic motivations. I also learned that providing questions in advance would help participants formulate clear thoughts about their past career experiences and decisions, aiding in the re-telling of these stories.

Due to the global pandemic, I was unable to conduct interviews in person. Consequently, I conducted and recorded the interviews using video-conferencing technology to simulate the customary face-to-face meetings. Using Zoom video conferencing, rather than phone call, helped build the necessary rapport with the participants to draw out detailed stories and experiences. I manually reviewed the Zoom recording automated transcriptions and edited the text for accuracy to produce verbatim transcripts of each interview. All the data files collected in this study are stored on a password-protected, university-issued computer and in cloud-based network storage systems.

Throughout the study I maintained a researcher journal, also referred to as analytic memos (Saldaña, 2016), to document my reflections, thoughts, and questions that formed as the study progressed (Bhattacharya, 2017) and as a place to bracket or “examine (my) biases and assumptions” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 27) prior to interviews. Post-interview journal entries allowed me to record my initial impressions and reactions to a specific participant’s interview. In addition, I noted potential follow-up questions for a subsequent interview. Through these reflective notes, I documented observations about the interviewees for later review when deriving meaning during the data analysis process. Keeping a consistent record of decisions that I made and questions that arose as the study progresses was a key step in accurately communicating my findings and discussion of the study in the final dissertation presentation (Bhattacharya, 2017; Saldaña, 2016).

Data analysis procedures. Qualitative data analysis is comprised of taking a potentially vast amount of raw text data and translating emergent patterns and themes simultaneously and continuously as data are collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because this study included two interviews with each participant, the timing of data analysis following each interview was crucial

to digest initial insights following the first interview with each participant. This also informed follow up questions that were asked of participants during the second interview. More than 400 pages of interview transcripts were produced from roughly 16 hours of recorded interviews.

Following best practices for interview analyses to produce “a more organized, rigorous, and analytically sound qualitative study” (Vanover et al., 2021, p. 134), I mapped the guiding interview questions to the primary research questions of the study and to the constructs of the theoretical framework (Appendix F). This organizational approach provided a clear structure for the initial readings and manual coding of the data that produced *in vivo* and process codes (Saldaña, 2016) which informed the development of categories that were systematically clustered to form emergent themes.

By following an inductive process of data analysis to answer the *a priori* questions, I identified common and divergent experiences in the participants’ stories. An iterative process of clustering categories resulted in the four to six themes which emerged to answer each of the three primary research questions respectively (Vanover et al., 2021). To analyze the data relative to the theoretical framework of career motivation theory (London, 1983; London & Noe, 1997), a deductive analysis approach proved most appropriate. Using the characteristics embedded within each of the three constructs of the theory (career identity, career insight, and career resilience), I used the sub-components of each construct to inform the coding and categorization. This informed my understanding of how participants identified with their academic career choice, navigated obstacles they faced, and their individual decision-making about going up for promotion to full professor.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

The concepts of trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative research are compared in the literature to reliability and validity, which are used to measure quality or rigor in quantitative studies (Jones et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). To achieve trustworthiness a qualitative researcher must focus on rigor in both their methodology and in their interpretation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), maintaining consistency throughout the study from design, data collection, and analysis that aligns with their stated methodology. Credibility is used to describe the transferability (relatable to readers), dependability (clearly communicated research processes), and confirmability (findings are aligned with data and analysis) of a study (Jones et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The ethical behavior of the researcher is also closely tied to the trustworthiness and credibility of any study, relating not only to the research process but also in presentation of findings, including that which may not align with expected findings (Jones et al., 2014).

Trustworthiness and credibility were achieved in this study through the use of interview protocols that ensured consistency in the questions that guided data collection from participants. Collecting data through in-depth interviews with multiple participants helped to ensure credibility in the results and interpretation so as not to rely solely on a single source or individual's unique experience (Jones et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). In addition, actively seeking "negative or discrepant data" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 330) and reporting those findings, along with findings related to the framework of career motivation theory, also helped ensure credibility and trustworthiness in the study. Reporting "verbatim accounts" from transcribed interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 330) further enhanced the credibility of findings in this study.

Member checking to confirm initial findings and emerging themes also added to the credibility of the study (Saldaña, 2016). As a member check step to solicit “respondent validation” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246), I verbally confirmed my initial impressions and clarified any questions about responses from the first interview during the second interviews with each participant. Following the completion of data analysis, a second member check was conducted by email to share the overarching themes that had emerged from the collective interviews. This was used to gauge to degree to which broader themes resonated with individual participants and were reflective of their experiences. Five of the participants responded to this request for feedback, and it was universally positive.

Another measure of trustworthiness in the study came from the research journal, also referred to as an audit trail (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña, 2016). This documentation of decisions made in the data collection and analysis process, reflections, questions, or issues arising in the research process ensured consistency in carrying out and later reporting on the findings of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña, 2016). Credibility was enhanced through acknowledging that my researcher’s perspective was informed by prior experience and observations through my positionality as a non-faculty member of the academic environment, and by intentionally bracketing any prior assumptions or biases while engaged in data collection when doing interviews (Bhattacharya, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Ethical concerns that might arise for participants in this study were addressed through informed consent. In addition, to ensure participant confidentiality, each was assigned a pseudonym; similarly, their universities are identified by pseudonyms. Numerical identifiers are used to identify the data files that contain participant interview transcripts and any other data (Jones et al., 2014). A master file linking actual names to the pseudonyms and study

identification numbers was kept in separate folders from interview transcript files to further minimize any chance of loss of confidentiality. My integrity as a researcher to present findings, including any findings which did not fit or align with the theoretical framework guiding the study, helped to maintain a high level of ethics in this dissertation study.

Role of the Researcher

In this qualitative study, I was the research instrument. The interview questions could have touched on a potentially sensitive topic, thus my role as the researcher required that I take the time to build rapport and cultivate a level of trust with each participant. I approached every interview with empathy, compassion, and patience to allow participants to share, reflect on, and sometimes re-live emotions experienced at different stages of their career which they might not have discussed or explored deeply before. Confidentiality became particularly critical in this study in any instances when a participant discussed their professional outcomes and advancement.

Limitations

There are few limitations inherent in this study. First, this study focused on faculty in one specific type of university setting, a private, not-for-profit, teaching-focused institutional type. This was an intentional decision in designing the study however did limit the perspectives to a narrow segment of participants that did not include faculty in research-intensive universities where promotion and tenure expectations and requirements likely differ. Second, this study did not include tenured faculty who have elected to remain at the rank of associate professor since the purpose of the study was to better understand the motivations of those tenured associate professors who had an intention to seek promotion. Third, the recruited participants represented

a homogeneous group that was very limited in terms of racial diversity. However, this study does serve as a starting point to create an understanding of participants' experiences.

Summary

This chapter introduced the approach and appropriateness of using qualitative design to study intrinsic motivations of tenured faculty in a university environment. A detailed explanation of the methods including participant selection strategy, data collection, and data analysis aligned with qualitative methodology traditions of in-depth semi-structured interviews and manual coding of data from interview transcripts followed. Intentionality in pursuit of trustworthiness and credibility, as well as limitations and efforts to minimize these effects, were discussed to address validity of the study. Ethical considerations to protect participants' confidentiality, collect and analyze data with integrity, and interpret meaning from participants' experiences have also been addressed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how intrinsic motivators influenced the decision by tenured university faculty members at the rank of associate professor to pursue promotion to the rank of full professor. The insights gained from this study expand our understanding of the issues of mid-career or associate professors in pursuing promotion to full professor. In carrying out this study I provided participants with a confidential space to share obstacles and challenges faced in their academic career journeys and explore how these experiences impacted their likelihood to seek a promotion to the rank of full professor in the near future.

The findings presented in this chapter begin with a discussion of the theoretical framework of career motivation theory (London, 1983; London & Noe, 1997), how the constructs of this framework shaped my research, and overarching findings related to the career motivation theory constructs of career identity, career insight, and career resilience (London, 1983; London & Noe, 1997). This is followed by introductions of the seven study participants which include a short biographical sketch and individual characteristics of the theoretical framework constructs and related elements that were illustrated in the participants' stories.

The major findings of the study are presented in relation to the primary research questions that framed this study. I discuss key themes which I identified through the data analysis of 14 interviews (two per participant) using a thematic analysis approach (Saldaña, 2016). The findings are presented with rich descriptions drawn from individual participant experiences to make meaning of the participants' thoughts (Terosky, 2010) about their career decisions and actions. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the key findings of this study.

Theoretical Framework

Career motivation theory was originally conceptualized as focusing on the individual, both in terms of internal characteristics and making decisions (London, 1983). I sought to determine to what extent the participants, tenured associate professors in higher education, demonstrated career identity, career insight, and career resilience (London & Noe, 1997) through their stories of pursuing tenure and considering or seeking promotion to full professor. The components embedded within each construct of London's model informed both the primary research questions and two semi-structured interviews conducted with each participant. I will discuss the broader implications of the findings in Chapter 5.

London (1983) described career motivation as “the set of individual characteristics and associated career decisions and behaviors that reflect the person's career identity, insight into factors affecting his or her career, and resilience in the face of unfavorable career conditions” (p. 620). Within each of the participant sketches presented in the following section, I highlight the elements of constructs that were particularly unique about an individual participant. Common elements found across the participant group are also briefly discussed below.

Career Identity

The self in relation to job or profession was universally as described by participants in this study as “professor,” “teacher,” and “scholar”. There is not another element across the three constructs where these seven individuals are more closely aligned based on the data collected through 14 interviews. As scholars and academics, the participant experiences reflected seeking recognition primarily within their respective field or discipline. This recognition was generally framed in terms of an individual's publication record. Participants varied in their motivation for leadership roles. Some actively sought and held campus or external leadership roles by design,

while others reluctantly accepted a role when it was their turn (e.g., department chair, committee assignment, etc.).

Career Insight

In the context of this construct, insight emphasizes self-awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses in relation to goal setting (London, 1983). Because this study explored the participants' motivation to pursue the rank of promotion to full professor, the individuals who agreed to participate in the study were forthcoming about their perceived strengths and weaknesses in attaining such a goal. Most participants were transparent that when they set out on their academic journey as a faculty member, becoming a full professor was not an aspiration to which they were bound. Several participants had more recently come to see this objective as a viable goal particularly in light of encouragement they received from peers or academic leaders, as the findings later in this chapter will show. Because several participants had not explicitly set an earlier goal of seeking promotion to full professor, the most common weakness described by the participants related to research productivity, along with some introspective reflections on priorities and intentions which explained the decisions of some individuals not to focus on seeking promotion earlier in their academic career.

Career Resilience

One stark observation that emerged from this study was the reality that the academic environment for faculty is rife with obstacles that might conspire against their success. All four of the resilience construct elements, adaptability, achievement orientation, self-efficacy, and risk tolerance, were present in several or most of the participants' stories. Adaptability took various forms but often was described as a mindset shift toward adopting a teaching-centered focus over research or as being nimble in response to continuously changing expectations due to leadership

transitions. Achievement orientation emerged in the participant interviews primarily in relation to an early career objective of earning tenure. It also appeared later in the academic career lifecycle as generating quality research to produce the publications needed for a promotion-worthy dossier to go up for full professor promotion. While this may seem in conflict with a shift toward a teaching-centered mindset, most participants explained that if they were to pursue promotion to full professor their research production would have importance in that review, so they must also prioritize research if they were to have a successful bid for full professor.

Self-efficacy was most frequently illustrated in stories of participants' confidence in their teaching effectiveness. There is ample proof of strong performance to back up this confidence as five of the participants list one or more teaching awards or nominations on their academic Curriculum Vitae (CV). These accolades range from departmental to university-wide recognition, as well as a prestigious humanities fellowship awarded to early career scholars for outstanding teaching.

The ways that participants demonstrated risk tolerance varied most widely among the resilience characteristics, spanning the continuum from not at all risky to "fearless", as one participant described themselves. What was perceived as a risk by each individual also varied. Participants recognized they would have to accept some level of risk in pursuing promotion to full professor because they were operating in what London so aptly coined "unfavorable career conditions" (1983, p. 620). In other words, participants acknowledged they may experience some negative feedback in the peer review nature of promotion evaluation, but this risk would be worth it for the reward of earning promotion to full professor.

Participants

The participants in this study were tenured associate professors at seven different institutions at the time they agreed to be interviewed in late spring of 2021. All indicated they were either actively pursuing promotion to full professor or likely to pursue a promotion. During the data collection process, one participant was notified that their application for promotion to full professor was successful and they would be formally promoted in fall of 2021. Six of the participants were employed at private, not-for-profit universities or colleges located in the western United States. One participant was employed at a private university in the southern United States. Five of the institutions are religious affiliated private institutions and two are non-religious private universities or colleges.

To preserve the anonymity of participants in this study, pseudonyms are used to identify individuals, and their specific academic disciplines are not discussed in relation to each individual. The academic disciplines represented across the participant group included business, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. The average number of post-tenure years across the study group was 12.7 years, with a range of 8 - 18 years post-tenure. Four of the participants were female and three were male. The group was overwhelmingly white with only one person of color in the group. All participants indicated they were born in the U.S. Participant demographic information is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Years Post-Tenure	Discipline	Intent to pursue promotion to full
Jim	Male	White	11	Business	Likely
Sandy	Female	White	16	Humanities	Likely
Heather	Female	White	14	Natural Sciences	Actively seeking ^a
Gina	Female	Black	8	Business	Likely
Tom	Male	White	9	Social Sciences	Actively seeking
Betsy	Female	White	18	Humanities	Likely
Sam	Male	White	13	Humanities	Likely

Note. Participants are listed in the order in which they initially committed to participate in the study. ^aNotified of successful promotion to full professor during data collection.

Jim

Jim, a white male business faculty, has been in academia his entire professional life. Prior to his current institution where he began on the tenure track fourteen years ago, he held two non-tenure-track teaching positions at large public universities. Jim described his early academic career decisions as entirely influenced by his wife's career which moved them from the midwestern United States to Southern California where she took a non-academic role at a large, public university. Jim's academic career became the primary focal point when his wife decided to focus on family building and Jim secured the tenure track (now tenured) faculty position he holds today.

Having six years of prior teaching experience, Jim's tenure clock was accelerated to three years. Since earning tenure he has served in numerous department, college, and university level leadership and committee roles, including department chair and program director. Jim initially intended to pursue an administrative leadership career path in academia, stating "I wanted to be a university president."

Forays into leadership roles and his clear objective to ascend to a senior administrative position signaled a need for advancement (career identity, London, 1983), which Jim exhibited to a high degree among the participants. However, when he served as a department chair Jim realized that, in his words, the headaches would only get worse at the executive level. This realization led him to realign his goals to remain in a faculty role. As a result of institution-wide program eliminations, consolidations, and revisions, Jim's academic program was realigned into a new department. Through this transition he had to draw upon adaptability within the resilience construct (London, 1983; London & Noe, 1997), adjusting to a new set of colleagues and different expectations for service and research and staying motivated to achieve.

Jim viewed the change as a positive move that allowed him to focus on his research agenda, including a co-authored collaboration that has provided renewed momentum to his research. Describing himself as being "really good at setting the big goals," and mapping a process to get there, Jim said his task now is to "buckle down and keep building on the momentum I've created." Assuming he meets the publication goals he has set, Jim hopes to submit a promotion package for consideration within three years.

