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FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF OPEN AND AFFORDABLE EDUCATION RESOURCES

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education in Higher Education
The University of Mississippi

by

MEGAN W. LOWE

May 2022

ABSTRACT

A now-common question regarding whether or not individuals should pursue college degrees is whether college is worth the cost. One of the ways that institutions of higher learning may help students reduce cost of attending college, thereby reducing the financial stresses, is to reduce expenses where possible. One place where institutions of higher learning can reduce expenses for students is course texts and materials. This reduction can be accomplished in several ways, but one way that has gained visibility is the use of open educational resources (OER) and affordable education resources (AER), also known as AOER. This qualitative research study employs nine (9) semi-structured questions posed to a convenience sample of 14 self-selecting faculty members across different departments and levels of responsibility. The conceptual frameworks employed in this search are conflict theory, as predicated on the work of Karl Marx, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

The interviews produced six (6) overarching themes: AOER, student-related experiences, concerns about course materials, contextual and structural factors, financial considerations, and motivations. They revealed contradictions to the earlier and predominant literature. Earlier studies seemed to reveal that faculty were more focused on workload and convenience rather than saving students money. The findings in this study revealed a group of faculty who are more concerned about the financial stability of their students. The study also revealed some reflections with the literature such as concerns about the quality of and diversity of available disciplines/topics of AOER. Implications and solutions are presented and examined.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all of my family, friends, and colleagues who helped me through the process and who encouraged me to keep going, especially when I was tired and was not sure I had it in me to keep going. Of particular note are my parents Barbara and Ray, my siblings Andrew and Whitney, my husband Eric, and my friends Daniel, Collin, Nadia, Tom, and Elizabeth. But most of all, this is dedicated to my best friend, Sarah “Syd” Clay, who encouraged me to do this doctorate with her so we could help each other through, which we have most certainly done. I am honored that we have completed this journey together!

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AER	Affordable education resources
AOER	Affordable and open education resources
OER	Open education resources

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I am ever so grateful for my husband Eric who listened to me rant and rave and cry as I worked my way through the program and the dissertation experience. I could not have done this without him (and so many others)! He believed in me and my dream. He supported me at every step, and I cannot thank him enough for that.

I must also acknowledge Sarah Clay, my long-time best friend with whom I undertook this journey. She talked me into this, and I am ever so grateful that she did! She helped me realize a lifelong dream and believed in me even when I could not. Her faith in me and in us in the process is a testament to her intelligence, will, friendship, and love.

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Manuscript 1: Faculty Perceptions of Open and Affordable Education Resources

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April 11, 2021

Manuscript 1: Faculty Perceptions of Open and Affordable Education Resources

A now-common question regarding whether or not individuals should pursue college degrees is whether college is worth the cost. A simple Internet search on the question *is college worth the cost* turns up a variety of responses that highlight a variety of challenges that face individuals pursuing higher education, not the least of which is the reality of student loan debt. The price tag associated with a college education is not merely tuition – it is tuition *plus* several other expenses, both directly and indirectly associated with the cost of attending college. One of the main pain points regarding college costs are course materials (e.g., textbooks, course packets, and/or purchasing access codes).

One of the ways that institutions of higher learning may help students reduce cost of attending college, thereby reducing the financial stresses, is to reduce expenses where possible. One place where institutions of higher learning can reduce expenses for students is course texts and materials. This reduction can be accomplished in several ways, but one way that has gained visibility is the use of open educational resources (OER) and affordable education resources (AER), also known as AOER. AOER represent free or affordable resources that, in essence, cost the student nothing or are more inexpensive compared to traditional commercial materials.

The lynchpin regarding the adoption of course materials takes the form of faculty. Faculty are responsible for identifying and adopting texts and materials for their courses. They wield the power to decide between an expensive commercial text and AOER. Therefore, understanding faculty's views of AOER is important for laying the foundation for more meaningful conversations with them regarding the benefits to students of adopting AOER. To

that end, this study will elicit and examine the perceptions of faculty at a public four-year institution in the Southeast regarding AOER.

Problem of Practice

The problem of practice is how to encourage faculty to consider the adoption of AOER in lieu of traditional commercial texts where possible in undergraduate courses, with an eye toward reducing the cost of course materials for students. To that end, this study will examine the perceptions of faculty at a public four-year institution in the Southeast of open education resources and affordable education resources (AOER).

Statement of Positionality

All research occurs within a complicated matrix of contexts and biases. One of the most profound and obvious contexts is that of the author(s) conducting the research. It is the author's responsibility to be aware of, admit to, manage to the best of their ability, and make visible their own contexts, biases, privileges, and experiences. A statement of positionality affords the author an opportunity to do just that.

I have worked in libraries in higher education since 1997, as my first college job was a library student worker. I have worked in higher education as a faculty librarian since 2003. My experiences as library student worker significantly influenced my decision to become a reference librarian in higher education. One of the most frequent questions I encountered from the time I started working in libraries until I stopped working at the reference desk – in 2018 to become the Director of my current library – was “does the library have copies of the textbook?” The answer everywhere I have worked has been “sort of.” In some cases, faculty would proactively put copies of course texts and materials on reserves. Sometimes, the library just happened to have a copy or a slightly older edition of a course text in the collection.

More often than not, though, the answer is honestly “no.” At my current library, the library does not purchase or maintain a collection of relevant course texts. The primary reason is that the library has frankly not had a book budget since 2007. We do not have the funds to buy books regularly. However, another reason is that course texts are particularly expensive, and sometimes when libraries do make course texts available, those texts ‘walk away,’ requiring replacement. This can become expensive, not to mention frustrating – which sounds remarkably like the experience of students regarding course materials: expensive and frustrating.

Speaking of the student experience, in addition to the terminal degree I have to do my job (a Master’s degree in Library and Information Science [MLIS]), I have an additional Master’s degree (in English, with a concentration in creative writing). I was able to obtain that degree using a tuition waiver through my university. I only had to pay for fees and course materials. My husband was also in school while I was working on that degree, also on a tuition waiver through my university, which meant we only had to pay for fees and course materials for him. While that sounds like a sweet deal, frankly we maxed out a credit card and experienced material hardship because of the cost of course materials. So, my interest in the financial stressors that affect students do not just come from a place of empathy but also from sympathy, which informs my desire to identify potential solutions to costly course materials.

Additionally, the COVID pandemic and the consequent stay-at-home order in my state have meant that my husband was unable to work for several months, meaning we temporarily lost an income stream. The federal stimulus checks have been a boon, especially as we never heard about unemployment while my husband was unable to work. I was able to continue to work from home (WFH), so that income stream has not been lost. However, I am keenly aware that others find themselves in my husband’s situation but without another income stream. While

I was able to remain in school and did not experience material hardship, I know that many students have not been so fortunate.

COVID also necessitated a lot of adjustment on the part of faculty to make resources digitally available, since students could not necessarily access print materials in the Library or easily visit the campus bookstore. In Louisiana, the digital divide negatively affecting students became painfully apparent. Students still had to come to campus to make use of the institution's Wi-Fi network, especially for those classes that made use of proprietary web-based software. Several active military students were deployed in this timeframe as well. Several of them were unable to purchase their textbooks prior to deployment and were deployed to areas where they could not just order the textbook from Amazon and get it shipped to them. These situations necessitated discussions of copyright and fair use in order to scan print copies of the textbook in one course to make it available to these students via email. However, just scanning textbooks was not and is not always possible and therefore not a surefire or stable solution.

In addition to these mixed personal/professional experiences – which reflect certain privileges which should not and cannot be ignored, such as not having to foot the entire bill for a graduate degree for myself and an undergraduate degree for my husband – I have other professional experiences that inform this research. For several years now, the statewide academic library consortium to which my library belongs has proactively and actively pursuing resources and support for AOER. I have been involved in these efforts in a variety of capacities since about 2013. Pursuing the adoption and implementation of AOER at my own university has been frustrating and slow for several reasons.

One reason is that while I feel that my administration is sympathetic to the experiences of their students, they do not appear to fully understand or appreciate AOER. Additionally, they are

often approached by publishers such as McGraw-Hill that offer inclusive-access options that sound good but upon closer examination are not the magic solution to expensive course materials and their related issues that publishers like to think their products can be. They are still ultimately motivated by profit, and that undermines their ability or willingness to examine how their practices create inequities in access to materials and higher education.

However, somewhat miraculously, the State Legislature has passed Senate Bill (SB) 117 (also known as Act 125) that provides explicit support and promotion of AOER in higher education. Sponsored by the Board of Regents with input and support from LOUIS, the statewide academic library consortium, SB 117

directs Regents to continue developing and implementing plans to increase the acquisition, availability, and accessibility of affordable textbooks as well as other open educational resources to lower overall student costs. Additionally, cost transparency for students is addressed in the bill by requiring campuses to clearly mark courses that use low-or no-cost course materials so those registering for classes can make informed choices. (Sunstrom & Godfrey, 2019).

I have served on the Executive Board of LOUIS since 2018, but I have been involved with many OER and AER related activities through the consortium for some time. I have chaired and been part of several task forces (or working groups [WG]) over the years. Most recently, I chair the Board of Regents Alignment WG; it focuses on making sure that the LOUIS consortium's activities align with the Board of Regents' Master Plan, which includes promoting accessibility and affordability in higher education. Additionally, there has been significant support for using AOER in dual enrollment to support high school students that can potentially increase their access to higher education. I was recently appointed to the advisory board for a \$2

million Department of Education (DOE) grant that LOUIS won to examine AOER in the context of dual enrollment. I am also participating in a AOER grant administered through Lyrasis.

Overall, I regard the use of AOER as a viable solution to increasing the affordability and accessibility of higher education. However, I recognize that classroom faculty have many strong feelings about AOER that can make the adoption and implementation of such materials difficult. This frustrates me immensely. Current studies on perceptions of faculty reveal a great deal about the experiences of faculty with AOER (which will be explored in the literature review).

However, of concern to me is how often the faculty's experiences focus on their perceptions of how much work and convenience (or lack thereof) emerge from AOER without considering the positive impact of such resources on their students. In at least one study, faculty do acknowledge that they like how such resources can save their students some money and that cost-saving was a significant motivator (Belikov & Bodily, 2016), but this does not seem to be motivation *enough*. This concerns me greatly, given that research shows how financially stressful course materials are for students and how many negative impacts such stressors have on students (which will also be examined in the literature review). Therefore, I acknowledge that I am predisposed to believing that faculty are focused on their workload and convenience rather than supporting their students. This circumstance contributes greatly to my concerns and bias.

Though I am a faculty member, I am not classroom faculty. I recognize that my experiences and job duties are different from my classroom counterparts. Yet, my job has exposed me to both the rigors of tenure and some of the experiences of faculty. It has also exposed me to the challenges, fears, and concerns of students. While I am frustrated by what I have seen of faculty attitudes about AOER, I want to understand their experiences. I want them to understand their students' experiences and how they, the faculty, have an opportunity to

increase access and affordability and reduce the financial burdens of their students, thereby increasing their students' ability to perform well and persist.

Context of the Problem

Concerns regarding the cost of attending college are not strictly the purview of educational researchers and scholars. The question of whether college is worth the cost has penetrated the public sphere, prompting a spate of news articles and documentaries that examine the actual financial cost of attending college. A quick search of the Internet reveals several articles featuring the title "Is College Worth the Cost?" Emma Kerr's June 17, 2019, article for *U.S. News and World Report* provides a good starting point for understanding from the public view why there are concerns about the (rising) cost of a college education. Kerr (2019) reports that the average cost of attending a four-year institution for undergraduates is \$26,000, an estimation based on 2015-2016 data from the National Center for Education Statistics. Consequently, Kerr (2019) writes, students and their families "must weigh not only the cost against the likelihood of a better job and salary following graduation, but also the personal benefits, experiences and opportunities college can provide."

According to Kerr (2016), \$26,000 represents the average price tag of attending college. However, when the student and/or their family borrows money to attend college, they end up paying more than that because of interest. This means that the average undergraduate student may wind up paying more than \$37,000, if not more, for an undergraduate degree (Beal, Borg, & Stranahan, 2019). This amount does not reflect potential credit card debt that may also be incurred, not to mention the cost of living expenses. As Beal, Borg, and Stranahan (2019) observe, with debt at these levels, the financial burdens facing students and their families "have the potential to fray the social and economic fabric of the country" (p. 219).

Kerr's and Beal et al.'s analyses provide a troubling overview of the cost of college in the immediate moment and after the fact. It is important to understand the overall financial cost and therefore the financial stressors facing students and their families with regard to attending college as these elements represent the larger super-structure of the issue at hand. However, what these analyses do not touch upon explicitly and which forms a significant portion of the context for the problem of practice is the cost of course materials. These analyses may ask the question of how institutions can feasibly reduce costs but they do so without meaningfully looking at options like AOER.

The Costs of Course Materials

The main financial stresses related to higher education take many forms, from direct to indirect costs. Increasing tuition and the need for student loans represent the biggest pain points. However, the cost of textbooks represents another significant pain point for students. According to Senack and Donoghue (2016), the cost of college textbooks has increased by 73% since 2006, which is more than four times the rate of inflation. The authors add that an individual textbook can cost more than \$200 with some reaching prices as high as \$400 (Senack & Donoghue, 2016).

Some quick math reveals that if a student is taking four classes where each class has at least one textbook that costs at least \$200, that's \$800 in textbooks alone for a single semester. It has been the experience of this author that even in undergraduate classes, particularly those which are text-heavy (like literature or history), a student might be buying 2-3 books *per class*. That means in a single class, a student might be paying between \$200 and \$400 for the required texts. If they have three such classes, using the upper limit amount, that would be \$1,200 in texts alone, which is almost the same price as tuition for a single semester at the author's institution for undergraduates. This does not even take into consideration professional programs like

nursing and pharmacy where newer editions are often required, nor does this take into consideration any activation codes for special software (e.g., Pearson's MyLab).

In the third edition of their annual survey on textbooks, the United States Public Interest Research Group, aka U.S. PIRG, found that 65% of student participants stated that they skipped purchasing a required textbook for a course because of the cost in 2020. That same survey reported that 63% of participants had done so in the same period in the previous year (U.S. PIRG, 2021). This decision was not made lightly by these students, as 90% of participants expressed "being significantly or somewhat concerned" in 2019 and 2020 about the negative impact on their grades as a consequence of not having the course texts. Students are also skipping access codes associated with courses, though at admittedly lower percentages than course texts (U.S. PIRG, 2021).

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic also caused issues with students' access to course texts. U.S. PIRG (2021) reports that 79% of students were impacted in some way by the pandemic, and "those side effects of the pandemic were correlated with greater struggles to access course materials." Furthermore, a lack of stable Internet access was cited by 10% of participants as being their reason for not being able to participate in remote classes (U.S. PIRG, 2021). The report notes that 30% of participants who lacked reliable Internet access admitted to not purchasing an access code for course material "compared to the 21 percent for the larger sample" (U.S. PIRG, 2021). The report goes on to note that 8% of participants who lacked reliable Internet access reported failing a course because they were unable to afford their course materials in comparison to the 2% of the national average (U.S. PIRG, 2021).

In short, students are often not purchasing texts *because they cannot afford to*. Yes, they are aware of and concerned about the impact on their grades but they feel they have no choice.

Access codes providing access to materials are evidently as problematic as course texts and are also being skipped by students, though at lesser rates. COVID-19 has exacerbated these issues and highlighted how many students do not have reliable Internet access which further exacerbates these issues.

Faculty and AOER

The key to the selection, adoption, and implementation of OERs and AERs in curricula and classrooms are faculty. The literature on OERs and AERs reveals that there are many barriers related to faculty with regard to such resources. Faculty are one of the key stakeholders in the adoption of classroom resources, including OERs and AERs. Belikov and Bodily (2016) examined faculty-related barriers and incentives regarding OER/AER adoption and what incentives seem to support the adoption of such resources. The primary barriers were categorized into *need more information* (faculty indicated that they wanted/needed more information about OERs before they would consider them); *lack of discoverability* (faculty could not identify or locate appropriate OERs easily); and *confusing OERs with digital resources* (faculty did not understand the differences between traditional digital resources like databases and OERs) (Belikov & Bodily, 2016).

In terms of incentives, faculty reported realizing that adopting such resources can save students money, but this does not necessarily reflect the (a) a meaningful understanding of the cost of higher education, (b) the financial stresses that students experience, and (c) what the ramifications of those stresses are (namely discontinuing college). Furthermore, the acknowledgement that OERs and AERs can save students money was not towards the top of the list of benefits that faculty identified for such resources. Jhangiani, Pitt, Hendricks, Key, and Lalonde (2016) identified additional factors which have bearing on OER and AER adoptions

such as faculty's willingness to share teaching/learning materials, not to mention personality traits such as openness. Additionally, according to Jhangiani et al. (2016), institutional policies regarding OERs and AERs play a role in faculty's perceptions of those resources. Ultimately, understanding how faculty perceive OERs and AERs is critical to addressing and removing barriers to the adoption of those resources.

Reducing Costs Through Open and Affordable Educational Resources

There is no silver-bullet solution to the problem of the high price of college. As such, colleges must pursue several strategies in tandem that help students keep other costs low. One area in which colleges can and have attempted to manage costs in the area of course textbooks and materials (henceforth simply referred to as course materials). This approach involves the implementation of AOER in place of traditional course materials.

OER, as defined by UNESCO (2019), are “teaching, learning and research materials in any medium – digital or otherwise – that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions.” AERs are low-cost substitutions in place of traditional commercially course materials, with the scope of materials encompassed being wider than that of OERs (OhioLINK, 2020). AER can include library-licensed materials; these materials are not considered OER because they have a cost (paid by the library) but represent no cost to the students (OhioLINK, 2020). AERs also encompass “institutional efforts to negotiate across-the-board lower costs for traditionally-published textbooks and materials” (OhioLINK, 2020). That is to say, those resources still cost money, but the cost will usually be less than \$100 per resource, per semester. The cost may not necessarily be paid by the student, as in the case of

library-licensed materials, but the point is that the cost to the student is low (in the case of AERs) or non-existent (in the case of OERs).

According to Colvard, Watson, and Park (2018), three of the key barriers for students, student learning, and student success in higher education are affordability, quality, and completion. In their study of the impact of OER, the authors discovered that OER adoptions can save students money and help address student debt concerns (Colvard, Watson, & Park, 2018). However, the authors also found that OER can improve end-of-course grades and decrease D, F, and withdrawal letter grades (DFW) rates for all students (Colvard, Watson, & Park, 2018). But of particular note for the discussion of student food insecurity is that students who are Pell Grant recipients, part-time, or members of historically underserved populations also experienced improved course grades and decreased DFW rates (Colvard, Watson, & Park, 2018). The authors concluded that OER can address issues related to affordability, attainment gap, completion, and learning (Colvard, Watson, & Park, 2018). These findings suggest those student populations that are most vulnerable in terms of food insecurity benefit from the implementation of OER.

Of course, this single study is only generalizable to a degree. However, this study is not an outlier in the literature. It reflects a growing body of literature that points to the benefits of AOER for students at large and students in vulnerable populations. This raises a very important question: why have AOER not become the standard for many colleges? The answer to that question is as complex as the factors that make the affordability of college complicated. At this stage, an in-depth discussion of that answer would be premature. However, one of the key elements in that discussion which forms a significant facet of this dissertation is *the faculty*.

These are the individuals who are responsible for course material selections and adoptions and

who work on a regular basis with those materials. They represent a significant point of contact and flow in the discussion of how to use AOER to benefit students.

Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) Principles

As much as this dissertation is driven by the problem of practice and the requirements of this doctoral program, it is also motivated by the principles of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED). The key principles that underpin this program are ethics, equity, and social justice. Consequently, these same principles also underpin this dissertation. They have immediate and direct connections to the problem of practice.

Ethically speaking, the increasing cost of course textbooks and materials are reducing the affordability and accessibility of higher education. Much of this may be attributable to the traditional publishing industry. At this stage, institutions of higher learning can only do so much to counter the practices which have resulted in a near 300%-increase in the prices of textbooks. However, institutions of higher learning can establish practices that can counter or mitigate the costs of course textbooks and materials.

Arguably, failure to establish or at least encourage such practices, which in turn implicitly endorse the practices of the traditional publishing industry, force students to swallow additional costs which may not be covered by financial aid. These additional costs force students into difficult places, often to the tune of the catch-22: if the students do not purchase the textbook, they cannot fully participate in the course. However, if they do not purchase the textbook, they may be able to afford their bills and material needs. But if they purchase the textbook (maybe using a credit card), they incur more debt, though they will be able to participate in their course, likely resulting in positive academic performance. Yet, if they purchase the textbook, they may have to forego food which – as the literature review will

demonstrate – can result in negative physical and mental effects that in turn negatively affect academic performance. In essence, the cost of course texts can become a *damned if you do, damned if you don't* scenario for students. This is unacceptable and unethical.

In terms of equity, it could be argued that the increasing costs of course textbooks and materials are decreasing students' ability to participate meaningfully in their courses. As suggested in the previous paragraph, access to course texts and materials exerts significant influence on a student's ability to participate and perform academically. For those students who are unable to purchase the course texts, or to purchase them in a timely fashion, their ability to participate and perform is not the same as their classmates who can purchase them. In other words, even if students can pay their tuition and get into their courses, their ability to perform in those courses is not supported and is not the same as their classmates who can get the texts. Those students without access to course materials are less likely to perform well and therefore to persist. While on the surface, it appears that these students have equitable access, the reality is that they do not have equitable access. This dissertation sees this lack of access, which is also related to affordability, as an equity issue and seeks to address it.

The connection of this dissertation to social justice is likely becoming clear at this point, given its connection to both ethics and equity. As will be repeated regularly throughout this work, financial aid usually pays for tuition and fees. It may not cover additional academic expenses like course textbooks and materials. In terms of financial aid and loans, even if there is 'overage' that will be paid to students, it may not come in a timely fashion. For example, this author is using private loans to fund this doctoral degree. During the first semester, while tuition and fees were entirely covered, and there was substantial overage intended to help with additional expenses, the overage was not disbursed to the author until October...in a semester

that began in August. While the author was able to acquire a few of the texts in a timely fashion, she was not able to acquire all of the materials until after October. Fortunately, one of the professors that semester used AOER, meaning the author's ability to participate and perform were not affected. This experience, however, is the exception, not the rule.

The most vulnerable populations facing material hardships in the context of higher education are African American, from low socio-economic status (SES) groups, and otherwise already facing many social and economic inequities. The added challenge of being unable to afford course texts and materials, or to purchase them in a timely fashion, further marginalizes many groups already marginalized in the higher education space. By offering solutions which increase timely access to course textbooks and materials, schools can reduce this marginalization and increase access and affordability. To accomplish this, it is crucial to engage faculty and to understand their perceptions of AOER.

Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks

The theoretical framework used in this dissertation is two-pronged; it will employ conflict theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Conflict theory emerges from the work of Karl Marx and is predicated on economic elements that influence structures within a society. Ostensibly, conflict theory explains how groups fight for and maintain power over resources, often scarce resources (Flores & Flores, 2018). This in turn provides insight into how some groups possess more privilege, access, or advantage in comparison to other groups, particularly framed in capitalistic terms (Flores & Flores, 2018).

The application of conflict theory arises because of the power differential between faculty and students. Faculty make the decisions about which texts and materials to use for a course; they select, adopt, and implement the materials into their curricula and courses. Faculty seem

somewhat resistant to the idea of using AOER for a variety of reasons (which will be discussed in the literature review). However, of immediate relevance is the idea that quality course texts and materials can only be found within the traditional publishing model. The work of most faculty most often flows through the traditional publishing model, and many faculty members publish textbooks, which allows them to make extra money. The use of AOER may be seen as a challenge to that opportunity for enrichment, not to mention legitimate (though increasingly unfounded) concerns about the quality of AOER. In other words, faculty wish to remain in power; they represent the thesis commonly associated with conflict theory.

In opposition to that thesis are students. Students have no power in the decision-making process regarding textbook and course material selection. While they may comment on the cost of materials for a single course in faculty evaluations (as this author has done before), that commentary does not necessarily motivate the faculty to change the process. The process as it stands serves the faculty. That the process may actually be hurting the very students that the faculty teach and endeavor to support academically does not appear to occur to the faculty or have bearing on their decision-making process. Therefore, the faculty continue to select expensive texts and materials that students cannot afford. The students do not have power. They are the antithesis to the faculty's position.

Within the conflict theory structure, the tension between the thesis and the antithesis can be resolved in one of two ways: accommodation or revolution. In this case, the accommodation is the use of OERs and AERs. Faculty still exert power in the process; they still make the decisions regarding the selection, adoption, and implementation of the materials into the course. However, in electing to use OERs and AERs, faculty are considering the financial burdens of their students and alleviating those burdens – even in a small way – by making the choice.

Conflict theory is one prong of the two-pronged theoretical approach. The other approach is encompassed in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Obviously, an institution of higher learning should provide academic support to its students since all things academic fall within its purview. However, an individual's ability to academically perform is not solely impacted by the availability of academic support or the student's own ability to academically perform. Regardless of how intelligent a student is, their ability to academically perform can be affected by a variety of factors, not the least of which falls under the heading of basic human needs. To put it bluntly, a malnourished student is not going to perform as well as they could, even if they have the academic competency to do so.

This flow of cause and effect echoes Abraham Maslow's notions of human motivation. At its most basic, this hierarchy demonstrates how people must have their most basic biological needs fulfilled before they can focus on achieving higher needs, with self-actualization as the traditional top of the pyramid used to represent the hierarchy (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006). The initial theory had five facets; subsequent revisions added additional levels, with the most recent iteration having eight. Regardless, three aspects of the hierarchy are of immediate relevance to this study. These levels are the lowest level in which basic physiological/biological human needs like food, air, shelter, and water are identified; the fourth level, which is the self-esteem level and encompasses the need for achievement; and the fifth level, which is the self-actualization level and includes problem-solving and achieving an individual's potential (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006).

The basic premise is that if an individual cannot get their basic needs met – those physiological, biological needs – they cannot advance up the hierarchy to realize their potential. Without adequate food and shelter, an individual cannot focus on the activities and processes needed to reach the next level of need. If students struggle material to meet their basic biological

needs, they cannot focus on reaching the higher level needs which include two crucial levels needed for learning and academic achievement. In a very real way – which will be discussed in the literature review – without the physiological needs met, students physiologically cannot necessarily perform academically at a level that will ensure their persistence and retention – in other words, realizing their academic potential that facilitates their graduation.

Next Steps

This section details the next moves for this study and its attendant processes. It will outline the preliminary research questions that motivate the collection and interpretation of data for this DiP. It will also identify and describe potential data sources, the various ethical and logistical issues that arise in the collection, use, analysis, and dissemination of the data. It describes the rationale for choosing qualitative research. A review of the literature has already been conducted and written for this DiP. This review will be re-evaluated and incorporated into the next manuscript.

Methodology

It bears repeating, and often, in order to cut to the heart of the matter: the problem of practice which drives this study is the examination of perceptions of faculty at a public four-year institution in the Southeast regarding AOER. Given its focus on *perceptions*, the broad methodology of choice for this study is *qualitative*. The purpose of qualitative research is to explore and understand a phenomenon from a humanistic or idealistic approach (Pathak, Jena, & Kalra, 2013). Qualitative research provides insight into the attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, experiences, and interactions/transactions of people (Pathak, Jena, & Kalra, 2013). It does not generate numeric data because ostensibly people's experiences cannot be (or should not be) quantified or calculated (Pathak, Jena, & Kalra, 2013).

However, the information qualitative research does produce can help provide a human context for the numeric data generated by quantitative data and extend the understanding of a phenomenon by providing insight into how that phenomenon affects aspects of the human experience. In other words: it is one thing to understand the cost-saving benefits of AOER in terms of return-on-investment (ROI) or the amount of money libraries can save students. However, the experiences of faculty with AOER can help explain why AOER have not been more widely adopted despite the quantitatively demonstrable benefits of those resources.

Since the implementation of AOER in the classroom at this institution is relatively recent and not formalized or universally required in any way, it would be irresponsible to regard faculty (or the author) as experts in the longitudinally documentable benefits of AOER. However, since faculty work more closely with students in the classroom and have a much more intimate and immediate role in the adoption of course texts and materials, documenting and examining the perceptions of faculty regarding the benefits of AOER are critical. Understanding how faculty perceive or understand these resources can help better identify and clarify both barriers and incentives to switching to AOER when possible. In identifying and clarifying both barriers and incentives, faculty-focused solutions may be developed which increase the likelihood of faculty adopting AOER and in turn reducing the financial stressors and burdens of students.

Additionally, the recentness of AOER make this study exploratory.

Setting

The setting for this study is a four-year public institution in the Southeast. The university is designated a Carnegie R3 institution – that is, a doctorate-granting institution with moderate research activity. The average full-time student enrollment is ~8,000 with 326 full-time faculty and 122 part-time faculty. Like many universities and college, the university has an extensive

online program. It makes use of the aforementioned full-time and part-time faculty and instructors as well as adjunct faculty and instructors. This is of relevance as the online program has been specifically directed to convert as many of its classes as possible to employ AOERs. This in turn affects the university's dual enrollment program as the dual enrollment program tends to use the same kind of resources and online course infrastructure as the online program.

Data Sources

The data sources are the faculty who have participated or are currently participating in a faculty learning community (FLC) on AOER, making it a convenience sampling. The faculty participants are full-time and either tenured or tenure-track.

Data Collection

The data regarding their perceptions will be obtained via semi-structured interviews. These interviews will be conducted in one-on-one settings, either in the faculty's office, the author's office, a neutral space such as a conference room, or via videoconferencing (Zoom) or telephone, depending on the faculty's location and availability. Many faculty are still working from home, and some have concerns regarding COVID-19 exposure. The author likewise has concerns, being immunocomprised and not yet fully vaccinated. Interviews will be recorded. In-person and telephone interviews will be audio recorded; videoconference (Zoom) interviews will be recorded. Interviews will be transcribed.

Data Analysis

The transcripts will be analyzed using typical theme-coding methods. More specific detail regarding data analysis will be provided in the next steps of the dissertation process. The author is currently taking EDRS 704, a course which is intended to help the author develop the appropriate skills for analyzing qualitative data.

Research Question

The research question driving this research reflect the key elements of the problem of practice. The question is: how do faculty perceive at the study institution perceive AOER in undergraduate course material adoptions?

IRB and Ethical Considerations

IRB and ethical considerations are addressed in line with IRB requirements of the university where the study will be conducted. IRB approval will be obtained (this will be provided as soon as it is obtained). Faculty will complete and sign consent forms in order to participate (this form is still be developed at this time). The author will anonymize participants' identities, and confidentiality protected as much as possible.

Summary

Like any complex organization in the 21st century, higher education is a complicated matrix of people, policies, procedures, practices, and politics. Agendas abound, and not all of them are working in tandem or in everybody's best interests. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that at the center of higher education are students who are real people – not just price points or revenue sources – with a variety of needs. Some of these needs are obviously the purview of the institutions that serve these students, such as academic support.

Students pursuing degrees find themselves facing many financial stressors and burdens. Sometimes financial aid is insufficient to meet the needs of students. Students who use loans are facing unprecedented levels of debt that can undermine their future prospects. Taking on more debt to ensure that they can pay their bills is an option but not necessarily good or feasible.

Reducing the impact of key financial stressors can help reduce the need for debt and/or the burden of having to make hard decisions. One way of reducing financial stressors is to reduce

costs or eliminate them when possible. Considering the substantial cost of the average course textbook, looking to reduce the price tag of course texts and materials seems as good a place as any to start, especially given that it can be and has been done. Open and affordable education resources (AOER) represent a solution to the cost of course materials.

One of the key elements in adopting and implementing AOER into the classroom are faculty. They represent the fulcrum in terms of getting such resources selected, adopted, and implemented into the classroom. However, there are several barriers associated with faculty in terms of AOER. Understanding their perceptions may help eliminate faculty-related barriers to the adoption of AOER.

The author has many personal and professional reasons for undertaking this problem of practice. Their experiences as a student and working with students have informed their decision to choose this topic. AOER may be one way of alleviating costs for students in one area of higher education. Furthermore, such resources represent a means of improving affordability and accessibility in general in higher education and echo the CPED principles of ethics, equity, and social justice that should underline all endeavors undertaken by academic institutions.

In this incarnation of the dissertation, the problem of practice has been introduced and contextualized. The author's positionality statement, reflecting her investment in and relationship to the problem and related topics both personally and professional, has been shared. The connection between this dissertation and the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) Principles has been made. It has discussed the conceptual/theoretical framework which will guide the dissertation. It outlines the next steps for work, focusing on methodology and its component parts.

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Manuscript 2: Faculty Perceptions of Open and Affordable Education Resources

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Manuscript 2: Faculty Perceptions of Open and Affordable Education Resources

One of the ways that institutions of higher learning may help students reduce cost of attending college, thereby reducing financial stresses, is to reduce expenses for students where possible. A significant financial pain point for students that institutions of higher learning can potentially reduce expenses for students is course texts and materials. One way of reducing course text and materials expenses that has gained visibility is the use of open educational resources (OER) and affordable education resources (AER), also known collectively as AOER. AOER represent free or affordable resources that, in essence, cost the student nothing or are more affordable compared to traditional commercial course materials.

The lynchpin regarding the adoption of course materials takes the form of faculty. Faculty are responsible for identifying, adopting, and implementing course texts and materials. They wield the power to decide between an expensive commercial text and AOER. Therefore, understanding faculty's views of AOER is important for laying the foundation for more meaningful conversations with them regarding the benefits to students of adopting AOER. To that end, this study elicited and examined the perceptions of faculty at a public four-year institution in the Southeast regarding AOER.

Problem of Practice

The problem of practice is how to encourage faculty to consider the adoption of AOER in lieu of traditional commercial texts where possible in undergraduate courses, with an eye toward reducing the cost of course materials for students. To that end, this study examines the

perceptions of faculty at a public four-year institution in the Southeast of open education resources and affordable education resources (AOER).

Statement of Positionality

Owing to a mix of personal and professional experiences – as a student, a library student worker, a library faculty member, and a library administrator, all of which reflect certain privileges which should not and cannot be ignored – I have other professional experiences that inform this research. For several years now, the statewide academic library consortium, LOUIS, to which my library belongs, has been proactively and actively pursuing resources and support for AOER. I have been involved in these efforts in a variety of capacities since about 2013. Additionally, the State Legislature has passed Senate Bill (SB) 117 (also known as Act 125) that provides explicit support and promotion of AOER in higher education. This has brought greater awareness of AOER and its implications to a wider audience in the state.

I have served on the Executive Board of LOUIS since 2018, but I have been involved with many OER and AER related activities through the consortium for some time. I have chaired and been part of several working groups (WGs) over the years. I currently serve on the advisory board for a \$2 million Department of Education (DOE) grant that LOUIS won to examine AOER in the context of dual enrollment.

Though I am a faculty member, I am not classroom faculty. I recognize that my experiences and job duties are different from my classroom counterparts. Yet, my job has exposed me to both the rigors of tenure and some of the experiences of faculty. It has also exposed me to the challenges, fears, and concerns of students. While I am frustrated by what I have seen of faculty attitudes about AOER, I want to understand their experiences. I want them to understand their students' experiences and how they, the faculty, have an opportunity to

increase access and affordability and reduce the financial burdens of their students, thereby increasing their students' ability to perform well and persist. But I must acknowledge that my concerns and frustrations are present and do contribute to potential bias.

Context of the Problem

The question of whether college is worth the cost has penetrated the public sphere, prompting a spate of news articles and documentaries that examine the actual financial cost of attending college. A quick search of the Internet reveals several articles featuring the title "Is College Worth the Cost?" Emma Kerr's June 17, 2019, article for *U.S. News and World Report* provides a good starting point for understanding from the public view why there are concerns about the (rising) cost of a college education. Kerr (2019) reports that the average cost of attending a four-year institution for undergraduates is \$26,000, an estimation based on 2015-2016 data from the National Center for Education Statistics. However, if the student and/or their family borrows money to attend college, they end up paying more than that because of interest. This means that the average undergraduate student may wind up paying more than \$37,000, if not more, for an undergraduate degree (Beal, Borg, & Stranahan, 2019).

Kerr's and Beal et al.'s analyses provide a troubling overview of the cost of college in the immediate moment and after the fact. It is important to understand the overall financial cost and therefore the financial stressors facing students and their families with regard to attending college as these elements represent the larger super-structure of the issue at hand. However, what these analyses do not touch upon explicitly and which forms a sizable portion of the context for the problem of practice is the cost of course materials. These analyses may ask the question of how institutions can feasibly reduce costs but they do so without meaningfully looking at options like AOER.

The Costs of Course Materials

The main financial stresses related to higher education take many forms, from direct to indirect costs. Increasing tuition and the need for student loans represent the biggest pain points. However, the cost of textbooks represents another significant pain point for students. According to Senack and Donoghue (2016), the cost of college textbooks has increased by 73% since 2006, which is more than four times the rate of inflation. The authors add that an individual textbook can cost more than \$200 with some reaching prices as high as \$400 (Senack & Donoghue, 2016).

In the third edition of their annual survey on textbooks, the United States Public Interest Research Group, aka U.S. PIRG, found that 65% of student participants stated that they skipped purchasing a required textbook for a course because of the cost in 2020. This decision was not made lightly by these students, as 90% of participants expressed “being significantly or somewhat concerned” in 2019 and 2020 about the negative impact on their grades as a consequence of not having the course texts. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic also caused issues with students’ access to course texts. U.S. PIRG (2021) reports that 79% of students were impacted in some way by the pandemic, and “those side effects of the pandemic were correlated with greater struggles to access course materials.” Furthermore, a lack of stable Internet access was cited by 10% of participants as being their reason for not being able to participate in remote classes (U.S. PIRG, 2021). The report goes on to note that 8% of participants who lacked reliable Internet access reported failing a course because they were unable to afford their course materials in comparison to the 2% of the national average (U.S. PIRG, 2021).

In short, students are often not purchasing texts *because they cannot afford to*. Yes, they are aware of and concerned about the impact on their grades but they feel they have no choice. Access codes providing access to materials are evidently as problematic as course texts and are

also being skipped by students, though at lesser rates. COVID-19 has exacerbated these issues and highlighted how many students do not have reliable Internet access which further exacerbates these issues.

Faculty and AOER

Faculty are one of the key stakeholders in the selection, adoption, and implementation of classroom resources, whether traditional commercial texts or AOER. Belikov and Bodily (2016) examined faculty-related barriers and incentives regarding OER/AER adoption and what incentives seem to support the adoption of such resources. The primary barriers were categorized into *need more information* (faculty indicated that they wanted/needed more information about OERs before they would consider them); *lack of discoverability* (faculty could not identify or locate appropriate OERs easily); and *confusing OERs with digital resources* (faculty did not understand the differences between traditional digital resources like databases and OERs) (Belikov & Bodily, 2016).

In terms of incentives, faculty reported realizing that adopting such resources can save students money, but this does not necessarily reflect the (a) a meaningful understanding of the cost of higher education, (b) the financial stresses that students experience, and (c) what the ramifications of those stresses are (namely discontinuing college). Furthermore, the acknowledgement that AOER can save students money was not towards the top of the list of benefits that faculty identified for such resources. Jhangiani, Pitt, Hendricks, Key, and Lalonde (2016) identified additional factors which have bearing on AOER adoptions such as faculty's willingness to share teaching/learning materials, not to mention personality traits such as openness. Additionally, according to Jhangiani et al. (2016), institutional policies regarding AOER play a role in faculty's perceptions of those resources. Ultimately, understanding how

faculty perceive AOER is critical to addressing and removing barriers to the adoption of those resources.