Sandy

Sandy, a white female humanities professor, joined the faculty of her institution immediately following the completion of her PhD. She has been riding the highs and lows of a small, private college in higher education for 22 years. Tenured and promoted to associate professor in her sixth year on the faculty, Sandy described her experience over the years as often "fighting to keep our jobs" as enrollments waned and university finances became less stable over time. As a department chair and later an associate dean, Sandy found little time to maintain her research projects while focused on administrative responsibilities and advocating for students

and colleagues. “I made sure to talk with and support and promote women in my division,” resulting in a few promotions to full professor while Sandy was associate dean. She explained “I was very pleased with that work I did...I was left behind, but that’s okay.”

In response to financial pressures which resulted in the elimination of tenured faculty lines, Sandy earned a master’s degree in an adjacent field with the intent of expanding her teaching portfolio to preserve her job. She felt this action was necessary for her own job security but also diminished her ability to prioritize time around her research agenda. Like many professors, Sandy intended to use sabbaticals to advance her writing goals. Instead, two early sabbatical leaves were dominated by family needs. A combination of “publishing too much, too early” (she published a book before tenure), followed by limited production during periods of high demand service and administrative roles, led Sandy to conclude she did not have enough publications to meet the research expectations for promotion to full professor. “I always wanted to be promoted to full, I still do,” Sandy explained. She is considering pursuing a dean position at another institution in the future and “it could look better...to have achieved professor level.”

Sandy’s experiences illustrate multiple facets of career resilience (London, 1983; London & Noe, 1997). Adaptability and achievement motivation stand out, especially as she described fighting to keep her position amidst faculty downsizing. Perhaps her resilience is high because her career identity as a professor is so strong:

I mean it's kind of my whole identity...I do have a life outside of academia, of course...but I do sort of feel like, and this has just always been the case, I do just always think about either the teaching or with research that I’m working on, or an administrative thing. Like that's just what I think about all the time. And so other things that I think about are subordinate to that.

As a divorced, single parent, Sandy has prioritized her son’s needs, and her own job security generally, ahead of a desire to be promoted, but sees an opportunity to reassess her own

aspirations when her son goes to college in a few years. In the most recent past academic year Sandy was the recipient of her college's sabbatical award, a full year of paid leave, during which she has been able to work on a second book that she hopes will position her to seek promotion to full once the book is published.

Heather

Heather's academic career path began with two post-doc appointments which led her to prioritize her academic job search around three primary goals: a good research environment, "a place that values teaching," and a place she would enjoy the lifestyle. A successful search earned her a position on the tenure track faculty at her current institution, where she has been teaching in the natural sciences for 20 years. Heather, a white female faculty member, emphasized a commitment to student-centered teaching. She has aligned the bulk of her service to the department and university in a similar vein, prioritizing supervision of student research and projects, along with service focused on educating pre-college students, as well as retention and student success on her campus.

Heather came into this study having already submitted her dossier for promotion to full professor. What makes this fact particularly interesting is her emphatic position that "I actually never, ever wanted full professor." This admission speaks to Heather's almost non-existent need for advancement on the career identity construct (London, 1983; London & Noe, 1997). Her most recent scholarly work ultimately contributed to her successful promotion, and which she also explained that initially she "was going to do in secret." She credits a particularly supportive dean and colleagues, especially one who advocated for her and helped to "legitimize...the work in the eyes of the university," as pivotal in influencing on her decision to submit the promotion package.

Heather described the tenure process as “really, really, really stressful.” She was relieved to earn it and used the immediate post-tenure sabbatical as an opportunity for a mental reset. She said that at that point, “I just regained my sanity.” As with her initial promotion and tenure experience, Heather did not find seeking promotion to full professor a positive experience.

If I had known, I mean in all seriousness, if I had known how much like anger, heartbreak, just unkindness, on top of the stress, that it would be, and knowing what I know now about certain members of the department, I would never have done it.

Despite this, Heather enjoys strong ties with a few close colleagues, positive validation and appreciation from her partner. The high energy interactions with students keep her motivated as a teacher. Additionally, she has found a sense of belonging in a local arts collaborative, into which she pours creative and organizational talents, and where her contributions are valued. In the arts collaborative community Heather has found a place that gives her a renewed positive outlook.

I’m making some big decisions, helping steer the place. And they’re really, really some good people involved with this, and so creative and interesting and also like warm and loving and it’s such a good space. Yeah, I’m really grateful I found it.

Gina

Gina’s path to academia was circuitous. She started her career as a plant engineer in manufacturing which led to a career promotion to lead the transition to a team-based organizational structure for a new plant startup. This put her on a trajectory of human resources leadership, which led her to seek a graduate degree in human resource development. Exposure to academic research in her master’s program and working closely with an internal organizational development (OD) team of Ph.D.’s at the manufacturing company were key factors in her decision to pursue a Ph.D. Originally thinking she would gain the knowledge and

credentials needed to join a corporate OD team, Gina found the socialization in her doctoral program strongly compelling and led her toward a career in academia.

Gina, a Black female business faculty, landed her first tenure track appointment as an assistant professor at a private university in the northeastern U.S. She initially chose this location to stay near family while her father was ailing. Having received two tenure track offers after she completed her Ph.D., Gina learned two years later that a position was still open across the country. She made the move to her current institution where she earned tenure and promotion to associate professor six years later.

One of Gina's challenges throughout her nearly 15-year faculty career is "being Black in academia." While there are many dimensions to how this has affected her experiences in academia, one is in elevated service obligations that Gina describes as "a challenge for, you know, people who have marginalized identities." The service obligations were over and above multiple administrative leadership roles she had been asked to take on which included both academic and external program director positions and a faculty development program role. "All of those things are super time consuming, and they just distracted me from...doing research quite frankly."

The likelihood that Gina will pursue promotion to full professor hinges on two primary factors. First is the reinvigoration of a research agenda centered on diversity, equity, and inclusion. She wants to create "a body of scholarship, both academic and public scholarship...that would make me proud to go up for full." Gina has accepted a tenured associate professor appointment at private university in the northeastern U.S. where she feels she can realign her teaching, service, and scholarship in a critical race perspective. "I need to be somewhere where people see me as a person who's going to be raising issues about race and

unapologetically. I want to be someplace where the resources and the commitment to do that is there.” The second factor she is considering is her husband’s health. She shared, “I would like to be a good partner more than, you know, be a full professor.”

As she makes the transition to a new institution, Gina foresees another decade in her academic career during which she will pursue her new research agenda and decide whether to seek promotion to full professor.

I know there is this way in which people want me to make full because I’m a Black woman, you know, it’s like we don’t have enough of you at full. And I get that. And so someday I hope I will go up for full and I hope I get it. But I also think...this is the struggle being black, is that these career moves, they’re for me too. They’re not just for you, so that you can say we have black women in the academy. They’re for me. And so, how do I balance that, where I say I’m going up to full because I feel that I have this, that I’m at that scholarly place where I want people to recognize me as this kind of scholar, versus, you know, I want you to do it because it’s time, because you say it’s time?

Choosing to make a move to a new institution where she can have the freedom to redefine herself speaks to Gina’s identity as a scholar with a clear vision for how she wants to be recognized. Gina also touched on every element of career resilience during our interviews with an emphasis on her risk tolerance (London, 1983; London & Noe, 1997). While she sees the potential for many risks in making this career move, “the risk of not trying some new things feels like a bigger risk than trying some new things.” Gina also reflected on her faith as an important source of her resilience: “I believe there's a God that's greater than my obstacles and is interested in me and is willing to strengthen me to get through stuff.”

Tom

Tom described his journey into academia as a white male, social sciences professor as “curvy and interesting.” While teaching high school and simultaneously working on a master’s degree, he was encouraged to pursue a Ph.D. He landed a tenure-track position at a regional state university campus in the Pacific Northwest (U.S.) and realized early on that the institution

was not a good cultural fit. To sum up that experience, Tom stated, “I hated it all, it was terrible...it really impacted my career choices...because I was just trying to navigate this political minefield constantly.” In his fifth year at the university, he and his then wife, also on the faculty, opted to leave before going up for tenure in order to seek better institutional alignment and a lifestyle better suited for their family. Tom immediately joined the faculty of a private, religious-affiliated institution where he negotiated a three-year tenure track line. He remains there today.

When responding to my initial outreach for study participants, Tom indicated that he was “actively seeking” promotion to full professor. In one interview he stated that he had been thinking about this for a couple of years and had very recently determined it is “time for me to get my shit together, I need to do this.” Like several participants, Tom identified his publishing record as one area he will need to address for a successful promotion package. A second area that he focused on in the last year is elevating his university service. Becoming chair on a high visibility campus committee “is something I never would have taken on if I weren’t thinking about and eyeing promotion.” These actions demonstrate his self-awareness of shoring up any gaps that would hinder reaching a goal of promotion to full professor (career insight, London, 1983).

In the process of member checking with participants, Tom shared with me via email his evolving state of mind about seeking promotion.

I did find myself recently saying to a couple of friends (and even my mom) something to the effect of, “I used to think I’d stay in academia forever. I’m not so sure anymore. If the right opportunity came along, I’d ditch my promotion plan and leave.” Even writing that makes me second guess my decision to go after promotion. I just worry I am working really hard for a castle I am slowly realizing could be made of sand.

Tom's identity as an academic may be becoming less entrenched than other participants. All the resilience in the world may not matter for Tom if the institution of higher education is not recognizable to him anymore. As he explained,

I am having a bit of an existential crisis about the future of higher education broadly and feeling sad about the changes... I am worried that the university (writ large) that I fell in love with as an undergraduate is not-so-slowly dying.

Betsy

Among the study participants, Betsy, a white female humanities scholar, was the most senior academic with 18 years of post-tenure experience as she approached three decades of cumulative academic experience. Her early career is notable for high profile fellowships and award-winning recognition for a book that was published pre-tenure. Betsy's longevity at the private liberal arts college where she was, at the time of the study, tenured was preceded by a two-year fellowship and one year on the tenure track of a private college that she described as "not a good fit culturally."

When Betsy joined her institution in the mid-1990s she found herself struggling to adapt to a student-centered atmosphere that was "almost like a consumer and client driven model." This did not square with her "sense of self" and "desperately hoped I could make a leap back to a research university." Betsy explained that she later came to appreciate being in a college that valued teaching and attributed this in part to a realization as her own children (three) grew older that she loved "being with and learning from and getting to share in the curiosity of young people."

Another early challenge that Betsy faced was an "extremely conservative...politically very, very conservative" campus culture which directly conflicted with Betsy's self-described "liberal and progressive" political ideologies. This showed up in what she described as "hostility

to the work that I do” because “it’s feminist, that it’s about gender, it’s about body sexuality, and to some degree about race.” Betsy attributed this early hostility to conservative voices outside of her department and acknowledged the campus culture has shifted noticeably with the times.

“Some of those challenges I had belong to me and a whole group of women, and maybe some men, and anybody who like didn’t fit into a regular box in the 90s and into the early 2000s.”

Although Betsy described her department as generally “supportive and hospitable and friendly,” she also called out “a couple of senior people, including one in my department, who have been actively destructive in my career.” Both this colleague (I’ll call him Greg) and a dean who was in place during her pre-tenure years created power dynamics that Betsy described as “senior people who are extremely judgmental and take power and take pleasure in the power of judging and being able to control people’s lives.” Above any other obstacle, Betsy stated that “the one reason I haven’t sought promotion is Greg...that’s totally the reason.”

Research productivity was a recurring topic mentioned among the participants in this study and Betsy was not immune to this obstacle. Like others, a turn in the dean’s office in an administrative role “kind of slowed me down and there’s a certain point where you lose momentum.” As a humanities scholar, Betsy explained, “I’ve really struggled with my second book.” At one point she decided to take a two-year unpaid leave because she was “floundering and there was no one who was supportive.” Though a book was not the primary output of that leave, “it was like the greatest two years of my life” when she prioritized her family and ultimately came back to academia with a “new attitude” focused on service and teaching. In the two years prior to the study Betsy had also found her book project come into focus and was feeling reenergized to finish her second book, with a research trip impending.

Betsy's experiences over a nearly three-decade career in academia illustrate an evolution in her career identity from her early research track goals to embracing a love for teaching. Her story depicts numerous obstacles and struggles with resilience, but ultimately, she had not given up on her potential to achieve full professor. Betsy's awareness of areas for personal and professional development, along with actions she had taken such as working with a therapist and seeking feedback on her most recent book project are her resilience in action to keep moving toward that goal.

Sam

At the time of this study, Sam, a white male academic in the humanities, served as an associate dean of a liberal arts school within a private, religious-affiliated university. He joined his current institution as a visiting faculty to cover a sabbatical following a three-year non-tenure-track teaching stint at a public state university. One year into the visiting appointment, Sam secured a tenure-track assistant professorship. Sam's pre-tenure years were notable for distinguished teaching and service-learning awards, as well as a fellowship with a professional school, contributing to his promotion and tenure six years later.

A turn as department chair (a rotating assignment) came with additional responsibilities to chair two councils within the faculty association. Due to the rotational timing of those appointments, they coincided with his department chair position. Sam explained, "I did that for two years actually rather than one, because I was having a good time doing it." A few years later Sam became program director for an academic major and similarly found himself "enjoying the leadership role" and "what you could do to facilitate the work of other people." This motivated him to pursue the assistant deanship, from which he was promoted to his current role as associate dean.

The evolution of Sam's career identity from professor to administrator also illustrates his self-awareness and insight (London, 1983; London & Noe, 1997). His academic leadership roles as a program director and department chair opened his mind to seeking the assistant deanship when it became available. Sam discovered fulfillment as an assistant dean initially in part because it gave him a chance to grow. As a faculty member he had learned to avoid mistakes yet knew in administration he would have to learn how to do things differently. "I'm making mistakes, being willing to make them, learning from them and not feeling like they're as determinative of, you know, my character or my abilities or who I was."

Sam explained that his interest in participating in this study was two-fold. In his administrative position he was closely involved in the review of tenure and promotion for faculty within the college he served. In this capacity he solicits external reviews for promotion processes and hoped to learn from this study. Additionally, as a tenured faculty member he had two options for considering his own promotion to full professor. He could return to faculty and seek promotion by that route, or he could pursue an administrative route to promotion, an option that may be particularly unique to his institution. Sam sees the administrative route a viable path. He noted, "I've let windows of opportunity pass in the past, but this is definitely a window of opportunity, so I also don't want to let that pass."

Motivation to Pursue an Academic Career

For those in academia on the tenure-track this career path is often a lifelong journey along which early career professors strive to attain the job security of being granted tenure and promotion from assistant to associate professors. To understand why associate professors are motivated to seek promotion to full professor I felt that first it would be helpful to know what had originally motivated an individual to pursue an academic career. This was the focus of my

first of three research questions. I identified five themes in the data that were shared among at least five of the seven participants who described a similar pull toward a career in academia.

One theme was universally shared by the participants.