Reducing Costs Through Open and Affordable Educational Resources

There is no silver-bullet solution to the problem of the high price of college. As such, colleges must pursue several strategies in tandem that help students keep other costs low. One area in which colleges can and have attempted to manage costs is the area of course textbooks and materials (henceforth simply referred to as course materials). This approach involves the implementation of AOER in place of traditional course materials.

OER, as defined by UNESCO (2019), are “teaching, learning and research materials in any medium – digital or otherwise – that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions.” AER are low-cost substitutions in place of traditional commercially course materials, with the scope of materials encompassed being wider than that of OERs (OhioLINK, 2020). AER can include library-licensed materials; these materials are not considered OER because they have a cost (paid by the library) but represent no cost to the students (OhioLINK, 2020). AERs also encompass “institutional efforts to negotiate across-the-board lower costs for traditionally-published textbooks and materials” (OhioLINK, 2020). That is to say, those resources still cost money, but the cost will usually be less than \$100 per resource, per semester. The student may not necessarily pay the cost, as in the case of library-licensed materials, but the point is that the cost to the student is low (in the case of AERs) or non-existent (in the case of OERs).

According to Colvard, Watson, and Park (2018), three of the key barriers for students, student learning, and student success in higher education are affordability, quality, and

completion. In their study of the impact of OER, the authors discovered that OER adoptions can save students money and help address student debt concerns (Colvard, Watson, & Park, 2018). However, the authors also found that OER can improve end-of-course grades and decrease D, F, and withdrawal letter grades (DFW) rates for all students (Colvard, Watson, & Park, 2018). But of particular note for the discussion of student food insecurity is that students who are Pell Grant recipients, part-time, or members of historically underserved populations also experienced improved course grades and decreased DFW rates (Colvard, Watson, & Park, 2018). The authors concluded that OER can address issues related to affordability, attainment gap, completion, and learning (Colvard, Watson, & Park, 2018). These findings suggest those student populations that are most vulnerable in terms of food insecurity benefit from the implementation of OER.

Of course, this single study is only generalizable to a degree. However, this study is not an outlier in the literature. It reflects a growing body of literature that points to the benefits of AOER for students at large and students in vulnerable populations. This raises a very important question: why have AOER not become the standard for many colleges? The answer to that question is as complex as the factors that make the affordability of college complicated. Regardless, one of the key elements in that discussion and which is the focus of this dissertation is *the faculty*. These are the individuals who are responsible for course material selections and adoptions and who work on a regular basis with those materials. They represent a significant point of contact and flow in the discussion of how to use AOER to benefit students.

Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) Principles

As much as this dissertation is driven by the problem of practice and the requirements of this doctoral program, it is also motivated by the principles of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED). The key principles that underpin this program are ethics, equity,

and social justice. Consequently, these same principles also underpin this dissertation. They have immediate and direct connections to the problem of practice.

Ethically speaking, the increasing cost of course textbooks and materials are reducing the affordability and accessibility of higher education. Much of this may be attributable to the traditional publishing industry. At this stage, institutions of higher learning can only do so much to counter the practices which have resulted in a near 300%-increase in the prices of textbooks. However, institutions of higher learning can establish practices that can counter or mitigate the costs of course textbooks and materials.

Arguably, failure to establish or at least encourage such practices, which in turn implicitly endorse the practices of the traditional publishing industry, force students to swallow additional costs which may not be covered by financial aid. These additional costs force students into difficult places, often to the tune of the catch-22: if the students do not purchase the textbook, they cannot fully participate in the course. However, if they do not purchase the textbook, they may be able to afford their bills and material needs. But if they purchase the textbook (maybe using a credit card), they incur more debt, though they will be able to participate in their course, likely resulting in positive academic performance. Yet, if they purchase the textbook, they may have to forego food which – as the literature review will demonstrate – can result in negative physical and mental effects that in turn negatively affect academic performance. In essence, the cost of course texts can become a *damned if you do, damned if you don't* scenario for students. This is unacceptable and unethical.

In terms of equity, it could be argued that the increasing costs of course textbooks and materials are decreasing students' ability to participate meaningfully in their courses. As suggested in the previous paragraph, access to course texts and materials exerts considerable

influence on a student's ability to participate and perform academically. For those students who are unable to purchase the course texts, or to purchase them in a timely fashion, their ability to participate and perform is different from their classmates who can purchase them. In other words, even if students can pay their tuition and get into their courses, their ability to perform in those courses is not supported and is different from their classmates who can get the texts. Those students without access to course materials are less likely to perform well and therefore to persist. While on the surface, it appears that these students have equitable access, the reality is that they do not have equitable access. This dissertation sees this lack of access, which is also related to affordability, as an equity issue and seeks to address it.

The connection of this dissertation to social justice is likely becoming clear at this point, given its connection to both ethics and equity. As will be repeated regularly throughout this work, financial aid usually pays for tuition and fees. It may not cover additional academic expenses like course textbooks and materials. In terms of financial aid and loans, even if there is 'overage' that will be paid to students, it may not come in a timely fashion. For example, this author is using private loans to fund this doctoral degree. During the first semester, while tuition and fees were entirely covered, and there was substantial overage intended to help with additional expenses, the overage was not disbursed to the author until October...in a semester that began in August. While the author was able to acquire a few of the texts in a timely fashion, she was not able to acquire all of the materials until after October. Fortunately, one of the professors that semester used AOER, meaning the author's ability to participate and perform were not affected. This experience, however, is the exception, not the rule.

The most vulnerable populations facing material hardships in the context of higher education are African American, from low socio-economic status (SES) groups, and otherwise

already facing many social and economic inequities. The added challenge of being unable to afford course texts and materials, or to purchase them in a timely fashion, further marginalizes many groups already marginalized in the higher education space. By offering solutions which increase timely access to course textbooks and materials, schools can reduce this marginalization and increase access and affordability. To accomplish this, it is crucial to engage faculty and to understand their perceptions of AOER.

Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks

The theoretical framework used in this dissertation is two-pronged; it will employ conflict theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Conflict theory emerges from the work of Karl Marx and is predicated on economic elements that influence structures within a society. Ostensibly, conflict theory explains how groups fight for and maintain power over resources, often scarce resources (Flores & Flores, 2018). This in turn provides insight into how some groups possess more privilege, access, or advantage in comparison to other groups, particularly framed in capitalistic terms (Flores & Flores, 2018).

The application of conflict theory arises because of the power differential between faculty and students. Faculty make the decisions about which texts and materials to use for a course; they select, adopt, and implement the materials into their curricula and courses. Faculty seem somewhat resistant to the idea of using AOER for a variety of reasons. However, of immediate relevance is the idea that quality course texts and materials can only be found within the traditional publishing model. The work of most faculty most often flows through the traditional publishing model, and many faculty members publish textbooks, which allows them to make extra money. The use of AOER may be seen as a challenge to that opportunity for enrichment, not to mention legitimate (though increasingly unfounded) concerns about the quality of AOER.

In other words, faculty wish to remain in power; they represent the thesis commonly associated with conflict theory.

In opposition to that thesis are students. Students have no power in the decision-making process regarding textbook and course material selection. While they may comment on the cost of materials for a single course in faculty evaluations, that commentary does not necessarily motivate the faculty to change the process. The process as it stands serves the faculty. That the process may actually be hurting the very students that the faculty teach and endeavor to support academically does not appear to occur to the faculty. It does seem to have bearing on their decision-making process. Therefore, the faculty continue to select expensive texts and materials that students struggle to or simply cannot afford. The students do not have power. They are the antithesis to the faculty's position.

Within the conflict theory structure, the tension between the thesis and the antithesis can be resolved in one of two ways: accommodation or revolution. In this case, the accommodation is the use of AOER. Faculty still exert power in the process; they still make the decisions regarding course materials. However, in electing to use AOER, faculty are considering the financial burdens of their students and can contribute to the alleviation of those burdens.

Conflict theory is one prong of the two-pronged theoretical approach. The other approach is encompassed in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Obviously, an institution of higher learning should provide academic support to its students since all things academic fall within its purview. However, an individual's ability to academically perform is not solely impacted by the availability of academic support or the student's own ability to academically perform. Regardless of how intelligent a student is, their ability to academically perform can be affected by a variety of factors, not the least of which falls under the heading of basic human needs. To put it bluntly,

a malnourished student is not going to perform as well as they could, even if they have the academic competency to do so.

This flow of cause and effect echoes Abraham Maslow's notions of human motivation. At its most basic, this hierarchy demonstrates how people must have their most basic biological needs fulfilled before they can focus on achieving higher needs, with self-actualization as the traditional top of the pyramid used to represent the hierarchy (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006). The initial theory had five facets; subsequent revisions added additional levels, with the most recent iteration having eight. Regardless, three aspects of the hierarchy are of immediate relevance to this study. These levels are the lowest level in which basic physiological/biological human needs like food, air, shelter, and water are identified; the fourth level, which is the self-esteem level and encompasses the need for achievement; and the fifth level, which is the self-actualization level and includes problem-solving and achieving an individual's potential (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006).

The basic premise is that if an individual cannot get their basic needs met – those physiological, biological needs – they cannot advance up the hierarchy to realize their potential. Without adequate food and shelter, an individual cannot focus on the activities and processes needed to reach and fulfill the next level of need. If students struggle materially to meet their basic biological needs, they cannot focus on reaching the higher level needs which include two crucial levels needed for learning and academic achievement. In a very real way, without the physiological needs met, students physiologically cannot necessarily perform academically at a level that will ensure their persistence and retention – in other words, realizing their academic potential that facilitates their graduation.

Research Question

The research question driving this research reflect the key elements of the problem of practice. The question is: how do faculty at the study institution perceive AOER in undergraduate course material adoptions? This primary question gave rise to nine (9) interview questions. They will be related in the narrative presentation of results.

Terms

Affordable educational resource (AER): a low-cost substitution in place of traditional commercially course materials, with the scope of materials encompassed under the umbrella being wider than that of OERs (OhioLINK, 2020). AERs also encompass library-licensed materials and “institutional efforts to negotiate across-the-board lower costs for traditionally-published textbooks and materials” (OhioLINK, 2020). That is to say, those resources still cost money, but the cost will usually be less than \$100 per resource, per semester.

Ancillary materials: also referred to as supplementary materials; these materials are intended to support and reinforce the content of the primary course material such as a textbook. Some of the most common forms of ancillaries are “quizzes, slides, instructor materials, homework platforms, etc.” (CSUDH University Library, 2021) and test banks. Both traditional commercial course materials and AOER can feature ancillary materials.

Open educational resource (OER): “teaching, learning and research materials in any medium – digital or otherwise – that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions” (UNESCO, 2019).

Data Overview

The question of the cost of course materials and where AOER fit into that equation can be both quantitative and qualitative. There is a great deal of quantitative data currently available about the costs of attending college, the costs of course materials, and how AOER can reduce both, including how much money AOER can and has saved students where they have been used. Some of that quantitative data has been used in this dissertation thus far and will arise again. However, there is also a great deal of qualitative data currently available as well. That data describes the lived experiences of various stakeholders, namely students and faculty. The author elected to take a qualitative approach and contribute to the literature from that perspective.

Nature of the Data

This study focused on the lived experiences and perceptions of faculty with regard to AOER. The literature contains many studies which have undertaken similar examinations in a variety of settings in terms of both geographic location and type of institution. This research contributes to that both of literature by gathering and examining the experiences of faculty at the study institution, a public four-year R3 institution in the southeastern United States. The data collected in this study was obtained via qualitative interviews and is therefore largely verbal, with conceptual themes developed based on the participants' answers to the questions.

The data was collected personally by the author through semi-structured interviews; the questions used in the interviews were listed in the **Research Question** section of this manuscript. The interviews were conducted via Zoom videoconferencing (henceforth simply Zoom). The interviews were conducted over the months of September and October of 2021. Zoom allows for the recording of sessions, of which the author took advantage. The author downloaded the recordings, using the audio portion of those recordings to obtain transcripts of the interviews.

The author utilized Otter.ai, a web-based, AI-driven transcription subscription service. The author also took field notes during the interviews. These field notes were used to clean up the transcriptions for ease of reading and to use for comparison to ensure corroboration and accurate representation of the participants' experiences when attempting to identify, generate, and evaluate possible themes and categories of meaning.

The data sources were faculty who self-identified as part of Act 125 reporting regarding their status of teaching classes that use AOER. The faculty participants are full-time and either tenured or tenure-track. The participants represent several different disciplines and colleges within the overall institution. The courses in which they taught using AOER represented traditional face-to-face, virtual, and hybrid courses taught in either summer 2021 or fall 2021 (the semester in which data was collected). The number of faculty on that list, generated as a part of S.B. 117/Act 125 course marking efforts, is 73. They were all contacted via email and invited to participate. Ultimately, 14 faculty members (19.18% of the total contacted) responded and agreed to be interviewed. They represented several disciplines/departments and colleges across campus including Psychology (School of Behavioral and Social Sciences); Atmospheric Sciences (School of Sciences); Biology (School of Sciences); Health Studies (School of Allied Health); English (School of Humanities); Chemistry (School of Sciences); Education (School of Education); History (School of Humanities); Physics (School of Sciences); Political Science (School of Behavioral and Social Sciences); and Music (School of Visual and Performing Arts).

The recordings and the transcripts were saved to an external hard drive which when not in use is kept in a fireproof safe. The recordings, per the informed consent statement, will be destroyed in a year from the time of recording, which will be September and October of 2022. The transcripts were printed for ease of reading and analysis. These printouts will be shredded at

the time the recordings and digital copies of the transcripts are destroyed. The data generated from this study will be made available generally speaking through the publication of the dissertation per the doctorate-granting institution's dissertation publication practices (e.g., a digital copy deposited in ProQuest and/or a physically-bound copy deposited in the university's library). It is also the hope of the author to parlay this work into something publishable in an appropriate journal and to present on these findings at relevant conferences in the future.

The transcripts were analyzed using inductive data analysis. Inductive data analysis “involves working exclusively from the participant experiences that drive the analysis entirely” (Azungah, 2018). Once the transcriptions were obtained, the researcher repeatedly read and reviewed them to develop categories and themes; the transcriptions represent the raw data used to develop concepts and themes in inductive analysis (Azungah, 2018). These categories and themes were evaluated against the researcher's field notes and, as necessary, the recorded interviews themselves. This evaluation was intended to ensure that the categories and themes were genuinely reflective of the experiences and perceptions of the participants.

Limitations of the Available Data

The adoption and implementation of AOER in the classroom at the study institution is relatively recently and not formalized or universally required or implemented in any way. Some faculty have simply switched out their traditional commercial text for an affordable or open one. Some faculty have redesigned whole courses to implement OER and open pedagogy. Some faculty use a blend of AER and OER in their courses; some faculty still use traditional commercial texts and supplement with OER. In other words, the adoption and implementation experiences of the participants had to be regarded as being limited in generalizability as well as comparison against the existing literature.

Additionally, the recency and lack of formal policy and practice regarding AOER at the study institution meant that it would be irresponsible to regard faculty (or the author) as experts in the longitudinally documentable benefits of AOER, whether at the institution or in the context of the AOER phenomenon in general. The participants also self-selected. Though the author contacted all faculty who had courses marked as AOER, only 14 responded. This is a small sample size, which is always a concern in research.

The limited sample size also means that there is not equitable disciplinary or content area representation. For example, because the psychology faculty seem very motivated to implement AOER in their department, several of them have more experience than their colleagues in other departments. Furthermore, because those faculty *as a department* are motivated to implement AOER, they have had more positive experiences than their colleagues in other departments. However, there is one professor in that department who participated who is less enthusiastic about it than their colleagues because of their early experiences and perceptions of AOER. Therefore, even within a department, the participants' experiences are not consistent, which can also make comparison and generalization difficult.

One must also consider the usual limitations associated with qualitative research methods. These are the personal and unique experiences of the participants working at a specific institution in a specific part of a specific country. They have personal biases and experiences which may be unconscious or unacknowledged. They are at varying points in their career and within the hierarchy of the university (i.e., regular classroom faculty versus school directors). It is difficult to generalize such specific data. There is value in this data for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that it reflects actual lived experiences of real, practicing teaching faculty who have adopted, implemented, and used actual AOER. While the data does not “solve” the

“AOER problem,” it certainly contributes to the growing body of research and rounds out the quantitative data acquired regarding the AOER phenomenon.

Delimitations

Delimitations are intended to “describe the scope of the study or establish parameters” and prevent the researcher from asserting that the “findings are generalizable to the whole population” (Miles, 2019, p. 7). They represent a study’s boundaries and contribute to a study’s scope. In the case of this study, there are several delimitations which must be acknowledged. First, as noted several times through this work, this study was delimited to a single institution, where the researcher was employed at the time of the study. This represents a geographic delimitation as well, as the institution in question does not have out-of-state satellite campuses. Any satellite campuses remain within the metro area of the city in which the institution is located.

Another delimitation is the choice not to determine whether the courses faculty taught as AOER courses were traditional face-to-face, online only, or hybrid courses. AOER are not limited to any specific type of course of the three aforementioned types. Furthermore, several faculty were prompted into examining the AOER option as a consequence of COVID lockdown in which all instruction was online only. However, many were actively focusing on implementing AOER in traditional face-to-face courses. Trying to drilldown granularly did not seem useful in the context of this study.

A third delimitation is that a convenience sample was used. Only faculty who have actually used AOER in their courses were used. Faculty who had never used AOER may have perceptions, negative or positive, that could shed light on the phenomenon. However, the researcher determined that hearing and reading variations of “well, I can’t really answer that” or

“well, I’ve heard but I don’t know personally” over and over again would not be useful to determining barriers to and solutions for the adoption of AOER in this context.

IRB and Ethical Considerations

IRB approval was obtained from both the study institution and the doctoral institution (please see Appendix A for IRB approvals). Per the IRB recommendation of the doctoral institution, the consent form attached to the recruitment email contained the following statements: *By continuing with this interview you are giving consent to participate in this study and verify that you are at least 18 years of age. Please retain a copy of this page for your records.* In other words, if a participant indicated that they would participate and followed through by setting up an interview date/time, these series of actions represented their consent to be interviewed. However, the researcher also confirmed that consent in the interviews and additionally confirmed with the participants on video their consent to participate and to be recorded. The author anonymized participants’ identities and protected confidentiality as much as possible.

Additional ethical concerns with regard to the use of the data were considered. In the case of this study, the author did not have to consider power relationships between the participants and herself. She was the Director of the Library and possessed no authority over any of the participants, all of whom were classroom faculty, though some also had additional administrative or supervisory duties. Though all participants are faculty like the author, the author was not in a position to exert any influence or power over the participants and vice versa. While not all the participants were tenured at the time, the author was not in a position to influence that facet of the participants’ professional practice or employment at the study institution.

With regard to conflicts of interest, the author worked at the same institution with the participants at the time of the data collection (the author has since left). Additionally, the author had been a facilitator in a three year-long faculty learning community (FLC) focused on AOER in which several of the participants had partaken. A few of those participants mentioned that FLC in their interviews. That participation and the author's role as a facilitator in that endeavor could represent bias, as the author was responsible for teaching FLC participants about AOER and related concepts (like copyright, fair use, and Creative Commons Licensing), meaning that deficits in the participants' knowledge, practice, and experience could potentially be attributed to the author. Additionally, facets of the participants' perceptions of AOER could have been potentially, unconsciously or consciously, influenced by the author's own perceptions and experiences as shared through the FLC.

Challenges of Interpreting and Using Available Data

One of the main challenges with the data in this study is that using semi-structured interviews allowed participants to talk about their experiences more freely. However, this format also meant that sometimes participants went off on tangents. Sometimes these tangents would resolve into or yield meaningful information regarding their experiences, such as providing context or assisting the author to make a cognitive leap in understanding the participant's experience. However, sometimes these tangents were irrelevant and served as a kind of conceptual clutter in the data analysis process. While these side stories can be interesting or entertaining (it can be funny or validating to hear how faculty criticize the commercial publishers, for example), those stories did not always contribute to the study at hand or clarify the participants' perceptions and experiences. But the stories still had to be read and considered *just in case*.

Another challenge is technology. During a few of the Zoom interviews, instability in the campus Internet network resulted in interruptions in the interview and disruptions of recordings. This in turn resulted in strange and disjointed, often unintelligible, parts of the transcriptions based on the audios of the recordings. Zoom has a transcription feature, but the author was using her account at the study institution, and that feature was not enabled. This necessitated the purchase and use of Otter.ai. While Otter.ai is, in the author's opinion and experience, far better than what Zoom is capable of generating, it is not perfect. This means that sometimes it was difficult to 'translate' the transcripts while cleaning them up and reading them. This could have potentially affected the author's interpretation of the content of the transcriptions. Additionally, transcriptions are just that: the words of the interview. They therefore lack the visual, audible, and nonverbal cues of the full recordings themselves.

Finally, as has been mentioned several times, the experiences related here are those of individual faculty members at a single institution in a specific part of the country. Therefore, generalizing the findings from this study is a dicey prospect. While the data contributes to the literature and deepens our understanding of the phenomenon a little more, it is merely a single though unique snowflake in a snowstorm. It provides insight to the phenomenon, but it cannot be taken as a definitive 'solution' or case study for it.

Findings

This section presents the results of the semi-structured interviews. The results are presented through two channels: tabular and narrative. The tabular presentation, while seeming quantitative, is little more than a demonstration of the basic demographics associated with the sample. The demographic presentation of this data is limited; considerations related to race, gender, or other common demographic designations were not considered as part of this study.

The key aspects of this study are the perceptions of the participants regarding their experiences with AOER. Nevertheless, some basic demographics are available and are presented here. These are intended to be contextual; they are not presented as causative or corroborative. The tabular presentation also shares the six overarching themes with their attendant concepts, topics, and quotations. The characterization of these themes is presented within this section.

The results are also presented narratively. The questions are presented and discussed with demonstrative quotations from the interviews. Within the narrative presentation, it will become evident why the themes obtained through the inductive data analysis should be thought of as fluid and flowing together rather than well-defined and discrete themes. The narrative presentation will also incorporate the conceptual frameworks as well as highlighting connections to equity, ethics, and social justice.

Results - Tabular

Fourteen (14) faculty members participated in the interviews. They were not asked about age, race, gender, or other common demographic designations. However, many of the participants commented on the struggles associated with AOER within their specific disciplines. Therefore, examining the distribution of schools and departments is noteworthy. Table 1 shows the aforementioned distribution with the number of faculty from those units.

School	Department	Number of Faculty
Allied Health	Health Studies	1
Behavioral and Social Sciences	Political Science	1
Behavioral and Social Sciences	Psychology	4
Education	Education	1
Humanities	English	1
Humanities	History	1
Sciences	Atmospheric Sciences	1

Sciences	Biology	1
Sciences	Chemistry	1
Sciences	Physics	1
Visual and Performing Arts	Music	1

Table 1. School, department, and number of faculty from those units among participants.

As noted earlier, the inductive analysis of the transcripts gave rise to six overarching themes. Table 2 depicts those themes with a selection of associated topics. Some of the selected topics are the actual articulated phrases from the participants. Other topics are conceptual amalgamations of phrases and ideas. The selection of associated topics is only meant to be representative; it is by no means exhaustive nor does it contain all of the statements or quotations associated with the major themes.

The development and identification of the six overarching themes was difficult. There is without a doubt overlapping and blurring of concepts. Some topics could fall under more than one overarching theme. Furthermore, the organization and arrangement of themes and the topics within those themes should not be understood as a prioritization or a hierarchy. Rather, they are intended to reflect a certain flow of thought that arguably could be experienced as a loop or a Venn diagram. They also reflect the way in which certain participants discussed certain concepts repeatedly though from different directions.

AOER. This is the lowest hanging fruit in terms of themes, given the focus of this study. As a theme, it encompassed several facets including quality concerns to benefits to challenges. This theme also encompassed the participants’ opinions and experiences of AOER.

Student-related Experiences. This is another obvious theme, given the nature of the study. This theme reflects the participants’ experiences with students in the AOER context and student-related concerns or motivations that are related to the study’s conceptual framework.

Concerns About Course Materials. While this study is about AOER, any discussion of AOER necessitates a discussion of traditional commercial course materials. Therefore, this theme encompasses faculty concerns regarding the materials they use in their courses regardless of whether the materials in question are traditional commercial products or AOER. One could potentially distill this concept to the comment from the professor that “there’s no such thing as the perfect textbook.”

Contextual and Structural Factors. This theme is closely connected to the conceptual frameworks of conflict theory and Maslow’s hierarchy. These aspects may be thought of as external to the faculty (and students) and sometimes systemic, if not historical and current. Regardless, some of these elements are larger than the faculty and, in some cases to a degree, beyond faculty control.

Financial Considerations. This theme address various economic or monetary aspects of the research question. There are economic motivations expressed within this theme. However, given the conceptual frameworks of this study, it is important to consider these facets collectively as a separate theme.

Motivations. While the financial aspects of AOER have been a sizable portion of the discussions reported upon here, there are other reasons faculty choose AOER as course materials. Therefore, this theme encompasses the non-financial reasons participants have chosen to use or pursue AOER.

AOER	Student-related Experiences	Concerns about Course Materials	Contextual and Structural Factors	Financial Considerations	Motivations
access	alleviating student anxiety	gold standard traditional course materials	concerns about the stability of access to library	the rising costs of textbooks wanting “the most bang for	reducing or removing obstacles and barriers (to student

convenience	avoiding student embarrassment	traditional textbooks as a technical component of student development	resources (as AER)	the buck” for course materials	learning and success)
accessibility in terms of ADA	fostering student resilience	importance of currency	library advocacy	value vs. cost	supporting the AOER movement and philosophy
“readily available online”	“meeting students where they are”	importance of relevance	academic freedom	cutting costs in classes	
challenge of redesign	“no excuses” for not using course materials	importance of learning objectives	challenges of departmental silos	savings for lower level courses, spending more on upper level courses	using authentic materials that align learning with professional practice (e.g., using standards manuals)
lack of material on certain topics and disciplines	positive student reactions – sighs of relief	“no such thing as the perfect textbook”	willingness to share one’s work	refund timing (for students who use refunds to purchase course materials)	using digital materials as preparation for professional practice in a digital environment
concerns about the quality of AOERs	supporting persistence and retention	problems with platforms like TopHat and McGraw-Hill Connect	administrative or supervisory apathy	sometimes hard to justify the costs of traditional textbooks	
challenge of meaningful assessment	“student success as paramount”	challenges of high volume and competitive classes	need for system-level support		using resources that are truly useful beyond the course
“it’s just more work” (workload concerns)	advocating for students in different ways	none of the basic info has changed (e.g., basic math)	frustrations with campus bookstore	for primary source material based texts, it feels like “we’re ripping off students, making them pay for public domain excerpts”	
need to pilot	access = achievement	copyright concerns	need people to do the work (of creating AOER)		getting students to use the resources
challenge of finding English translations	“it gets me off on the right		AOER as the way of the future of education		
personalization and customization					

	foot” with students				
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Table 2. The six overarching themes with selected representations of associated concepts/topics.

Results – Narrative

The questions used in this study were developed and tested as part of an assignment in the author’s doctoral coursework. The original set of questions contained 13 questions but was refined to the present 9. This section will present narratively more of what was presented in the previous tabular section. In other words, more phrases, quotations, and concepts will be included in this section, though they will be tied directly to the questions instead of organized into the themes. The thematic organization will be presented in the following section.

Question 1. This question asked the participant to talk about themselves: *Tell me about yourself as a professional – how and why you selected your discipline and to teach in higher education.* This question was not part of the original tested questions and was proposed by a member of the author’s committee. It was meant to help the participants ‘warm up’ for the interview process. Consequently, it did not elicit any information about the participants’ experiences with or perceptions of AOER. In that regard, this question did not necessarily provide illumination for the topic at hand. It did, however, elicit some unique and fascinating stories from the participants about their higher education journeys. As a means of protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, the answers to this question will not be shared, lest the detail included accidentally reveal the participants’ identities. Though it is worth noting that the diverse range of experiences represented here is encouraging in terms of AOER acceptance and adoption.

Question 2. The second question began the process of eliciting the participants’ experiences and perceptions. This question asked the participant: *Describe your familiarity with*

open and affordable education resources (AOER). Like the previous question, this question elicited a diverse set of answers ranging from little awareness to very involved. One participant responded, “So, my familiarity is very limited,” while another described their familiarity as “I would say that I’m pretty familiar.” A few of the participants self-described as being familiar but not experts: “I have dabbled in them, I will not by any means say I’m an expert in this resources.” Some described their familiarity as still developing. Some indicated that they had only encountered the concept last couple of years: “...it was pre-March of 2020” when one professor became aware of the concept. None of the participants self-described as being AOER experts. One professor indicated that in his discipline, physics, they had done what they referred to as open source for several years: “we just call them open source...I first started looking at that about 15 years ago.” Several indicated that they wanted to learn more about AOER and identified the main gap in their knowledge as being related to copyright, fair use, and what several of them termed “legalese.”

The fact that many of these professors do not claim expertise or significant familiarity with AOER is a little surprising. The author has been working with AOER in one capacity or another for over a decade, and the concept emerged from the work of UNESCO in 2002, though the concept is considered older, being connected to notions of open source, which go back to the late 1990s. However, Belikov and Bodily (2016) note that many faculty do not really understand the concept of OER and often confuse them broadly with the idea of “digital resources.” This lack of understanding does not reduce the role of the faculty as the thesis of conflict theory (Flores & Flores, 2018). The faculty still retain the power in the course adoption process instead of students who ostensibly do not possess sufficient power to influence the adoption process.

Question 3. The third question focused on the participants' application or implementation of AOER in their courses: *Tell me about any courses in which you have used or are using AOER.* This question likewise produced a diverse set of answers, given the different departments represented in the sample. Some respondents indicated that they mainly used AOER in large-scale introductory/survey-level undergraduate courses. Some respondents indicated that they used AOER in upper-level undergraduate courses; others used AOER in graduate level classes. Respondents indicated that AOER were used in both lecture and lab courses; AOER were also affiliated with some of the clinical courses as well. While ostensibly this study intended to look at undergraduate course adoptions, so many of the participants teach both undergraduate and graduate, including their experiences from the graduate teaching context is relevant rather than only trying to focus on undergraduate-focused courses.

The music professor indicated that they used AOER in their one-on-one private lesson-type courses which includes majors and non-majors from all classifications. The political science professor indicated that they use AOER in the courses they teach for the institution's Master of Public Administration (MPA) program. This professor also indicated that they preferred AOER for 'special topics' courses which the professor also characterized as 'niche' courses, a perspective echoed by another professor.

The atmospheric sciences professor uses AOER in major and non-major courses. This professor also added that they do not use "just one book" but instead use "multiple resources" that the professor and their colleagues pull "together through our LMS." The MPA professor stated that they pick and choose chapters from multiple books and resources for both undergraduate and graduate level courses. The physics professor indicated that both lecture and lab courses utilized AOER.

Admittedly, the literature reviewed for this study did not consider the question of *where* and *how* AOER may be used and what effect that may have on faculty perceptions. In other words, it is possible that faculty perceptions of AOER may be significantly impacted by whether the faculty member largely teaches undergraduate versus graduate classes and the size of those classes. It may also matter as to whether a faculty member uses AOER as the primary course material versus supplemental material. It may also matter whether a faculty member uses an open textbook versus a collection of resources. A professor who teaches in the traditional classroom will undoubtedly have different needs and expectations of AOER than a clinical faculty member who teaches in professional settings. These facets of the phenomenon were not part of the author's review of literature for this study, but it seems clear that these factors may significantly influence the faculty member's experiences and perceptions.

Question 4. The fourth question focused on the continued use of traditional commercial course materials: *Tell me about courses in which you continue to use traditional commercial texts and why.* The most common answers to this query involved departmental pressures or expectations that all sections of a course will use the same text; discipline-related considerations (e.g., there truly are not any AOER equivalents for upper-level pharmacy courses); a lack of AOER for that topic, course, or discipline; or a lack of AOER with adequate ancillary materials that the professor felt was necessary.

One of the psychology professors indicated that while there is a sufficient number of AOER for their topic, the AOER were mostly simple OpenStax textbooks without what the professor called "bells and whistles." This professor felt that a "PDF textbook" was not sufficient to provide students with the learning support that students needed. It is worth noting that this professor seemed, by and large, to think that most OER were merely PDF-based documents,

reflecting an admitted lack of familiarity with the diversity of AOER resources, commonly noted in the literature in terms of faculty barriers to adopting AOER (Belikov & Bodily, 2016).

However, this view of students needing robust resources for the learning process seems to demonstrate a willingness on the part of this professor to provide resources to the antithesis, the students, within the context of conflict theory (Flores & Flores, 2018). This view also reflects an awareness of the complex needs of students in order to succeed, in line with Maslow's hierarchy (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006).

The music professor indicated that they use Norton titles in some of their classes. At this stage, the pricing for the title the professor uses makes it an AER. However, the professor noted that if the publisher continues to raise prices, that resource "may move out of the realm of AER." The professor stated that the reason for continuing to use Norton is "first and foremost, a lot of the resources I used when I was in school, at the graduate level, were Norton." The professor added, "I got familiar with the way they lay their textbooks out, I got familiar with the ancillaries that come with it." The chemistry professor stated that their use of commercial texts persists in upper level chemistry courses: "The reason why I haven't moved to OER is because there's just no OER available for those upper level courses." These reasons the professors give for continuing to use traditional materials are in very much line with findings in the literature regarding barriers to and ways of incentivizing AOER (Todorinova & Wilkinson, 2020).

One of the psychology professors indicated that if they must pick up a class that someone else has taught (such as a sudden resignation from the university), the professor will simply go with the syllabus and course shell in the LMS that already exists. That means if the course uses a traditional text, the professor would simply go with that, especially if the professor had to pick up the course at the last minute. He clarified: "This year, I'm teaching two classes that have a

commercial text...they're two large graduate classes," noting that "I would have set them up differently, and I will set them up differently if I [continue] to teach them." He also noted that in some courses, such as psychological assessment courses, that "you aren't going to find any OER for that, the material is very proprietary." This finding is unsurprising in the sense that even at this point, there is not an OER or AER for every discipline or course. In some cases, it may be impossible to locate such resources, given the nature of the course, discipline, or profession.

This same professor noted that the publishers for some of the traditional texts have good accessibility features for the visually or hearing impaired which is not necessarily available in AOER. The participant noted that "there's some concern regarding accessibility...we have a faculty person who is visually, he's blind legally. And he's very, very concerned because of individual issues." The political science professor echoed this sort of concern. This professor also noted, as many of the other respondents likewise did, that traditional commercial texts are a considerable time investment. The professor added that "Our younger faculty – it takes time to set up AOER classes. And they [the younger faculty] often need to spend the time doing something else [for tenure]." Again, the issues listed here are commonly cited in the literature as barriers to faculty adoption of AOER (Belikov & Bodily, 2016; Todorinova & Wilkinson, 2020). Accessibility considerations are crucial in the context of equity, ethics, and social justice. If students cannot access their course materials, whether for technological or disability reasons, equity has been lost. It is unethical to not consider the access of those students to necessarily materials – failure to address and mitigate or remove such barriers is unacceptable. Within the frame of social justice, educators have an obligation to address such barriers meaningfully.

Question 5. The fifth question was meant to elicit the participants' motivations. It asks: *Describe why you adopted AOER for the courses in which you have used or are using AOER.*

What motivated you? The most common answer had to do with saving students money – “saving them some bucks,” as both the English and the physics professor phrased it. Regardless, to one degree or another, all of the professors indicated their concern with how expensive traditional commercial course materials were and the burden that put on their students. However, participants also cited other motivations. The chemistry professor indicated that “what motivated [them] primarily at first was actually getting my students to use the resource.” This was difficult because “a lot of students were not purchasing a textbook because most textbooks are expensive.” These observations reflect the findings of Senack and Donoghue (2016) which examined the increasing costs of textbooks and how this affected students financially. Furthermore, these statements reflect an awareness of the material needs of the students as well as their higher order needs. More notably, these comments challenge the tension between the faculty (thesis) and students (antithesis), diffusing the power dynamic between the two groups.

Several participants indicated that they felt a professional obligation to remove or reduce barriers, roadblocks, and obstacles to student learning. One of the psychology professors, who inherited the AOER courses she taught, noted that they felt like “OER is reducing those barriers” to higher education, particularly for adolescents who experience poverty. Another psychology professor indicated that they felt like “part of my role is advocating for students and in a lot of different ways,” so they were motivated to use OER as a way to prevent their students from struggling, at least in terms of that cost associated with attending college.

The ideas expressed in the previous paragraph that AOER can reduce barriers to access to higher education and improve student success are in line with previous studies in the literature (Belikov & Bodily, 2016; Senack & Donoghue, 2016; Todorinova & Wilkinson, 2020). Once again, these comments reflect an awareness of the various needs that students have that must be

met in order for them to succeed (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006). These comments also reveal a sense that faculty-as-thesis see the power that they have and feel an obligation to use it for the students which in turn suggests a sense of ethics and social justice on the part of the professors.

Several participants also indicated that the type of AOER that they used include using manuals and other materials that professionals in their fields would use, such as standards manuals. The education professor indicated that the AOER they used in their course were a combination of assessment manuals and teaching materials provided the state department of education. This professor referred to such resources as “authentic materials” and related that it made more sense to their students would be expected to use such materials in professional practice. The professor also indicated that they felt that the use of such materials aligned “faculty practice with actual education practice” which in turn prepared their students better.

The atmospheric sciences professor felt similarly, reporting that using professional manuals in class was important because students would be expected to use them as practitioners, echoing the education professor. Many professors also indicated that they wanted their students to use materials that would be useful and usable “beyond the course,” as one participant phrased it. If the student was going to have to purchase something, these professors felt it should have lasting usefulness, rather than just for the course at hand. This alignment of curricular or pedagogical practice with post-graduate work and employment is not a topic this author has encountered in the literature before with regard to AOER, which is an interesting and potentially emergent facet of the phenomenon.

One professor indicated that using online/electronic OER was also important to preparing students for professional practice. This professor teaches health studies in the School of Allied Health. Their rationale was that their students needed preparation for “professional practice in a

digital environment,” given the sheer amount of technology and technology-based systems used in the allied health sciences (e.g., electronic health records). What they do in class, the professor asserted, should be “reflecting what’s going on in the profession,” that the curriculum should echo the profession by being digital. This also echoes the atmospheric sciences professor’s use of freely-available NOAA and NASA weather data – professional meteorologists would be expected to use such data, so it makes sense for students to do so now as part of their coursework. Much like the use of standards manuals and other professional resources, the notion of using digital resources because certain professions are expected to operate in digital environments is not something the author had encountered previously. Again, this may represent an interesting and potentially emergent facet of the phenomenon.

The health sciences professor indicated that when they reflected on their own experiences as a college student, they recalled “not wanting to...be embarrassed, per se” by not having the textbook or being prepared. This professor also pointed to the anxiety a lot of students feel about school and how being prepared by having the course materials can add to that. The professor also indicated that they were very aware “geographically speaking” of the socio-economic state of the parish and from where their students come. The professor observed that “some of them are already behind the curve” educationally and in terms of college prep; this means that “they’re not really...necessarily set up for success.” This professor sees AOER as helping those students and meeting them where they are.