Desire to Teach

A primary motivation of all seven participants to pursue a career in academia is captured in their desire to teach. This realization struck participants at different stages of their lives, from as early as their high school years, during college for some, and for one participant a bit later when shifting away from a corporate career path. Jim described his realization occurring while teaching as a lecturer when he was working on his doctorate: “I just really felt at home.” Sandy originally thought she would become a nun because these were the teacher role models that she had experienced in her primary and middle school years. Once in high school she realized “what I really wanted to do was to teach. I didn't want to be a nun. It was just the teaching part that was kind of significant.”

Sam's moment of realization occurred at a very distinct moment in time during his undergraduate years.

In my fourth year, I became close with a professor of English. I was doing a minor in comparative literature, and he invited me to be a teaching assistant for a nature writing class, and uh the first day I got up in front of the class to give a kind of mini-presentation, you know. Oh my God, it was just, you know, horrifying, frightening, terrible experience. And the second time I got up in front of that class it was the best experience of all, and uh so I realized right then that, you know, I should go to graduate school, and I should continue on that path.

Heather “wanted to teach for a long time” and further stated, “I love to be taken seriously and having things explained to me and so maybe that's where my interest in being a teacher came from.” As she progressed through graduate school her commitment to this path became stronger, stating “I know I want to teach, I want to go to a place that values teaching.” In a similar vein,

Jim spoke of a clear preference for a “teaching institution.” By contrast, Sandy shared, “I didn't have some particular love of small liberal arts colleges, but then came to really like that kind of education after I got the job and feel like I kind of fit in.”

Lifelong Love of Learning

An unsurprising theme shared by six of the seven participants is a love of learning. Three of the humanities professors pointed to a lifelong love for reading and literature. Sandy put it very simply: “I can't remember a time when I didn't just love doing that, love reading, talking about books.” Sam described his commitment to learning as a desire to “get to the root of things” which led him to pursue one branch of humanities over another field toward which a professor was pushing him. Betsy concurred on this theme: “I’m just a very inquisitive person and I just have read voraciously my whole life... I just am obsessed with wanting to learn things.”

Two participants, Sandy and Gina, continued to seek out new learning through formal post-Ph.D. degree programs. Sandy’s motivation was driven partly by self-preservation. “I'm going to make sure I keep my job, and so I’m going to make sure that I’m, you know, also contributing ways that I can best contribute. So, I decided to go back and get a masters.” This aligned with a new academic major offered by Sandy’s department, giving her greater breadth of courses to teach and new avenues to explore research opportunities. Gina decided to pursue a second doctoral degree program. She explained, “I don’t feel like I have enough background, I don’t have as much as I’d like...so I am starting an EdD program in the fall that is focused on equity and diversity and very anti-racist in its orientation.” This is a very intentional goal for Gina to refocus her teaching, scholarship, and faculty development from a diversity, equity, and inclusion perspective.

Academia is a Calling

Autonomy in pursuit of research interests and “being able to explore what I wanted to explore” (Sam) are key aspects of a calling to work in academia. Comments, such as, “I’m made for an academic’s life...I like thinking and writing” (Gina) and “this is where I have a good calling” (Jim) signal an individual’s career alignment with academia. Engaging with students in a dynamic learning environment is another aspect of academia as a calling. Betsy related this as inspiring “people learning to explore themselves and explore their world...inciting curiosity” as a significant pull toward an academic career. Sandy described academia as “my whole identity” and “that’s just what I think about all the time.” She attributed “finding most of my satisfaction” in providing “a transformative experience for them (students).”

The autonomy or flexibility that academia offers has become an anchoring reason for Gina to stay in the profession.

I don't want to work in certain ways anymore, and I know a lot of people are coming to that conclusion after COVID, but I really don't want to work a traditional 9 to 5. I don't want to go to work every day and be in the office every day, and I know that's a privilege because not everybody can even think about that, but I think, you know, in my academic life you don't have to do that, you don't have to go to work every day. You, you have to work every day, but you don't have to go to work every day. And uh, and you can choose, you have so much autonomy over who you work with and how you work. It's a blessing and I don't feel like at this point in my life, I think, OK, I've had this experience now and I don't see why I would shackle myself to a typical 9 to 5 job again, I just won't. So, I'm thinking about it in terms of my lifestyle, as well as my, you know, like what I want to do content-wise.

Drawn to Research

The relationship that participants in the study have with academic research varied along a continuum of research being a necessary evil and that you must publish or perish on one end, and on the other end a desire to immerse themselves in research over teaching or service. Those participants who viewed it as a necessary evil also tended to describe the research demands as a

means to an end in earning tenure and to seek promotion to full rather than as something fulfilling. Others described their motivation for an academic career in part as a desire to produce scholarship.

For Gina and Sandy, the pull to be a researcher was deepened in graduate school. Gina's exposure to reading academic research in a master's program was the first hint that she wanted to engage in research. It was reinforced later. As she explained, "in a Ph.D. program there is a socialization toward academia...that socialization was very effective." She later shared, "I thought I would be a rock star researcher." Sandy felt a similar sense of socialization in her doctoral experience, stating "there was a certain sense like you have to get (an) R1 job and that's sort of the best."

Neither Sandy nor Gina followed a research-intensive path, instead they found themselves at private, teaching-focused institutions. Sandy explained that early in her pre-tenure years she "applied for jobs elsewhere but nothing kind of came of that," and with a family to consider, she chose to stay put. Gina decided to leave her current institution for "a school that I believe is more research-oriented...giving myself a chance at this latter part of my career to see if I can do what I thought I wanted to do oh so many years ago."

Betsy was equally drawn to research, stating "my sense of self in the 1990s was that I would ultimately be at a research university." However, in contrast to Gina and Sandy who felt their graduate school faculty advocated pursuing a research path, Betsy felt "pigeon-holed as like this kind of first generation of female academics...by our advisors." She described being "given these certain roles...whereas no male grad students were sorted out between being teachers versus researchers." Though she had a strong desire to pursue a research-oriented path in academia, Betsy attributed her journey in a teaching-centered institution in part influenced by her

Ph.D. advisor who said to her, “you’re not that ambitious” and “you’re such a good teacher...you should go teach.”

Jim’s introduction to research came a little earlier in his journey toward academia.

I was lucky. My senior year I had a professor that allowed me to do research with him and so that part of it, which was, you know, I didn't really know that much but all the sudden I had a really good feel for it. And I thought, okay, I’m going to be able to do this. So, I did some undergraduate research which enabled me to get a graduate assistantship... (I) got my master’s and had a really good experience there and did a really good thesis and had another good research mentor and then just felt really good about doing it. And then I was lucky enough that after I got my master's I was able to go back to my alma mater...

where Jim secured a lecturer position that he held while pursuing his doctorate at another public university in the region.

Overcoming Obstacles Pre and Post Tenure

To understand how tenured associate professors have persisted through obstacles in their academic careers, the focus of research question two, it is necessary first to discuss the nature of obstacles these individuals faced as faculty members within their respective institutions. Five themes characterize these common obstacles and are presented below, followed by three major themes that illustrate how participants persisted through obstacles. Themes that reflect both as common obstacles and ways to overcome obstacles are consistent with the existing literature introduced in Chapter 2. These connections will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Challenges in Maintaining Research Productivity

Post-tenure research productivity has proven to be a universal challenge for the participants in this study and a significant barrier to going up for promotion to full professor. Higher than expected teaching loads hindered productivity for Sandy and Gina. Scholars in the humanities and social sciences (Sandy, Betsy, and Tom) described ongoing struggles to publish a second book which they felt would be a necessary achievement to bolster any eventual full

professor portfolio. All three had book projects underway at the time of this study and expressed differing opinions about whether someone could go up for full with a book under contract or only after it was published. Tom leaned toward the former, stating “if I can get a contract for a book...I feel that will make me feel like, okay yeah, that’s pretty good,” while Sandy espoused the latter, stating “I feel like for full...I needed another book.”

Pivoting their scholarship and research agenda proved a considerable obstacle for Heather, Gina, and Sam. Both Sam and Gina described their post-tenure research as “off the rails” in part due to a loss of interest in their early research topic areas. For Sam, this challenge was exacerbated by a “loss of nerve, loss of confidence” because of “some criticisms for some stuff that I had written...and I didn’t give myself the chance for that expertise to kind of settle.” Gina explained that her early research trajectory was not the path she saw herself committed to for promotion to full professor.

I did not want to continue to do more of the same, even if it meant getting a promotion. Like, let's do something that's more meaningful, something, right. And I think that the last year, couple of years, have made it clear to me that if, that if 'Ima stay in academia, which I am, then I want to do things that, that have more meaning. And now, now full seems like it could be meaningful, but it did not feel that meaningful up until recently.

Heather’s loss of interest in her original area of scholarship led to nearly a decade without any publications, while she turned her attention to “having a really like extremely productive learning environment for the students.” She admits during that period there was institutional pressure to produce research, but she was “one of the best teachers in the department and (had) done some service” so felt that was “good enough.” In recent years Heather became reengaged in scholarship that merged her field with creative arts in a unique way that she explained she initially was “going to do in secret.” A close colleague in her department interceded in such a way that it “legitimized the sculpture work in the eyes of the university,” contributing to the

resurgence of her scholarship. “I was gonna do these projects in secret and now I’m doing them publicly and getting appreciated for it.” These projects had a direct impact on Heather earning promotion to full professor during this study.

Five participants explicitly pointed to administrative, service, or teaching obligations as a substantial contributor to low research production. The demands of an administrative appointment as department chair or assistant/associate dean affected Jim, Sandy, Gina, Sam, and Betsy. “It totally put a kink in my research, like it just, it just ground to a halt,” said Jim.

Similarly, Betsy described her stint in the dean’s office as a productivity drain:

Going to the dean's office, that kind of slowed me down and um there's a certain point where you lose momentum, and you realize you're not being asked to do things in the same way. And I, all of a sudden realize, like whoa, it's been a long time since I've really published something like a refereed article.

Gina found the combination of administrative appointments, service, and teaching obligations overwhelmed her ability to prioritize her research goals.

In retrospect, I don't think I thought this at the time so much, but you know people started to ask me as you have noted, to do administrative stuff and also to do service work, to teach in our EMBA program. And all of those things are super time-consuming, and they just distracted me from, from my, you know, from doing research quite frankly.

Administrative and service obligations hindered Sandy’s research productivity repeatedly throughout her faculty career. Earlier roles as an associate dean and a department chair, as well as more recently serving as a writing program director and on associated committees, have created situations that limited her progress on a second book. While Sandy felt a need to “publish more before coming up” for full professor promotion, she acknowledged “I’ve made choices to do service rather than the scholarship that I knew was more significant.”

In a similar vein, Sam explained that his post-tenure research hurdles “allowed myself to be distracted enough by all of the administrative work...that I am right now enjoying and being

successful at,” yet also admitted his original impetus for taking an administrative appointment was to find more time for research.

I wanted to start that job, you know, so that I wasn't consuming all of the intellectual labors in teaching, but were putting my intellectual labors back into, you know, research and thinking on, you know, these newer issues for me. And it hasn't really happened... because the, you know, the job just simply turned out to be much harder than, you know, I had hoped or really that anybody had hoped, particularly in the last year and a half, insufficient staffing, and crises. And, also, when you have skills then people are going to come and use them and get you to solve problems. And there have been a lot of problems, and I've solved a lot of them, so it's been very gratifying. But it didn't create that space uh for my intellectual life that I wanted it to.

Institution-level Obstacles

In any situation in life there are things beyond one's individual control. In academia, a number of things at the institutional level fit this pattern. Organizational politics, financial (in)stability, and changes in leadership at senior levels are well beyond the locus of control of any individual faculty member within an organization, yet the impact of these external forces can have a direct impact on the people within the institution. Numerous stories of these obstacles were shared by participants. The most illustrative are recounted here.

Navigating the politics of an organization can be tricky even for politically savvy individuals. Politics in this sense refer to the power, influence, and alliances that people hold or cultivate to achieve objectives. For participants in this study, institutional politics showed up in different ways. Tom was pulled into situations that he would have preferred not to engage in but could not avoid because students often confided to him about harassment by his faculty colleagues:

[I]t was a political minefield. There was shit going down all the time there. There were multiple accusations of sexual harassment...It was horrible, horrible. I just, yeah, I knew the sins of that place inside and out. I wasn't involved in any of it, and I hated it all, it was terrible.

The arrival of new leadership on a campus at the senior ranks (president, provost, academic deans) can create unexpected obstacles for faculty. Heather felt a disconnect between her values and those of the university. “Throughout the university, research has risen in importance. I think it’s happened everywhere maybe, but it’s definitely happened here. And then it definitely got to the point where it didn’t match with my interests.” This speaks to Heather’s desire to focus on teaching and student-centered work and wanting to be recognized for this, while new institutional leaders were seeking to elevate the importance of research and expecting more from the faculty in this area.

Sandy described a shift in the college’s orientation toward a higher research focus when she first arrived at her university two decades ago. This shift, initiated by a then newly appointed provost, sought to raise the reputation of the institution in national rankings:

People who were being hired at that time, including myself, were hired to do, were expected to do more research than people in the previous 10 to 20 years...who had come on board. So, there was a lot of tension between the kind of the people who were before us, who tended to focus more on teaching, and then our group who came in, it was more like it was more focused on research. So there tended to be some problems.

Subsequent leadership changes led to a return of valuing teaching over research, yet Sandy found this problematic in practice related to criteria for promotion of faculty.

The way we talk about what professors do, the way we talked about tenure, the way we talked about promotion has shifted much more toward the teaching side. But again, it still feels like we still have sort of the same requirements for research.

Sandy went on to describe her frustration with the situation.

We need to stop expecting so much on the research side if now we’re shifting back over to teaching, like, then something has to give. And so far, nothing has given. We still have the same expectations in all three areas, so that’s been very frustrating.

Institutional financial stability has been a concern for private and public universities alike in recent years and a global pandemic has only raised the stakes (Butrymowicz & D’Amato,

2020). The financial challenges discussed by participants in this study ranged from lack of research funding at the department level to declining enrollments and associated tuition revenue forcing budget cuts and hiring freezes. Sandy described this issue at her institution, saying “we've really just been kind of fighting to keep our jobs for the last eight years because of lower enrollments, because of financial issues with the college.” She went on to further explain:

...this whole year while I've been on sabbatical, we were told all year by the administration that they were definitely cutting again, they're going to cut faculty positions no matter what. Now, they did this time offer incentivize retirement, but they didn't quite catch enough people in that because they set the age parameters probably a little too old. Whatever. Anyway, so they kept saying this all year and it was very stressful for everybody. So again, I was glad to be on sabbatical because I didn't have to deal with some of that stress, you know. Then, all of a sudden (in) April they said “well, after looking at things, we're not going to do that”. So, it was great in a way, but it also just made for an incredibly stressful time.

Toxic People and Department Culture

Stories of toxic colleagues and toxic culture should not shock or surprise most readers as tales of such bad actors in academia and other work environments fill threads on social media daily. Several examples of this unfolded through interviews with five of the seven participants. Difficult colleagues were described in terms that ranged from “a pain in the ass” (Tom) on the mild side to “a complete fucking asshole” (Betsy) in the most extreme description.