These comments reflect the emphasis in the literature that AOER represent a means to alleviating the socio-economic inequities that often hamper student success (Colvard, Watson, & Park, 2018; Todorinova & Wilkinson, 2020). Therefore, the use of AOER represents a way of promoting equity in education by reducing financial burdens that interfere with students’ ability

to participate equitably in the classroom. The comments also reflect that awareness of the material deficits in their students' experiences and how that may limit the students in satisfying basic needs which in turn impacts their ability to realize higher order needs (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006). Without the fulfillment of needs at each step in the hierarchy, an individual's success becomes less and less likely.

Several professors across disciplines indicated that they were also motivated by the opportunity to customize their courses or personalize them. As one of the psychology professors admitted that they "like the idea of customizing a course," while another asserted that the ability to personalize the course seemed to increase student engagement. One of the psychology professors stated that "I think it's worth putting the time in and doing it can allow for more personalization," especially with regard to topics within the course that "are more meaningful to me, and I have a deeper content knowledge."

One of the other psychology professors admitted that they were looking for "an evergreen book platform" – that is, something with all the bells and whistles needed to support learning objectives and student success. The atmospheric sciences echoed the student success notion: "So, it's [OER] keeping that student success and best practices in mind." Student success is a matrix of metrics and concepts, and research has found that AOER can support positive student performance and outcomes across student-focused metrics (Colvard, Watson, & Park, 2018).

The history professor noted that their discipline and its courses often rely on primary sources, much of which is in the public domain. The professor observed that making students pay for public domain in collected excerpt textbooks was essentially "ripping off students just to make them pay for stuff they can access for free." This professor also acknowledged that

creating their own excerpted collections from public domain material gave them more control, echoing some of the customization and personalization language used by other participants.

A number of the participants also indicated that they chose AOER because they believe in the AOER movement/philosophy. These participants stated that they felt that AOER was the direction that education is moving in – or should be moving in – and they wished to foster that philosophy and support it however they can. The political science professor stated that what motivated them “was a philosophical support of the concept.” The biology professor admitted that secondary to the financial considerations was that “I really support the idea, just the philosophy, of OER as like a movement.” At least one professor felt that the AOER movement is reflective of the direction in which society is going as well – that in a society in which information is highly commodified, freeing that information and increasing its visibility and accessibility was both inevitable and desirable.

Given the idea that AOER founded in the idea of making information freely (or affordably) available in order to foster access, learning, and research, it seems self-evident that at its heart, the AOER concept is rooted in equity, ethics, and social justice. By removing barriers to information access, AOER supports learning, reducing the barriers faced by certain historically marginalized groups in education. While faculty still have the choice of what they use, whether traditional materials or AOER, the choice of AOER seems more considerate of the material needs of students, reducing the tension between thesis and antithesis.

Question 6. The purpose of question six was to elicit the participants’ perceptions of the challenges associated with AOER: *how would you describe the challenges of adopting and/or using AOER?* There was some consistency across answers to this question. The chemistry professor described their biggest challenge “with adopting OER is my other colleagues.” This

professor, like other participants, described resistance from other colleagues for a variety of reasons, including “they don’t know it, they don’t really want to look at it, they don’t want to utilize it.” The biology professor echoed this sense as well. These comments are very much in line with the literature focused on faculty-based barriers to adoption (Belikov & Bodily, 2016; Senack & Donoghue, 2016; Todorinova & Wilkinson, 2020). These comments hint at the idea that some faculty do not realize how their refusal to consider the AOER solution can negatively affect their students, thereby strengthening the position of the thesis and reducing the resources of the antithesis which in turn materially affects the antithesis and their equitable access to and participation in higher education.

But ultimately, the professor stated, “it basically boils down to their workload...it’s just more work,” a sentiment echoed by other participants. There can be a lot of work on the front end to redesign courses for and/or implement AOER. One of the psychology professors asserted that redesigning is challenging, where the particular challenge is figuring out “where I can assess learning.” The professor added, “Yeah, it’s time-consuming.” This seemed to be as much a challenge regarding ancillaries as it is the process of restructuring a course and its assignments. The political science professor observed that it required a lot of time to locate materials, whether in the library or on the web. Again, these findings are in line with other studies in the literature (Belikov & Bodily, 2016; Senack & Donoghue, 2016; Todorinova & Wilkinson, 2020).

However, all participants who were asked as a follow-up whether the front-end time investment was worth it stated that it was, a sentiment expressed across disciplines, departments, and schools. None of them indicated that the time investment was not worth the effort. This suggests an awareness that the use of their resources on the faculty’s part (thesis) benefits the students (antithesis), which shifts the power and resource dynamics that classically characterize

conflict theory. This awareness (hopefully) creates a space for equity and affordability, both of which foster access.

Some of the answers to this question echoed some of the answers to the question of why participants keep using traditional course materials. The time/workload answer is just one such echo (though a particularly loud one). The political science professor stated that for their courses the topics tend to be “more niche” and so “they [AOER] just aren’t out there,” which is what motivated some professors to keep using traditional commercial materials. While the niche notion does not appear to have entered the AOER conversation yet, the idea of there being insufficient AOER for specific topics, disciplines, and courses is not new (Belikov & Bodily, 2016; Senack & Donoghue, 2016; Todorinova & Wilkinson, 2020).

However, other answers emerged as well. The history professor, for example, who took umbrage at making students pay for freely available public domain content, noted that the commentary included in excerpted resources is sometimes invaluable and necessary: “...it’s probably good for students to have that commentary right there,” as sometimes the language in older primary source materials “is a bit archaic and whatnot.” In other words, the material that is freely available in the public domain is invaluable but often lacks the commentary and context including in the traditional commercial texts. The music professor also commented on the necessity, quality, and accessibility of commentary in materials within his field as well. The music professor added that a lot of AOER did not have clear progression either which is a significant challenge. These pedagogical and quality deficits are not unheard of in the literature and represent ongoing issues within the field of AOER. While there are certainly more AOER materials available now, with large-scale repositories making it easier to search for vetted materials than it was five years ago, quality and rigor issues remain.

The education professor noted that one of their biggest challenges was associated with copyright, fair use, and licensing. The professor noted that “the amount of work that it took to make sure we had the right permissions to use” certain materials was significant and led to the decision to only focus on using AOER in 2000-level and lower classes. In addition to that, the professor noted that there is a great deal of material available to sort through, and the volume of material can be overwhelming. The copyright/permissions concern is a common one (Todorinova & Wilkinson, 2020), as is the volume of material available being overwhelming or time-consuming (Belikov & Bodily, 2016).

The physics professor indicated that for them, in order to do it right, “the tough part is really doing it, which is coding those [physics homework] problems,” especially if one is producing one’s own web-based material. The challenges associated with creating AOER to use in one’s own class were echoed by one of the psychology professors: “One big, big, big problem was...getting illustrations, because there’s so many, you know, stipulations of what you can and can’t use,” which also echoes the psychology professor who commented on the amount of work associated with getting the proper permissions. However, creating one’s own materials also gave one control over when and how to update – but that initial creation is a significant investment, echoing the workload concerns.

Question 7. Question seven was the other side of the coin of question six: *how would you describe the benefits of adopting and/or using AOER?* Categorically, the most frequent answer was the cost-savings benefit or the alleviation of financial burdens on students. The atmospheric sciences professor said outright, “So, for me, the benefit is the savings for the student.” The history professor stated that a significant benefit was saving students from “hideously expensive” course materials. While the cost-saving benefits do appear in the literature, they are often

shadowed by workload costs. The number of faculty in this study who cited the financial savings aspect of AOER as being one of the – if not the – major benefit is a deviation from earlier studies of the phenomenon, though more recent studies reveal that this concern has climbed to the top of the considerations list (Todorinova & Wilkinson, 2020). Again, these statements reflect an awareness of the material needs (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006) and resource scarcity (Flores & Flores, 2018) concerns of students and the faculty’s desire to alleviate those issues. This again reduces the tension between thesis and antithesis, diffusing some of the power differential as described by conflict theory (Flores & Flores, 2018).

A few participants highlighted the fact that AOER give students “access to the sources earlier,” according to the health sciences professor, or as one of the psychology professors put it, “The biggest benefit is that the majority of students of the class should be able to obtain the book within the first two weeks of class.” Another psychology professor asserted that “there’s 15 to 20% of students you’re going to reach better because they’ll have quicker access to the text.”

The English professor cited the ability to edit and control the material better as a benefit. The professor stated, “There’s a sense of having the course tailored to them [the students]” which “appeals to a lot” of students. .” One of the psychology professors also indicated that the “personalization of your particular course” is a major benefit for them. The atmospheric sciences professor echoed those statements, stating, “I see nothing but benefits because the material, really, you can highly tailor it to what you need.” This, the professor qualified, gave them greater control of the material so that “you can tailor it so that it's not so intimidating and it becomes more approachable for a student.

The music professor also cited being able to make things easier on the student as a benefit: “...I don’t want any students to fail my classes. If the reason is because they could not

get their hands on the textbook, I take that very seriously. Life is hard enough without that being an issue.” The chemistry professor also discussed a major benefit as being reducing barriers to student success, stating that “if a student wants to learn chemistry, I do not want them to have to jump through hoops other than the ones of having to learn chemistry because that’s a big enough series of hoops to jump through to begin with.” These more compassionate approaches to the students’ viewpoints and experiences is a deviation from the earlier studies which often revealed that faculty were more motivated by the benefits to them than to their students (Belikov & Bodily, 2016). This group of faculty seem more mindful of their students’ needs and the power they, the faculty, have to address their students’ needs. Consequently, the power dynamic between thesis and antithesis becomes less well-defined and disparate, and the opportunity for the students to succeed and reach the higher levels of self-actualization increases. This evolution can only occur where barriers are reduced, and equity is enhanced.

The English professor also indicated that they felt that another benefit was how using AOER influenced how their students saw them. The professor stated, “I feel like it enhances my credibility, too” with the students. The chemistry professor made a similar statement, saying that their use of AOER “gets me off on the right foot” with students. The biology professor cited the interactivity of certain AOER as a benefit and how they engaged students as well as the ability to share more viewpoints through different modalities and resource types. The students are “getting the same information...presented in different ways which, at least for me, for some challenging concepts in particular” is useful for helping the students learn.

The political science professor cited convenience as a major benefit for them. “For me personally,” the professor explained, the big benefit “is having easy access when I travel...I usually travel a fair amount, COVID has changed that, but usually I travel a fair amount.” Being

able to access the course materials electronically while the professor is traveling (and did not have to lug all the course materials with them) was significant to them. This professor characterized this convenience as a benefit to the students as well, stating that “that easy, immediate access” meant students had access day one of class, and “that instantaneous access is probably really good.” While increased access to resources (and therefore higher education) is addressed in the literature (Todorinova & Wilkinson, 2020), the notion of convenience has not always formed a part of the discussion. However, it was brought up in this study, and not just with this particular respondent. In some cases, convenience may be conflated with notions of access, which is not wholly illogical or inaccurate. However, convenience does not necessarily appear in the literature as a major motivator or benefit, though it is a selling point. It is difficult to situate the idea of convenience in terms of Maslow or conflict theory, except where convenience becomes a commodity only accessible to the thesis, reflecting a lack of equity and social justice.

The physics professor shared that they felt having complete control over the material was a benefit, from a professor’s perspective. The professor stated, “I’m a tenured professor. And you know, we’re really touchy about, you know, people coming in and telling us how to do things.” This sentiment extended to the selection and use of course materials. The professor went on to say,

You’re allowed to change your mind and other people are, too. You know, it’s not a big emotional thing. So, but, you’ve got to have control. If you’re going to take responsibility, and you’re going to be given the authority [to teach], then that sits with you, you have to be in control.

The professor's point extended into acknowledging that course materials become a place where you can connect with or alienate students. The professor noted that "you got to be on their good side. Not completely on their good side...but you got to be flexible, and you kind of have to let them know that you have their best interests at heart." These observations are somewhat conflicting, revealing a bit of dissonance that disrupts the thesis/antithesis dynamic. Where the professor acknowledges that they possess the authority and power, which characterize the thesis, they also characterize the students, the antithesis, as possessing power in this context as well. This hints that perhaps the students, the antithesis, have more power in the course materials adoption process than they realize, perhaps even more than the thesis realize.

One of the psychology professors noted that when using certain AOER, the professor is able to connect their students with "more relevant and more recent" resources, citing the "recency of content" as being a significant benefit. Relevance was also a benefit for the education professor. One of the other psychology professors named their number one benefit as "reducing barriers to higher education." Relevance and currency used to relate to criticism in AOER when the movement first began, but these topics have gained importance as the movement has developed. Recency of content, or currency, is a significant consideration in many fields, and it has emerged as important to faculty and students alike (Todorinova & Wilkinson, 2020).

Other benefits for students emerged. One of the psychology professors noted that AOER "does relieve some stress from them, from students," which the health sciences professor echoed. The health sciences professor noted that when the students had access to the course materials earlier, the students "are less anxious" which in turn cuts down on emails, and them trying to set up...appointments." This professor also indicated they felt it reduced student embarrassment

related to being unprepared. Mitigating the impact of such negative impacts on the student has the potential to increase their academic success, once again connecting AOER with student success (Colvard, Watson, & Park, 2018). These comments also reveal how AOER contribute to the meeting of emotional needs which are critical to satisfying needs in the hierarchy required to achieve the highest levels of success (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006).

Question 8. The eighth question was intended to give the participants a chance to talk about interactions with students regarding AOER: *describe any interactions you have had with students about your use of AOER.* The physics professor indicated that the technical hiccups in their “homebrewed” OER resources sometimes irritated the students but otherwise “I’ve never had a pushback on open source ever. They’ve [the students] never said ‘this isn’t good enough.’”

One of the psychology professors related that students often express confusion at first: Sometimes they’re like, what’s the access code [for the course material]? You know, like where do I put it in? Or, you know, where’s the ISBN? And I’m like, well, it’s on there, but you don’t need to do anything with it.

The professor indicated that once the students understood the nature of the AOER course materials, they would say things like “Wow, that’s so nice!” The professor further reported that students liked the ease of the materials “a lot” and that “I’ve never had a complaint” in their AOER courses. “And in fact,” the professor added, “in classes where we have OER, my evaluations are higher! And so, there’s a global halo effect.”

The music professor reported that in their private music lessons with students, their students expressed excitement and curiosity about what resources a new semester would bring. “There’s actually, believe it or not, some excitement about what new resource they’re going to have. And because they’re not worried about how much it is going to cost this time, at least my

perception of it, is that they are more engaged with the material,” the professor related. The professor added that in evaluations, students will recommend the professor’s lessons and courses because of the professor’s use of AOER. The professor termed this “peer influence” as students comment on the affordability of the professor’s courses.

The English professor noted that they did not remember specific conversations or interactions with students about AOER. However, the professor did report that when one has been a teacher for a while, “you learn how to read the room,” and that from the professor’s perspective, “there’s a good vibe in the room” when students realize they do not have to buy a textbook. “There’s a sense of appreciation, a sigh of relief that they don’t have to spend” money on course materials, the professor noted. These student reactions reveal the alleviation of material stress which can pave the way for the realization and fulfillment of the higher needs in the hierarchy (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006). Additionally, it suggests that the resolution of the tension between thesis and antithesis is possible to some degree.

The atmospheric sciences professor noted that “some students are very happy” about their use of AOER. However, the professor also noted that “I’ve had both positive and negative encounters.” This was qualified by saying “most people are happy that they’re not having to buy a textbook and will wade through whatever to get the benefit” but that some students do not seem to like the AOER experience and think it is insufficient for what the students want.

The chemistry professor likewise reported a mix of positive and negative reactions. “They have been overwhelmingly positive,” the professor reported, but “there have been a couple of negative ones. Very, very few...less than five negative ones [comments].” Much like the atmospheric sciences professor, the students in the chemistry professor’s class did not seem

to like the AOER experience and thought it was insufficient. The professor stated that those negative responses

all stemmed from the fact of ‘my friend is another section with another professor, and they’re using this book and all of these things’...one student was just absolutely convinced that my resources of my homework were not the same quality as the other section...but basically, what that boils down to is that their roommate...who’s in another section did better on the first exam than they did...they convinced themselves that if it had been, but if they’d been learning the other book, they would have done better.

The professor noted that if one has taught long enough, “you’re gonna know, students do bad and they start looking for excuses other than, you know, ‘I didn’t start studying til 7pm,’ you know? That clearly had nothing to do with it.” Ultimately, though, the professor felt that “everybody appreciates that they have easy access to a textbook.”

One of the psychology professors indicated that they have had “lots of interactions with them [students]” about courses in which the professor does NOT use AOER. The professor reported that the students will ask they the professor does not use AOER in their courses like one of the other psychology professors. The professor also reported that some students who have taken one of the other AOER psychology courses have asked if the professor teaches other courses that use AOER. The students “are looking for options to take [courses] that have these types of resources.”

Another psychology professor (the other psychology professor that prompted students to ask the professor in the previous paragraph why they did not use AOER) indicated that they think students are “thrilled they don’t have to pay for a textbook” and are very communicative in a positive way about the platform the professor uses. The professor reported that “there’s much

more engagement, I think, with the readings [on the part of the students], and they like that, as opposed to a traditional text option.” This professor also reported that they used the non-AOER platform in one of the doctoral classes they took recently that is also used in the professor’s department at the study institution. The professor stated that from their student experience of the non-AOER platform, it made them appreciate students’ feelings about it and why many of the students are so positive about their AOER experience. This invigorated the professor’s desire to use AOER: “It was frustrating. I was like, I’m not gonna do this to them.” This is the only professor who has had the student and faculty member experience.

Another psychology professor reported they have “had nothing but like good, but good things from students to say about” their AOER experience. This professor reported that they “had to kind of put myself in their [students’] shoes,” which helped guide the professor’s choices in resources and how they used them. It also strengthened the professor’s desire to advocate for their students and support them. Advocacy on behalf of the students, though it appears several times in answers in this study, does not necessarily appear in the literature in terms of motivating faculty. It is worth noting that most of the professors who discuss the idea of advocating for students are psychology professors, though the physics professors discusses it as well, though not in those terms.

The education professor did not feel that they could answer this question. The professor reported that they and their colleagues “received written feedback in the pilot phase of fall 2020” but that “it wasn’t the most reliable or valid data.” However, the professor did say that from what they got, the students “are really seeing the benefit of the [AOER] materials, they are really investing in the learning.”

The biology professor described a particular AOER resource they have used that garnered feedback. The professor reported that “some students have said that they really enjoy doing them [simulations] and that they really help them to kind of visualize trick concepts better.” However, it should be noted that this is specific to the resource and does not necessarily reflect on the AOER nature of the resource in question. This represents the most feedback the professor has gotten on their use of AOER, though the professor noted that they were “really interested in hearing feedback,” especially in terms of if the students “feel like they learned less.”

The political science professor reported that their interactions with students about the resources focused more on things that are not necessarily unique to OER, such as being able to increase font size or change fonts for easier reading or the quick and convenient access. However, some students told the professor that they “really want a tactile [experience], want something they can highlight in manually because that helps their retention of knowledge.” But the professor reported not having many, if any, conversations with students about cost.

Two professors reported that they had not had student interactions about AOER. One was a psychology professor (which, in light of some of the previous experiences was noteworthy). The history professor likewise indicated that they had not had interactions with the students about the AOER resources. “They do have to interact with them [the resources] because...there’s a near weekly writing assignment,” the professor reported, “but I don’t really have students talk to me about OER.” In other words, the students interact with the resources and interact with the professor about them, but not in a sense that refers to the nature of the resources as OER. One wonders about the students at the study institution and what their contact or experiences with AOER have been. In these classes in which the professors have little to say of student interactions, one wonders if that means that students are becoming aware of AOER.

Question 9. The final question provided the participants with the opportunity to provide additional insight and information regarding their perceptions and experiences of AOER as faculty. This question was posed thus: *Please share any additional thoughts, observations, concerns, or experiences related to your experience as a faculty member with regard to AOER.* This question definitely garnered a range of responses. Some professors, like the political science professor, noted that they “would like to explore” more OER and would eventually put more resources and time toward creating an OER or AER and contributing them to an OER repository.

The history professor ruminated on the fact that they had to pursue getting a license for Adobe Acrobat so they would be able to edit pdf documents for their OER efforts. The professor also ruminated on the variety of vintage films available on the Internet as well as 17th, 18th, and 19th century documents that Adobe Acrobat enabled the professor to edit for more meaningful excerpting from the professor’s perspective.

The English professor taught abroad in both the Middle East and China. The professor noted that for the Chinese students to whom the professor taught English as a second language, they seemed to have a feeling that the OER material is “tailored to them” and that by using OER created by other faculty, students seemed to regard those resources with an “added level of credibility and immediacy.” The professor also felt that “there’s something psychological that goes on there that’s very positive.”

One of the psychology professors stated that they felt the use of AOER should be treated as “an individual decision for each professor” rather than being a top-down mandate. The professor did not like the idea of a top-down mandate, whether it came “from the state, the university, the Board of Regents, or even just your own department chair.” Instead of top-down mandates, it would be better for administrators to use encouragement, “just putting it out

there...taking the marketing perspective: you want customers to adopt and purchase this product. So how do you market it? So, use marketing techniques,” the professor suggested. The professor also recommended “just bringing it [AOER] up more and more and more and having it be a natural part of [departmental] conversations” to obtain buy-in. The professor also advocated transparency, “like disclosing the positives and negatives of it.”

The professor agreed that AOER is a good idea, but the professor stated that people should have the right to make their own decision. The professor added that “you just like put the price tag next to them [all the options, AOER and tradition commercial materials]” – that price tag “will factor into their decision.” The professor closed with stating that they “still think of OER as not great quality” and having problems. But they were clearly open to the adoption and use of AOER. This concern reflects Jhangiani, Pitt, Hendricks, Key, and Lalonde’s (2016) finding that administrative policies and mandates can affect how faculty perceive the notion.

In contrast, the atmospheric sciences professor felt that “unless there is some sort of push, larger push, by the system or the university to adopt more OERs, people are not gonna pick it up on their own because of what we were talking about, the barriers...” The professor noted that “if we really do want to increase, we could, you could have learning communities; you could have, you know, university presentations” that would allow faculty members to see the value in AOER. On the other hand, the professor did acknowledge that a certain level of choice would be best in terms of gaining buy-in. There is a need for a plan, but not mandates, “not mandating, not telling you like, oh, chemistry needs to do this. Let them self choose.” The professor added there was a need for more faculty education on topics like copyright and a need to reach out to other institutions and learn about their experiences with AOER. This too reflects the role that administrative policies and support may have on faculty perceptions (Jhangiani et al., 2016).

The biology professor reported thinking that faculty:

are moving in the right direction. And I have been a little bit surprised...and not. So, not surprised that there's a lot of resistance toward moving away from traditional textbooks.

But I've also been surprised at how much support there is for it.

This professor also indicated a desire to “get a lot more into using...and incorporating OERs or AOERs that involve ‘renewable’ resources...renewable assignments.” They described “renewable assignments” as “so like students would create something, especially like infographics” that future classes could make use of and build on. The professor felt this was a good alternative to traditional writing assignments. The professor felt that just using AOER was not enough. To really leverage AOER, faculty should have “students help create them” which the professor felt “would also go a long way towards, you know, I don't have to spend quite as much time finding all of these other resources myself, if students are helping to create them in the first place.”

The physics professor closed their interview by characterizing their AOER experience thus: “it's been a really positive experience altogether...the students, it's been overwhelmingly positive, really from everybody.” The professor felt that experience must be positive because “if it weren't being positive, no one liked it, I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't do it because in the end, the students have a vote one way or another.”

One psychology professor felt that their major concerns moving forward with AOER is “that the campus bookstore and ‘big publishing’ may have usurped some of the energy from OER by saying that ‘we will have this one price thing that will keep things, prices, low.’” Because the university seems to think the “one price thing” is a suitable solution to the cost of expensive texts, the professor feels like “I got to hold back and see what direction the university

goes.” The professor also added that they believed “higher quality and lower cost is where all information ultimately goes, and so, you know, textbooks will be no exception.”

This psychology professor also stated that “I just get very happy when I’m able to save students money. It means a lot to me.” The professor also believed that with AOER efforts and students,

what we’ve done is we’ve made them a little more resilient. When the next crisis occurs, which ultimately will whether, you know, their engine blows up, or they have an unexpected heat bill, or whatever, you know that \$75, \$100, \$125 I’m saving a student in class is going to...give them the ability to deal with that. And that matters.

The music professor, like a few of the other participants, had participated in an OER-focused faculty learning community, as noted earlier. In their closing comments, the professor noted that their experience has “been very positive.” The professor discussed how far textbook adoption practices have come since 2006, at the study institution and at large. The professor closed with the statement that they “think it’s [the AOER movement] is going to development and continue to be made more accessible, so I think that’s the important thing.”

One of the psychology professors expressed disbelief that more people were not getting on board with AOER. The professor admitted to understanding that some faculty prefer to do what is familiar and that there are challenges associated with AOER. Nevertheless, the professor commented, “I don’t see a reason that more people aren’t moving towards that [AOER], to be honest.” The professor added, “Someone would have to really convince me [of] the value of having students buy a \$300, \$200 something dollar text for one semester.”

The psychology professor that there are many resources out there “that students are already into” like podcasts and Youtube channels that the professor thinks students are “going to

walk away from a class” that relies solely on traditional commercial materials. The professor closed by theorizing that perhaps some faculty that stick with traditional commercial materials do so because that is how they were taught. This the professor could understand to a degree. However, “there is a lot of consideration of how we disseminate information to students...I just think there’s a lot better ways to do something that makes something stick for a student than purchasing really expensive texts.”

Another psychology professor felt that their students were “on top of their assignments for those [AOER] courses, versus the [proprietary platform-based] ones because of the difficulty students had just even getting started.” The professor critiqued the notion of complicated traditional commercial platforms, noting that in classes that use such platforms “you were having to get over the initial learning curve of this new platform before you could actually start learning the content.” They had not experienced such issues in those courses where they were using AOER; AOER let them and their students get into the meat of the course far faster and deeper.

This sense is echoed in one of the closing statements of the education professor. That professor stated that their experience had “been positive, but I should preface that to say it’s been positive because I was part of the design of the course.” The professor explained that being part of the redesign meant that they understood “the way behind all of the decisions we made on which materials to use and in what order,” giving them more control and connection to what the professors were teaching.

The health sciences professor’s closing comments focused on the need for administrative support. The professor stated, “I wish we can really get administration on board. I think there’s, the seed has kind of been planted, but they haven’t really gotten behind the whole community of us [AOER users].” Like the psychology professor (and several other participants), the health

sciences professor comment negatively on the campus bookstore and the problems associated with it in the adoption process. The professor also commented on the institution's newly-invested president, stating

...he knows the demographics; he knows the population that we serve. And like I said, some of them already set up for failure. Right? They're not set up for success. So, why are we not in their corner...their success is my success, right? I don't set out to fail students. I want them to achieve the goal.

This professor also echoed the psychology professor in their criticism of traditional commercial publishers, observing that the publishers have

made money off of us for so long that it's ridiculous. And...then the publication companies want you as an expert to publish, and then they want you to charge that much for your book. No, no. I'm gonna publish. I'm gonna publish them for free.

The chemistry professor opened their closing comments with the statement that "I am very appreciate that [study institution], there seems to be a fairly – I don't want to say large, but – a growing community of other professors interested in OER." The professor felt that "this is just going to have to be a grassroots movement where we're just gonna have to build our numbers slowly, one by one." The professor discussed opportunities in which they had participated at the study institution that they felt reflected a growing interest and support in OER. The professor expressed hope that "the intractables will slowly come around to realizing that this is not for every course...and it's unrealistic to have all your resources for a lot of these courses [be OER]." One certainly does hope that the movement continues to grow, especially since higher education is getting increasingly unaffordable and therefore accessible.

Responses to the Research Question

To refresh – the research question is: *how do faculty at the study institution perceive AOER in undergraduate course material adoptions?* The short answer to this question is: it depends on the individual and a variety of factors associated with their experience. Based on the answers presented here, the factors involved could potentially include discipline, type of faculty (e.g., traditional classroom versus clinical), whether the department is open to the idea of AOER, level of familiarity, workload, and length of time teaching. However, this list is not exhaustive, and being a qualitative study, the correlation of factors is not part of the analysis. The answers to the questions should not necessarily be considered in a causative light either. Therefore, the answer to the question is: faculty at the student institution have a diverse and wide-ranging set of perceptions regarding AOER in undergraduate course material adoptions that hinge on a diverse and wide-ranging variety of factors which were beyond the purview of this study. They are, by and large, primarily positive about the adoption of AOER but acknowledge that AOER have some benefits and challenges.

Faculty largely believe that the movement and practice of adopting and using AOER are increasing, but there is a need for administrative support, though not necessarily administrative mandates, especially given the level of resistance the participants experience within their own departments. Faculty have had largely positive experiences in their interactions with students about AOER. However, not all of the courses taught by participants were fully AOER. There are legitimate reasons why some courses have not been redesigned and may never be redesigned. There are cases in which it is unlikely that AOER could replace traditional commercial materials. Platforms seem to be another issue in which there is something of a consensus; Most faculty appreciate the bells and whistles and how they can contribute to student learning. However, the

attendant technical issues undermine their utility. There is a consensus that the primary motivating factor and benefit for faculty to adopt AOER is cost-saving for the student, while others talked about the level of control one can have over AOER in terms of customization and tailoring, which is highly attractive in terms of academic freedom.

Implications

The resounding sense that emerges from these interviews is that faculty are aware that their students struggle materially which in turn can lead them to struggle academically. A student's academic success cannot be solely situated in their academic performance. If they cannot afford the textbook because they are not financially stable enough, their ability to participate academically is curtailed. They may also be struggling in other material ways, such as food, housing, and/or transportation insecurity. These become roadblocks to their access to and participation in higher education. The meeting of the more basic needs is a prerequisite to the realization of their higher needs which are necessary for academic success (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006). In other words, students who lack the resources to get their basic needs met are not equipped to participate in – or in some cases even access – higher education. Such material barriers represent a significant inequity in higher education.

Of note through the lens of conflict theory is that many of the professors did not seem to really realize the power differential inherent in their ability to select course texts. It is merely one of their job duties, from their viewpoint, and an onerous one at that. They do not recognize themselves as the thesis in the conflict theory dynamic. However, they do recognize that their students are vulnerable, though without realizing that their students are the antithesis, having little meaningful power in the course material adoption process.

Some of the professors articulated the idea that students DO have power when it comes to course materials – that student voices are heard in the classroom, in evaluations, and in other ways as well, such as expressing a preference for AOER courses over the same courses taught with traditional commercial materials. In other words, while there is a power differential here in line with conflict theory, the relative participants in this dynamic may be largely unaware. The participants did not necessarily acknowledge or articulate their authority and power over students regarding course materials adoption in a conflict theory manner. However, they did acknowledge and articulate their ability to positively influence the experiences of students in this context. This contradicts the conflict theory notion that the thesis always strives to defend its position and retain control over resources (Flores & Flores, 2018). Additionally, the acknowledgement of their ability to positively influence the experiences of students reveals excellent spaces for articulating issues of equity, ethics, and social justice as well as discussing the myriad ways faculty (and universities) can address the needs, both material and not, of their students.

Summary

Like any complex organization in the 21st century, higher education is a complicated matrix of people, policies, procedures, practices, and politics. Agendas abound, and not all of them are working in tandem or in everybody's best interests. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that at the center of higher education are students who are real people, not just price points or revenue sources, with a variety of material and non-material needs. Some of these needs are obviously the purview of the institutions that serve these students, such as academic support, and those institutions have an obligation to meet those needs.

Students pursuing degrees find themselves facing many financial stressors and burdens. Sometimes financial aid is insufficient to meet the needs of students. Students who use loans are

facing unprecedented levels of debt that can undermine their future prospects. Taking on more debt to ensure that they can pay their bills is an option but not necessarily good or feasible.

Reducing the impact of key financial stressors can help reduce the need for debt and/or the burden of having to make challenging decisions. One way of reducing financial stressors is to reduce costs or eliminate them when possible. Considering the substantial cost of the average course textbook, looking to reduce the price tag of course texts and materials seems as good a place as any to start, especially given that it can be and has been done. AOER represent a potential solution to the cost of course materials.

One of the key elements in adopting and implementing AOER into the classroom are faculty. They represent the fulcrum in terms of getting such resources selected, adopted, and implemented into the classroom. However, there are several barriers associated with faculty in terms of AOER. Understanding their perceptions may help eliminate faculty-related barriers to the adoption of AOER.

The author has many personal and professional reasons for undertaking this problem of practice. Their experiences as a student and working with students have informed their decision to choose this topic. AOER may be one way of alleviating costs for students in one area of higher education. Furthermore, such resources represent a means of improving affordability and accessibility in general in higher education and echo the CPED principles of ethics, equity, and social justice that should underline all endeavors undertaken by academic institutions.

In this incarnation of the dissertation, the problem of practice has been revisited and contextualized. The author's positionality statement, reflecting her investment in and relationship to the problem and related topics both personally and professional, has been shared, though in a more condensed form. The connection between this dissertation and the Carnegie Project on the

Education Doctorate (CPED) Principles has been made. It has discussed the conceptual and theoretical frameworks which will guide the dissertation.

This incarnation also contains an overview of the research data. It discusses the nature and features of the data, including the type of data and its collection. It identifies and discusses the limitations of the available data. It also discusses any concerns related to the ethical use of the data, from IRB considerations to possible conflicts of interest on the part of the author. It also examines and explores the challenges of interpreting and using the data, including such issues as technological disruptions. Most importantly, this manuscript presents the study's findings, sharing the results in both tabular and narrative formats. It describes the six major themes generated from the participants' responses, exploring concepts underlying those themes.

Using the themes and direct quotations from the interviews, this manuscript also directly addresses the research question. It explores how the themes and quotations provide an answer to the question of *how do faculty at the study institution perceive AOER in undergraduate course material adoptions?* By and large, the answer to that is that AOER are a viable though problematic alternative to expensive traditional commercial course materials. Many of the participants regard AOER as an admirable and inevitable direction in higher education and even society, given the nature of an information-driven economy.

Almost unanimously, the participants agree that identifying, adopting, implementing, and using AOER is a time-intensive, labor-intensive process, but that the front-end investment is very much worth the effort. Several participants felt that there is not sufficient administrative and/or supervisory support for AOER, but they felt that the growing AOER community on campus was a step in the right direction. Some felt that the adoption of AOER more widely across campus is inevitable, though at least one respondent indicated that the adoption of AOER

should not be mandated by administration. This individual felt that AOER should be a choice, especially in terms of academic freedom, but that support is needed for faculty to make informed decisions about AOER. Most respondents also felt that the quality of AOER has improved, and that the availability of ancillary materials had increased. However, at least one professor indicated that in spite of these advancements, AOER still did not, for the most part, have the needed bells and whistles to be truly competitive with traditional commercial products. This same professor also indicated they felt that quality was still an issue for AOER.

This manuscript also presents the implications of these findings. Again, while difficult to generalize in some ways, in other ways it is quite easy to generalize, yielding cogent implications. Among those implications is highlighting the need for administrative and supervisory support; the need for learning opportunities for faculty about AOER and attendant issues (e.g., copyright), especially as a means of outreach and promotion; and the need to examine the unique challenges of AOER within individual disciplines. It is worth noting that the findings and implications reflect the tension between the thesis and antithesis of conflict theory; faculty remain the thesis and students remain the antithesis, but it is clear that some faculty are aware of this tension and disparity. Those faculty wish to advocate for students and see students having a voice in the course material adoption process. The findings and implications do not directly and explicitly reflect the application of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, though several of the faculty did acknowledge how the expense of course materials did negatively affect the material needs of students, which the faculty wished to mitigate.

The next manuscript will leverage these findings and implications for implementation into higher education policy and practice. It is the obligation of the educational leader and

scholar-practitioner to leverage those findings and implications in that way. It will look at that obligation and its attendant application in the local context and beyond.

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Manuscript 3: Faculty Perceptions of Open and Affordable Education Resources

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Manuscript 3: Faculty Perceptions of Open and Affordable Education Resources

Summary of the Problem of Practice

The phenomenon that originally gave rise to this dissertation is food insecurity among college students. There are several reasons why college students experience food insecurity. Some students grow up experiencing food insecurity as part of the socio-economic conditions of their homes. Some students experience food insecurity as part of the cost of college. To some degree, it does not matter when the food insecurity begins. What does matter is trying to alleviate the students' experiences of food insecurity. This necessitates alleviating the financial stresses that students experience – reducing expenses for students where possible.

A significant financial pain point for students that institutions of higher learning can potentially address is course texts and materials. One way of reducing course text and materials expenses that has gained visibility is the use of open educational resources (OER) and affordable education resources (AER), also known collectively as AOER. AOER represent free or affordable resources that, in essence, cost the student nothing or are more affordable compared to traditional commercial course materials.

The author of this dissertation is a library faculty member and has worked in libraries for over 20 years. Arguably, library resources represent one of the earliest recognizable forms of affordable education resources. The author knows how academic libraries support students by providing access to research resources, whether print books or scholarly journals. The author has also been involved in the OER movement in her state for many years now and has seen how

much money OER has saved students in her state since the state academic library consortium began its efforts on the AOER front.

However, not everyone is on the AOER bandwagon. The lynchpin regarding the adoption of course materials takes the form of faculty. Faculty are responsible for identifying, adopting, and implementing course texts and materials. They wield the power to decide between an expensive commercial text and AOER. However, at the study institution, there is not widespread adoption of AOER. This is not to say there is not any adoption; in fact, there is some adoption. Therefore, the question of why more faculty have not joined the AOER bandwagon arises.

Consequently, understanding faculty's views of AOER is important for laying the foundation for more meaningful conversations with them regarding the benefits to students of adopting AOER. The problem of practice is how to encourage faculty to consider the adoption of AOER in lieu of traditional commercial texts where possible in undergraduate courses, with an eye toward reducing the cost of course materials for students. To that end, this study examines the perceptions of faculty at a public four-year institution in the Southeast of open education resources and affordable education resources (AOER).

Literature Review and Conceptual Frameworks

A considerable number of students do not purchase course materials because of the cost. This in turn affects their ability to perform academically and persist in college. Institutions of higher learning have many ways of supporting students academically to increase retention and persistence. In deference to the many financial stresses college students face, college have the option of adopting AOER instead of traditional textbooks. According to Senack and Donoghue (2016), the cost of college textbooks has increased by 73% since 2006, which is more than four times the rate of inflation. The authors add that an individual textbook can cost more than \$200

with some reaching prices as high as \$400 (Senack & Donoghue, 2016). AOER represent no-cost or low-cost alternatives to expensive course materials.

The literature reveals a great deal about AOER benefits to students. Colvard, Watson, and Park (2018) note that OER in particular have several benefits for students which are measurable across several student-related metrics. The authors found OER can do more than help students save money and address concerns regarding student debt concerns (Colvard, Watson, & Park, 2018). Colvard, Watson, and Park (2018) report that such resources can improve overall course grades as well as decrease D, F, and Withdrawal letter grades (DFW) for students. The authors also found that Pell recipient students, part-time students, and historically underserved populations experience improved course grades and decreased DFW rates (Colvard, Watson, & Park, 2018).

What this amounts to, according to the authors, is the OER have the capability to address issues of affordability, attainment gap concerns, completion, and learning (Colvard, Watson, & Park, 2018). However, student perceptions of these resources have bearing on their use as well. As Jhangiani and Jhangiani (2017) observe, for all the benefits obtainable through OER, particularly the alleviation of students' financial stresses, students are not likely to use them if those resources do not meet myriad needs and preferences on the parts of students. Furthermore, it is worth noting that such benefits are really only consistently attainable if faculty are adopting, promoting, and/or supporting OER.