Betsy's depiction of academia as “an old-fashioned hierarchical institution” that harbors these bad actors was the starkest. She explained that “a person who's senior to you, who's a toxic person in academia really does have a sort of very real, concrete, material factual power.” Betsy encountered not one but two toxic obstacles in her path – a faculty colleague (Greg who was mentioned earlier) and the college dean. She described Greg as “very poisonous” and “extremely judgmental” to the extent that “a lot of what I spend time with my therapist talking about is dealing with Greg” because she has internalized the negativity she feels from this

colleague. If Greg were not enough to deal with, the treatment she described having received from a former dean left her feeling humiliated and demoralized:

In my third year review he said I was not, I was not tenure material and to the whole department. And said that my problem, he said, I had two fatal flaws. One was that I was a perfectionist, and the other was that I was ambitious, and I would never be perfect and that my ambitions far outstripped my abilities. And he said that in front of all of my senior colleagues.

Toxic behavior is not always so blatant. Sometimes it is disguised as a mentor. Gina's experience with a department colleague in her pre-tenure period left her with a sense of distrust of her peers.

I was given a mentor who said to me not to worry about my research and to focus more on my teaching, which I interpreted as really bad advice and sabotaging. And they may not have thought about it that way, but at the end of the day at our university research matters a lot for tenure, more than teaching. People expect that your teaching will get better and better over time. And people know that it takes a long time to publish, and so I thought it was bad advice and I didn't understand why she would give me that advice and I felt like it could have been racially motivated, or I felt like maybe she doesn't like me, really doesn't like me, but that seems like really bad advice.

Heather reflected on the challenges she faced at the department level.

I was proud of what I had accomplished recently, and I wanted to share that with people who I felt like were my colleagues and who I've been with for 20 years, you know... And I think that's what made it even harder to get my ass kicked the way I did. I think departments are, can be really ugly places to be. I don't know why we don't want to be more supportive of one another.

Jim characterized his experience in a department chair role as "the biggest impediment to my growth to being promoted to full professor." Shortly after earning tenure Jim stepped into the leadership role for the next five years chairing a department that was "completely at odds all the time about every decision" and "where there were a lot of, for lack of a better term, personnel issues." These internal conflicts were compounded by an upper administration that was constantly changing direction, which left Jim feeling like "you're just bouncing all over the

place. And so, trying to adapt to those adjusting goals was just really, really hard and...left no time for my research agenda.”

The toxic people and cultures they described led some participants to consider leaving academia. Betsy recounted a period of feeling “like I was floundering and completely alone” with no allies in her department. In a moment of despair several years ago, she told her husband, “It’s all over, I can’t stand this, I want to leave academia.” Rather than take this dramatic step, she took a two-year unpaid leave which she calls the “best two years of my life.” She used the time to reset her focus. When Betsy returned to the faculty she came back with a “new attitude and decided that I live a life of service and that I really love teaching.” She also took steps to re-energize her scholarship: “I don’t feel like it’s over in the same way. I’m confident that I will do a book.”

Tom’s first tenure-track faculty position was at a rural state university. He resigned from that position after five years due what he described as the toxicity of the environment. Coming from a then number one ranked Ph.D. program at a flagship public university in the midwestern U.S., Tom was accustomed to a very different culture than that where he landed as an assistant professor: “Being in such a toxic environment just kind of set the tone. I think it kind of stained kind of my early thinking of what this could look like.” He went on to reflect that this early experience “influenced all my career choices...I just thought about relocating and not even being an academic anymore.” Ultimately, Tom transferred to another university in a tenure-track position where he has remained for the balance of his academic career.

Lack of Formal Support for Promotion to Full Professor

Jim’s depiction of the support structures for pre-tenure faculty were generally shared by other participants in relation to their respective campuses: “I felt supported by the university

broadly in terms of getting through the P&T process...I felt like the university wanted you to succeed.” Not only did Jim have access to workshops designed for faculty on the tenure track, but he also had informal support of colleagues who were “allies for you” in preparing for the promotion and tenure process. As post-tenured faculty, most participants highlighted the lack of formal support as an obstacle in pursuing promotion to full professor.

Five participants acknowledged that formal mentoring of tenured faculty did not exist at their institutions. Betsy offered her analysis of this void:

I understand how and why getting tenured faculty promoted is a very low priority in terms of mentoring on campuses. I mean, there's so many things that are higher priority... There's no kind of conventional way to give people credit for mentoring somebody after associate professor-land, right, it's like that's just out of the goodness of your heart, and so I can see how it happens. But I think it's absolutely indefensible that institutions don't set up something.

The lack of a formal structure to support associate professors who might be seriously considering a bid for promotion to full professor was coupled with an absence of any informal or meaningful conversations with peers, department chairs, or academic deans for Jim and Betsy. There were “not a ton of support, not a ton of conversations about how we can get Jim to be a full professor,” leaving Jim feeling like he had to navigate the path alone. Similarly, Betsy spoke of a desire for meaningful conversations with peers but not finding the support she needed, which contributed to her eventual extended leave.

I went through this long time where I just really felt like I was floundering and completely alone. And like, you have to talk to people about your work, but nobody at school gives a flying phooey about my work and so there's no one there to talk to.

For some participants, clearly understanding the criteria under which they would be evaluated presented a challenge in deciding if or when to seek promotion to full professor. Academic disciplines vary widely and trying to create one set of criteria to serve all is akin to comparing apples and oranges. Yet participants in this study across disciplines described their

institution and/or department promotion criteria for promotion to full professor as “amorphous” (Sandy). Beyond the criteria related to scholarship, service, and teaching evaluations, Jim highlighted another important piece of this puzzle, “That’s something I’ve got to sort of figure out, is what are the unwritten rules of going up.”

The internal criteria, written or unwritten, are one part of the calculation. Gina and Sam brought to light another consideration of whether the promotion file they assemble “will pass through the external reviewer filter” (Sam). In both instances Sam and Gina were redirecting the focus of their respective research agendas which would draw upon a different external reviewer community than their earlier scholarship. Gina referenced an interdisciplinary collection of potential external reviewers that might include “critical management scholars,” “black scholars,” and “people outside of the business academy...who do race work”.

That's the community that I would want to evaluate my scholarship if I were going up for full, and I couldn't do that right now...I don't think that I have enough of whatever that is for those people to evaluate me, and I don't think I have enough of the other stuff for the general academy, business academy, to evaluate me in a way that I would feel like I really put my best foot forward.

Family Obligations and Individual Challenges

The challenge of balancing work and family obligations were not entirely in the domain of the women in this study. Jim explained that his early academic career took a back seat to his wife’s career moves. Sam alluded to unspecified “domestic family issues” contributing to an “extremely challenging” period in his career.

Sabbatical leaves are generally intended to allow faculty an extended break from teaching and service obligations while they focus on research projects. For some of the participants, sabbatical leaves were less productive either by design or happenstance. Sandy and Betsy both recounted their experiences navigating maternity leaves at a time when their institutions had no

leave policy for employees, leading them to use sabbatical leaves to manage family matters, leaving little to no time to work on research. Sandy's shared that her first sabbatical was orchestrated strategically and that "we deliberately planned...to have a child during that time." A sabbatical several years later was a less joyous experience for Sandy because "my husband and I got separated during that sabbatical, kind of ruined that one too."

Heather's first sabbatical was scheduled to begin while she was still waiting on her tenure decision. She would not know the result of the decision before the sabbatical began so there was a chance that she "would use sabbatical to find another job." The stress of the tenure process was so intense for Heather that she indicated that she lost interest in her research, "I didn't do much. Honestly, I mostly, I just regained my sanity."

Participants also described individual challenges related to the work environment or to the academic profession which stood out as a significant obstacle along their respective academic careers. The stories highlighted below by Betsy and Tom were unique to these participants and not discussed by others in this study.

Betsy described her institution as a "extremely conservative" and this climate of conservatism led to hostility she experienced from colleagues on her campus.

On my own campus and outside my department there's always been such hostility to the work I do, that it's, you know, that it's feminist, that it's about gender, it's about body sexuality, and to some degree about race. And it was, I was very early in that work, which is also one reason that I kind of felt like I should be at a research university, that I was like one of the very first people working on some of these topics in Britain or the United States... I mean it's been really bad, like really openly hostile to my work, and like really kind of intellectually shut out of the world on campus.

Tom described the individual challenge of navigating the academic publishing process. Rejection occurs in academia with regularity, especially from external sources in the form of a

journal article not accepted for publication. The sting of a journal rejection has stayed with Tom for nearly two decades, following his early efforts to publish articles based on his dissertation.

I sent one to a high-level journal and I got back an email from the editor with reviews, and then I also got a paper rejection that came. And the paper rejection just felt thick in this envelope and I just, I've never opened it. And, and I'm not very good at that kind of feedback stuff in general ... Some people take those things, and they just whoosh, they just whip themselves and they promise to make themselves better and it's so good for them to just get all that negative feedback. I always had a really hard time with it.

Tom went on to explain that in the editor's email was a summary of reviewer comments including one that recommended the article manuscript be declined but "there is a kernel of a good idea in there." Tom has "hung on that phrase for like 20 years...it was just so damaging to me."

The participants in this study volunteered to be included in part because though they had encountered various obstacles, they still considered it likely they would seek promotion to full professor. Now I turn to the findings that speak to how they persisted through the obstacles detailed in the preceding pages.

Departmental and Institutional Support

This first theme emerged as both an obstacle (lack of support) and a source of help depending on the perspective of the participant. Without exception the participants identified supportive colleagues as a source of support in overcoming obstacles. Even when a participant had firsthand experiences with people they described as toxic, they also acknowledged colleagues or a dean who made a positive impact.

Gina found her network of support through a leadership development program for faculty of color that she joined when she came to her current institution. This program, in tandem with a new faculty institute on her campus, gave Gina a "cohort of people" that she felt she could rely upon outside of her immediate department. "It was great to be able to go and have these

conversations will people outside of my college” where she could seek trusted advice and support.

Betsy was pleasantly surprised at the “fleet of people who came to my support” when she embraced being vulnerable and approached her dean for help.

What was clear is that other departments on our campus actually support their associate professors in various ways. Our department is notorious for not doing it, I mean, there are two departments...where the senior people actively try to keep the associates from becoming fulls. Not true in any other department. And they have informal and formal ways of doing that. So that was revealed, but then... we came up with a bunch of ideas and I had a number of people read parts of my work to give feedback and advice.

Simultaneously, Betsy’s department chair worked across departments to coordinate a workshop featuring book editors on the topic of second authored books. Betsy reflected positively on this: “a number of very practical things that came out of all of these conversations...it was great, I mean I feel like it really helped get me on track.”

Helpful Research Collaborations

Research collaborations were considered a positive support by all seven participants. For those participants whose typical modus operandi as a scholar was to produce solo work, the research collaborations tended toward finding writing partners with whom they could share co-motivational strategies to boost accountability. Sandy highlighted a “works in progress group” who periodically gathered “to read each other's work and talk.” She reported receiving helpful feedback from this peer group on two chapters of her book project that she was working on at the time of this study.

Whether research partners are internal to the institution or external did not seem to have any differing impact on the benefits of the collaborations. Heather spoke of developing a relationship with a research partner who “was willing to also talk to me about the other projects, so he really helped me a lot in just being able to bounce ideas off or helping me see where what I

was writing wasn't very clear.” Tom also found this sounding board opportunity with a team of researchers he collaborated with on a National Science Foundation funded project that studies teaching in the STEM fields.

Those women have been enormously influential to my career and my career development, and the way I see myself. I can't overstate how important those relationships are and um, so that's been huge for me...They really helped me think about myself in a more academic way often and I really am grateful for that and differently than I would get it at my home department.

Betsy and Sam spoke of re-engaging within their discipline more broadly to find sources of inspiration within the field which they had been missing. Betsy explained,

...for very long time there was like this space where I had no one to talk to about my work at all, like both at school and then just kind of in the profession. And then, kinda by luck and chance, I kind of renewed some academic friendships and that's opened up some conversations, so I feel more on track now.

The participants who conducted research in business disciplines spoke highly of their co-authors as a deep well of support. Gina found publishing success by collaborating with a colleague. She explained that “I just felt stuck, I think she did too, and so then we started writing together. And we, I think we've written three papers together...and was also just helpful, just to have somebody to write with.” Jim confessed that early in his career he avoided co-authoring because it was easier to work on his own, but recently had found success and enjoyment through collaboration:

What he teaches me and what I teach him has really kind of fired me up a little bit about research... and it's just sort of been kind of motivational and that way to have some accountability and also to kind of grow as a as a thinker in your field.

Autonomy in Teaching, Service, or Research

Autonomy in a personal sense is often defined as an ability to govern oneself. It is considered a desirable characteristic of the faculty experience in the academic environment. Tenured professors enjoy certain degrees of autonomy in their teaching, service, and research

decisions. Six of the participants reflected on such freedom to make independent choices about their work as one way to demonstrate agency.

Sandy discussed her autonomy in developing new curriculum in response to declining enrollments in one discipline and to serve students in an adjacent major where demand was stable and growing. She described this as “a natural way to contribute” and also as a way “to keep my job” in the wake of ongoing financial tensions that had twice resulted in layoffs. Sandy later explained her own mental shift toward “finding my own satisfaction in...teaching and in trying to design good courses to provide a transformative experience.”

Both Heather and Betsy spoke of pursuing autonomy in their teaching, particularly after earning tenure. Betsy described this as wanting to “have the freedom to teach all sorts of things” and not feeling constrained by a conservative climate of an institution. Heather expressed autonomy as having the freedom to push students to reach high standards.

You have to give whatever it takes to get them to the high standards, that’s really where my heart was...I was glad I had tenure because now I was felt like I was free to focus on what was important to me. What was important to me was having a really like extremely productive learning environment for the students.

Autonomy in service was stressed by participants as a way to maintain control of their time and effort within the scope of what is expected of faculty at their institution. Whether this meant serving on committees which focused on student-centered initiatives or faculty governance or stepping up to lead in areas within their department or college, having the ability to choose where an individual made their expected contribution was key. Tom spoke of this in relation to using his autonomy to provide leadership in an area that he had a preference for in relation to his teaching. He was approached by his dean about starting a new program and said, “directing a master’s program...gave me cover from doing a bunch of stuff I didn’t really like doing...I direct that program, I teach in that program, I hire the adjuncts. I create everything for

it.” This gave Tom not only alignment with his interest in graduate level programs but allowed him to “just do my own thing.”

The third area of autonomy and one particularly critical for three of the participants was in having the freedom to pursue a change in their research agenda. For Heather this was a pivotal shift in her personal satisfaction with her academic life. As described in her participant profile, Heather was going to pursue a new area of scholarship discreetly and was surprised to discover that it would be embraced by her university. She described this new body of work as a major contributor to her successful promotion to full professor.

Similarly, Gina and Sam both expressed disillusion with their original lines of academic inquiry and a need to pursue more meaningful areas of scholarship. Gina shared:

The truth is I feel like I had a mini existential crisis after I got tenure. I feel like I was, I thought to myself, do I care about the research that I’m going? And partly I think that was the beginning of a hard journey but a good journey of looking at I was always interested in race, but I was not often writing about it because I didn’t believe that would be acceptable in the Academy, that it would get published. And so, I was publishing around race, you know, and trying to figure different contexts where I could study it. And I think that after tenure, I was like, do I want to keep doing the same stuff that doesn’t make me happy? And it took me, I would say it took me three or four years, honestly, to sort of be honest with myself about I know I don’t want to keep doing that.

Influences on the Decision to Pursue Promotion to Full Professor

The final research question in this study attempted to get at the heart of what motivates an associate professor’s decision to pursue promotion to full professor. As a researcher, I was keenly interested to explore the intrinsic motivations that influenced this decision. What I learned was that few of my participants could point specifically to intrinsic motivations. However, it was abundantly clear that extrinsic influences were strong for nearly all the participants. There was considerably less overlap among participants about what influenced

their intention to pursue promotion to full professor than what they had revealed about their motivations for an academic career or how they persisted through obstacles.

Intrinsic Motivation

The handful of intrinsic motivations that emerged through the participant interviews boiled down to ego, pride, and individual goals. Both Jim and Tom spoke of ego as a motivation to pursue promotion to full professor. Jim framed it as “I’m good enough to do it and I need to be able to say, like, I just went for it.” Tom was more explicit in his framing of the ego as motivation and the risk-reward of such a decision.

I’ve been an associate professor for a little while now, I think about ten years, and it’s like, it’s time for me. It’s kind of an ego thing, so I’m willing to take the risk of those, that exposure because I feel like my ego is on the line some with this. It’s just time to kind of move this along. So, which again, it’s the risk, it’s the threat of discomfort when it comes to protecting the ego that then makes you take action...that’s more of a motivator. I guess you would call those maybe stick motivators as opposed to the carrot motivator, like I’ll take the risk because the reward is so great.

Heather stated unequivocally that she never intended to seek promotion to full professor but the encouragement of supporters among her colleagues and dean helped persuade her to assemble her promotion portfolio.

Part of me was motivated by pride in where I was with my career and I think that’s what made it even harder to get my ass kicked the way I did...it does give me some joy to know that there are people in the university who appreciate what I’m bringing, and who did look at everything and say this is a package we think is next level.

Sandy envisioned her academic career advancing to the rank of full professor when she started on the tenure track. She explained “obviously I always wanted to be promoted to full” but like other participants, she pointed to external factors having a stronger influence on a decision or intention to pursue promotion to full professor. In some cases, external factors were of positive motivation from colleagues. In other cases, it could be a matter of outlasting a

specific barrier, namely a person. The themes that follow illustrate how participants explained the external influences on their decision process.

Encouragement from Colleagues or Dean

Although Heather admitted that she never intended to go up for promotion to full professor, she had in fact submitted a promotion dossier and been notified of the successful application as data collection was underway. She attributed her decision to encouragement from a colleague who publicly advocated in a faculty meeting that it was time to rally around Heather and another associate professor to support them in reaching full. “Just to...feel like there was a cheerleader, that was really nice,” Heather explained. She also gave high praise to another department colleague who was a catalyst for research collaborations that propelled her resurgence as a scholar and helped pave the way for her non-traditional research to get institutional recognition and support. Scholarship that Heather was going to pursue “in secret” was instead showcased on the university’s website front page and that “makes me feel a little more supported, a lot more supported really.”

When she found herself struggling to make progress on a book, Betsy said she took a chance on asking for help. She was pleasantly met with willing supporters who further boosted her confidence: “I got a lot of very positive feedback...and people were emphatic, like...you long ago met the standards for promotion.”

Perceptions of the External Research Community

There was universal agreement that not only meeting but exceeding the expectations of research productivity and publication quality set by one’s department, school/college, and institution must be achieved if one plans to seek promotion. For some participants a key consideration that influenced their decision to seek promotion to full professor was their

perception of how they were viewed within their respective field or discipline. Jim framed this in describing how he approached whether to seek promotion to full professor:

My mindset over the past two years has really been like just be the best scholar you could be, publishing in the best journals you can... I want to have a good five years of knocking out some good research that's respected in the field and feel like okay...I'm ready to go up for full.

Two participants discussed the external reviewer impact on the promotion process and how this influences their thought process about going up for full. For both Sam and Gina, part of the calculus in their final decision of whether to go up for full professor relates to the external scholarly community. These participants will consider how the external scholarly community will evaluate them as they each shift their research focus into new areas where they would be relative unknowns to a scholarly community. From Sam's point of view, the concern about external reviewer perceptions was partly fueled by his interpretation of promotion criteria which stated a "substantial contribution to your field" and his understanding that "you had to be someone who had made an impact."

As she pursued an interdisciplinary line of research that intersected her existing business-oriented scholarship with race, Gina discussed her thoughts about how shifting her research focus would impact fellow scholars' perceptions of her.

I think that the full designation presupposes that you have sort of this trajectory, you've been studying something for a long time, and you are one of the recognized experts in that thing, whatever it is. And I think what could happen to a person, or again I'll just talk about me, what happened to me after is that I'm not going to write about that stuff anymore. So, now will people say I'm a recognized expert for, you know, this new stuff that I'm starting to write about and, or will they see that as a discontinuity in my scholarly portfolio? And, if they're going to be such harsh judges, maybe is it worth it?

Financial Incentive

Most of the participants did not point to any financial motives as influencing their decision or intent to seek promotion to full professor. The possibility of a financial incentive

influenced only two participants' decision or intent to seek promotion. Aside from very modest stipends attached to a handful of service or administrative appointments, Sandy had received "very few raises in the last 15 years." She revealed that money motivated her to keep working toward a promotion to full professor because "the only way around here to make more money is to get promoted." Heather was not promised a pay increase though her dean did offer to advocate for a salary increase when encouraging her to seek the promotion. This gesture was compelling to Heather. "The motivation was not like I want the title or anything, it was like I just want to be able to support myself more easily."

Family Considerations

Several participants raised the topic of family as a significant external influence on any career decision. To illustrate how considerations vary, I will highlight two participants' stories. Sandy shared that parenting had impacted her research productivity, specifically "publishing less than I did before my son was born." She went on to say, "I make sure that my teaching is finished by 2:30...so that I come home with him, we do his sports, we do all that." As a single parent Sandy prioritized her son's needs and interests over her own professional goals while he was in his formative years.

The needs of a spouse or partner can similarly take priority, as Gina shared. Though she clearly aspires to seek a promotion within a few years of her move to a new institution, she acknowledged that a cross country move is a compromise, "he [my husband] is willing to go but it's not his top choice." Gina was emphatic that she would not pursue her goal at the expense of her husband's health, as he has had "a number of chronic illnesses." She explained that "if things become more challenging, you know, it's just possible that I won't be able to pursue full in that way and I'm going to be okay with that."

Waiting for a Difficult Colleague to Retire

Two participants shared that they had been waiting several years to give serious consideration to seeking promotion due to a colleague who they perceived as a threat. Betsy discussed the impact that Greg has had on her decision. “I don’t feel safe going up for promotion because of Greg...he can tank me at every turn.” She explained that two faculty who were junior to her were recently promoted to full professor, giving Betsy a bit more confidence that there will be “force of numbers, so four of five of the full support me.” Yet, as she further explained, Greg has undermined “two other cases and he’s been very successful in making people miserable, so I’m just waiting for him to retire at this point.”

Tom had also taken a waiting approach due to a colleague within his school “who I just didn’t feel like dealing with” and who served on the promotion and tenure committee. Once this professor retired and Tom no longer perceived him to be a threat, he felt that preparing to go up for promotion would be “an easier to navigate kind of situation” because this departure “clear(ed) the path for me.” With this specific obstacle out of his sight line, Tom was able to take specific actions to close gaps in his service to the university that would elevate his profile as a faculty leader. He also focused on securing a contract for a second book. Tom felt that achieving both objectives would put him in a better position to seek promotion to full professor.

Summary

This chapter introduced seven participants who are tenured associate professors self-described as actively seeking or intending to seek promotion to full professor. The participants shared their individual academic career experiences, obstacles faced along their journeys, challenges, and triumphs in persisting “in the face of unfavorable career conditions” (London, 1983, p. 620). Using a thematic analysis approach (Saldaña, 2016) to analyze nearly 16 hours of

individual interview transcripts, key themes and findings emerged to help make meaning of participants' thoughts about their career decisions and past and future actions (Terosky, 2010).

The presentation of findings related to the framework of career motivation theory (London, 1983; London & Noe, 1997) were presented as both broad findings across the participant group, as well as unique characteristics notable to an individual. These individual characteristics were highlighted in the biographical profiles which introduce each of the seven participants. While career motivation theory was selected as a framework for this study primarily because of the original conceptualization as focused on characteristics that motivated an individual's choices and actions in their career (London, 1983; London & Noe, 1997), some common findings emerged and were presented in broad terms. A universal characteristic across the participants was the element of self within the career identity construct, with all seven associating strongly with the identities of professor, teacher, and scholar. A recurring topic that emerged in relation to career insight centered on individuals' challenges to meet the research productivity necessary to submit a promotion portfolio for consideration. The nature of the participants' individual disciplines, institutional and department climates, and personal circumstances were so unique and varied, even among a small study group, that resilience was equally wide ranging. It is clear from their individual stories that the academic environment can be rife with obstacles, even for those who are protected by tenure. Perhaps most inspiring is that despite this, these participants remained optimistic that a promotion to full professor was not out of reach and was a goal to which they continue to aspire.

To answer the primary research questions that framed this study, key findings were presented as themes under the broader headings of motivation to pursue an academic career, overcoming obstacles pre and post tenure, and what is influencing the decision to pursue

promotion to full professor. Four themes emerged to answer the first research question of what motivates an individual to pursue an academic career: desire to teach, lifelong love of learning, academia is a calling, and drawn to research. Understanding the obstacles that participants faced and how they persisted illuminated findings related to the second research question, resulting in five themes that speak to the obstacle pre and post tenure, and three themes focusing on ways participants overcame obstacles. The primary obstacles that participants faced are captured in the following themes: challenges in maintaining research productivity, institution-level obstacles, toxic people and department culture, lack of formal support for promotion to full professor, and family obligations and individual challenges. The ways that individuals persisted to overcome obstacles were reflected in three broad themes of: departmental and institutional support, helpful research collaborations, and autonomy in teaching, service, or research. Finally, to understand what influenced a participant's decision to pursue promotion to full professor, six themes are presented which illustrate the greatest divergence among participant experiences in the study. The themes presented include intrinsic motivation, encouragement from colleagues or dean, perceptions of the external research community, financial incentive, family considerations, and waiting for a difficult colleague to retire.

Career decisions for tenured professors are not purely independent of the environment in which they work. The participants in this study shared rich and personal examples of their difficulties, trials, and triumphs in moving toward their decision whether to seek promotion to full professor. Even when an individual articulated their aspiration or intrinsic motivation to attain a promotion to full professor, they needed to consider numerous factors outside of their own control.

The data analysis and findings presented here form the basis of the discussion in the next chapter, where I present implications for practice, recommendations, and areas for further study.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand how intrinsic motivation influences the decisions of tenured university professors to pursue the rank of full professor. At the outset of this research project, I acknowledged that making such a decision is a complex and uniquely individual process that is influenced by both internal and external motivations. Using a qualitative inquiry approach, I sought to understand what influenced the decision of tenured professors in private, not-for-profit teaching focused universities and colleges to seek promotion to full professor. The rich experiences of seven participants presented in Chapter 4 illustrate a range of both intrinsic motivations and external influences at play in the career decision process of a tenured university professor. The findings from this study help to address the lack of research on progression in academic careers to the rank of full professor (Gardner & Blackstone, 2013; Gladwin et al., 2014; Lindholm, 2004; Terosky et al., 2014), which the participants' experiences confirmed is a journey that can be rife with obstacles that intrinsic motivation alone may be insufficient to navigate.

The findings detailed in Chapter 4 were reached through both deductive and inductive analysis of more than 400 pages of interview transcripts produced from roughly 16 hours of interviews. The data informed my understanding of how participants identified with their academic career choice, navigated obstacles they faced, and their individual decision making about going up for promotion to full professor. In this chapter I discuss the findings related to the theoretical framework both in terms of what participants shared explicitly and what their stories imply about their motivation to pursue promotion to full professor. I further discuss the themes that emerged in relation to the research questions with respect to the existing literature.

This chapter also introduces implications for policy and practice, recommendations for further research, and closes with my own reflections and concluding remarks regarding this study.

Findings Related to the Theoretical Framework

We learned from participants' experiences that navigating a faculty career in the academic setting is not for the faint of heart. Using career motivation theory as a framework to understand the participants' career identity, career insight, and career resilience (London, 1983; London & Noe, 1997) provided a lens to delve deeper with participants into their decisions and actions in the face of the obstacles and barriers they encountered. A brief discussion of how each construct of career motivation theory emerged from the data analysis follows.

Although the framework was centered on the individual in my analysis in the same way career motivation theory was originally conceptualized by London (1983), the career identity characteristic of professor was universally noted as both individually and collectively the participants associated deeply with their roles as professors and scholars. One element of career identity that I found most participants struggled to articulate explicitly or with strong conviction was a need for advancement, which is characterized as a need to seek promotion to full professor in the context of this study. One participant went so far as to say, in fact, this was not their goal, yet the same individual had already submitted a promotion dossier at the time they agreed to participate in the study. Despite their original indication of intent to pursue promotion to full professor, several expressed concern that they may not be successful in overcoming present obstacles such as publishing a second book, acceptance by external reviewers in a new research focus, or waiting out a difficult colleague's retirement. The doubts they expressed may temper their conviction of this need to minimize disappointment if they ultimately do not pursue the promotion or are unsuccessful in their bid. This implicit need for advancement (promotion to

full professor) is a subtle signpost of internal motivation toward the goal of promotion to full professor. I would argue that by acknowledging an intent to seek promotion and taking proactive steps to position oneself to pursue promotion to full professor, each participant is implicitly confirming a need for advancement.

Among the participants there was a high level of transparency in disclosing perceived individual failings described by those who had not yet sought promotion to full professor. Through their stories, the participants demonstrated strong self-awareness, particularly of any individual weaknesses which may have impeded their progress toward promotion and suggest a deep sense of career insight about their career goals (London, 1983; London & Noe, 1997). Participants owned their choices and intentions, especially regarding challenges in maintaining their research productivity, which was a predominant obstacle preventing them being ready to seek promotion to full professor. Generally, participants acknowledged external obstacles but did not lay the blame on persons or situations. As Gina astutely reflected, how she engaged in service as a faculty member of color at her institution placed increased demands on her time that constrained her production as a scholar – “together we created a situation where going up for full was challenging.”

Career resilience was displayed by participants in uniquely individual ways in response to wide ranging situational obstacles they encountered at various junctures in their academic careers. Adaptability in response to institutional shifts as well as broader impacts being felt across the higher education sector weaved through participant experiences. Self-efficacy emerged strongly through participants’ confidence as high caliber teachers and advisors to their students. An individual’s tolerance for risk varied widely but noticeably increased after tenure based on their sense of job security. Achievement motivation was most related to earning tenure

earlier in their career and more recently in generating high quality scholarship that would be recognized as fulfilling or exceeding the criteria for full professor of both internal (institution) and external reviewers.

Findings Related to the Literature

In the discussion that follows, there are close linkages between the experiences of my participants and themes that emerged in this study to the existing literature. This is especially true regarding motivations to pursue an academic career, the obstacles that faculty encounter, and overcoming such obstacles. The greatest divergence in participant experiences and related themes came out of my efforts to address the question of intrinsic motivations that influence an individual's decision to pursue promotion to full professor.

Motivation to Pursue an Academic Career

To fully appreciate what influences faculty to pursue promotion to the rank of full professor begins with an understanding of their early inclinations to engage in an academic career. The literature identifies intellectual challenge, passion for research and the freedom to direct areas of research, autonomy and flexibility in structuring one's work, and an ability to influence students (Gladwin et al., 2014; Lindholm, 2004; Sutherland, 2017) as common motivations for this career path. Themes that emerged to explain my participants' motivations to pursue an academic career aligned very closely with these reasons. As faculty at institutions with a teaching-focused mission, the *desire to teach* and have a positive impact on students (Sutherland, 2017) was a leading motivator that emerged as a primary theme. The themes of *lifelong love of learning* and being *drawn to research* were shared among the majority of participants in my study, lining up closely with intellectual challenge and a passion for research (Gladwin et al., 2014; Lindholm, 2004). The theme of *academia is a calling* confirms

participants' agreement that freedom to direct research, autonomy and flexibility in structuring work, and influencing students are key motivators for their work in academia.

Obstacles Faculty Faced Pre and Post Tenure

The participants in my study were exceeding forthcoming regarding the external barriers and situational influences which created obstacles in their faculty careers, especially post-tenure. These stories informed the development of five core themes that characterized common obstacles that participants faced as tenured faculty.

Challenges in maintaining research productivity. The predominant theme that emerged as an obstacle for my participants was an overarching *challenge in maintaining research productivity*. As we learned in Chapter 4, the average number of post-tenure years of the participants was 12.7 years. An analysis of their academic CVs indicated at least five of the participants had a gap of ten or more years without scholarly production. A substantial contributor to the challenge of maintaining research productivity among the participants is echoed in the literature. The increasing workload demand of teaching and service have been shown to impact faculty across ranks (Baker et al., 2016). As the participants in my study explained, the constraints of one's teaching and service workload significantly hindered achievement related to their scholarship agenda, which is also evident in the existing literature (Baker et al., 2016).

Institution-level obstacles. Another theme that emerged from my study, *institution-level obstacles*, refers to organizational policies, practices, or politics which are beyond an individual's locus of control, but which impact their productivity, satisfaction, or ability to advance. In several instances the participants described institutional change with respect to the importance of research over teaching or vice versa as top administration leaders changed. These

changes reflect both the issues of values misalignment for some scholars and lack of clarity in expectations (Crawford et al., 2012; Sutherland, 2017) for promotion that we also see in the literature.

Shifting expectations with respect to how research, teaching, and service were weighed or criteria that were not clearly defined was raised by several participants as concerns affecting their potential decision to seek promotion to full professor. Conflicts between an individual's priorities and institutional expectations were found to be of particular concern for women (Terosky et al., 2014). Among the participants in my study this was also a challenge for men.

Toxic people and department culture. A third theme that emerged to explain the obstacles that participants faced is *toxic people and department culture*. The most extreme examples were described by Betsy, the longest tenured participant in the study at 18 years post-tenure and nearly three decades in academia. Betsy's experiences with toxic people closely resembled research on bullying in the academy which was found to not only negatively affect job satisfaction and discourage seeking promotion, but potentially push them out of the academy altogether (Frazier, 2011; Keashly & Neuman, 2010). In fact, at one point Betsy shared that she considered leaving academia, as did Tom, who described the toxic environment of his department in the first tenure-track position he held at the start of his career causing him to consider "not even being an academic anymore." Stories of departments in conflict and colleagues not supporting each other in positive ways contributed to Jim, Gina, and Heather's collective dismay with negative cultures impacting their satisfaction and individual success.

Lack of formal support for promotion to full professor. Pre-tenure support programs and resources are well documented in the literature, particularly faculty development programs and mentorship (Baker et al., 2016; Baldwin & Chang, 2006; Cullen & Harris, 2008) which give

tenure-track *assistant* professors the best chance of getting promoted to associate professor rank with tenure. However, looking specifically at female *associate* professors' agency in career advancement, Terosky and colleagues found that "lack of positive mentoring or feedback from departmental colleagues worked against their perspective that advancement was possible" (2014, p. 66).

This mirrored the experiences of my participants, as no formal programs aimed at preparing tenured associate professors to seek promotion to full professor existed within their respective institutions, leaving participants to seek alternative resources. Gina took advantage of external resources made available through her institutional membership in the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity (NCFDD), who offers tailored programs and resources for each phase of the academic journey including mid-career post-tenure faculty (NCFDD, n.d.). Gina explained that since earning tenure, her utilization of resources had been limited to NCFDD's writing support tools.

Lacking formal support in preparing for a promotion to full professor was also linked to questions of the clarity around promotion criteria by participants in my study. This concern has been explored by several scholars who found that promotion criteria is vague on multiple levels, from weighting of teaching, service, and scholarship, to the minimum number of publications and/or preferred journals or publishers, to the optimal timing of a promotion (Baker et al., 2016; Britton, 2010; Crawford et al., 2012; Mabrouk, 2007; Sutherland, 2017). The vagueness in promotion criteria combined with shifting of institutional priorities related to the value of teaching, research, and service, created confusion and frustration for participants, leaving some to delay a decision to seek promotion or assume they would not meet the criteria.

Family obligations and individual challenges. Extensive research addresses the obstacles faculty encounter related to work-life and family considerations (Jacobs & Winslow, 2004; O'Meara & Campbell, 2011) as well as the impact of these challenges on female scholars (Bird, 2011; Misra et al., 2010; Teroksy et al., 2014) and persons of color (Cora-Bramble, 2006; Frazier, 2011; Ponjuan et al., 2011). The experiences depicted by the participants in this study echoed these challenges. As mentioned in Chapter 4, work-life and family considerations were not exclusively in the domain of female participants, yet the impact of such challenges was typically of greater consequence to these female scholars.

While a sabbatical leave is generally viewed as a time to focus on research, two of the female participants found themselves using their leaves to manage family matters (e.g., maternity, marital issues). Another participant used her immediate post-tenure sabbatical as a chance to reset and recover from the stress of the tenure process. More recently, one of these female participants was awarded a full-year sabbatical leave yet found herself drawn back into administrative obligations that could not be ignored during her leave. The intended purpose of focusing on research during sabbatical leaves proved to be a mirage for these participants.

One participant, Betsy, recounted how she has had to overcome being a female scholar in academia through multiple examples. From her graduate school experience at a research-intensive institution (i.e., R1) being discouraged from pursuing a research track career, to disguising her pregnancies while on the tenure-track out of fear she would not be taken seriously as a scholar, to being bullied by a dean, to name a few. These experiences, which Betsy attributed to her gender, led her to take a two-year unpaid leave, during which she considered leaving academia all together.

Overcoming Obstacles in Pre and Post Tenure

Despite the obstacles and challenges that tenured faculty experienced which are captured in the five preceding themes, participants found a myriad of ways to persist toward their intention of an eventual promotion to the rank of full professor. Their stories of resilience informed a deeper understanding of how they persisted through obstacles, resulting in three core themes that related to their persistence in the face of such obstacles. Here we see external support systems (departmental and institutional support and research collaborations) playing a key role in two of the themes and the autonomous nature of faculty work emerging as the third theme to explain how participants overcame obstacles.

Departmental and institutional support. As I discussed earlier in relation to the theme of obstacles labeled as “Lack of formal support for promotion to full professor,” departmental and institutional support resources are prevalent for early career, pre-tenure faculty, particularly in the form of faculty development programs and mentorships (Baker et al., 2016; Baldwin & Chang, 2006; Cullen & Harris, 2008). Gina, a Black female associate professor in business, echoed this experience in describing a program for new faculty of color at her institution. Jim, also a business professor, lauded the workshops offered by his institution as particularly useful to keeping pre-tenure on track in preparing for promotion, as well as colleagues he framed as “allies” who demystified the tenure track process.

As participants transitioned from assistant to associate professor with tenure, the support shifted away from structured programs toward more informal or as-needed support, which more closely resembles the social capital and professional networks shown by scholars to be essential in all stages of the faculty career journey (Baldwin & Chang, 2006; Gladwin et al., 2014; Niehaus & O’Meara, 2015; Terosky et al., 2014). Several participants described the positive

impacts of departmental and institutional support in the context of faculty colleagues or senior administrators (deans, provosts) who advocated on their behalf in ways that participants both appreciated and at times considered going above and beyond. Sandy, Heather, and Betsy held high praise for colleagues who came to their aid when they were in need. Betsy reflected on her own vulnerability in asking for help also being a key for her in persisting through obstacle. Through activating her request for support, she was opening herself up to receive assistance from her colleagues with a renewed sense of commitment to her goals. In this way, Betsy was taking positive actions that suggested she was ready to shake off the “mid-career malaise” (Beaubeouf-Lafontant et al., 2019, pg. 646) which often creates a drag on research that has taken a back seat to increased service obligations and teaching priorities of associate professors.

Helpful research collaborations. Leveraging research collaborations through internal networks proved especially effective for both Betsy and Sandy, who reached out to colleagues when they found themselves stuck in their writing. By contrast, both Jim and Sam described the value of the external networks and building connections with scholars outside their institutions to move their own research agendas in a positive direction, which the literature demonstrates is particularly important when internal research collaborations were unavailable (Niehaus & O’Meara, 2015). The flexibility of what Terosky and colleagues termed “self-selected professional networks” (Terosky et al., 2014, p. 67) were deemed essential in supporting women faculty in their study and among the participants in my study, this blending of independently chosen internal and external collaborators were of equal benefit to both female and male participants.

Autonomy in teaching, service, or research. The autonomous nature of faculty work is reflected as a motivation for a career in academia for the flexibility in how work is structured and

the independence that professors enjoy (Lindholm, 2004; Sutherland, 2017). Interestingly, the participants in my study, who were mostly senior academics, reflected on autonomy from the perspective of the control in allocating their time and energies put forth to service and research, as well as having autonomy in how they approached teaching. As tenured faculty this autonomy gave participants a greater sense of agency and contributed to their resilience in overcoming obstacles (Gladwin et al., 2014). For some participants, autonomy in service allowed them to align their values with service, whether that be a student-centered service portfolio or a focus on faculty-oriented issues. Several participants underscored the importance of having autonomy over an evolving research agenda that would be pivotal to their satisfaction and success as scholars, and the role this played in their eventual decision whether to pursue promotion to full professor.

Influences on the Decision to Pursue Promotion to Full Professor

In exploring this line of inquiry to understand what influences the decision to pursue promotion to the rank of full professor, it became abundantly clear that divergence of reasons would prevail over convergence. Though some participants share similar motivations to a degree, the context of such motivation was typically very unique to a person, as Sutherland (2017) discovered in her analysis of early academic career success as a subjective evaluation based on individual values regarding career success. The following themes of *intrinsic motivations, encouragement of colleagues or dean, perceptions of the external research community, financial incentives, family consideration, and waiting for a difficult colleague to retire*, illustrate the wide breadth of decisional influences and the power of external factors at play in this decision.

Intrinsic motivations. Isolating intrinsic motivations as influencing the decision to pursue promotion to full professor proved to be a sticking point with several of the participants in this study. A few participants who identified a specific internal motivation to seek the promotion described this as ego and pride. Missing from the explicit musings of the participants but abundantly present between the lines of their respective stories was a high level of career agency (Terosky et al., 2011) which is evident in their reflections about their goals and stated confidence they would be able to do what they need to achieve such objectives. For Jim and Tom, agency emerged as ego in the form of “I’m good enough” and “it’s time for me,” signaling their readiness to pursue the goal of promotion. Pride took a few different shapes, including Gina’s reflection that part of her motivation is to explore a new area of research and feel good about her body of scholarship.

Satisfying one’s intellectual curiosities are an important intrinsic motivator in producing high quality research (Mantikayan & Abdulgani, 2018) and were noted by Betsy as one of her original intrinsic motivations. She also revealed that her career actions of late have been influenced by extrinsic factors but earlier “being ambitious and goal driven, especially when I was younger, for acclaim and awards and success” were a stronger influence. This is reflective of existing scholarship on faculty aspiration and goals that operate at the person level and evolve as professors advance in rank, with potential external influences coming from the institution level (Blackmore & Kandiko, 2011; Lindholm, 2004; Sutherland, 2017).

Encouragement from colleagues or dean. I was not able to identify academic research focused on how direct encouragement can positively influence a faculty person’s action toward seeking promotion to full professor. However, given what we know about the lack of formal post-tenure mentoring or widespread programs aimed at supporting associate professors in

preparing for promotion to the rank of full, this did not surprise me. It is equally unsurprising that a few of the participants in this study gave credit to such encouragement or to a perception of strong support. The nature of peer evaluation in the academic promotion process would intuitively suggest that if one was going to subject themselves to such intensive scrutiny of their teaching, service, and scholarship contributions voluntarily, they would do so with a fairly high confidence of a positive outcome.

As Heather explained, she had no intentions of seeking promotion but ultimately decided to submit a promotion dossier in response to being lobbied by department colleagues and her dean. For Sandy, having a sense that her dean “has always wanted me to move to that level” has given her a feeling of “emotional support” that keeps the spark of seeking promotion alive for her.

Perceptions of the external research community. Recognition and one’s reputation within the scholarly community provide external motivation to advance within the faculty ranks (O’Meara et al., 2018) and was raised by participants in this study. Multiple participants discussed this as a key consideration in their analysis of whether to seek promotion based on their individual perceptions that their research would pass the external review filter. Questions of contribution to the field and being recognized as an expert, particularly in new areas of scholarship, were identified as influencing one’s decision about seeking promotion. Publishing in top journals helps to raise one’s profile and Jim highlighted this as a measure he will take in his eventual decision. Both Gina and Sam described their own weighing of how they felt the external community would receive them as new contributors to a field seeking promotion to full professor. For these two participants, the uncertainty about the external review of their work was

yet another potential hurdle to cross before a final decision could be made about seeking promotion.

Financial incentive. It might be more appropriate to frame this as financial disincentive because the fact is that faculty compensation has decreased for the first time in nearly a decade based on the American Association of University Professors' (AAUP) annual Faculty Compensation Survey (Flaherty, 2021). Constraints on compensation and other resources such as research support were raised by several participants in this study. For a few the constraints were felt even deeper in the form of retirement incentives and the elimination of faculty lines to reduce costs. In this climate of shrinking budgets and declining enrollments, only a few participants raised the topic of any kind of financial incentive. In fact, only Sandy spoke of any potential of a raise upon promotion to full professor. For Heather, the possibility of a raise was dangled as a carrot to encourage her toward promotion, but no promises were made. In an analysis of the latest AAUP Faculty Compensation Survey, Flaherty (2021) points out that the number of full-time faculty are declining across institution types, and most of all at the private institutions like those represented by the participants in this study. Fewer full-time faculty in combination with decreasing financial resources makes this largely moot as a positive motivation influencing faculty to seek promotion to full professor.

Family considerations. Work-life constraints are not unique to the academic profession by any stretch of the imagination. Especially in our current times living in a global pandemic, the challenges of juggling the demands of family and work have been acutely heightened across sectors, professions, and socio-economic levels. The family considerations faced by faculty on the tenure track and post-tenure have been explored from a gendered perspective in pursuing advancement (Jacobs & Winslow, 2004; Teroksy et al., 2014) and broadly regarding the

constraints that faculty experience in trying to balance the demands of work and family obligations (Jacobs & Winslow, 2004; O'Meara & Campbell, 2011). In exploring how family considerations impact work-related decisions, such as seeking a promotion, O'Meara and Campbell (2011) noted that such decisions are contextual to things external to the individual and often outside of one's control.

The experiences of the faculty participants in this study bore this out in nearly every example raised during interviews. While some considerations were of a clearly gendered nature (e.g., female participants navigating parenthood without any parental leave policies to provide a paid maternity leave), all were not strictly in the domain of impacting women. For instance, Jim's early academic career initially took a backseat as his wife pursued opportunities that moved their family to different institutions where he held non-tenure track teaching positions. Tom decided to move his family to a new state and seek a new tenure-track role, delaying his own path to tenure by three years, to find better institutional culture and values alignment, along with a positive environment in which to raise his children. It is important to note that family considerations of the study participants were not limited to child-rearing issues. Gina accepted her first academic position based on proximity to her ailing parents and explained that her current decision of whether to pursue promotion to full professor will be predicated on the health of her husband.

Waiting for a difficult colleague to retire. As I noted in Chapter 2, one of the lesser studied topics, but clearly an issue in academia is bullying. This behavior not only affects job satisfaction (Frazier, 2011; Keashly & Neuman, 2010) but we learned from two participants in this study, it can discourage one from seeking promotion to full professor and has the potential to drive someone away from an academic career all together. Though ultimately the participants

who raised this issue remain in academia, both Betsy and Tom expressed misgivings about their longevity in the profession, in part due to bad actors in their midst. For both participants, the path to seeking promotion to full professor is a waiting game and they hope to outlast the person or persons blocking their path.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The original intent of this dissertation study was to explore how intrinsic motivations influence the decision to pursue promotion to the rank of full professor. In the process of carrying out this inquiry I gained a deep understanding that although intrinsic motivation has a role, it often takes a backseat to the myriad of external considerations that a tenured professor is navigating along their academic career journey. As a result, several of the implications for policy and practice fall predominantly in the domain of external to the individual versus internal. As noted in the following set of recommendations, some are inspired by input shared by the participants in this study who are living this experience every day.

The first recommendation focuses on articulating the value of the rank of full professor. This question was raised by Tom, a social science associate professor who is actively positioning himself toward seeking promotion, and also asked of me by my dissertation committee during my proposal meeting. Articulating the value of the rank of full professor assumes there is clear messaging from the institution and the college or department level which address why achieving the rank is important, what is expected of an incumbent holding this rank, and any rewards or incentives associated with a promotion. Institutions and colleges/departments would need to clearly link this value proposition at the organizational level to individual needs such that a faculty member can see their own goals and aspirations fulfilled by seeking a promotion. Institutions and their respective colleges/departments should consider undertaking an assessment

of their current messaging about post-tenure promotion to full professor, and if needed, realign their communications to eligible faculty to articulate this value more clearly.

A second recommendation beats on a previously heard drum calling for increased clarity of expectations for promotion to full professor to provide greater transparency of the process, standards and criteria, and promotion packages at the institutional and department levels (Buch et al., 2011; Campbell & O'Meara, 2014; COACHE, 2014). Nearly all the participants in this study pointed to the vagueness of their institution's promotion guidelines and improvements in articulating and communicating such information is critical. Such transparency would demonstrate an institutional commitment to paving a clear pathway to post-tenure promotions while at the same time signaling the institution's belief in the value of the rank of full professor. Furthermore, communicating both the value proposition and clarity of expectations for promotion early in the tenure-track and post-tenure periods illustrate an institution's dedication to fostering culture of growth and opportunity for its faculty.

A third recommendation is a call for institutions to take stock of their existing faculty support resources to identify gaps in programming aimed at post-tenure faculty and re-envision structured programs to serve this core segment of their faculty. The existing literature is abundantly clear that faculty development programs (Bird, 2011; Buch et al., 2011; Niehaus & O'Meara, 2015; Terosky et al., 2014) and mentorship (Gardner & Blackstone, 2013) work effectively when aimed at early career faculty and marginalized persons including women, people of color, and LGBTQ faculty. More intentionally targeting the mid-career faculty with tailored development programs could positively impact individual motivation for advancement (Baldwin & Chang, 2006). Helping tenured faculty navigate both the organizational and

individual considerations as they think about and prepare to go up for promotion to full professor would create “the conditions for a full academic life” that faculty like Gina aspire to.

A fourth recommendation is focused on the individual faculty member who finds themselves pondering the question of whether to pursue promotion to full professor and draws from the lessons shared by participants in this study. Two primary barriers experienced by these participants were low to no research productivity and limited sources of support from their departments or institutions. In examples shared by nearly every participant, proactively seeking aid helped to advance a stalled research project, enabling the individual to regain confidence in their scholarly abilities. Similarly, expanding one’s circle of support resources beyond the home department or institution mitigated a sense of being on their own to flounder or flourish. Building social capital and professional networks has been shown to facilitate knowledge sharing, activate informal mentoring, and boost career advancement (Baldwin & Chang, 2006; Gladwin et al., 2014; Niehaus & O’Meara, 2015; Terosky et al., 2014). The recommendation for individuals is two-fold: 1) Ask for help when you need it – it is very likely that “a fleet of people” will come to your aid like they did for Betsy; 2) Curate a support network of trusted colleagues beyond the boundaries of your department / institution – they will help you get through rough patches and may inspire your scholarly output as Gina, Tom, and Jim discovered.

A final recommendation is offered for researchers who may be challenged to recruit study participants especially during a global pandemic. Using a multi-pronged participant recruitment strategy proved necessary in reaching the participant goals of this study. I encourage other researchers to build into their recruiting plans multiple strategies to reach a diverse potential study population, including direct email outreach if this an option for a specific study. I found this approach to be the most productive in recruiting participants for this study, combined

with social media posts and sharing the recruitment outreach with people in my academic network.

Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative study centered on a population of tenured associate professors who met a limited criteria of affiliation to private universities or colleges with a teaching focused mission, thereby limiting the perspectives and experiences to the context of individuals in this type of environment. Future studies could expand the selection criteria to explore how faculty experiences differ when weighing the decision about promotion to full professor in other academic environments including teaching-focused public institutions and research-intensive universities where demands to secure external funding and higher research production expectations to go up for full professor exist.

Due to the smaller number of participants included in the study demographic diversity was noticeably absent (e.g., only one of seven participants was a person of color). Future studies could focus on diverse faculty who were not represented in this study to better understand the experiences of these faculty who are likely to encounter additional issues in the academy. Because I did not ask about sexual orientation or potential disabilities, it is unclear how those social identities may impact someone seeking promotion to full professor. Therefore, future studies that focus on these identities could further expand our understanding of experiences among faculty populations that might include LGBTQ or persons with different abilities (e.g., disability status).

Researchers could further expand on this work by investigating tenured faculty who elect to remain at the associate professor rank to help us understand the career decisions of these individuals. Insights gained from this population of faculty might help to better explain what

influence any external barriers or obstacles described in this study may have on a tenured professor's decision not to pursue promotion to full professor.

Future studies to expand on the work of this dissertation and add to the body of scholarship on faculty career advancement could use an exploratory sequential mixed methods approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) beginning with a qualitative approach to explore motivation with a small sample. Informed by the findings of a qualitative study, a questionnaire or survey could be developed and administered to a representative sample of tenured associate professors. Using a quantitative approach to collect and analyze responses to a such a survey would help researchers understand the extent to which experiences and themes learned through the qualitative study are common among a larger population of faculty.

Another line of inquiry for future study could explore how career mobility or moving to a new institution might influence an individual faculty member's decision about when to pursue promotion to full professor. The participants in this study differed in their opinions of the advantage or disadvantage of seeking promotion before or after a transition if they were contemplating changing academic institutions. Gina summed the challenge up very clearly in stating "full will not mean the same thing at all universities," so if a move is in the cards for an individual they will "need to learn how to share (their story) if they want to move places." Further research on how aspirations of career mobility may influence the decision to seek promotion to full professor would be helpful to the academic community.

Researcher Reflection and Concluding Remarks

Why does it matter whether a tenured professor pursues the rank of full professor? I have been asked this question by faculty in my doctoral program as this dissertation topic began to formulate at the start of my journey and more recently by my committee. Other questions that

have been posed to me are whether I hold any judgements or assumptions about tenured faculty who do not seek promotion. Today, I can answer the latter questions with complete conviction that I have no judgements about an associate professor who chooses to remain in that rank for the duration of their post-tenure faculty life, nor can I make any assumptions about the individual motivations of their decision. As a career professional who supports individuals in defining their career goals and navigating the process to reach them, I hope that this research expands our thinking about how academia can intentionally enable career advancement to the rank of full professor for those who desire to seek promotion in rank.

Answering the former question of why it matters is less about the individual faculty member and more about the system of academia and the institutions within higher education. The short answer is that it matters because the system presents an opportunity for eligible members of the faculty to achieve this level of rank and providing a clear pathway for those who aspire to the rank is a reasonable expectation. Of course, we know that clarity of expectations for promotion to full professor is not the reality today for many tenured faculty (Baker et al., 2016; Crawford et al., 2012; Sutherland, 2017), including the participants in my study who also bemoaned the disparities in weighting of publications over teaching excellence, even in institutions that touted a focus on teaching as the hallmark of their mission (Britton, 2010; Mabrouk, 2007). There may also be conflicts in present-day academic institutions with the historical origins of the tenure system codified in the mid-20th century that created an opportunity for earned permanency of employment for professors and a rank system for tenured faculty (AAUP, n.d.). Are the universities and colleges of the 21st century able to create an environment where the academic faculty can expect a realistic possibility of earning tenure and the potential to achieve promotion to full professor? Rising costs and declining enrollments were

a trend even before a global pandemic upended our world, and a suggestion that tenure is dying (Vedder, 2020) should give us pause.

When embarking on this study I did not intend to focus on the system or the external influences of a tenured faculty members decision about pursuing promotion to full professor. I was interested in understanding how intrinsic motivation plays into this complex decision. In the process of gathering data from my participants through intensive interviews and analyzing that data to uncover themes that answered my research questions, I began to understand that a multitude of external factors create such an overwhelming amount of noise and distractions to contend with that one's individual goals and aspirations can fall by the wayside. As humans with lives outside of their professorial career, some of this 'distraction' is personal life and family matters which participants acknowledged as having a higher priority in general or at specific points in time. External factors at work that can distract from one's potential career advancement include the challenges of juggling teaching and service obligations while also maintaining a research agenda, or the stresses imposed on an individual who unfortunately finds they are operating amid a toxic or generally non-supportive environment.

Intrinsic motivation alone is unlikely to be sufficient to counter the obstacles one faces in reaching a goal on the level of promotion to full professor if that is an individual's aspiration. This realization was borne out in the stories shared by my participants, especially those like Betsy, Tom, and Jim, who described departments and colleagues who displayed varied levels of toxicity. I stumbled on a tweet that so clearly sums this up: "...while you may be able to survive in a toxic environment, you cannot thrive in a toxic environment" (Johnson, 2021). For tenured faculty operating in an environment where toxicity exists, simply surviving may be their measure of success and other personal aspirations like pursuing promotion to full dissipate or never grow.

My initial curiosity about what influences faculty promotion to full professor that began from a seed of an idea at the start of my doctoral journey four years ago, blossomed into this qualitative study and resulting dissertation. As I described my positionality as a researcher, I found myself straddling both emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspectives (Bhattacharya, 2018; Jones et al., 2014) in the context of my current environment. While I had an observational view on the phenomenon of faculty career advancement as an insider, I was not privy to what individual faculty members were thinking or experiencing as they considered this decision. As a new scholar I was encouraged by faculty in my doctoral program to explore the topic yet was unsure whether my study would resonate with the prospective participants I sought to engage in the project. Would participants open up and share with me their motivations, aspirations, obstacles, failures, and wins?

It has been especially satisfying to understand how participants reflected on their engagement in this study. Tom shared that “it’s been really nice to be forced to reflect on some things within my own career...thank you for that.” For Sam who has struggled to feel a sense of clarity about the process for promotion to full professor at his institution, participating in this study helped him to realize “what some of those pieces are...actually it’s much more concrete...that was one of the big pieces that helped me really put things together in our conversation earlier.” The most revealing and rewarding was a reflection shared by Heather, a natural sciences professor who described both her tenure and post-tenure promotion experiences as terrible.

I haven’t been this honest about this process with anybody except my partner and I’m really interested to see what other people’s experiences are because I think...I don’t think people will talk about this sort of thing in a more public way, or at least about the painful parts of it...I really needed to reflect on the experience and put it to bed a little bit, so I appreciate you getting in touch with me.

Expressions of assurance from the participants that there was something of personal value for them by contributing to the study fuels the career coach persona in me immensely. “To the degree that your project can be advisory or the way that the dissertation will leverage itself into...even the smallest form of mentor or feedback (for) an Associate Professor, I think is instrumental” (Betsy). As a researcher, one participant’s confirmation that this work has value to the field further validates the importance of this study as a contribution to the body of scholarship on faculty careers. Giving voice to the experiences of the participants through this dissertation has been a tremendous privilege as an emerging scholar.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL & FLYER

Recruitment Email Version 1 (to existing contacts in higher education)

Dear (Name of colleague),

With my dissertation proposal approved, I am actively recruiting participants for my dissertation study focused on exploring what motivates or influences an associate professor's decision to pursue the rank of full professor. My study seeks 6-10 participants who are currently *associate professors eligible for / intending to pursue promotion to full professor and working in a private, not-for-profit doctoral granting university where teaching is a core focus of the institutional mission.*

I'm reaching out to ask if you will share the attached recruitment flyer with individuals in your network who fit this description and might be willing to participate in a study of this nature.

If it would be helpful to you, I am happy to chat by phone and explain in more detail the nature of my study. Thank you for any help in sharing this with your network that you are able to offer.

Regards,

Margaret Roberts

Recruitment Email Version 2 (direct outreach to potential participants)

Dear (Dr. Last Name),

I am a doctoral candidate in the University of the Pacific's Benerd College working toward an EdD in Educational & Organizational Leadership. I am actively recruiting participants for my dissertation study focused on exploring what motivates or influences an associate professor's decision to pursue the rank of full professor. My study seeks 6-10 participants who are currently *associate professors eligible for / intending to pursue promotion to full professor and working in a private, not-for-profit doctoral granting university where teaching is a core focus of the institutional mission.*

Based on a review of your public CV I believe you may fit the participant profile I am seeking for this study. I am reaching out to explore whether you might be willing to participate in a study of this nature or might be willing to share this invitation with colleagues who fit the participant profile outlined above.

If it would be helpful to you, I am happy to chat by phone and explain in more detail the nature of my study. Thank you for consideration.

Regards,

Margaret Roberts

SEEKING PARTICIPANTS

ASSOCIATE PROFESSORS WANTED FOR STUDY



This qualitative study explores the motivations for pursuing promotion to the rank of full professor

DOES THIS STUDY FIT YOU?

PARTICIPANT PROFILE:

- Tenured associate professor
- Eligible for promotion to full professor
- Private, not-for-profit university
- Open to sharing information about your career motivations, obstacles overcome, etc.

WHAT'S INVOLVED?

- TWO (2) hours total
- 2 Interviews via Zoom
- Sharing personal stories, experiences

EXPRESS YOUR INTEREST



QR CODE TO
GOOGLE FORM
HERE

Researcher:
Margaret Roberts
Doctoral Candidate

e: moberts1@pacific.edu
Benerd College
University of the Pacific

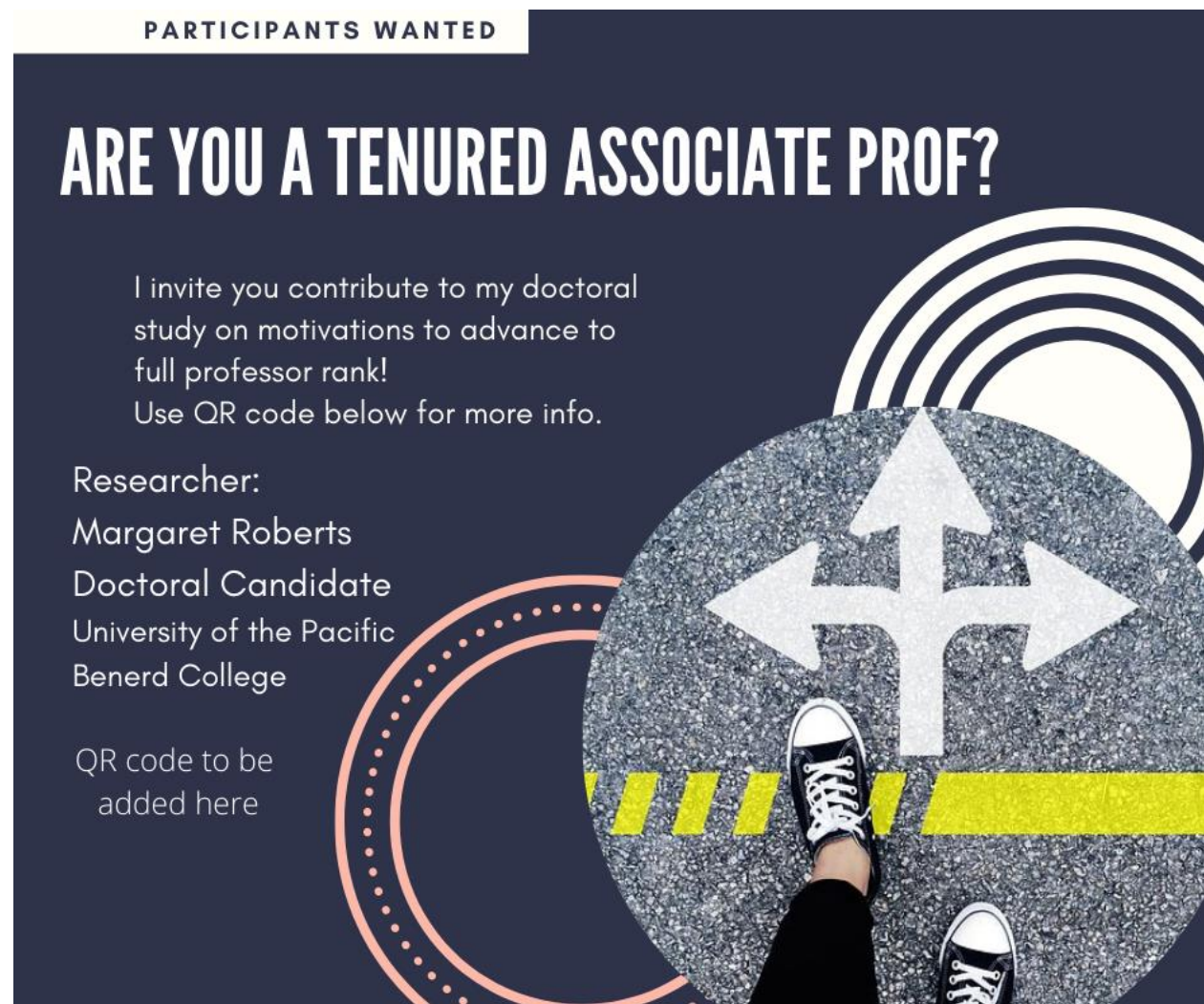
APPENDIX B: SOCIAL MEDIA POST & GRAPHIC

Social Media Post Caption & Graphic Image

Caption for post:

Seeking study participants! Exploring how motivation influences the decision to pursue promotion to full professor. Learn more: (link to Google form questionnaire)

#AcademicTwitter #AcademicChatter



APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INTEREST QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant Interest Questionnaire for Dissertation Study
[Information to be collected via a Google Form questionnaire]

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation study of how motivation influences an associate professor's decision to pursue promotion to the rank of full professor. This Participant Interest Questionnaire will help you and I determine whether you meet the study's participant inclusion criteria and time commitment requested of participants.

This is a qualitative study involving a minimum of two (2) interviews estimated to require one hour each. In total, a commitment of two (2) hours is anticipated.

Please respond to the following questions to express your interest.

1. What is your current tenure status? (Drop downs: non tenure track, tenure track, tenured)
2. What is your present faculty rank? (Drop downs: assistant, associate, full, other)
3. In what year did you earn tenure and promotion to associate professor? (enter year)
4. Which of the following best describes you? (Drop downs: I am actively seeking promotion to full professor, I have decided to seek promotion to full professor, I am likely to seek promotion to full professor, I have decided not to seek promotion to full professor, Other)
5. What is your research / teaching discipline? (enter field)
6. Which type of institution are employed at? (Drop downs: private, not-for-profit / public / other)
7. Which of the following best describes your institution type? (Checkbox: mission emphasizes teaching focus, mission emphasizes research focus)
8. What is the highest level degree granted by your institution: (Checkbox: bachelors, masters, doctoral)
9. If selected for this study are you able to commit to two (2) one-hour meetings for the purpose of conducting interviews? (yes / no)
10. If selected for this study are you able to meet virtually over Zoom? (yes / no)
11. Name
12. University
13. Title
14. Email
15. Phone

[Questionnaire completion message]

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation study. I will be in touch with you to follow up on your potential participation within three (3) business days. I can be reached directly at mroberts1@pacific.edu.

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT

Research Title: An Exploration of the Role Motivation Plays in the Decision to Pursue Promotion to the Rank of Full Professor

Lead Researcher: Margaret Roberts

Faculty Advisor: Rachelle Kisst Hackett, Ph.D.

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION: You are being invited to voluntarily participate in this study to explore how motivation influences the decision of tenured university professors to pursue the rank of full professor. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in up to two (2) interviews of 45-60 minutes in length. The interviews will involve answering open-ended questions about your experience as a tenured faculty member in higher education. Interviews will be conducted over a video conferencing service (e.g., Zoom) and will be recorded. Automated transcription from the video conferencing technology will be followed by a review of the audio recordings to ensure that interviews are accurately transcribed verbatim for data analysis used in the completion of my dissertation research. There will be no experimental aspects of this study. There are no alternative research procedures so your alternative is not to participate.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation is expected to take two (2) hours.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The risks associated with this study are the possibility that you may experience some psychological distress from discussing your experiences navigating the tenure and promotion process and any obstacles you have encountered in your professional life. You will always have the option not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. You may choose to terminate an interview and/or withdraw from the study at any time. There is also a potential risk loss of confidentiality by way of your data being breached; to mitigate this risk all data will be kept in password protected cloud storage at all times. There are some benefits to this research, and may include contributing to a better understanding of how individuals in the university faculty population use intrinsic motivation to advance their academic careers.

COMPENSATION: Participants who complete two (2) interviews will be offered a \$25 electronic gift card as a thank you for their contribution to this study.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this research project, you understand that your participation is entirely voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals. It is possible that we may decide that your participation in this research is not appropriate. If that happens,

you will be dismissed from the study. In any event, we appreciate your willingness to participate in this research.

CONFIDENTIALITY: We will take reasonable steps to keep confidential any information that is obtained in connection with this research study and that can be identified with you.

Measures to protect your confidentiality are: Pseudonyms will be used during, after and in the report of the results of the research study. All data and recordings related to your participation will be stored in a password protected Cloud database. Any files related to your data will be de-identified and the consent form stored in a separate electronic file not correlated to the research data. The number of persons with access to the records will be limited to only myself, the primary researcher, and my dissertation faculty adviser, Dr. Rachelle Kisst Hackett.

Upon conclusion of the research study, the data obtained will be maintained in a secure, password protected Cloud database, and will be destroyed three years after the research is completed.

PARTICIPATION: You were identified as a possible participant in this study because: you are a tenured, associate professor who is more than five years post-tenure, currently teaching in a private, not-for-profit doctoral granting university with a teaching focused mission and identify as intending to seek promotion to full professor. Your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

I am the lead researcher in this study and I am a doctoral student at the University of the Pacific, Benerd College. This research study is part of my dissertation for a doctorate in education with an emphasis in educational administration and leadership.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, please contact me at 209-946-7350 or by email at mroberts1@pacific.edu, or Rachelle Kisst Hackett, PhD, dissertation advisor, at 209-946-2678 or RHackett@Pacific.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project or wish to speak with an independent contact, please contact the Office of Research & Sponsored Programs, University of the Pacific at (209) 946-3903 or by email at IRB@pacific.edu.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND SIGNATURE:

I hereby consent: (Indicate *Yes* or *No*)

- To be audio / video recorded during this study:
☐ Yes ☐ No

- For such audio records resulting from this study to be used for transcription and data analysis:
____Yes ____No

The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you have been afforded the opportunity to ask, and have answered, any questions that you may have, that your participation is completely voluntary, that you understand that you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

SIGNATURE _____ **DATE** _____

Research Study Participant (Print Name): _____

Researcher Who Obtained Consent (Print Name): _____

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview #1 Protocol

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself ? (Probe for personal info / family, kids, prior career, if not offered.)
2. What motivated you to pursue an academic career in (field)?
3. When you began on the tenure track, how would you describe your career goals in general? What were you thinking about with regard to tenure and promotion?
4. What did you experience along the way to earning tenure that matched up with your expectations? What was not in line with what you expected?
5. How would you describe the institutional or departmental culture where you work as a tenured faculty member in terms of importance placed on research / teaching / service? How does this fit with your own values and goals as a scholar / professor / colleague?
6. Can you share any obstacles that you have had to overcome along your academic journey? Similarly, what supports have you experienced in your academic journey?
7. Following tenure and promotion to associate professor, what did you see as the next steps in your academic career? Were you interested in pursuing the rank of full professor?
8. In what ways, if any, did your department support your career goals?
9. How did your department / unit / institution's guidelines affect your decision to pursue / not pursue the rank of full professor?
10. Thinking about your career since earning tenure, what primary factors have contributed to your professional accomplishments as a tenured faculty member within your department / institution / discipline?
11. Is there anything else about your experiences navigating tenure and promotion you'd like to share which haven't been addressed by any of the previous questions?

Interview #2 Protocol

1. (Questions relating to *career identity*)
 - a. How do you identify yourself in relation to your role as a professor or faculty member?
 - b. When you introduce yourself in social or professional situations, in what terms do you identify who you are?
 - c. In what ways is recognition of your professional accomplishments important to you and by whom?
 - d. How would you characterize your need for recognition within your department / institution / academic field?
2. (Questions relating to *career insight – goal-setting, self-awareness of strengths / weaknesses*)
 - a. Can you share your approach to goal-setting in your personal and work life?
 - b. How do you describe your individual strengths and weaknesses?
 - c. Can you share any examples of how you have leveraged your strengths to achieve professional goals?
 - d. Can you share any examples of how you have mitigated any weaknesses to achieve your professional goals?
3. (Questions relating to *career resilience – self-efficacy, achievement motivation, risk tolerance*)
 - a. In different stages in your academic career (pre-tenure / post-tenure) what has pushed you to reach your goals?
 - b. What sources of inspiration have you relied on outside of yourself and within to reach your goals?
 - c. In other aspects of your life outside of your work, what has pushed you to reach personal goals? Have you relied on different or similar sources of inspiration to reach these goals?
 - d. How would you describe your approach to making career decisions in terms of any perceived risk that may result from a given decision?
4. As you think about your decision to pursue promotion to full professor, what factors have had the most significant influence on this decision?
 - a. Of the external factors named (repeat to participant), which are/were most significant and why?
 - b. Of the internal factors named (repeat to participant), which are/were most significant and why?
5. As we wrap up this conversation is there anything else you might want to me to understand about your decision to pursue promotion to the rank of full professor that might help me understand your personal experience in this decision-making process?

**APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTION MAPPING TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS &
CAREER MOTIVATION THEORY FRAMEWORK**

Interview Questions	RQ 1	RQ 2	RQ 3	CMT: Identity	CMT: Insight	CMT: Resilience
Can you tell me a little about yourself?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
What motivated you to pursue an academic career in your field?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
When you began on the tenure track, how would you describe your career goals in general? What were you thinking about WRT tenure and promotion ?				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
What did you experience along the way to earning tenure that matched up with your expectations ? What was not in line with what you expected ?		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
How would you describe the institutional or departmental culture where you work as a tenured faculty member in terms of importance placed on research / teaching / service ? How does this fit with your own values and goals as a scholar / professor / colleague?		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Can you share any obstacles that you have had to overcome along your academic journey? What supports have you experienced in your academic journey ?		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Following P&T to associate professor, what did you see as the next steps in your academic career ? Were you interested in pursuing the rank of full professor ?			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
In what ways, did your department support your career goals ?				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
How did your department / unit / institution's guidelines affect your decision to pursue / not pursue the rank of full professor ?			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
What primary factors have contributed to your professional accomplishments as a tenured faculty member within your department / institution / discipline?				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Is there anything else about your experiences navigating tenure and promotion you'd like to share?			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Career Identity Questions						
How do you identify yourself in relation to your role as a professor or faculty member ?				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
When you introduce yourself in social or professional situations, in what terms do you identify who you are?				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
In what ways is recognition of your professional accomplishments important to you and by whom?				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
How do you characterize your need for recognition within department / institution / academic field?				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

Interview Questions	RQ 1	RQ 2	RQ 3	CMT: Identity	CMT: Insight	CMT: Resilience
Career Insight Questions						
Can you share your approach to goal setting in your personal and work life?					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
How do you describe your individual strengths and weaknesses ?					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Examples of how you have leveraged your strengths to achieve professional goals ?					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Examples of how you have mitigated any weaknesses to achieve your professional goals ?					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Career Resilience Questions						
In different stages in your academic career (pre- / post-tenure) what has pushed you to reach your goals ?			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
What sources of inspiration have you relied on outside of yourself and within to reach your goals?						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
What has pushed you to reach personal goals outside of work? Have you relied on different or similar sources of inspiration to reach these goals?						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
How would you describe your approach to making career decisions in terms of any perceived risk that may result from a given decision?						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Closing Questions						
What factors (external and internal) will have (had) the most significant influence on decision to pursue promotion to full professor ?			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Anything else you want to share about decision to pursue promotion to the rank of full professor to help me understand your personal experience in this decision-making process ?			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	