One of the key elements of getting students to use AOER is their consistent adoption and use on the part of classroom faculty. This makes faculty one of the key stakeholders in the adoption of classroom resources, including AOER. Belikov and Bodily (2016) examined faculty-related barriers and incentives regarding AOER adoption and what incentives seemed to support

the adoption of such resources. The primary barriers were categorized into *need more information* (faculty indicated that they wanted/needed more information about OERs before they would consider them); *lack of discoverability* (faculty could not identify or locate appropriate OERs easily); and *confusing OER with digital resources* (faculty did not understand the differences between traditional digital resources like databases and OERs) (Belikov & Bodily, 2016).

In terms of incentives, faculty reported realizing that adopting such resources can save students money, but this does not necessarily reflect the (a) a meaningful understanding of the cost of higher education, (b) the financial stresses that students experience, and (c) what the ramifications of those stresses are (namely discontinuing college). Furthermore, acknowledging that AOER can save students money was not towards the top of the list of benefits that faculty identified for such resources. Jhangiani, Pitt, Hendricks, Key, and Lalonde (2016) identified additional factors which have bearing on AOER adoptions such as faculty's willingness to share teaching/learning materials, not to mention personality traits such as openness. Additionally, according to Jhangiani et al. (2016), institutional policies regarding AOER play a role in faculty's perceptions of those resources. Ultimately, understanding how faculty perceive AOER is critical to addressing and removing barriers to the adoption of those resources.

Many librarians advocate strongly for the use of AOER as they perceive such resources as tools for promoting equity and social justice, key principles of CPED (Maron et al., 2019). However, AOER are not without their barriers and problems. Of significance to the current study is how faculty perceive AOER which in turn affects their willingness to adopt and use such resources – a decision which affects students financially.

The frameworks selected through which to examine the study phenomenon are conflict theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Consequently, the conceptual framework for this dissertation is two-pronged. Conflict theory emerges from the work of Karl Marx and is predicated on economic elements that influence structures within a society. Ostensibly, conflict theory explains how groups fight for and maintain power over resources, often scarce resources (Flores & Flores, 2018). This in turn provides insight into how some groups possess more privilege, access, or advantage in comparison to other groups, particularly framed in capitalistic terms (Flores & Flores, 2018).

The choice of this lens emerges from the tension between faculty and students. In the context of the PoP, the choice of conflict theory is meant to reflect the power differential between faculty and students. Faculty make the decisions about which texts and materials to use for a course; they select, adopt, and implement the materials into their curricula and courses. Faculty seem somewhat resistant to the idea of using AOER for a variety of reasons. However, of immediate relevance is the idea that quality course texts and materials can only be found within the traditional publishing model. The work of most faculty most often flows through the traditional publishing model, and many faculty members publish textbooks, which allows them to make extra money. The use of AOER may be seen as a challenge to that opportunity for enrichment, not to mention legitimate (though increasingly unfounded) concerns about the quality of AOER. In other words, faculty wish to remain in power; they represent the thesis commonly associated with conflict theory.

In opposition to that thesis are students. Students have no power in the decision-making process regarding textbook and course material selection. While they may comment on the cost of materials for a single course in faculty evaluations (as this author has done before), that

commentary does not necessarily motivate the faculty to change the process. The process as it stands serves the faculty. That the process may actually be hurting the very students that the faculty teach and endeavor to support academically does not appear to occur to the faculty or have bearing on their decision-making process. Therefore, the faculty continue to select expensive texts and materials that students cannot afford. The students do not have power. They are the antithesis to the faculty's position.

Within the conflict theory structure, the tension between the thesis and the antithesis can be resolved in one of two ways: accommodation or revolution. In this case, the accommodation is the use of AOER. Faculty still exert power in the process; they still make the decisions regarding the selection, adoption, and implementation of the materials into the course. However, in electing to use AOER, faculty are considering the financial burdens of their students and alleviating those burdens – even in a small way – by making the choice.

The other framework is Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Obviously, an institution of higher learning should provide academic support to its students since all things academic fall within its purview. However, an individual's ability to academically perform is not solely impacted by the availability of academic support or the student's own ability to academically perform. Regardless of how intelligent a student is, their ability to academically perform can be affected by a variety of factors, not the least of which falls under the heading of basic human needs. To put it bluntly, a malnourished student is not going to perform as well as they could, even if they have the academic competency to do so.

This flow of cause-and-effect echoes Abraham Maslow's notions of human motivation. At its most basic, this hierarchy demonstrates how people must have their most basic biological needs fulfilled before they can focus on achieving higher needs, with self-actualization as the

traditional top of the pyramid used to represent the hierarchy (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006). The initial theory had five facets; subsequent revisions added additional levels, with the most recent iteration having eight. Regardless, three aspects of the hierarchy are of immediate relevance to this study. These levels are the lowest level in which basic physiological/biological human needs like food, air, shelter, and water are identified; the fourth level, which is the self-esteem level and encompasses the need for achievement; and the fifth level, which is the self-actualization level and includes problem-solving and achieving an individual's potential (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006).

The basic premise is that if an individual cannot get their basic needs met – those physiological, biological needs – they cannot advance up the hierarchy to realize their potential. Without adequate food and shelter, an individual cannot focus on the activities and processes needed to reach the next level of need. If students struggle material to meet their basic biological needs, they cannot focus on reaching the higher-level needs which include two crucial levels needed for learning and academic achievement. In a very real way without the physiological needs met, students physiologically cannot necessarily perform academically at a level that will ensure their persistence and retention – in other words, realizing their academic potential that facilitates their graduation.

Following the study, Maslow's hierarchy remains relevant. Students have material needs, basic biological needs, and higher-order needs. All of these needs must be met in order for students to realize their potential in terms of academic performance, persistence, and success. One way in which institutions of higher learning can support students is to help them fulfill those needs. One way in which institutions of higher learning can help fulfill those needs is reducing the financial stresses that attend pursuing a college degree. One way that institutions of higher

learning can reduce those financial stresses is to adopt and implement AOER. In other words, it seems like a logical framework for understanding the significance and importance of AOER.

The conflict theory prong of the conceptual framework appears less relevant, at least in the context of this group of participants. This group of participants made statements to the effect that their decision to pursue AOER was motivated by the material needs of students, an acknowledgement that students experience resource scarcity. If faculty are the ostensible thesis in the dynamic, they would not care about or would wish to perpetuate the resource scarcity of the antithesis, the students. However, the faculty asserted that they want to reduce the students' resource scarcity. This is an articulated rejection on the part of faculty to maintain power.

Furthermore, the faculty also asserted that the students do have power in the dynamic. Several of the participants indicated that student opinions of course materials, cost, value, and use also drive the decisions that the faculty make about the materials for their courses. This suggests that the power of the thesis is not so stable or complete and that the antithesis does have a means by which to participate in the dynamic to even the distribution of power. In other words, the antithesis is not so powerless as often suggested by conflict theory.

In light of these assessments, the application of conflict theory as a conceptual or theoretical framework is not so appropriate *as applied to the faculty*. It is worth noting that the publishers of traditional commercial (and expensive) course materials and platforms could most certainly be characterized as the thesis in the course material discussion, with the antithesis being faculty and even institutions of higher learning, along with students. In that case, faculty and institutions of higher learning should perhaps be categorized as unwilling agents to the thesis. It is also worth considering that other faculty, especially faculty who make substantive income from textbook publications, might have a vested interest in fully embracing the role of the thesis

and perpetuating the power differential and resource scarcity that typify conflict theory. However, in this context, the motivations of the faculty make conflict theory inappropriate.

Data and Study Exploration

Since this study sought to understand the experiences and perceptions of faculty regarding AOER, it made sense to use a qualitative approach, making use of semi-structured interviews. Using this approach, new data was collected. While this approach and the acquisition of the type of data are not new, such a study had not been conducted at this university before, providing new insight to the phenomenon of AOER at the institution. Given the study's qualitative approach, inductive data analysis was an appropriate analytical approach, producing themes that were not necessarily surprising or innovative but were in keeping with the findings of other studies of the phenomenon in the literature.

No unique terms emerged. The participants' self-described level of familiarity with AOER as a concept and a phenomenon is reflected in this lack of unique terms. No confounding situations emerged. The use of inductive data analysis was an attempt to reduce bias and preconceived notions or expectations on the part of the researcher.

However, limitations did emerge. Psychology professors dominated the sample. There was not equitable representation of hard sciences versus social sciences versus humanities in the group of participants. The study also did not ask how long faculty members have worked in higher education or whether they were tenured, factors which may affect how secure faculty felt in pursuing AOER resources. Knowing length of time in higher education and whether faculty were tenured could have shed light on the participants' choices and experiences. As one professor noted, since they had been teaching for over 15 years they felt comfortable not having a structured text from which to teach. However, the professor noted that if they were newer to

the profession, they would feel different about the lack of structure provided by a text. Tenure would likely color the ways in which junior faculty felt about making decisions or assertions in the face of their senior colleagues.

Other limitations relate to the fact that faculty at only one institution in a southern state were interviewed. This constrains the generalizability of the findings. Arguably, these findings could be applied to the study institution's sister schools in the system to which the institution belongs. They could also potentially be applied to institutions in the state which are similar in structure and FTE even if they are not in the institution's system. Potentially, the findings could be applied to similar institutions in neighboring states with similar socio-economic and political conditions, not to mention attitudes toward higher education. Ultimately, however, any generalizations drawn from the data are best used in attempting to promote AOER at the study institution and contribute to the available body of literature but should be used carefully.

Summary of the Findings

The findings of this study can be summed up quite obviously: the experiences and perceptions of the study participants vary from person to person, though there are overlaps and similarities in their experiences, attitudes, and perceptions. Admittedly, this is not groundbreaking or innovative. However, it is a fair summation of what the interviews revealed about the participants' perceptions of AOER. Characterizing their experiences as "positive" or "negative" or "neutral" is inadvisable from the perspective of this researcher as it values those experiences or weights them through the researcher's experience and bias. Furthermore, what the researcher might characterize as a "good" thing because it serves students diminishes the point of the study: understanding the faculty's experiences.

The findings suggest that several factors influence a faculty member's perception of AOER. The factors involved could potentially include discipline, type of faculty (e.g., traditional classroom versus clinical), whether the department is open to the idea of AOER, level of familiarity, workload, and length of time teaching. Faculty at the study institution have a diverse and wide-ranging set of perceptions regarding AOER in undergraduate course material adoptions that hinge on a diverse and wide-ranging variety of factors which were beyond the purview of this study.

Faculty's perceptions appear to be generally positive about the adoption of AOER but acknowledge that AOER have some benefits and challenges. Faculty largely feel that AOER as a movement is growing and that the practice of adopting and using AOER is increasing. However, there is a need for administrative and supervisory support. This administrative and supervisory support should not necessarily manifest through top-down mandates, especially given the level of resistance the participants experience within their own departments. To implement such mandates appear to be a violation of academic freedom and professional choice.

Faculty report largely positive experiences in their interactions with students about AOER. But it should be noted that not all of the courses taught by participants were fully AOER. Some merely used AOER as supplement resources rather than as the primary course material approach. Some courses have not been redesigned to employ AOER and may never redesigned and for legitimate reasons, including accreditation expectations and complexity. There are cases in which it is unlikely that AOER could replace traditional commercial materials.

Platforms were a topic that most of the participants mentioned. Most faculty reported appreciating the bells and whistles and the ways in which the platforms can contribute to student learning. However, the attendant technical issues undermine their utility. There is a consensus

that the primary motivating factor and benefit for faculty to adopt AOER is cost-saving for the students. Other faculty talked about the level of control one can have over AOER in terms of customization and tailoring, which is highly attractive in terms of academic freedom.

To return to the research question which drove this study: *how do faculty at the study institution perceive AOER in undergraduate course material adoptions?* The simplified answer is that it depends on the individual faculty member and a variety of factors associated with their experiences as faculty members. Some of their reported motivations and experiences reflected the findings of studies in the literature. For example, several faculty commented on concerns about copyright and permission, which is a common concern (Todorinova & Wilkinson, 2020).

Participants also reported being overwhelmed by the volume of available material and finding the process of sifting through that volume time-consuming (Belikov & Bodily, 2016). The large-scale and specialized repositories currently available, such as OER Commons and Open Educational Network (OEN), make it easier to search for vetted materials, but this still requires time on the part of faculty to navigate and peruse. Faculty also reported quality/rigor concerns, which are often mentioned in the literature, and which also reflect ongoing issues within the field of AOER. While there are certainly more AOER materials available now, with large-scale repositories making it easier to search for vetted materials than it was five years ago, quality and rigor issues remain.

Ironically, despite the volume of available AOER, participants did highlight challenges with regard to niche or special topics courses. While the notion of the niche course does not appear widely in AOER literature, the idea of there being insufficient AOER for specific topics, disciplines, and courses is not new (Belikov & Bodily, 2016; Senack & Donoghue, 2016; Todorinova & Wilkinson, 2020). Another contrast with the existing literature has to do with the

faculty's motivations vis-à-vis students. While saving students money and considering student needs was sometimes mentioned among faculty motivations, it was often farther down the list. However, the participants in this study explicitly talked about the material and financial needs of their students and trying to alleviate the financial stresses of their students. This compassionate or considerate approach to the students' viewpoints and experiences is a deviation from the earlier studies which often revealed that faculty were more motivated by the benefits to them than to their students (Belikov & Bodily, 2016).

With regard to policy and practice in the local context of the study institution, it is not clear what will change or could change. The findings of the study itself are unlikely to affect practice in the local context, partially because the author has left the study institution where the author was the primary OER expert on campus. The other part of the uncertainty about what could be done in policy and practice is the ongoing lack of consistent administrative and/or supervisory support. This is not surprising. Jhangiani et al. (2016) assert that institutional policies regarding AOER play a role in faculty's perceptions of those resources. Since the study institution has not adopted or expressed intention to adopt AOER-related policies, or otherwise explicitly articulated support for – or even rejection of – AOER, beyond those elements mandated by the state for course markings, it is unlikely that anything will change in the near future. The participants felt there was potential for change at the study institution, but it would take a slow-burn grassroots effort in order to effect that change.

Improving Practice to Enhance Equity, Ethics, and Social Justice

The purpose of examining a PoP is to identify possible solutions to that problem. However, it is not enough to merely solve the problem. One must think in terms of equity, ethics, and social justice when examining both the problem and then its possible solutions. In this way,

the four As of higher education – access, affordability, achievement, and accountability – are enhanced. Considering the PoP at hand, it is necessary to consider the problem and its possible solution(s) from various angles.

This section will identify and discuss programmatic changes or revisions in policy and practice at the institutional and unit levels as revealed by the data obtained through the study. It will also consider possible interventions as suggested by the literature and whether or not they have bearing based on the findings here. This section will also identify and discuss new efforts or revision in obtaining stakeholder involvement required to sustain both implementation and improvement. It will also provide reflection upon changes to the author’s personal and professional identity as an education leader. It will also consider new approaches to the author’s practice from doctoral study and the dissertation process. Finally, this section will discuss plans for dissemination of findings and other products from the dissertation process, including but not limited to potential publications and presentations.

Programmatic Changes/Revisions in Policy and Practice

Ideally, the savings students have obtained from AOER as documented by the statewide academic library consortium LOUIS, of which the study institution is a member, would be sufficient. Since the consortium started its efforts around 2012-2013, the consortium has saved students \$30.3 million (LOUIS, n.d.). However, those numbers – as impressive as they are – do not seem to have motivated the study institution to support AOER overtly or explicitly in faculty course adoptions. For what it is worth, the study institution has not overtly or explicitly prohibited or discouraged faculty from engaging in AOER adoption or creation.

It is also worth noting that the study institution, like many other institutions in the state, no longer manage their own bookstores. The study institution’s bookstore is run by Barnes &

Noble. Financially speaking, it behooves the institution to have such a partnership because (a) it takes the onus of procurement and management off the institution and (b) generates revenue, not to mention freeing up time and personnel resources for other tasks (Fuchsberg, 1989). This was an emergent phenomenon in the late 1980s (Fuchsberg, 1989), though it is now commonplace in contemporary higher education. This is relevant to this discussion and to programmatic changes, as well as budgetary ones. Increasing adoption of AOER can save students money. However, the fewer traditional commercial course material adoptions are channeled through the bookstore, the less revenue comes from that direction. In other words, AOER may not necessarily be desirable from a financial direction for the institution.

Given these two contexts, the lack of articulated policy (and prohibition) and the financial implications, the biggest change needed in the AOER discussion is that the institution needs to articulate *something* about AOER. As noted earlier, administrative policies and mandates can affect faculty perceptions of AOER (Jhangiani et al., 2016). It should also be borne in mind that some faculty feel that top-down *mandates* are counterproductive. Therefore, the institution needs to make some statement, explicitly articulated, that demonstrates the value that it sees in AOER. It is not necessary for the institution to *require* all faculty to adopt AOER in all courses. In fact, it is not feasible for all courses to adopt AOER in all courses – the findings from this study demonstrate that, in reflection of the literature and the author’s own experiences.

However, the faculty in this study, in reflection of the literature, need articulated support from the administration for their efforts in AOER, whether adoptions or creations. This support also needs to come from school and college deans and directors as well as department and program heads/chairs and directors. Faculty need to know that their efforts are accepted (and hopefully endorsed) and that their supervisors and administrators will advocate for them and

their efforts. Faculty clearly want to feel that all the work they do with regard to AOER has value, meaning, and protection. One could get into the notion of psychological safety and how administrators and supervisors could create that for AOER, but that is beyond the purview of the current study. Regardless, some articulated statement of support or endorsement for AOER, not necessarily a mandate, directive, or policy, is needed to create the right environment for faculty to explore, adopt, and implement AOER.

What may be helpful for the study institution is to really look at the costs of course materials. In the usual “cost of attending” content shared on the institution’s website, the “tuition and fees” language does not include any estimates on textbooks and course materials. However, when the author was applying for student loans to fund their doctoral education, Sallie Mae made recommendations for how much to budget for one’s course materials. It seems that perhaps the institution should review such estimates and consider how its own course materials match up. The institution should consider where AOER could be implemented to benefit students and reduce those estimates. Admittedly, the institution could only develop estimates, as course materials change and are updated; professors come and go and have their own preferences for materials. Technology changes, and programmatic and institutional accreditation can also influence the materials used in courses. Nevertheless, it would behoove the institution to take a good, hard look at what course materials are costing students and consider the AOER solution.

In the same way that it is difficult to determine the precise cost of course materials, it is difficult to determine the budgetary implications of any proposed AOER policy. Since the current financial impact of traditional course materials on the students is unknown, it seems safe to assume that the impact of the use of such materials on the institution is unknown. What may be known, and what may weigh heavily on the minds of administrators, is the potential loss of

revenue from the bookstore. However, knowing the impact of traditional commercial course materials on students and their persistence and therefore their retention which in turn means a potential loss of enrollment revenue, it certainly seems time for the institution to do the math. Once those numbers are determined, it would be easier to determine what the budgetary impact would be of encouraging or endorsing AOER adoptions.

Similarly, it is difficult to articulate detailed timelines for implementation of any of these recommended changes. Undoubtedly, it will take time to determine course material costs at the departmental, program, and school/college level. It will take time to determine what savings could be obtained for students. Some of this data already exists thanks to the statewide library consortium but determining the institution-specific data will without a doubt be time-consuming. However, simply writing and articulating some statement of support and endorsement would take no money at all and very little time. Institutions release memos and statements to their faculties on a regular basis, indicating support (or a vote of no confidence) in system-level policies or actions on a regular basis. Student organizations like the SGA release letters of support of institutional actions regularly.

It seems that the administration could easily release a memo or letter of support endorsing AOER adoptions and explorations to its faculty. Such a statement could be released at any time, though preferably far in advance of deadlines to submit course adoptions to the bookstore. In short, to simply support faculty efforts by communicating to the faculty that the administration values those efforts will take very little money, time, or effort but could potentially make a big impact on students.

Enhancing Stakeholder Involvement in Implementation and Improvement

As has been stated several times throughout the manuscripts involved in this dissertation (and frequently in the author's discussion with administrators and others involved in AOER discussions), the lynchpin to course adoptions and therefore to the implementation of AOER in course adoptions is the faculty. Aside from the conflict theory framework and its decreasing propriety to the discussion as faculty participants revealed their willingness to reduce resource scarcity and attribute power to students, faculty still wield the most power in the course adoption process. They remain the key to increasing AOER course adoptions. Getting their buy-in is critical to the success of that approach.

However, it is clear from their reported experiences that the faculty participants do not feel adequately supported by the administration of the study institution. Some faculty did not necessarily feel supported by their department chairs/directors or deans. Some faculty did not feel that their peer colleagues understood what they were trying to accomplish. It is clear that there are many stakeholders on campus that need to be engaged and in different ways. As discussed in the previous section, the administration needs to understand the impact their support (or lack thereof) has on faculty AOER endeavors.

Supervisors like deans and department heads also need to understand the impact their support (or lack thereof) has on faculty AOER endeavors. These two groups need to be engaged by state and library AOER leaders and experts (like those within the statewide academic library consortium). It may also be effective and necessary for the Board of Regents, who oversees the consortium, to get involved and articulate the importance of administrative support at the institutional level to AOER efforts. The Board of Regents has long been aware of and interested in AOER efforts in the state and could exert some influence in terms of articulating support.

It would also be useful to get students to articulate their understanding of AOER and how it benefits them to administrators, supervisors, and faculty who are not involved in AOER.

Students who have gained an awareness of what AOER at the study institution have asked why more courses do not offer an AOER option or section. Those students who communicated with the participants in this study more often than not expressed appreciation for the money-saving efforts of their professors. Given that the cost of course materials most directly impacts students, their academic performance, persistence, and retention, their voices are the next most crucial ones in the AOER discussion in terms of adoption.

In order to better engage administrators and supervisors, as well as faculty not currently involved in (or interested in) AOER efforts, information-sharing opportunities would be advised. At least one participant indicated that they believed that many of their peers simply needed more information regarding AOER. Several of the participants reported that they learned about AOER on their own and felt if they had had more information sooner, they would have jumped on the AOER bandwagon sooner and with more enthusiasm (and less apprehension and confusion).

Some participants reported that their first contact with AOER was a faculty learning community (FLC) focused on OER. This suggests that such an effort would probably be effective again and worth repeating. Other opportunities to learn about AOER, especially in terms of how to locate them, how to redesign a course using AOER, and how to employ open pedagogy, would also undoubtedly be useful to gaining more traction. Professional development opportunities about AOER and attendant topics (like copyright) would be highly beneficial to promoting awareness of AOER and helping faculty develop relevant knowledge and skills.

It is worth noting that the author taught a summer course in 2020 directed at faculty and instructors about AOER on behalf of the university system of which the study institution is a

part. This course was developed and funded through a grant program run by the system. The author also taught a course on copyright, fair use, and Creative Commons Licensing for this same summer program, topics relevant to the AOER discussion. In other words, there have been opportunities available at no cost to faculty at the study institution and its sister institutions regarding AOER. The content of these courses is still available to those faculty members though the courses themselves are not currently active. The summer program was repeated in 2021, with those courses active as self-directed opportunities. The author was also a co-facilitator in the aforementioned OER FLC at the study institution for the three-year cycle the FLC ran. That FLC came with monetary and material incentives (namely a Samsung Galaxy Tablet), and FLC participants left the FLC with a whole course redesigned for AOER. In other words, faculty at the study institution have had opportunities, but perhaps those opportunities – if reactivated or offered again – need to be better promoted, as well as endorsed explicitly by the administration.

Personal and Professional Practice Reflection

The author readily admits that their own opinion regarding faculty perceptions of AOER has changed significantly, both personally and professionally. When the author began their own experiences with AOER, there was a lot of impatience on their part with faculty who were resistant to AOER. The author understood how the library as an institution can alleviate the cost of research and learning for students; it was hard to understand how faculty did not seem to see that. Professionally, it was frustrating to realize that faculty did not seem to understand how libraries were already doing a lot of work on the AER front, not to mention the OER front (as libraries are often cited as a prime example of AER). It was also frustrating to realize that faculty did not understand fair use or copyright or how they may already be engaging in AER.

However, as the author progressed through their career, it became clear. Most faculty are not taught how to be teachers. They are undoubtedly content experts, deeply intimate with their subjects and the professional values and ethics of their disciplines. However, they are not always pedagogical experts. They are not taught to be educators; they are taught to be professionals in their fields, which is not the same thing. Consequently, the author developed greater patience with faculty in that regard. This eventually helped the author understand how faculty could be confused or ignorant of and intimidated by copyright and fair use issues.

It is also worth noting that as faculty teaching loads increased at an alarming rate (in the author's opinion) over the last few years, it was clear that trying to just stay on top of their workload was faculty's priority. Of course, most faculty are tenure-track. Given the demands on their time, engaging in AOER, where there is uncertain administrative support and no acknowledgement in tenure and promotion process, is a dicey prospect. It does not necessarily represent a good use of faculty time and resources, given the pressures they are under.

Eventually, the author's personal and professional maturity also weighed in. The author has become a researcher in the emotional dimension of the library workplace and emotional intelligence as well as library workplace issues. Faculty struggle. More often than not, they are doing the best they can with the resources and support available to them. There has to be grace and understanding, as well as a place to make mistakes and to learn, if faculty are to successfully engage in AOER explorations that could lead to adoptions (and even creations).

It is also clear that faculty experiences with AOER have changed since the earlier literature was published. While participants in those studies seemed focused on the benefits to faculty, especially in terms of incentivizing AOER activities, the participants in this study focused on the students and the notion of academic freedom. This reflects a positive shift on the

part of faculty that could be leveraged and should be embraced on the part of the author and their colleagues in librarianship. While the cause of this shift is unclear, the author welcomes it. The author is inclined to attribute this shift in faculty perceptions and attitudes to an increasing awareness on the part of faculty regarding the inequities in higher education and a desire to increase equity and access.

The author also admits that they may be projecting that awareness onto faculty as a consequence of their own increased awareness from their doctoral experience. However, as the author has climbed up the supervisory ladder to an administrative position – and changed jobs to a similar position but with great responsibility – they have gained a different perspective on the in-the-trenches faculty and students. They have also gained a deeper understanding of all the moving parts of an institution and its constituents. This deeper understanding has fostered greater patience for all stakeholders involved. It has also fostered a desire for more collaboration between units, departments, and institutions, recognizing that the problems that all institutions of higher learning and higher learning practitioners face may manifest differently from institution to institution but are, in a sense, universal. Solutions can be more easily pursued and identified through collaboration.

Additionally, there needs to be an openness to new and different solutions in order to address these issues. Some of the things that have been done in higher education and which continue to be done – such as leasing agreements with bookstores to generate revenue – may be lucrative but are not beneficial. And while such practices are endemic to higher education, that does not mean that they need to or should persist.

Plans for Dissemination of Findings

The first plan for the dissemination of the findings is to share them with the statewide library consortium as part of their “Open Education Week” activities. A request was made to the consortium membership for practitioners to share local activities around AOER, inquiring about projects supported, information about faculty using AOER, project/goals for the future, or “something else,” as stated in the email. Regardless of the outcome of the dissertation defense, the author plans to share these efforts as part of that event.

The statewide library consortium also offers another opportunity for dissemination. The consortium holds a conference every year in the fall for the consortium membership. The author is a regular presenter at this conference and plans to submit a proposal for a presentation centered on the findings of this study to that conference. There are other professional conferences which would also be appropriate venues for such a proposal, and the author will leverage their affiliations with those organizations to present these findings. One such opportunity is CALM, the Conference on Academic Library Management.

In terms of publications, the author intends to publish a refined version of the three manuscripts generated for this dissertation on their LinkedIn profile as well as other platforms on which one can share professional publications. If the time comes when the author’s current institution (not the study institution) establishes an institutional depository, the author intends to deposit a copy. A refined version of these manuscripts, cleaned up and reformatted, will likely be submitted to several appropriate publication venues including the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* and *International Journal of Library and Information Services*. The author also edits a journal, *Codex: The Journal of the Louisiana Chapter of the ACRL*. There is a conflict of

interest involved in submitting an article to one's own journal. However, the author can refer to their efforts in their editor's column and engage in that space with practitioners.

Summary of Manuscript

What has been documented and explored here seems simple. This research was driven by the author's concern about student food insecurity. This led to an exploration of solutions, informed by the author's involvement in affordable and open educational resources (AOER). While AOER is a feasible solution to the financial stresses students experience which can give rise to food insecurity, widespread adoption of AOER as course materials by faculty has not manifested. Therefore, the problem of practice is not food insecurity. Rather, the problem of practice is how to encourage faculty to consider the adoption of AOER in lieu of traditional commercial texts where possible in undergraduate courses, with an eye toward reducing the cost of course materials for students.

The reducing of cost of course materials for students is very much within the realm of enhancing equity, ethics, and social justice in higher education. One returns to the four As of higher education – access, affordability, achievement, and accountability. None of these can truly be realized without equity, ethics, and social justice. Given the current costs of traditional commercial course materials, access and affordability become debatable. Students forgo buying course materials because they are simply too expensive. Unfortunately, without such materials, the students' ability to achieve is curtailed. Their ability to achieve, to realize academic success, affects their ability to persist and remain in the higher education system.

The accountability piece is less obvious, but to the author it represents a question: who is held accountable for the increasing costs of course materials? The answer is not straightforward. The publishers responsible for those traditional materials set the prices. From a librarian

perspective, it is hard to understand how the publishers might justify some of the prices they charge for textbooks and materials.

The college and universities themselves may also bear some of the blame. Their partnerships with bookstores and ambivalence (apathy?) toward AOER create an environment in which students sometimes pay \$250 for a textbook they use for one semester in one class. This circumstance may occur across multiple courses in a single semester, costing the student \$1,000 or more. Faculty also bear some responsibility for this issue, as they select and adopt the materials for the courses they teach, either individually or as members of departmental committees. If they are aware of the costs, one wonders how they can make some of the choices they make (highly specialized and technical disciplines notwithstanding) and then complain when their students do not purchase the course materials.

It seems that the accountability piece is missing, and with that missing piece, equity, ethics, and social justice in higher education are undermined. Given the weight that price tags carry in this discussion, it should be unsurprising that equity, ethics, and social justice may go a little by the wayside. To this author, it seems easy for institutions to ignore the cost of materials when the bookstores funnel revenue into the institutions' coffers. The fact that this revenue undermines the very students who also contribute to the institution's revenue is confusing and raises questions about the possible conflict of interest potentially inherent in such partnerships.

Regardless of who bears blame and how much they bear, at the end of the day, to increase equity, ethics, and social justice in higher education, it is necessary to examine the factors that decrease those things. One of the key factors that decrease those things is *cost*. It also undermines access, affordability, achievement, and accountability. Therefore, it becomes

necessary to identify areas in which cost can be mitigated, reducing financial stresses on students. One way in which this can be accomplished is through AOER.

In order to frame this exploration in terms of *need*, conflict theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs were selected. The conflict theory piece was intended to demonstrate how faculty possess the power and control of resources, making them the thesis in classical conflict theory. The antithesis of thesis, the party which does not possess power and experiences resource scarcity, are students. In other words, faculty have the means by which to shift the power differential and control resources – that is, choose more affordable materials (AER) or utilize no-cost options (OER). The findings of this study did not necessarily bear out this power/resource dynamic, as faculty participants expressed concern at students' resource scarcity and wished to alleviate, in defiance of conflict theory. Conflict theory asserts that the thesis wishes to control resources and ensure scarcity in the antithesis; however, participants wished to avoid this scarcity. They also indicated that students had power in the process, a voice by which to express preference and support, which is contravenes the thesis/antithesis dynamic, because it means faculty do not feel that they have absolute power in the process.

The hierarchy of needs framework was selected to indicate how the failure to meet the biological and material needs of students prevents them from realizing the higher-order needs of Maslow's hierarchy. The higher-order needs must be realized in order to obtain academic achievement. In other words, Maslow's hierarchy was employed as a subtle reminder that a hungry student is not going to academically perform well. A student who opts to buy the textbook instead of food may have the academic tool needed to succeed, but if their biological needs are not met, their ability to achieve is curtailed. Similarly, a student who opts to buy food but not the textbook is missing the academic tool needed to succeed, which also curtails their

academic achievement. When a faculty member choose to adopt AOER for course materials, they are giving the student a chance to meet their material biological needs and obtain the tools needed for academic achievement, all in one fell swoop.

The findings were a mix of mirroring the existing literature while revealing a shift in faculty motivations. While earlier studies on faculty perceptions of AOER revealed mistrust of the resources, a need for material incentives, and a focus on the benefits to *faculty*, the participants expressed more trust in the materials, a willingness to engage in AOER activity as a professional obligation, and a focus on the benefits to students and faculty. Faculty, regardless of their experiences with AOER in their individual classrooms, their colleagues, and their supervisors, expressed the idea that they felt AOER was the direction higher education is going and should be going. They reported being encouraged by the growing interest in AOER but admitted that things would likely develop slower than AOER practitioners would want, a sense with which the author fully agrees.

Many of the faculty participants reported wishing to remove or reduce barriers to higher education and learning for their students. This reported wish is encouraging, not only because it advances the AOER agenda but also because it acknowledges the disparities and obstacles in higher education. This reported wish demonstrates a dedication to equity, ethics, and social justice in higher education, even if the participants do not articulate it that way. It shows there is a willingness, at least in these participants, to address some of the issues facing higher education, to explore solutions and take risks, in the name of supporting their students and their learning. That it undermines the theoretical framework of conflict theory as applied to the phenomenon is a failure the author is willing to accept.

Among the recommendations for policy and practice is a need for articulated support on the part of administrators and supervisors. There is a need for administrators and supervisors to communicate their willingness to support AOER implementation and exploration, not to mention communicating and endorsing the efforts and value of what has already been done by faculty. Without this support and endorsement, and given faculty workloads, faculty who are not currently engaged in AOER activities are not likely to engage, especially given the time investment inherent in such activities. This inhibits the potential growth of AOER exploration and therefore AOER adoptions.

There is also a need for education and professional development at all levels to promote AOER to administrators, supervisors, and faculty and to enhance their knowledge and skills to support such efforts (such as clarifying copyright and fair use). At the study institution and within the system of which it is a part, there exist opportunities for such education and development, at no cost to faculty. This suggests that there is a need for greater promotion and support of such opportunities from higher levels, including the system and the Board of Regents. While the statewide academic library consortium is involved, it does not carry the same legislative, resource, and regulatory weight that the Board of Regents and university system leaders do. Again, without explicit, unequivocal support from institutional and system administrators, it will be difficult to effect policy change.

Nevertheless, the author – who has long been involved in AOER as a practitioner – is not discouraged. The findings here provide momentum and guidance for ways to reach out to faculty, supervisors, and administrators and ways to present AOER efforts. The findings of the study and the author’s reflection on those findings have redoubled their efforts to promote

AOER. They also serve to better prepare the author to make in-roads at their new institution with regard to AOER and hopefully more effectively than they did at the study institution.

While the findings of this study are difficult to generalize, they are not without merit. The author hopes to share the findings through presentations at various professional conferences as well as submissions to scholarly journals. The author also intends to share these experiences through the statewide library consortium's "Open Education Week" activities. These experiences will also factor into formal and informal discussions the author has around AOER in general, with educators and practitioners across higher education, both in state and beyond.

Ultimately, what has been done with this study is a tiny drop in a big bucket of inequities and injustices which have persisted in higher education. It is getting increasingly expensive to attend college, which means it is getting harder and harder to access higher education. It is the responsibility of the scholar-practitioner to shine a light on such issues, even when such issues are obvious. It is also the responsibility of the scholar-practitioner to identify and implement solutions to those problems whenever possible. It is the responsibility of the higher education scholar-practitioner to realize that the problems which plague higher education are systemic and historic, complex and convoluted. They are often interrelated and emerge from issues which affect students long before they ever reach one's institution.

While the institution may not be able to rectify those issues before the student arrives, this does not absolve the institution from attempting to help the student once they arrive. This is why equity, ethics, and social justice must be borne in mind as higher education evolves and changes moving forward. And this is why the doctoral student, the scholar-practitioner, the higher education practitioner, and the educational leader must all also bear them in mind and ensure that these values remain in the forefront of the minds, hearts, and practice.

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Megan Lowe
Curriculum Vitae

Objective

To obtain an administrative position in an academic library at a research-focused institution of higher learning that values equity, ethics, and social justice. I believe strongly in increasing accessibility to higher education across multiple domains using best practices that employ considerations of technology, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Experience

November 2021 – present

Director of University Libraries • Academic and administrative head of the four-library ecosystem • Northwestern State University of Louisiana (NSULA)

February 2018 – November 2021

Director of the Library • Academic and administrative head of the Library • University of Louisiana at Monroe (ULM)

July 2016 – February 2018

Interim Assistant Dean of the Library/Coordinator of Public Services • Served simultaneously as interim asst. dean and coordinator public services • ULM

February 2012 – July 2016

Coordinator of Public Services • Department head overseeing all public services department, primarily reference/instruction • ULM

I started at ULM in 2003 as a reference librarian. I worked my way up, taking on increasing responsibilities and duties, including onboarding ULM's first Chief Information Officer (CIO) in 2017.

Education

University of Mississippi, Ed.D., Higher Education, May 2022

University of Louisiana at Monroe, M.A., English/Creative Writing, Dec. 2008

University of Southern Mississippi, MLIS, Academic concentration, Aug. 2002

Mississippi College, B.A., English, Dec. 2000

Publication Highlights

Batte, E., & Lowe, M. (anticipated 2022-2023). Burnout among library deans and directors. In C. Holm, A. Guimaraes, and N. Marcano (Eds.), *Academic librarian burnout*. Association of College and Research Libraries.

Lowe, M., & Reno, L. (2017). *Examining the emotional dimensions of academic librarianship: Emerging research and opportunities*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

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Lowe, M., Matthews, M., Reno, L., & Sartori, M. (2016). The LOUIS consortium and catastrophe. In B. Dougherty (Ed.), *Technology-centered academic library partnerships and collaborations* (pp. 126-166). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Service Highlights – Professional

- Founder and editor, *Codex: The Journal of the Louisiana Chapter of the ACRL* (2010-present).
- Executive Board member, ACRL-LA, as *Codex* editor (2010-present).
- Past Chair, LOUIS Executive Board (2021-2022).
- Chair, LOUIS Executive Board (2020-2021).
- Member, LOUIS Grant Advisory Board, DoE OER for Dual enrollment grant (2020-present).
- Chair-Elect, LOUIS Executive Board (2019-2020).
- Member-at-Large, LOUIS Executive Board (2018-2019).
- LOUIS Electronic Resources Working Group, member (2021-present).
- LOUIS IT Best Practices Working Group, chair (2020-2021).
- LOUIS Institutional Repository Working Group, member (2020-present).
- CALM conference reviewer/volunteer (2020-present).
- Louisiana Virtual Academic Conference Planning Committee member (2018-present).
- Associate editor, *International Journal of Library and Information Services (IJLIS)*

(August 2017-present).

- Peer reviewer, *Journal of Academic Librarianship* (August 2020 – present).
- Peer reviewer, *Global Knowledge, Memory, and Communication (GKMC)* (April 2018-present).

Research Interests

- Emotional intelligence
- Burnout
- Workplace issues
- Institutional repositories
- Open access
- Affordable and open education resources (AOER)
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion