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Dissertation Experiences of Faculty Members: Individual, Relational and Structural Factors of Success

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Success

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ABSTRACT

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This phenomenological research study explored the dissertation experiences of individuals

working as faculty members across disciplines at regionally accredited four year universities.

Research questions utilized the constructs of social development theory to explore dissertation

experiences from an individual, relational and structural perspective. Prior scholars have used

social development theory as a framework to explore the individualities of the student, the

relationship with faculty advisors and mentors, and the resources provided by the department and

institution when evaluating the dissertation process (Liechty, Liao, & Schull, 2009).

A purposeful, criterion sampling strategy and maximum variation sampling were employed to

select a wide range of academic disciplines, classified in Biglan's Augmented Model (Drees,

1982). The constant comparative method was used in data analysis of transcribed interviews with

findings organized into the most prevalent themes.

The individual experiences of dissertation success included three prevalent themes: career

advancement opportunities and the development of extensive research agendas were described as

motivators for participants to successfully complete the dissertation. Additionally, family and

peer influence and prior knowledge were attributed as individual factors to success. Five themes

were identified regarding the relational factors leading to dissertation success: (1) dissertation

chair and committee, (2) cohort associates, (3) family members, (4) technological

communication, and (5) guidance, feedback, and preparation. Finally, three themes related to the structural factors leading to dissertation success were identified: (1) financial aid, (2) streamlined processes and (3) institutional resources. Recommendations for future research include studies to better understand faculty experiences with job placement in academia, faculty experiences as a dissertation chair, and faculty views regarding dissertation attrition and retention.

DEDICATION

My most significant source of inspiration to complete my dissertation came from my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I also dedicate this work to my parents, sisters, and husband. My parents instilled in me the value of education and displayed a phenomenal work ethic that shaped my behavior immensely. My sisters served as consummate role models and a major source of encouragement throughout my collegiate years. My loving husband was a continuous source of motivation through uncertain times associated with this process.

This dissertation is also dedicated to the numerous role models, teachers, and leaders who have molded me throughout the years. While I received my foundation of education at home, I must also dedicate this work to my African American, female professors with doctoral degrees at Tuskegee University. They served as visual inspirations for me during my undergraduate studies. Because of these ladies, I believed that I could one day earn a terminal degree. Lastly, I do not remember all of the names of people who encouraged me in my church, job, and neighborhood, but I sincerely dedicate this dissertation to anyone who wished me well in my studies.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

European universities offered the first doctoral degrees in the 1600s (Archbald, 2011; McAdams & Robertson, 2012). American universities incorporated the European model of doctoral studies and began awarding doctorates during the 19th century (West, Gokalp, Peña, Fischer, & Gupton, 2011). Approximately 40,000 doctoral students currently graduate annually in the United States; however many students drop out before completion (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011). The Council of Graduate Schools launched The PhD Completion Project that highlights a 50% attrition rate among students enrolled in doctoral programs in the United States. Attrition rates reflect elevated levels of attrition among minorities and women while varying attrition rates are reported among doctoral disciplines (Sowell, 2010). The ten year completion rates by ethnicity are as follows: African Americans (47%), Asian Americans (50%), Hispanics Americans (51%), and Whites (55%). The ten year completion rates for different disciplinary areas are as follows: Engineering (64%), Life Sciences (63%), Social Sciences (56%), and Humanities (49%) (Sowell, 2010).

Existing research concerning the attrition rates of doctoral students typically focuses on lack of financial assistance, individual variables, or unanticipated life trials. Limited research focuses on campus initiatives that positively impact the dissertation process, the phase with the highest attrition resulting in students remaining in the All But Dissertation (ABD) phase (Varney, 2010). In order to address the attrition rate associated with the dissertation stage of doctoral studies, continued research is warranted to highlight methods to assist doctoral students with the dissertation process (Gearity & Mertz, 2012; Liechty et al., 2009; Varney, 2010; Willet, 2014). Because many universities provide limited resources for dissertation support and

progression, more research regarding the dynamics of dissertation completion from the perspective of the doctoral graduate is needed (Gearity & Mertz, 2012).

The Council of Graduate Schools completion report detailed the need for interventions and strategies to assist with the completion of the doctoral degree (Sowell, 2010). Interventions to decrease doctoral attrition are essential to assist with the increased labor market demand for knowledge and information based jobs of the 21st century. Doctoral graduates with analytical skills and applied research abilities are highly sought after in the job market. According to current job market statistics, 2.6 million existing and replacement jobs will be available between 2010 and 2020 with 20% requiring the doctoral degree. In response to the need for skilled workers with doctoral degrees, additional methods to assist doctoral candidates with degree completion are warranted (Cross, 2014). Furthermore, rapid growth of the student populations at universities will benefit from the production of additional qualified faculty members (Bergquist, Robertson, & Gillespie, 2010).

Increased retirement of faculty members and heightened requests for graduate level research to assist with societal dilemmas are major reasons to address doctoral attrition. Faculty members are also in high demand to contribute to existing literature regarding the unique challenges of aspiring colleagues enrolled in doctoral programs (Bergquist et al, 2010). The role of faculty members concerning the doctoral process can be described as follows: classroom instructor, dissertation advisor, assistantship supervisor, research chair, and program mentor. As a result faculty members are often regarded as gateway personnel for the doctoral student's successful completion of graduate studies. A researcher expresses the need for increased input from faculty pertaining to doctoral completion among various disciplines and different institutions (Gardner, 2010). Faculty members have a responsibility to support and prepare future

faculty members in their respective disciplines. Each discipline distinctively legitimates and defines research methods, research questions, the relationship between research and teaching, and work association between scholars (Austin, 2002; Bergquist et al, 2010).

Gardner (2009) describes disciplines as follows:

Disciplines are cultural phenomena; they are embodied in collections of like-minded people, each with their own codes of conduct, set of values, and distinctive intellectual tasks. These cultures within disciplines, therefore, greatly influence the faculty and, consequently, the doctoral students within the departments. (p. 387)

Faculty members must pay increased attention to assisting students with the methods and norms of scholarly communication and scholarship required for doctoral completion respective to each discipline ((Bergquist et al, 2010; Boote & Beile, 2005). Structural and programmatic completion related to the dissertation process are specific to each discipline category (Gardner, 2010).

Biglan (1973) developed one of the most prevalent academic disciplinary classification systems to date. Biglan (1973) analyzed faculty member's perspectives regarding course of study among various disciplines, and he developed the following dimensions: hard-pure, hard-applied, soft-pure, and soft-applied disciplines. "The dimensions involve the degree to which a paradigm exists in the field, the degree of concern with application of the disciplinary knowledge, and whether or not the discipline is concerned with life systems" (Mukhtar, 2012, p. 30). Faculty members within the same department are typically homogenous as it relates to resemblances in disciplinary practices (Mukhtar, 2012). Biglan (1973) analyzed faculty members' perceptions on discipline specific subject matter in order to develop his classification system of academic

disciplines. Biglan's (1973) conceived the terminology regarding distinction between fields of study.

Mukhtar (2012) delineates hard versus soft and applied versus pure disciplines as follows:

Hard disciplines are those in which there is a high degree of paradigmatic consensus: for example chemistry, where the numbers of elements and stable chemical processes, as well as methods of investigating their properties, are commonly agreed. Soft disciplines are those whose paradigms are more nebulous; for example philosophy, where the foundations of philosophical systems are multiple. Pure fields are those in which there is little concern for practical application. For example, in English literature, a pure discipline that has little applied focus, is distinguished from engineering, an applied one, which is precisely about practical application of scientific concepts. (p. 30)

Drees (1982) described the nonlife versus life dichotomy as less influential when compared to soft versus hard and applied versus pure dichotomies. Drees (1982) further described that the life versus nonlife dichotomy is based solely on the separation of nonlife and life systems. The Biglan model is an empirically validated measure to scrutinize the differences among doctoral disciplines (Creswell & Bean, 1981). In order to understand dissertation experiences, a maximum variation sample was utilized in the current study to select faculty with doctoral degrees completed in disciplinary areas as denoted by Drees (1982) augmented model of Biglan's classifications. The augmented model categorizes an additional 38 doctoral disciplines into the originally established system (Drees, 1982).

The dissertation requirement has been a customary component among many doctoral disciplines since its origins at European institutions (Archbald, 2011; McAdams & Robertson,

2012). The dissertation is the gateway for research doctoral students to become scholars in their particular fields (Kamler & Thompson, 2008). Although there are a variety of 21st century, nontraditional doctoral program options void of the dissertation requirement, many research doctoral programs continue to require the traditional, five-chapter dissertation for degree completion (Archbald, 2011). "The traditional simple dissertation presents a single study in five chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Results, and Conclusions" (Boote & Beile, 2005, p. 10). Thus, the traditional dissertation format is the most prevalent dissertation option (Boote & Beile, 2005; Thomas, 2015). "Despite being the dominant pedagogical approach in doctoral education, there is little research done on the process and goals of completing a dissertation" (Thomas, 2015, p. 5). Several researchers highlight the 50% attrition rate of doctoral students who exit doctoral programs prior to completion (Gearity & Mertz 2012; Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Varney 2010). Additional doctoral attrition statistics denote that 30% of graduate students discontinue their studies during the dissertation phase (Willet, 2014). In light of the increasing attrition rate regarding doctoral completion, researchers are acknowledging that specific interventions are necessary during the dissertation phase because it is a time of such high risk of drop out for students (Gearity & Mertz, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

Typical dissertation completion can take up to ten years as students adequately explore scholarly research pertaining to their respective topics (Patton, 2013). The high attrition rate and the prolonged commitment to complete a doctoral degree have been topics of inquiry for numerous researchers (Liechty et al., 2009; Main, 2014; Yarwood-Ross & Haigh, 2014). Prior research on this topic cites additional research is needed to augment existing literature from the student's perspective regarding doctoral degree completion (Yarwood-Ross & Haigh, 2014).

Researchers also suggest there is a need for specific interventions related to the successfully completing the dissertation to assist with attrition (Gearity & Mertz, 2012; Varney 2010).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the dissertation experiences and perceptions of faculty who completed the doctoral degree in the past five years. A purposeful, criterion sampling strategy was used to select twelve participants who met the following criteria: employed as a faculty members at a regionally accredited institution, recipient of a doctoral degree inclusive of a dissertation requirement from a regionally accredited institution within the last five years, and earned doctorate in a discipline that can be classified in the Biglans Augmented Model (Drees, 1982). For the purpose of this study, dissertation experiences were defined using the social development theoretical constructs of individual, relational and institutional characteristics. Social development theory is a multidimensional, theoretical framework used to examine relationships that students have with external resources that affect the dissertation process (Liechty et al., 2009).

Theoretical Framework

Existing literature related to the dissertation process has used Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory because it offers a blended theoretical framework for researching the multilevel influences affecting dissertation achievement (Liechty et al., 2009). Vygotsky suggested that an external relationship has a significant impact on learning and that collaboration between the pupil and outside sources can augment the person's zone of proximal development (ZPD). The initial assessment of the student's current zone of current development (ZCD) is necessary to outline the dissertation student's strengths and weaknesses (Liechty et al., 2009). "The actual development level characterizes mental development retrospectively while the zone

17

of proximal development characterizes mental development prospectively" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). The research then suggests using the initial assessment to assist with the development of ZPD in the form of scaffolding from a mentor, faculty member, and institutional guidance. Thus, researchers used constructs of social development theory to explore the individualities of the student, the relationship with the faculty advisor, and assistance from the institution when evaluating the dissertation process (Liechty et al., 2009).

Vygotsky (1978) postulates in his social development theory that higher order thinking happens in the context of essential relationships. The greatest result of learning occurs when the student is paired with a more skilled person to offer scaffolded direction and support. Scaffolding from a mentor, expert, or teacher is an individualized method that extends current ZCD. According to scholars using social development theory to examine the dissertation process, an evaluation of the following areas can be used to assist with dissertation completion: (1) an assessment of the student's current cognitive ability (individual factors), (2) a review of the amount of scaffolding provided to assist with the task (relational factors), (3) and an appraisal of the opportunities for support provided by the institution and department (structural factors) (Liechty et al., 2009). These three conditions served to provide the line of inquiry for the present study related to the dissertation experience for faculty across disciplines.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What individual behaviors and cognitive abilities are critical to completing the dissertation process?

2. How do relational factors assist with progression through the dissertation process?

3. What departmental or institutional opportunities for support contribute to dissertation completion?

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations are described as possible weaknesses of a study that are not controllable by the researcher (Simon, 2011). The purposeful, criterion sampling technique and length of time to gather data were limitations of this study. A purposeful, criterion sampling strategy was used to select twelve participants who met the following criteria: employed as a faculty members at a regionally accredited institution, recipient of a doctoral degree inclusive of a dissertation requirement from a regionally accredited institution within the last five years, and earned doctorate can be classified in the Biglans Augmented Model (Drees, 1982). The participants were not representative of all doctoral disciplines and since participants attended different universities for their doctoral degrees, care should be taken before transferring findings to the disciplinary areas at-large. Purposeful, criterion sampling, as opposed to random sampling, yields results that cannot be normally applied to the population at large (Simon, 2011). A second limitation of the study is related to the duration of the data collection stage of two months. Time is often considered a limitation because results are only a snapshot dependent on conditions of the study (Simon, 2011). Because participants were now serving as faculty members, the time limitation for data collection was less of a concern in that the experiences of participants as faculty members tended to provide thoughtful and in-depth responses related to the dissertation experience.

Delimitations are the boundaries of the research study that are controllable by the researcher (Simon, 2011). The boundaries of the current study include the standardized interview conditions and the criterion to purposely select participants. All participants were asked the same

interview questions using a structured interview protocol. It is possible that semi-structured or customized interview protocols could have yielded different results. However, phenomenological inquiry supports standardized interviews as a method to provide consistency in the interview process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

A second delimitation of the study is the criteria used to select the sample A purposeful, criterion sampling strategy was used to select twelve participants who met the following criteria: employed as a faculty members at a regionally accredited institution, recipient of a doctoral degree inclusive of a dissertation requirement from a regionally accredited institution within the last five years, and earned doctorate can be classified in the Biglans Augmented Model (Drees, 1982). Thus, doctoral graduates across disciplines were selected for participation. A second criterion of this study was that the participant must have been a doctoral recipient within the last five years (2011-2016), and a doctoral graduate who successfully defended a dissertation. It is possible that an altered graduation window or another set of sites could lead to different findings. Nonetheless, this study was important to conduct despite the current limitations and delimitations because more research is needed to provide insight as it relates to the dissertation experiences for individuals, specifically across different disciplinary areas.

Definitions of Terms

1. *Advisor*-an individual, also known as the dissertation chair, who guides the doctoral candidate towards completion of the dissertation by providing continuous communication and advisement (Barnes & Austin, 2009; Hilliard, 2013; Schwarz & Fairweather, 1997).

2. *All But Dissertation (ABD)*-the period in the research doctoral program after the completion of coursework, qualifying examination, and the dissertation proposal, but the dissertation has not been completed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015; Liechty et al., 2009).

3. *Dissertation*-a research assignment that details an investigation of a phenomena by collecting data to analyze and report findings, conclusions, and future recommendations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015).

4. *Dissertation Committee*-a panel of experienced individuals who provide guidance and counsel throughout the dissertation process (Bowen, 2005).

5. *Doctoral Candidate*-a doctoral student who has completed coursework and passed qualifying exam and is actively working on the dissertation proposal (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015).

6. *Doctoral Student*- a student actively enrolled in doctoral studies coursework (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015).

7. *Feedback*-timely and honest written response to the doctoral student with the goal of assisting the candidate with the completion of degree requirements (Hilliard, 2013).

8. *Mentor*-a relationship formed with any person, regardless of position, who guides the doctoral student through the dissertation process (Barnes & Austin, 2009).

9. *Phenomenology*-the study of awareness as determined by an individual's lived experiences (Patton, 2002).

10. *Proposal*-a defense to the dissertation committee of the initial chapters of the dissertation to provide insight regarding the research study in order to obtain approval to proceed with the final chapters (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015).

11. *Research doctorate*-a degree denoted by the completion of a dissertation. Doctoral research is concerned with preparing students to contribute original findings to the existing body of research (NSF, 2015).

12. *Scaffolding*-intangible external assistance provided to increase a student's cognitive abilities (Vygotsky, 1978).

13. *Social development theory*-also known as sociocultural theory, pioneered by Lev Vygotsky, proclaims that learning and behavior is impacted by social, individual, and organizational factors (Vygotsky, 1978).

14. *Zone of Actual Development (*ZAD)-the independent period of development when the learner has mastered a learning objective (Vygotsky, 1978).

15. *Zone of Current Development (ZCD)*-the learner's current level of cognitive development without external assistance (Vygotsky, 1978).

16. *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*-the range of cognitive development concerning the learner's current abilities and potential abilities (Vygotsky, 1978).

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study is to understand the dissertation experiences of recent doctoral graduates from accredited universities across disciplines. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the study that provides an overview of the relevance, importance and significance of the study. Chapter 2 is an overview of the existing literature related to the multiple factors that contribute to the completion or non-completion of the dissertation process. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology of the study highlighting the design, sample data collection, ethics, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 provides code, category and thematic findings related to the key questions of individual, relational, and structural factors leading to the successful completion of the dissertation. Chapter 5 is a discussion of the findings and conclusions as well as recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The doctoral degree began at the University of Berlin in 1810. Many Americans traveled to Germany to participate in doctoral programs until American universities began offering terminal degrees in the latter half of the 19th century with Yale University serving as the initial site of implementation. Yale's doctoral model became the standard method of doctoral education as doctoral programs spread across the country (Archbald, 2011; McAdams & Robertson, 2012; Willet, 2014). The traditional model included three distinct stages in the doctoral degree progression: the initial coursework coupled with a qualifying exam, the dissertation proposal, and the concluding dissertation defense (McAdams & Robertson, 2012). Since the first American doctorate degree was conferred in 1861, 1.36 million doctoral degrees were granted in the 20th century (Golde, 2015). Currently, the United States produces the most doctoral graduates in the world at more than 400 universities (Martinez, Ordu, Scala, & McFarlane, 2013; Willet, 2014). On average, 40,000 doctoral students earn the degree annually in America (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011). Doctoral students drop out each year at a 50% annual rate of attrition. Data regarding the 50% attrition rate of doctoral students has been fairly constant for the last four decades (Johnsrud & Banaria, 2004; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Doctoral attrition is of national concern because obtaining a doctoral degree yields positive returns for the economy and lifetime earnings for recipients (Abel, Deitz, & Su, 2014).

Doctoral degree attainment has been a historical predictor of increased lifetime earnings (Abel et al., 2014; Fatima, 2009; Walker, 2009). Groenvynck, Vandevelde, and Rossem (2013) purport that doctoral achievement has the potential to produce an advanced workforce in a specified region. American employment statistics suggest workers with a doctoral degree will be

in demand for knowledge based jobs of the 21st century (Cross, 2014). The unemployment rate

for doctoral recipients is less than 6% (Abel et al., 2014). The doctoral degree serves a valuable

employee selection tool within industry, business, health education, and other service

professions. Employers who require employees with advanced skills and knowledge will seek

applicants with the doctoral credential to allocate personnel for various offices, functions, and

roles (Archbald, 2011). After graduation, doctoral completers recount additional workforce

opportunities associated with earning the degree (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

Although doctoral graduates can obtain work both outside and inside of academia,

research suggest graduates are still interested in faculty positions. Furthermore, the much

anticipated retirement of numerous seasoned faculty members is taking place at a time when

societal and academic expectations of higher education institutions are changing. Doctoral

students replacing tenured faculty will be required to possess an enhanced array of talents when

compared to their predecessors. New faculty will experience pressure, stress, and uncertainty as

the demands of academia continue to shift. As a result, researchers are encouraged to examine

the components of the doctoral preparation programs from faculty member's perspectives for the

next generation of the professoriate (Gillespie & Robertson, 2010).

"As long as students continue to enroll in colleges and universities, there will remain the

demand to teach them-and to teach them well" (Buskist, 2013). Although the traditional focus of

research doctoral training prepares students for faculty positions at research universities,

employment trends over the last decade suggest that many doctoral recipients are also seeking

employment in other industries. The new challenge for doctoral students requires a capitalization

of their intellectual doctoral experiences while finding a ways to market skills in the workforce

(Buskist, 2013, p. 40). For many years there has been growing tension concerning the aim of

doctoral preparation. Scholars are searching for the necessary program of study to prepare doctoral students for an array of employment opportunities (Buskist, 2013). In a landmark study by Johnsrud and Banaria, (2004), 32,000 doctoral students from 1,300 graduate schools outlined that only 38% of participants were satisfied with career preparation and 45% were satisfied with research faculty member preparation.

One scholar concluded that a doctoral education has a positive effect on workforce productivity and suggested that doctoral degrees train recipients in the skills of production, diffusion, and transmission of knowledge. The generalizable skills associated with doctoral preparation are considered vastly transferable skills that can assist with productivity. Doctoral graduates contribute higher level skills that are generally significant in increasing workforce productivity. Highly educated doctoral graduates often have higher rates of workforce production due to increased generalizable abilities and higher level thinking skills (Fatima, 2009).

The 21st century academic institutions are becoming inundated with technology, student diversity, enhanced workloads, evolved expectations, emphasis on student's needs, and a changed labor market for the academe. An increasing amount of institutions are offering virtual course options. Thus, future professors will be expected to incorporate technology rich instruction in order to meet the standards and pressures from undergraduate's parents, employers, and legislators. As a result of the new higher education infrastructure, the customary tenured faculty position is evolving (Gillespie & Robertson, 2010). Due to the continued need of the doctoral graduates, it is important to review the doctoral stages from beginning to completion.

Doctoral Stages

Envied around the world as the backbone of the United States' creativity and scientific innovation, doctoral education in the United States has earned a global reputation for

generating knowledge and preparing disciplinary stewards who understand what is

known and discover what is yet unknown. (Anderson & Anderson, 2012, p. 239)

The doctoral experience is a challenging and tumultuous entry into the scholarly world. A

doctoral education should provide the skills essential for a successful and productive contribution

in educational communities. Doctoral graduates frequently advise aspiring students of the

unwavering commitment linked with doctoral studies. Doctoral students often experience

challenges mentally, emotionally, and financially (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

Also, the prolonged time to complete the doctoral degree has a major impact on the doctoral

experience (Willet, 2014). To improve conditions for doctoral students, researchers must

scrutinize student proficiencies in their individual programs and the distinctive arrangements

aimed to support the completion of the degree (West et al., 2011).

The doctoral experience has never been described as a monolithic task (Gardner, 2009).

Doctoral students historically undergo a developmental process as motivations and needs differ

appreciably through the various stages of doctoral study (Rose, 2005). The traditional doctoral

experience includes a specific amount of coursework, a research proposal, a research experiment,

and a compilation of results and conclusion. The dissertation requirement distinguishes the

research doctoral degree from other higher education pursuits. The student's ability to move

successfully through the specified stages depends upon several factors. Students gain identity

while progressing through the doctoral stages. Any barrier or delay could stunt the creativity

capacity required to complete independent research (Noonan, 2015). Below is a thematic

summary of the literature that categorizes the doctoral experience into three distinct stages:

Stage 1

Most doctoral students begin their doctoral journey by exploring several schools and programs of interest (Noonan, 2015). Students soon realize that disciplines have unique codes of conduct, qualities, culture, intellectual tasks, and values (Mukhtar, 2012). First year doctoral students experience a new routine, environment, and people. Universities often provide orientation programs to assist students with any misconceptions about doctoral programs and process or clarify any issues prior to the beginning of the program (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011). For most doctoral students the initial stage is filled with coursework that prepares students to cultivate a precise research plan as a doctoral candidate (Ampaw & Jaegar, 2012).

Stage 2

Preliminary exams, qualifying exams, and orals are all terms used to describe components of doctoral programs that serve as assessments of a student's comprehensive understanding after all coursework is complete and before being admitted to candidacy. Qualifying examinations serve as a milestone to measure the content learned throughout doctoral studies, and the doctoral student's ability to advance to the next stage (Golde & Dore, 2001; Noonan, 2015). After the qualifying examination is successfully completed, students enter into a doctoral candidacy status until the completion of the dissertation proposal. The ABD status is earned after the approval of the dissertation proposal. The standard qualifying exam and dissertation proposal require a different writing skill set when compared to other degree requirements. Writing as a doctoral candidate focuses on developing new ideas from synthesizing and analyzing data (Hadjioannou, Shelton, & Fu1, 2007; Noonan, 2015). The authenticity of the dissertation proposal topic makes each student's experience markedly different from this point. During this stage, doctoral students are aligned with an advisor and

committee as progression toward the dissertation stage ensues. Advisors and students are usually matched based on similar interests and research methods. Although students have the support of an advisor and committee, from this point on, they generally work independently (Noonan, 2015).

Stage 3

The independent dissertation associated with this stage is often described as long, daunting, and complicated (Ali & Kohun, 2007; Noonan, 2015). Doctoral students require a robust network of support to offset isolation, loneliness, stress, confusion, inadequate finances, and excessive workloads. Existing literature rarely highlights the transformation of graduate students into scholars while simultaneously describing the arduous experience that is both emotionally and mentally challenging (Hadjioannou et al., 2007; Noonan, 2015; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapiw, 2012). A good relationship with the dissertation advisor is crucial in order to ensure communication, feedback, and progress reports (Ali & Kohun, 2007; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapiw, 2012). The last stage of the doctoral process is defined by completing research and defending the dissertation and initiating career choices after graduate school (Ampaw & Jaegar, 2012; Cockrell & Shelley, 2011). Throughout these stages, doctoral students shift their focus from individual courses to participation in an ever-evolving professional culture where expectations and requirements increase with progression through the program (Hadjioannou et al., 2007; Noonan, 2015).

Doctoral Program Format

In addition to different stages of doctoral programs, there are also differences in the format of doctoral programs. The literature can be thematically clustered around traditional and nontraditional programs as follows:

Traditional Doctoral Program

The traditional research doctorate is very similar to European programs of Berlin, Oxford, Cambridge, and Paris that inspired initial American programs in the late 19th century. The traditional research doctoral degree is a campus based, full-time program of study for pre-career adults who are able to devote full-time efforts to graduate study. Traditional programs are also characterized by dormitories, residency requirements, initial years of coursework, and multiple years devoted to a five chapter dissertation. Traditional doctoral programs are most attractive to single, young adults with no children (Archbald, 2011).

Nontraditional Doctoral Program

The nontraditional doctoral options are the result of demands for professional development for working adults, the data technology uprising, and the creation of online universities. Nontraditional programs provide part time students with an option to complete doctorates while working full-time. The Internet and advanced technological infrastructures enable nontraditional programs to exist without students meeting in a structured classroom setting. Nontraditional programs offer accessibility to courses and doctoral faculty via learning management systems devoid of requiring students to discontinue working, relocating, and commuting long distances (Archbald, 2011). In addition to the different formats of traditional and nontraditional doctoral programs, there are several types of doctorates.

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Types of Doctorates

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Doctoral degrees can be placed into three different categories: research doctorate (PhD), professional research doctorate in education (EdD), and professional practice doctorates (MD, PsyD, OTD) (Offerman, 2011; Zusman, 2013). The original purpose of the research doctoral degree focused on preparing scholars to educate the next generation of scholars. Research based

doctoral programs conclude with defending a dissertation. The research doctorate, PhD, aims to yield scholars to discover, apply information, and distribute findings via dissertation (Offerman, 2011). The professional research doctorate in education, EdD, was established in 1921 (Archbald, 2011) with an applied research emphasis on a perceived problem in professional practice via dissertation (Offerman, 2011). Professional Practice Doctorates (PPDs), also known as clinical doctorates, have expanded options over the last decade. In 2012, nearly 1000 PPDs from approximately 500 programs were awarded. In lieu of original research required for research doctorates, PPDs require a clinical element for completion. Many PPDs originated in the health related fields but currently are visible in other disciplines (Zusman, 2013).

A list of the most frequently accepted doctoral degrees by the National Science Foundation (NSF) is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Types of Doctorates

Title	Doctorate
DA	Doctor of Arts
AuD	Doctor of Audiology
DAOM	Doctor of Acupuncture Oriental Medicine
DBA	Doctor of Business Administration
DDS	Doctor Dental Surgery
DEng/DES	Doctor of Engineering/Doctor of Engineering Science
DFA	Doctor of Fine Arts
DHL	Doctor of Hebrew Letters
DMA	Doctor of Musical Arts
DME	Doctor of Music Education
DMin	Doctor of Ministry
DML	Doctor of Modern Languages
DNP	Doctor Nurse Practitioner
DPH	Doctor of Public Health
DPS	Doctor of Professional Studies
DPT	Doctor of Physical Therapy
DrAT	Doctor of Art Therapy
DSc	Doctor of Science
DVM	Doctor of Veterinary Medicine

Table 1 (continued)

EdD	Doctor of Education
JCD	Doctor of Canon Law
JSD	Doctor of Juridical Science
MD	Doctor of Medicine
OTD	Doctor of Occupational Therapy
Pharm.D	Doctor of Pharmacy
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PsyD	Doctor of Psychology
STD	Doctor of Sacred Theology
ThD	Doctor of Theology

There are also variations of dissertation types among research doctorates

Types of Dissertations

Different doctoral programs include various options regarding the method to complete

the dissertation requirement (Offerman, 2011). Many students spend several years gathering

historical data associated with their respective dissertation topics (Schuman, 2014). The

dissertation requires doctoral candidates to contribute researchable, original work to the field.

Dissertation topic selection lacks specific criteria although most universities require that topics

are focused on the student's doctoral concentration. Optimal dissertation topics provide students

the opportunity to discover new principles or facts, suggest unrecognized relationships, challenge

existing assumptions or theories, or highlight new interpretations or insights of unfamiliar

phenomena. Dissertation research can be utilized as a tool to assess student's ability to conduct

scholarly research (Black, 2012). There are three general types of dissertations referenced in the

scholarship related to doctoral education that can be thematically categorized as: traditional

dissertations, manuscript-option dissertations, and nontraditional dissertations.

Traditional Dissertation

The traditional dissertation is a five chapter document created by the doctoral student

under the tutelage of a faculty advisor. Doctoral students typically take several years to

adequately research scholarly articles on a singular topic. The traditional monograph most often reflects the career goals of doctoral students and seeks to contribute to academia (Guo & Rose, 2015; Patton, 2013). Researchers argue that incomplete dissertations in the traditional form are the primary reason for doctoral student attrition (Johnsrud & Banaria, 2004; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapiw, 2012). Although the traditional format shares many similarities across the disciplines, the experience of each student varies. Doctoral students acquire traditional dissertation topics that are reflective of their individual field of study, the sequence and structure of their individual program, and the institutional setting (Mukhtar, 2012; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Traditional dissertations are often very specialized with scholarly writings that are less understandable by the general population (Patton, 2013).

Johnsrud and Banaria (2004) examined the overall value of research preparation in regards to writing the traditional dissertation several years ago. They also debate whether traditional dissertations assist upcoming scholars in preparation for educational research. Dissertations are not commonly reviewed by intellectuals in the field, and the five chapter method of organization does not imitate the kind of writing required for an academic profession. Furthermore, substitutes to the traditional dissertation should be deliberated. One option would be to create documents available for submission to academic publications (Johnsrud & Banaria, 2004) also known as the manuscript option dissertation format (De Jong, Moser, Hall, & Dake, 2005; Gross, Alhusen, & Jennings, 2012).

Manuscript Option Dissertation

The manuscript option dissertation is becoming more prevalent throughout American universities as an alternative to the traditional dissertation. Manuscript option dissertations commonly consist of an introduction, three manuscripts, and a chapter detailing the subject

matter. One of the manuscripts must include original findings as a result of the research (Gross et al., 2012). This option also requires that manuscripts are either ready for journal submission or publication. Although the formatting guidelines are similar to traditional dissertations, exact guidelines are determined by the dissertation committee and the institution. The manuscript option often allows students to develop the manuscript in conjunction with completing coursework. (De Jong et al, 2005; Gross et al., 2012).

Doctoral candidates who write dissertations using the manuscript option format are motivated to obtain publications prior to degree completion. Researchers also note that this option supports early development of skills essential for publication. Manuscript option dissertations have been associated with assisting students in the job market and obtaining research funding. Publications resulting from this option could assist with future tenure and academic rank. The benefits associated with this option make it an increasing contender to the traditional dissertation format (Gross et al., 2012).

Nontraditional Dissertation

A third dissertation format is a group of all other types that do not fall under the traditional five chapter or manuscript format description. This group of dissertations can be categorized as nontraditional dissertation formats. Nontraditional dissertations provide options for students to produce a work beyond the traditional monograph. Nontraditional approaches seek to substitute the hierarchical committee arrangement with a new project organization style of cooperation. Many universities have altered the traditional dissertation process in the disciplines of literature, history, anthropology, philosophy. The University of Virginia, City University of New York, and Michigan State among others have invested major financial resources to create digital humanities centers for the implementation of digital dissertations.

Technological advances allow students at several universities to produce digital dissertations that integrate film clips, interactive maps, three-dimensional animation, and sound (Patton, 2013). Washington State University and Texas State University require history doctoral students to create dissertations that provide useful assistance to historical societies, museums, and preservation agencies. History doctoral students at Stanford University and Emory University collaborate digitally on projects with lab assistants, computer technicians, faculty, and geographers using geolocation mappings to create collaborative visuals to display their dissertation requirement in aesthetically pleasing ways (Patton, 2013).

The Dissertation in Practice (DiP) is another alternative to the traditional dissertation approach, and it is supported by the Carnegie Project on Educational Doctorate (CPED). DiP is characterized as a closed cohort delivery method that encourages peer group identity and support via a group supported dissertation. "Most higher education CPED cohorts deciding to undertake a group styled dissertation in practice (DiP) choose to divide up the cohort into several small groups whom select a topic to complete (and it is optional whether or not the topics for each small group bear any relation to one another)" (Guo & Rose, 2015, p. 25). Students participating in the DiP method aim to decrease isolation while increasing depth of understanding regarding the selected topic. Although it is still in primary stages at 88 colleges, doctoral student's capacity to think, achieve, and act with honesty are expected to increase as a result of this approach. Ongoing participant input of this method is needed to promote a paradigm revision in the mindset of doctoral faculty and students (Guo & Rose, 2015). In sum, there are different types and formats of doctoral programs as well as different types and formats for the dissertation as a component of the doctoral program. Although there are different doctoral programs and different dissertation formats, one thing they all have in common is attrition.

Doctoral Attrition

Successful doctoral completion can take up to ten years (Barnes & Randle, 2012). 41% of enrolled doctoral students complete doctoral studies in 7 years and 57% have a success rate in 10 years. Full-time enrolled doctoral students are more likely to finish the program compared to part-time students. Furthermore, students who receive some portion of financial support are more likely to persist through the program. Research does not support that a high undergraduate Grade Point Average (GPA) is a predictor of doctoral degree success; non-completers have similar undergraduate GPA's to completers (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012).

Attrition rates vary greatly among institutions and disciplines (Gardner, 2010; Groenvynck et al., 2013). Nontraditional, distance doctoral programs report 10% to 20% higher attrition rates than traditional programs (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2011). Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) typically have lower attrition rates than humanities and social science majors (Groenvynck et al., 2013). Biomedical and behavioral sciences report an attrition rate of 24% while humanities and social sciences experience nearly a 67% attrition rate. Overall, departure and attrition rates range from 40% to 60% across various disciplines (Gardner, 2010; Groenvynck et al., 2013). Gardner (2009) found that disciplinary context and culture greatly impacted doctoral success. Also, there are definite distinctions between disciplinary interpretations of success among departments (Gardner, 2009).

Golde and Dore (2001) in a landmark study found that many doctoral students felt inadequately trained to write a dissertation. Approximately, 72% of participants expressed that coursework failed to provide an adequate foundation for completing independent research. In addition, 43.5% of participants described qualifying exams and orals as unhelpful and arbitrary. Less than half of survey respondents reported feeling prepared to publish after doctoral program

completion. The scholars recommended that departments explore the intended purpose of doctoral coursework and qualifying exams (Golde & Dore, 2001).

Attrition creates noneconomic and economic consequences for institutions. The waste of departmental, institutional, state, and federal resources is a byproduct of attrition. Noneconomic waste occurs at the emotional and social level. Students who do not finish are often deprived of potential productivity in academia (Golde, 2015).

> Completion rates and time to degree in doctoral training programmes are important indicators monitoring the stock and flow of researchers in academic labour markets and in evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of doctoral education. The return on investment in doctoral education is negatively affected by high attrition. (Groenvynck et al., 2013, p. 199)

Given the screening process associated with admitting students to doctoral programs, the attrition rate is somewhat astounding (Martinez et al., 2013). Because doctoral courses are the most expensive of graduate coursework, researchers describe heightened attrition as an unacceptable waste of the institution's financial and human resources. Furthermore, continuous researchers have denoted that students who fail to complete report emotional disparagement (Willis & Carmichael, 2011; Johnsrud & Banaria, 2004).

Lovitts (1996), a noted scholar on doctoral attrition, suggests that the graduate school environment promotes pluralistic ignorance among students:

> The competitive environment does not encourage students to admit that they are having difficulty understanding what is expected of them or that they are having difficulty fulfilling expectations that are often unrealistic. Thus, when graduate students who are struggling see other graduate students putatively thriving, they come to believe they are

the only ones having problems and attribute their difficulties to their own inadequacies and not to the structure of the situation (Lovitts, 1996, p. 9).

Attrition statistics often support the tautological and false assumption that only the best are able to complete the degree. Due to a steady pool of applicants or readily available replacements, students are rarely asked the conditions associated with their exit (Lovitts, 1996).

Existing qualitative and quantitative research regarding doctoral attrition warn that beginning doctoral studies is a high-risk decision (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). "Doctoral student attrition as an area of study is highly complex, largely because there is no systematic data collection process within programs, graduate schools, college/university records offices, or national databases" (Stallone, 2011, p. 19). The sources of attrition are profoundly rooted in the process, structure, and culture of graduate institutions in higher education. Historical perspectives of faculty members denote a shortage of obligation to endure the meticulousness of doctoral education as the leading reason of attrition (Ali & Kohan, 2007). Liechty et al., (2009) reported that current doctoral matriculation follows a four stage pattern with heightened dropout rates for doctoral students during the ABD period. Nontraditional, distance doctoral programs report 10% to 20% higher attrition rates than traditional programs (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2011). Although 50% of doctoral students fail to complete their studies, 30% of doctoral students drop out during the dissertation phase (Willet, 2014).

The dissertation stage is characterized by independent research nearly absent of social collaboration with external parties (Willet, 2014). Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) reported that a successful dissertation defense and subsequent degree completion leave doctoral students with a huge sense of accomplishment and relief. Doctoral completers report a degree of pride associated with obtaining the highest degree in their respective fields. The joy of

successfully defending a dissertation and participating in a doctoral graduation exercise is noted very positively by doctoral graduates. In addition, the lifetime initials behind the name and the doctoral title is regarded as the high point for doctoral graduates (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Varney (2010) further states that additional research is needed to assist with the amplified drop-out statistics in order to identify factors that positively influence completion. As a result, Gearity and Mertz (2012) suggest additional research related to factors that influence doctoral completion.

Factors that Influence Doctoral Completion

The literature related to factors that influence doctoral completion can be categorized into three overarching thematic areas: (1) individual characteristics, (2) programmatic factors, (3) relational supports that aid success.

Individual Factors

The first theme is identified in the scholarship related to factors that influence doctoral completion is the theme of individual characteristics that include demographics, cognitive factors, non-cognitive factors, personal obligations and professional responsibilities. Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) found that doctoral studies require sacrifice of quality time with children, spouses, and extended family as well as a sacrifice of time spent on hobbies, sleep, job responsibilities, and leisure activities. Due to the prolonged time to complete doctoral studies, a host of intervening circumstances such as career, birth, marriage, childcare, illness and death are also factors that influence doctoral completion. Demographic factors associated with persistence include gender, ethnicity, age, and marital status. Also, males are more likely to persist than females, middle-aged majority students are more likely to complete than middle-aged minorities,

and married students complete at a higher rate than unmarried (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

Additional individual factors that affect student persistence include personal, professional, and financial ramifications. Researchers often associate doctoral attrition with: financial assistance, institutional orientation, writing skills, and the relationship with the dissertation chair as key indicators of successful advancement through the program (West et al., 2011; Noonan, 2015). External commitments and obligations including family and financial needs are huge influences on the ability to concentrate on the huge demands of a doctoral degree (Willet, 2014). Self-efficacy has historically been stated as a key factor to positively impacting dissertation completion (Faghihi et al., 1999). "High levels of self-efficacy in research in the present study were defined by students' level of confidence in conducting/executing different aspects of the dissertation, such as the literature review, topic selection, writing, and technical aspects related to design and analysis in both quantitative and qualitative mode" (Faghihi et al., 1999, p. 17).

Lovitts (2008) denoted formal and informal knowledge as a prevalent theme regarding doctoral students making the transition to independent researchers. Formal knowledge is best associated with the coursework portion of graduate study. It is inclusive of the ability to acquire knowledge of principles, facts, theories, concepts, attitudes, paradigms, and opinions regarding issues in the methods of assessing problems and examining the contributions of others. Although a degree of acquired formal knowledge is required via a passing score on qualifying exams, it does not guarantee doctoral students have the sophisticated knowledge to independently perform research in their respective subject areas (Lovitts, 2008). Informal knowledge is not considered learned knowledge, but it is better characterized as inferred knowledge. Students who possess

39

more informal knowledge were found to have more experience with research during undergraduate studies. Doctoral students who did not engage in research assignments in undergraduate and previous graduate courses seriously lacked the tacit infrastructure to attack an independent research project such as dissertation (Lovitts, 2008).

Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) asserted that: intelligence, learning style, GRE performance, interview performance, intrinsic motivation, and personality as positively associated with dissertation completion. "Students with ABD status showed lower frustration tolerance, more difficulty making decisions, less ability to receive help, greater self-criticism, and less structure in their approach to academic tasks than successful PhD graduates"(Liechty et al., 2009, p. 85). Responsibility is linked to the ability to accept constructive criticism. High achieving doctoral students sometimes have difficulty accepting responsibility for failure to complete the dissertation process because they are accustomed to academic success and praise (Liechty et al., 2009). Additional personal factors associated with degree completion include job layoffs and promotions, death, and family obligations (Willet, 2014). Many students compensate for unintended life trials by altering career plans and postponing family plans (Martinez et al., 2013).

Lovitts (2008) found that creativity was an essential individual characteristic necessary for doctoral completion. The following themes associated with the necessary individual factors that influence doctoral completion: intelligence, knowledge, thinking styles, personality, motivation, and environment. Empirical research also indicates the following as essential for degree completion: self-discipline, capacity to postpone gratification, perseverance when frustrated, independence of decision-making, endurance of ambiguity, desire to take risks, and an increased ability to complete independent tasks for excellence. Also, the following character

40

traits are essential for independent doctoral student research: willingness to work hard and patience, persistence and initiative, and intellectual curiosity (Lovitts, 2008). Although researchers denotes many individual characteristics associated with doctoral success, higher education institutions continuously search for answers to address the barriers associated with doctoral studies (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

Programmatic Factors

In addition to the theme of individual characteristics, a second theme in the literature related to factors that impact doctoral student completion is the theme related characteristics of the doctoral program, such as preparation, structure and culture. Although graduate schools seek to assist with attrition by placing attention on the student admission process, researchers suggest that attrition has more to do with program culture and structure than individual student characteristics (Lovitts, 1996; Stallone, 2011). Scholars have insisted that it is important to create a supportive and cooperative departmental climate with opportunities for institutional and peer support during the preparatory stage of doctoral education. Student productivity was linked to psychosocial assistance such as role modeling, counseling, and empathizing (West et al., 2011).

The program structure and type has a significant impact on the integration and experience of students into the program and university. Doctoral students equate a strong orientation program that outlines procedures, expectations, and process as favorable and a great introduction to the culture of the university. Students in distance programs report an elevated feeling of isolation due to limited access with faculty and peers. Furthermore, adult learners have been most persistent in program with flexible curriculums that are relevant to their current careers (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). "Doctoral persistence increases within programs that recognize the challenges associated with transitioning from structured coursework to

unstructured dissertation writing by building a connection between coursework and skills

needed to execute the dissertation" (Spaulding Rockinson-Szapkiwm, 2012, p. 202).

Additionally, Lovitts (1996) continuously argues that attrition is more of a product of the

social structural experience that takes place after a student is admitted. The study sample

included 40 doctoral granting universities across several disciplines and found that

undergraduate GPA was not a predictor of doctoral student success. The amount of participants

who graduated with a doctoral degree with less than a 3.0 undergraduate GPA was almost

identical to the number of students who graduated with greater than a 3.0 undergraduate GPA.

The scholar then concluded that it is not the student but rather the experience after admittance

that impacts doctoral attrition (Lovitts, 1996).

The doctoral experience is highly influenced by the type of doctorate being pursued as

well (Offerman, 2011). Participants in a four-year qualitative study reported their institutional

programs did not prepare them for the dissertation process. Participants reported inadequate

feedback from staff and suggested developing organized programs to assist students throughout

the doctoral process (Hadjioannou et al., 2007). Another study that accumulated data from 4000

students from 11 science and arts disciplines at 27 higher education sites found that students are

oftentimes not adequately orientated about the doctoral progression, and they lack a clear

knowledge of advisor's guidelines and time to progress through the degree (Barnes & Randle,

2012). Although many doctoral programs offer supportive measures in the initial stages of the

program via orientations and cohort formations, support diminishes when students enter the

independent dissertation phase (Holmes, Robinson, & Seay, 2010).

Relational Support

A third theme identified in the academic literature related to doctoral success is the theme of relational support. Researchers suggest that cohorts enhance peer relationship and academic success (Spualding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Weidman et al, 2001). Because dissertation students are likely to form an organic bond if given the opportunity to work together, institutions are encouraged to schedule communication of cohorts throughout the dissertation process. Students who are assembled for a common purpose in a cohort report the opportunities for collaborative learning and shared accountability whether deliberate or inadvertent. In addition to providing accountability, cohorts assist with the commitment to time management both as a collective and individual goal for students. The mutual influence of cohort members assist with completing the dissertation (Holmes et al., 2010; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). "Cohort formation involves the selection and organization of doctoral students in a cohort with deliberate arrangements to facilitate group cohesiveness, and trust for peer support and learning" (Noonan, 2015, p. 13). Traditional and nontraditional students participating in cohorts report the opportunity to collaborate professionally, share accommodations, pray, brainstorm, and laugh as a supportive unit (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). "Irrespective to the model, cohorts provide interactions with peers that foster connectivity and increase social integration, sense of belonging and community" (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012, p. 202).

Additionally, Ali & Kohun (2007) have been long time supporters of the cohort approach and additional remedies decrease isolation associated with doctoral students. The researchers outline the necessity for a social integration plan at each institution. The social integration plan includes clear expectations to decrease confusion regarding doctoral program procedures. Additionally, the implementation of study groups can help prepare doctoral students for the

qualifying exam requirement. The authors recommended that universities implement debriefing sessions after the qualifying exam to discuss programmatic issues. A further suggestion of practice from the study was that universities provide some type of structure during the dissertation stage including a collaborative model with the dissertation advisor. The authors recommended the cohort approach as a means to provide a sense of community to foster individual growth (Ali & Kohun, 2007).

Current researchers also support effective faculty advising and self-efficacy as integral for dissertation success (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Faghihi et al. (1999) previously examined doctoral students' relationships regarding research preparation, background characteristics, research environment, student-advisor relationship, research involvement, dissertation involvement, and research self-efficacy. All participants were in the candidacy stage with a passing score on coursework, orals, and qualifying exams during a period of 1987-1997. A 61 item questionnaire assessed three areas and yielded the following conclusions: graduate students who had satisfactorily experience with coursework and qualifying exams were able to advance more in the dissertation stage. Other participants who perceived previous training as lacking reported slow progress and frustration with the dissertation. The study denoted self-efficacy as the key factor to positively impacting dissertation completion (Faghihi et al., 1999). The research related to factors that influence doctoral completion has many elements in common with studies of barriers related to doctoral student success.

Barriers to Dissertation Success

The dissertation is a major hurdle for the majority of doctoral students. Doctoral students report several barriers during the dissertation as they transition to independent scholars (Holmes et al., 2010; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). The most prevalent challenges occur when

44

students are striving to complete the research proposal, finding the method to collect data, and writing the dissertation. Inexperienced students who are not exposed to institutional supports and adequate dissertation chair supervision have a challenging experience (Ismail, Abiddin, Aminuddin, 2011). The student and advisor relationship is the most critical factor of the dissertation experience (Ismail et al., 2011; Barnes & Randle, 2012). The dissertation stage differs from previous stages of the doctoral program due to the elimination of synchronous class meetings with other students and faculty. The entire support structure available at all levels of the American education model vanishes for doctoral students during the dissertation stage. As a result, students find it difficult to persist during the dissertation phase because of unstructured and limited guidance. Students report having difficulty maintaining deadlines and managing time during the independent dissertation phase (Willet, 2014).

Individual Barriers

Psychological factors and personal circumstances play a substantial part in dissertation completion as well (Liechty et al., 2009; Willet, 2014). Doctoral candidates report a significant personal sacrifice of time with children, spouses, and friends in order to complete the requirements of the dissertation. Candidates also report a sacrifice of hobbies and sleep. Also, researchers denote intervening life occurrences such as the following: death, illness, birth, marriage, job promotion, job loss, or faculty sabbatical as individual barriers that could impede persistence (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

Kearns, Gardiner, and Marshall (2008) reported that competitive academic settings that require a high level of mental ability can create emotional and cognitive blocks. Self-handicapping behaviors such as perfectionism, procrastination, overcommitting, dependency,

unrealistic thinking, and busyness were debilitating during the dissertation process (Green & Kluever, 1997; Kearns et al., 2008; Liechty et al., 2009; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2015; Thomas, Williams, & Case, 2014). Green and Kluever (1997) suggested that ABD students have less self-motivation and self-discipline than degree completers. Furthermore, several researchers agreed that ABD students claim less responsibility for their incomplete dissertation status (Green & Kluever, 1997; Liechty et al., 2009).

Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) found that the greatest barriers to dissertation completion were to time management, autonomous work, statistics, and advisor-student relationship. Researchers also reported that students struggle with finding a researchable topic, putting together a compatible committee, computing statistics, mastering new technologies, and the writing process. Lovitts (2008) found that difficulty with thinking styles that contribute to the doctoral student's inability to complete independent research. Comments suggest that students who drop out have thinking styles incongruent with becoming an independent scholar who can work in isolation to complete the independent dissertation.

Lovitts (2008) reported that analytical, practical, and creative intelligence were all needed to produce credible independent research. Analytical intelligence was described as the ability to solve and recognize problems, examine the quality of thoughts, and disseminate resources to develop ideas after addressing problems. Doctoral students who transitioned to the independent research stage made higher scores on graduate entrance exams such as the Graduate Record Exam (GRE). Practical intelligence was defined as the ability to answer problems and use thoughts in appropriate methods, exhibit them adequately to an audience, and respond suitably to criticism so that thoughts earn approval. Doctoral students who most often transitioned to the independent research stage were efficient, worked independently on tasks, and achieved

standards and goals for themselves. Creative intelligence was defined as the capacity to

formulate high quality ideas and problems. Creative intelligence resembled a student who can

adequately generate ideas via debates, seminars, and discussions on an array of subject matter.

The researcher concluded that a good predictor of the ability to create an independent

dissertation, rests with students who are able to be critical, think about what is read, and willing

to assess problems in several methods (Lovitts, 2008).

The lack of motivation can be another individual barrier to doctoral student success.

Doctoral students who are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to progress further

through the dissertation process are most successful (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

Although most graduate students have the ability to finish their degrees and contribute a modest

amount to existing literature, their motivation and enthusiasm will impact the quality and nature

of the contribution to a specified research inquiry. Although students who are extrinsically

motivated by grades, evaluations, and monetary rewards have an increased probability of

completing an independent research problem, those who are highly internally motivated spend

increased time exploring various aspects of an independent research assignment (Lovitts, 2008).

Doctoral students experienced competing responsibilities and roles that demand attention

and time and have difficulties balancing their educational pursuits with personal responsibilities.

As a result, work-life balance is a frequent topic of concern for doctoral students. A significant

source of stress for doctoral students resulted from the struggle to balancing the necessities of

life, work, and studies (Martinez et al., 2013). Additionally, relational barriers with advisors and

frustration with the institution of higher education have been acknowledged as contributors to

attrition (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

Relational Barriers

Researchers directed a study with six doctoral students who left doctoral studies during the dissertation stage. The aim of the research was to assist aspiring and current doctoral students. The major barrier for the majority of participants was the dissertation chair relationship. Five participants reported harassment or neglect. As a result, participants report an inability to stay on task due to lack of guidance through the dissertation journey. The same participants report turning to their jobs for feelings of adequacy as they describe feeling powerless during the dissertation process. Participants eventually report long term struggles associated with dropping out. One participant recounted a positive emotional reaction of peace and relief because of feeling drained of time and money when writing the dissertation. Implications of the study suggested that dissertation chairs should be matched in relation to shared interest in topic and quantitative or qualitative preference with a collaborative method of research mentoring (Willis & Carmichael, 2011).

The lack of significant relationships is also classified as barrier to dissertation completions. Doctoral studies have long been associated as an autonomous, isolating, academic work. The aforementioned characteristics are such the norm when referencing doctoral students that many have been traditionally accepted as customary for doctoral completion (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011). "To the socially isolated individual, there is no social venue to vent out this kind of psychological pressure, and this may lead to a conscious decision to leave the program" (Ali & Kohun, 2007, p. 41). Ali and Kohun (2007) found isolation was a key factor for students who decided to discontinue doctoral studies. Isolation has been defined as being void of meaningful relationships. The change in lifestyle in doctoral studies creates a decrease of meaningful connection with social contacts. Isolation is most gruesome when coping with the pressures of

doctoral studies that oftentimes cause stress and disappointment. Isolation coupled with the demands of skill and preparation doctoral studies are a recipe for heightened fatigue and dropout.

Skill and Preparation Barriers

Another major barrier that doctoral students face in the dissertation process is writing. Doctoral candidates must have adequate skill preparation in order to complete the dissertation process (Liechty et al., 2009). Kamler and Thompson (2008) suggested that penning the dissertation is the epitome of the acquisition of the doctoral degree. "In academia, an outdated assumption exists that graduate students possess sufficient academic writing skills that they acquired prior to entry into graduate school, and do not need writing assistance" (Thomas et al., 2014, p. 70). "Yet too often doctoral writing is treated as separate from and ancillary to real work of research. Graduate students are rarely offered systematic instruction in high-level academic writing. Academic writing is treated as a discrete set of technical skills that are effectively context free" (Kamler & Thompson, 2008, p. 507).

Past researchers have expressed that inadequate training has often resulted in anxiety, fear, and negative feelings towards the dissertation experience. Even though an academic microenvironment is conducive to progressing to the dissertation stage, it does not always translate to dissertation completion. Sometimes this type of productive environment equates to finishing faculty research assignment rather than completing the dissertation process (Faghihi et al., 1999). Thomas et al. (2014) also report that novice students who are expected to write at the professional level are often unsure about punctuation and mechanics and quantitative and qualitative information. "Studies show that doctoral students often lack a sense of how to structure and plan for a major independent project, and that they are unclear about expectations, time management, and establishing a reasonable time frame" (Liechty et al., 2009, p. 490).

Students must undertake the following: absorb the content of what they read, determine what is known is what needs to be known, identify important ongoing disciplinary debates, develop the judgment to discriminate between work of high quality and mediocre efforts, extract useful information on which to build, juxtapose multiple theoretical perspectives and explanations, connect research studies to one another, synthesize and reappraise others' work, and learn the stylistic conventions of written work, such as norms of what to say and what to omit. (Golde, 2007 p. 344)

As a result, faculty members at the graduate level were puzzled regarding the best methods of assistance regarding skill preparation (Thomas et al., 2014).

Thomas et al., (2014) denoted that higher order and lower order concerns must be addressed with graduate level writing in order to assist students. "Higher order concerns can include problems with purpose of a work and/or following the assignment; quality/clarity/originality; the quality/logic of the argument; development and organization of ideas; transitions between ideas and paragraphs; the use of sufficient evidence and detail; paragraph organization; and unity and coherence with the paragraphs themselves" (Thomas et al., 2014, p. 72). Higher order concerns can be an intimidating task for graduate writers because many assignments require an incorporation of multiple concepts (Thomas et al., 2014). In addition, some graduate students require a refresher on lower order concerns. "Lower order concerns include excessive passive construction, choppiness, wordiness, redundancies, misuse/vague use of pronouns, misplaced modifiers fragmented or run-on sentences, and issues of parallelism"(Thomas et al., 2014, p. 73).

Hodson and Buckley (2011) utilized the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey with over 30,000 doctoral students and reported that research skills are a critical issue for doctoral

students. Hilliard (2013) suggested that some doctoral programs provide relevant coursework, such as statistics, too many semesters preceding the dissertation process. Participants of the study report not remembering course content when it was time to apply skills during the dissertation phase. Results of the research also indicated that candidates needed more instruction related to collecting and analyzing data. A majority of the participants in the study also desired the following skill preparation: a technical writing course, examples of successfully written dissertations, access to a statistical data base, review of relevant vocabulary associated with research design, more developmental activities concerning the dissertation process, and faculty members with a proven background in teaching research design (Hilliard, 2013).

Several opportunities should be integrated in the curriculum before doctoral students are required to write professionally during the dissertation stage (Golde, 2007). Doctoral students must become knowledgeable of acceptable ways to collect and analyze information. New ways of thinking are required to contribute to the existing body of literature (Golde & Dore, 2001). Knowledge achievement for the doctoral student includes the ability to comprehend and familiarize the educational culture, to meet faculty criteria, and to complete higher order thinking tasks after being provided with both simple and progressive material. The data can be acquired through conventional and unconventional resources from an assortment of sources, predominantly educational standards and structures, faculty role and management, and pupil peer culture. Knowledge attainment was derived mostly from administrative structures (with faculty serving as principal socializing representatives) and pupil peer culture (Weidman et al., 2001).

Financial Barriers

Over 37 million Americans have collegiate student debt. Since the year 2010, more people have student debt than credit card debt. Graduate students acquired more than 35 billion

dollars in private and federal loans during the 2011-2012 school year alone (Belasco, Trivetter, Webber, 2014). Financial barriers for students are historically the result of rising costs of higher education coupled with reduced contributions of public higher education institutions (Johnsrud & Banaria, 2004). Doctoral students have traditionally depended on financial support via graduate teacher assistantships, fellowships, and research assistantships. An increasing amount graduate students use personal resources and sustain debt while completing degree requirements. Approximately, 40% of the participants were unsure about methods to fund dissertation research (Belasco et al, 2014; Golde & Dore, 2001). Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) reported that doctoral students receiving financial aid via assistantships, scholarships, and fellowships experience less stress than their counterparts who do not receive financial assistance.

Doctoral students are faced with rising debt during the pursuit of doctoral education. Some institutions are combatting the issue by enrolling fewer students in order to provide departmental financial support. Although funding remains available via stipends and assistantships, pressure to produce quick results has caused a decrease in effective faculty mentorship (Johnsrud & Banaria, 2004). A study completed by Willis and Carmichael (2011) found that students would be better served by participating in a doctoral program that provides ample financial support. Students receiving sufficient financial aid completed doctoral studies at a higher rate than those who did not receive aide. Furthermore, students receiving financial assistance through fellowships or assistanceships were more likely to complete and develop lasting connections with faculty (Willet, 2014). The amount of time and energy that graduate students put forth in meeting program requirements most closely approximates the extent of investment. As students progress beyond matriculation, enroll in courses, interact with faculty and peers, learn the ropes and proceed through each semester, their investment deepens

(Weidman et al., 2001). Attrition contributed to the rising costs of education due to the department's resources to recruit, admit, and select doctoral students. Attrition was often considered and an economic concern for the university and workforce (Johnsrud & Banaria, 2004). As such, social development theory has been utilized to assist with the typical barriers associated dissertation completion (Liechty et al., 2009).

Social Development Theory

"Socialization during the graduate education has been defined as the process through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring an advanced level of specialized knowledge and skills (Barnes & Austin, 2009, p. 301). A skilled educator offers appropriate guidance to encourage students to reach their highest development (Liechty et al., 2009). "Without scaffolding, even extremely enthused doctoral scholars may feel flabbergasted and incapable of advancing through the dissertation process" (Liechty et al., 2009, p. 483). When using the social development framework to outline the necessary development to complete the dissertation process, the multilevel factors affecting success can be divided into three constructs: individual characteristics, relational factors, and structural factors (Liechty et al., 2009).

A recent study asserts that independent learning requirements, such as a dissertation, requires that students appraise their needs, determine the paramount methods to obtain desirable skills or knowledge, and assess that learning has ensued (Kriner, Coffman, Adkisson, Putnam, & Monaghan, 2015). Several researchers proclaim that self-handicapping, individual characteristics such as procrastination and perfectionism can create obstacles for students working on a dissertation (Green & Kluever, 1997; Kearns et al., 2008; Liechty et al., 2009). Numerous studies report that the relationship between the faculty advisor and dissertation student as crucial

to the successful completion of the study (Barnes & Austin, 2009; Columbaro, 2009; Hilliard, 2013; Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Main, 2014; Yarwood-Ross & Haigh, 2014). In addition, some researchers suggest that an institutional mentoring program for dissertation students can provide specialized assistances and campus networks as the major rewards for pupil involvement (Holley & Caldwell, 2011).

Vygotsky's social development theory rests on providing the learner with a community of assistance (McArthur, 2012). Vygotsky believed that it was necessary to actively support learners in order to enhance cognitive ability (Vygotsky, 1978). "It is the responsibility of the student to commit to scholarly habits that make success possible; the responsibility of the department to plan a program in which students can sequentially gain skill mastery to complete a dissertation; and the shared responsibility of the student, faculty, program, and institution to create and utilize interpersonal opportunities for student-faculty, student-peer, and student-program mentoring activities" (Liechty et al., 2009, p. 493).

In response to the many challenges faced by doctoral students, universities have responded with different support mechanisms needed during various stages of the doctoral process. Program satisfaction and student persistence have been deemed as very important measures for student completion. Current research is beginning to focus on the support component as crucial to degree completion. Doctoral academic support is inclusive of the following: mentors, doctoral cohorts, or organized graduate school programs (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011). Faculty support such as coaching, modeling, articulation, scaffolding, reflection, and stimulating the transfer of knowledge have been designated as effective and practical means to reinforce the socialization of upcoming scholars (Anderson & Anderson, 2012).

Socialization cannot be viewed as occasional support but rather as an ongoing process. Doctoral students enter programs with idealism and enthusiasm to engage in a meaningful graduate experience. Doctoral students often struggle to make sense of graduate work as it relates to 21st century careers. Socialization with family, friends, peers, and faculty are deemed essential in making sense of the systematic process of completing graduate studies (Austin, 2002). Austin (2002) conducted a four-year qualitative, longitudinal study regarding the socialization development of doctoral students who aspired to join the professoriate. The most prevalent themes in regards to socialization included the following: reflective advisor/mentor feedback and guidance, structured meetings to observe others in the field, opportunities to participate in diverse teaching conditions, and increased guidance and information regarding faculty position requirements (Austin, 2002).

The research continually supports that students who have healthy academic support are more likely to matriculate through the stages of doctoral study. First year doctoral students experience a new routine, environment, and people. The literature suggests orientation programs to assist with any misconceptions about doctoral programs and process or clarify any issues prior to the beginning of the program (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011). Social development theory offers a multilevel academic framework for understanding the integrative influences affecting dissertation accomplishment (Liechty et al., 2009). Existing literature suggests that doctoral student persistence is the product of individual student and collaboration with the institutional and social environment and relations formed with others (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

Relational Support

Work-life balance in regards to doctoral studies is a challenge for students in all academic programs. Research reports that students struggle to juggle career, family responsibilities, and the demands of doctoral studies. The prolonged time needed to complete independent research often leads to feelings of worry, stress, guilt, and anxiety for many doctoral students. Heightened stress associated with work-life external relationships contributes to doctoral attrition. Formal and informal relations with parents, spouse, friends, editors, and statisticians have been noted as valuable support system. Although balancing doctoral studies is a challenging feat, research denotes the relationship with the dissertation chair and committee is most challenging (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

Existing literature indicates that the absence or presence of external relationships with faculty highly influences the doctoral experience (Stallone, 2011). Academic doctoral student relationships seek to facilitate and support self-discovery as the student progresses to an independent scholar. Pertinent relations evolve over the course of the doctoral studies. Initial relations are formed with faculty and peers followed by the advisor-candidate relationship. Eventually, doctoral, independent scholars establish a working relationship with their respective discipline and academic community (Noonan, 2015). Doctoral students typically work with an advisor in order to develop the necessary skills to move toward becoming an independent researcher (Golde & Dore, 2001; Main, 2014).

Weidman et al., (2001), widely quoted scholars on socialization for doctoral students, and Gardner and Gopaul (2012) all assert that graduate school faculty are essential socialization agents for the doctoral student Vygotsky suggests that relationships with advisors and mentors have a strong effect on developing ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). "Such social interaction with mentors

and more expert peers is part of the hidden curriculum of doctoral study-the embedded and social ways in which academic culture and tools of research are gradually transmitted to students" (Liechty et al., 2009, p.487). Several research studies make the claim that relationships with external parties are pivotal to the success of the doctoral student (Barnes & Austin, 2009; Columbaro, 2009; Hilliard, 2013; Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Maher, Feldon, Timmerman & Chao, 2013; Main, 2014; Yarwood-Ross & Haigh, 2014). "We know that the supervisor can make or break the PhD student" (Maher et al., 2013, p.701).

Lovitts (2008) suggests that the doctoral students' environment is divided into macroenvironment and microenvironment. The macroenvironment is the larger environment where doctoral students live and work. The microenvironement includes the university and department setting where graduate students spend a vast majority of time (Lovitts, 2008). Participants of the study conducted by Lovitts (2008) also denotes the advisor as the most essential environmental factor necessary to complete independent research.

The major role of the advisor is to ensure that the doctoral student successfully finishes the degree requirements (Hilliard, 2013). According to Main (2014), faculty advisors are coupled with students centered on factors such as availability, similar research interests, programmatic necessities, and funding opportunities. Hilliard (2013) also states the advisor should establish a professional relationship where feedback is constant. Existing literature including doctoral candidates and post graduates suggests that advisors need to be encouraging and nurturing during the dissertation process (Hilliard, 2013; Yarwood-Ross & Haigh 2014). Yarwood-Ross and Haigh (2014) report that doctoral students desire an advisor who is reliable, knowledgeable, encouraging, and informative. Characteristics of effective supervisors include active listening, mutual debate, and continuous support and feedback (Yarwood-Ross & Haigh,

2014). Scholars found that doctoral degree completers report a more positive relationship with advisors than non-completers (Barnes & Austin, 2009). Erratic advice from an advisor could lead to a rocky beginning and ultimately to frustration and or mistrust (Ali & Kohun, 2007).

Schlosser, Know, Moskovitz, and Hill (2003) completed a study concerning doctoral students and advisors. The participants of the study represented nine higher education institutions with advisors who ranged in age. Satisfied and unsatisfied participants denoted the following themes as most crucial to the advising relationship: advisor selection technique, frequency of communication, costs and benefits of the relationship, and the method of conflict resolution. Satisfied participants reported a positive relationship while unsatisfied participants recounted a negative relationship (Schlosser et al., 2003). Research indicates the following essential functions and roles of an advisor: reliable source of information, departmental and occupational socializer, and an advocate and role model for the advisee (Rose, 2005).

A research study sought to dichotomize the experience of satisfied and dissatisfied students in regards to the advising relationship. Participants who reported a satisfactory experience often selected their advisor while many unsatisfied participants were assigned dissertation advisors. Satisfied students also reported a relationship where regular, individual meetings were consistent while unsatisfied students reported inconsistent group meetings with advisors. Satisfied students reported that meetings assisted with obtaining participants, evaluating data, writing outcomes, and career guidance while unsatisfied students reported not having support readily available. Satisfied participants also recounted that conflict was handled openly and positively affected the relationship while unsatisfied participants recounted that conflict was not discussed and avoided. In addition, satisfied participants generally reported that

they explored other sources such as peers, supervisors, or faculty to meet any additional need not fulfilled by their respective advisor (Schlosser et al. 2003).

Jaeger, Sandmann, and Kim (2011) conducted a qualitative study regarding the doctoral student and dissertation chair relationship. The researchers described the student and advisor relationship as profoundly impacted by the experience of the advisor and support structure provided by the advisor during the dissertation process. Conclusions of the study suggest that it is ultimately important that students and advisors intentionally exhibit mutual respect for each other and the learning process. The researchers also reveal that a reciprocal and personal relationship is favored over a traditional hierarchical relationship where advisors are considered experts. The recommendations for the future included a focus on relationship building between the student and advisor throughout the dissertation process (Jaeger et al., 2011).

Scholars on the topic cite program devotion and mutual respect with advisors as necessary for dissertation progress. The advisee acquires proper role performance through didactic training and through collaboration with others who previously hold the applicable normative dogmas about society and suitable role performance (Weidman et al., 2001). Advisors are most critical in last stage of doctoral studies. The natural progression of the advisor's role transforms from social and interpersonal to communicating knowledge, skills and guidance (Faghihi et al., 1999). Students who are aligned with a nurturing faculty advisor can ensure systematic progress toward graduation (Weidman et al., 2001).

Researchers characterize the dissertation process as problematic for doctoral students because of the pressure associated with augmenting the existing body of work on any given topic. The struggle is increased because there is limited structure and limitations to produce scholarly research. Because of the tedious nature of the dissertation, criticism from advisors is

oftentimes perceived as personal attacks. A maladaptive relationship with an advisor could make the doctoral process a nightmare. The dissertation stage can easily become strained if the advisor-student relationship lacks harmony (Weidman et al., 2001).

Barnes and Austin (2009) report that the mentor and advisor roles are not always exchangeable. Additional researchers agree that the terms are not synonymous although some characteristics overlap (Schlosser et al. 2003). Only half of doctoral students report having a mentor during the graduate degree experience while all doctoral students who pen a dissertation report having an advisor (Rose, 2005). Mentoring is generally characterized as a positive relationship that promotes professional development between the mentor and protégé. Advising is characterized as a positive or negative relationship that can enhance or derail professional development (Schlosser et al., 2003). Mentoring connections, while including many features as the advising relationship, are often differentiated by the shared emotional formations that grow innately and spontaneously (Rose, 2005). Although mentors can be associated with the university, outside parties such as reviewers, editors, supervisors can serve in the mentorship capacity as major contributors of the dissertation process (Mizzi, 2014).

"Mentors, in contrast to advisors, do more than simply stand and point the way. Mentors accompany their protégés through the entire process" (Barnes & Austin, 2009, p. 299). Many research studies denote a mentoring relationship as pivotal to the dissertation process (Barnes & Austin; 2009; Columbaro, 2009; Holley & Caldwell, 2011). Barnes and Austin (2009) and Holley and Caldwell (2011) further explain that advisors are required to participate in the formal capacity to approve coursework while mentors can be sponsors, teachers, or role models who develop a relationship that positively impacts the completion of the dissertation. Although the doctoral student is paired with a faculty advisor during the dissertation phase, a mentoring

association offers professional and personal support that goes beyond the customary advising requirement (Holley & Caldwell, 2011). The research indicates that doctoral students often find that mentors are supportive and interested in student achievement, competent and knowledgeable in their respective fields, and eager and persistent in maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships with advisors (Holley & Caldwell, 2011; Schlosser et al., 2003).

Prospective graduate students are often universally advised to seek a mentor. The resulting task of soliciting a mentor can be complex and intimidating. Due to the perceived necessity of obtaining a mentor during doctoral studies, an Ideal Mentor Scale (IMS) was created by Rose (2003) to assist with student preferences associated with mentors. The goal of the IMS is to create a psychometrical tool to measure student preferences regarding mentorship, to increase awareness of most desired mentoring traits, to assist with matching doctoral students with appropriate faculty members, and to enhance relationships with existing mentoring relationships. The pilot sample to create the instrument included 82 doctoral students. The second sample included 250 doctoral students, and the last sample included 380 doctoral students. The results indicated that consistent feedback and appropriate interpersonal skills are universal ideal characteristics for mentors. Guidance, integrity, and relationship were all found to be positively correlated with doctoral student satisfaction and completion. (Rose, 2003).

The most essential contribution of a mentor is the ability to effectively and clearly provide feedback. Mentors furnish protection, sponsorship, exposure, challenge, visibility, acceptance, coaching, and/or confirmation to doctoral students (Rose, 2005). The results of a survey inclusive of 9,000 doctoral candidates concluded that a mentor was a key person to give advice and provide encouragement and support to the doctoral student. The study further suggests that additional strategies for mentors to implement with doctoral students are needed to

assist with student completion. The authors also denoted that doctoral students were a valuable resources to obtain the best interventions needed to assist the mentor and student relationship (Felder, 2010). The typical mentor relationship generally begins with the students acting as an apprentice while gradually developing knowledge under the direction of the mentor. The culminating relationship shifts from dependency to the development of autonomy by the doctoral students as the mentor and protégé communicate as peers (Rose, 2005).

The literature suggests that doctoral students benefit from a mentor during the identity development phase from a psychosocial standpoint. A research study investigated doctoral advising and mentoring skills to ascertain the influence on doctoral completion. The 477 participants were from various disciplines from two universities. The results indicated that advisors with mentoring characteristics were important to the 50% of them that regarding their advisors as having those attributes. The research further denotes that existing literature regarding mentoring is plagued by definitional complications, questionable conclusions, and minuscule effect sizes (Lunsford, 2012).

Yarwood-Ross and Haigh (2014) report that experiences with external relationships during the dissertation phase can have negative effects as well. Many doctoral students are obligated to write a dissertation, but report that they have minimal control over their process. Students also report that members of their committees often move during their process, disagree among themselves regarding their work, or even show disinterest during the dissertation defense (Leatherman, 1996). Mizzi (2014) reports that some doctoral students regard feedback from faculty as a frustrating and emotional experience. "In addition, students may not be willing to share negative information about their supervisory experience due to concerns regarding

anonymity and the need for continued good relationship throughout their academic careers"

(Vanstone, Hibbert, Kinsella, Mckenzie, Pitman & Lingard, 2013, p. 44).

Researchers completed a recent study from the doctoral student's regarding experience of

the dissertation phase and outlined the results in a "thematic analysis" (Yarwood-Ross & Haigh,

2014; p. 39). The five most prevalent themes were: communication difficulties, control and

engagement, academic bullying, lack of trust, and desertion (Yarwood-Ross & Haigh, 2014).

Communication Difficulties

The most prevalent theme, communication difficulties, was highly influenced by advisors

workloads. An example of a participant's response, "He has over 40 PhD students and possibly

has no time" (Yarwood-Ross & Haigh, 2014, p. 40). More participant experiences outline

advisors inability to meet when needed due to other obligations and the expectation that students

should be more independent. Also, many students reported that feedback was not given in a

timely fashion. (Yarwood-Ross & Haigh, 2014).

Control and Engagement

Participants of this study identified control as an obstacle due to advisors level of

expertise over the subject matter. Because the advisors were well-informed, they reportedly

stifled the inspiration of student's work. Other participants report that some advisors were not

engaged in their topics and offered little input (Yarwood-Ross & Haigh, 2014). An exemplar

states, "My supervisors lost interest in work pretty soon, so it was hard to get them to help or

indeed get a response at a certain point! I did doubt if they remembered my existence"

(Yarwood-Ross & Haigh, 2014, p. 41).

Academic Bullying

Participants repeatedly reported bullying from advisors due to a pattern of undermining their self-confidence (Yarwood-Ross & Haigh, 2014). An emotional response from a participant states, "I know I am going to quit…treats me like a second-class citizen and has to scrutinize everything I do. She has not only made me feel worthless, but I have lost all passion for science now" (Yarwood-Ross & Haigh, 2014, p. 41). Yarwood-Ross and Haigh (2014) suggest that additional research is warranted regarding faculty members and bullying of students.

Lack of Trust in Supervisors

Great support and guidance from external relationships are positively associated with completing the dissertation. However, a theme of this study recalls incidences where advisors used student's work without citing credit of their contributions (Yarwood-Ross & Haigh, 2014). A participant states, 'One of my supervisors wants to use my data for a publication. I doubt I will be an author in the paper" (Yarwood-Ross & Haigh, 2014, p. 41).

Desertion

Researchers also report that many participants in their study experienced a supervisor who had to leave or decided to depart with the student before they completed their dissertation. The abandonment caused participants to feel deserted. One participant states, "My supervisor left to go 500 miles away. He suggested transferring to the new university but that wasn't feasible for various reasons, not least their rules on taking existing students" (Yarwood-Ross & Haigh, 2014, p. 42).

"In sum, the positive advising relationship could be described as one in which the members have a good rapport, process conflict openly, and work together to facilitate the advisee's progress through the graduate program and development as an emerging professional

(Schlosser et al., 2003, p. 19). Pupils must be encouraged to extend their network of consultants so that there are additional devotees to advocate for them. No eligible students should ever discontinue a program because of inadequate advising. There should be support structures, at all stages and in every department, to guard learners. Students with greater than one supporter often benefit from the scope of outlooks. A subsequent external support also helps moderate against reliance on the control and sponsorship of one faculty member (Golde & Dore, 2001).

Structural Support

Tinto (1993) suggests that the institution plays a major role in student retention. Institutions are encouraged to distinguish how campus wide actions impact drop out decisions for students. Effective retention initiatives are dedicated to the welfare of all students over other university goals. Cardona (2013) describes Tinto as a leading scholar on the subject of socialization as it relates to the academic community. Tinto (1993) also outlines that institutional commitment is long term progression of program improvement rather a slogan highlighted in brochures. Thomas et al. (2014) report that each institution must decide the appropriate type of institutional support needed for graduate student successful completion. "A more recent trend in the literature on dissertation completion is an emphasis on structural barriers and facilitators to completing the dissertation" (Liechty et al., 2009, p. 489). Departmental and institutional level initiatives are both integral to providing scaffolding during the dissertation process (Liechty et al., 2009).

Weidman, Twale, and Stein are often cited as contemporary scholars in regards to socialization for doctoral students (Cardona, 2013). Doctoral program admission and curricula are a multifaceted process based on criteria evaluated by university, faculty, and professional standards. Departments at individual institutions vary considerably based on the stringency and

65

nature of the workload distributed to students. Internal factors affect the socialization of doctoral students including the capacity to adequately understand material, the capacity to adjust to professional norms, and the capability to communicate needs (Weidman et al., 2001). Research highlights that departmental climate affects doctoral completion. Increased completion statistics have been noted in departments with positive departmental climates. As a result, departmental decisions reflect the policies and norms of the graduate students more so than the institution as a whole (Willet, 2014). Weidman et al. (2001) declare that doctoral support groups generated by the department provide a communal environment to assist with the demands of academics and offer opportunities for future networking.

Doctoral student perspectives of lived experiences can assist with detailing the problems of the institutional program organization. The doctoral student is well suited to provide insight regarding institutional practices and policies. Doctoral students in a national study report that many participants enter doctoral programs without a clear understanding of the money, time, purpose, and persistency that the degree entails. Recommendations of the study encourage institutions to critically define doctoral objectives throughout the program of study. Findings also suggest that doctoral programs should be uniquely tailored to meet the individual needs of each student. The recommendations also request that institutional programs publish expectations, outline requirements, and create limits and boundaries for degree completion. Participants further recommend that aspiring doctoral students pick programs carefully and pay attention to detail. Survey results indicate that many doctoral students failed to ask questions about doctoral programs before beginning (Golde & Dore, 2001). In a mixed method study, Stallone (2011) indicated that doctoral students perceive cohort structure, program culture, and faculty-student relationships as critical to success.

Departmental initiatives regarding doctoral completion most frequently fall under the scaffolding process. Departments can use tracking software per discipline to monitor students during the dissertation process. As a result of monitoring and tracking, appropriate time can be placed on student's weaknesses in order to form individualized assistance. Monitoring of students by the department can provide early intervention for students that will assist with providing clear expectations and directions throughout the dissertation process. Proactive departmental interviews include observing development, refining quality of mentoring, executing initiatives that facilitate social network, providing chances to conduct supervised research, and seminars to provide transitional assistance after graduation (Liechty et al., 2009).

Although the department level support is integral, campus wide structural support can impact ZPD. Institutional initiatives have recently focused on facilitators and barriers to the dissertation process. The remainder of this section summarizes various campus wide interventions used to assist students with the dissertation process and doctoral degree completion (Liechty et al., 2009).

Tide Together Mentoring Program

A qualitative research study detailed the components of an institutional program, Tide Together Mentoring Program, at a four year university. The researcher reports that the goal of the institutional program was to cultivate the professional and personal skills needed for success in the attainment of the doctoral degree. The Tide Together program paired students with mentors who were required to meet on the regular basis for social assemblies, scholastic lectures, and professional development activities (Holley & Caldwell, 2011). The data from the student and mentor interviews details, "mentors expressed satisfaction in terms of their relationship with participants, but they also felt empowered as to their degree experience and general academic

knowledge" (Holley & Caldwell, 2011, p. 251). The student interview data suggests that program was beneficial because of academic support, professional networking, and heightened campus prospects (Holley & Caldwell, 2011).

Graduate Writing Institute

Thomas et al. (2014) conducted a study with 63 graduate students who were completing a thesis or dissertation. The study was initiated after survey results from the majority of the faculty indicated the need for writing assistance for graduate students at a predominantly Hispanic research institution. Participants volunteered to attend a multi-day writing program. The four-day program was a mixture of seminars and writing workshops. It differed from typical boot camps because it incorporated a combination of instructional guidance, peer-tutoring, and individual consultation. The data suggested that students gained an improved knowledge of professional writing skills based on increase of scores from pre-test to post-test on the Writing Inventory of Skills and Preferences (WISP) writing exam.

> Providing graduate students working on their thesis/dissertation with this type of specialized learning assistance (non-course based, interdisciplinary, non-contextualized holistic approach to addressing lower order concerns, higher order concerns, and academic risk) in a week long intensive institute with instructional time, peer interaction, individual writing time, and one-on-one writing consultations should be replicated for the benefit of graduate students at other institutions. (Thomas et al., 2014, p. 69)

PhD Completion Workshop

A 7 year study, the PhD Completion Project, included 29 universities focused on matriculation and attrition patterns. The study also reviewed the effectiveness of university level interventions in improving timely PhD completion statistics. The study included six levels of

university level interventions including advising and mentoring. The results of the study suggested university sponsored dissertation workshops, implementation of academic support organizations, and recognitions of outstanding dissertation advisors are very beneficial to assisting with dissertation completion (Liechty et al., 2009).

Mellon-Wisconsin Dissertation Writing Camp

Earle, Mullen, Steffy, and Karls (2015) detailed the components of a writing place designated for a cohort of dissertators for an entire week. The simple concept of the writing camp provided by instructors during three sessions with approximately 220 graduates focuses on assisting students during the key time of their writing process. The major components of the program are controlled writing period, one-to-one sessions with trainers, workshops on a range of writing subjects, and a unique chance to participate in community support and fellowship with students across disciplines. The purpose of the camp is to escape from distractions and to assist with the feeling of isolation shared by many dissertation students. Faculty members report that moving the solitary act of writing the dissertation to a centralized location create opportunities for bonding and inspiration for students to finish. Many participants shared favorable comments regarding the writing camp experience in regards to assisting with the completion of the dissertation requirement.

Doctoral Community Network (DC)

DC is an emerging program to facilitate interdisciplinary research agendas in online community inclusive of faculty and doctoral candidates. The program was created to assist nontraditional doctoral students and faculty who were not geographically inclined to meet in a residency fashion. The community of scholars and doctoral students connect to engage in a collaborative effort for students who are completing the doctoral degree. The DC provides

roadmaps, resources, and references as tools of support for aspiring scholars. The DC is not merely a social network because the goal is to foster completion of the doctoral degree while providing commitment in the greater educational community through chances to present and publish research (Radda, 2012).

Golde (2007) describes two structural programs, the list and the journal club, that have provided support for doctoral education in English studies and neuroscience. The list and journal club both have the goal of acquainting doctoral students with existing literature. The researcher asserts that components from both initiatives can be integrated into other doctoral disciplines. Both programs are a supplemental tool for sharing, searching out, and critiquing new findings. Although neither program is a panacea to the dissertation process, both could serve as assistance in regards to dissecting literature with the sophistication and ease of seasoned professionals and practitioners (Golde, 2007).

The List

The list is a collection of texts or works that forms the foundation of the qualifying or comprehensive examination for doctoral students majoring in English. The list usually includes 60 to 100 assorted novels, poems, secondary sources, and theoretical works. English studies students use the list to demonstrate a degree of mastery and breadth to create dissertation ideas. Faculty and students work together to customize personal lists to reflect emerging expertise and interests. The list serves as the foundational experience for beginning the dissertation process (Golde, 2007).

The Journal Club

Journal clubs are professionally coordinated reading assemblies that dissect existing research literature. They cross organizational and disciplinary boundaries because they are

typically interdepartmental in nature. Journal clubs are usually inclusive of postdoctoral fellows, faculty members, doctoral candidates, and early stage doctoral students. Journal clubs assist with allowing experienced faculty members to mentor the novice graduate students while providing the opportunity to review and critique current literature. Journal club assemblies assist with evaluating scientific findings, obtaining common grammatical conventions, and conversing on obfuscating articles for the doctoral student (Golde, 2007).

Doctoral Students

Doctoral students of the 21st century are a mixture of traditional and nontraditional students. The shift in student enrollment has favored more nontraditional formats because traditional doctoral programs often do not coincide with the lifestyles of minorities, students attending part-time, and students with children (Noonan, 2015). The characteristics of doctoral students mostly include married, female candidates with no children in their 30's (Martinez et al., 2013). Likewise, the characteristics of traditional doctoral programs have changed from some components of the original European model in order to coincide with the modern day student. For example, many traditional doctoral programs are debating the necessity of campus residency requirements for students. Nontraditional doctoral students of today are less familiar with their institutions and oftentimes did not attend the same institution for undergraduate studies. Many 21st century doctoral students have commitments outside their studies such as family and career. Also, a vast majority of doctoral students are part-time, online students; thus, the doctoral experience has been cited by doctoral students as an isolated undertaking (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011).

Nontraditional programs include a distinctive population of graduate students. A shift in higher education allows students to earn doctoral degrees through virtual modalities (Cross,

2014). The demands of the doctoral enrolled student differ from the modern paradigm of doctoral acquisition. Due to the 21st century workforce coupled with rapid advancements in educational technology, doctoral education has extended to accommodate the demands, expectations, and proficiency of employed professionals. Many nontraditional students enter the doctoral program with previously earned graduate degrees in addition to an extensive work experience (Radda, 2012). An exploratory study was completed with nontraditional doctoral students who received instruction virtually. Although programmatically the course requirements were similar across disciplines, most participants followed a predesigned program of study. Students were geographically dispersed across the world with various backgrounds. The study revealed that individual character traits, specifically grit, are necessary to complete nontraditional doctoral coursework (Cross, 2014).

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative research study is to understand the dissertation process from doctoral graduates' recollections of lived experiences. This chapter reviewed existing literature regarding various subject matter related to the dissertation phase of doctoral study. The chapter also denoted the social development theory as the theoretical framework used to examine individual, relational, and institutional factors that influence dissertation completion. Chapter 3 will provide procedures and methodology used in the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

While Chapters 1 and 2 focused on the background and literature support for more research on dissertation completion, Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methodology related to the study. The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study is to understand the dissertation experiences of recent doctoral graduates from accredited universities. Although there are multiple methods of interpreting a single experience, the phenomenology design allows each participant to construct his or her independent version of reality (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The findings of the study could prove beneficial to aspiring doctoral students, students currently in doctoral programs, graduate school faculty, and higher education administrators. Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory served as the theoretical framework to guide research inquiry.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the dissertation experiences and perceptions of faculty who completed the doctoral degree in the past five years. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What individual behaviors and cognitive abilities are critical to completing the dissertation process?

2. How do relational factors assist with progression through the dissertation process?

3. What departmental or institutional opportunities for support contribute to dissertation completion?

Design of Study

Phenomenology permits researchers to "understand the individual and collective internal experience for a phenomenon of interest and how participants intentionally and consciously think about their experience" (Henfield, Woo, & Washington, 2012, p. 3). In depth interviews with participants who have directly experienced the dissertation process was the main source of data collection. For this study, a purposeful, criterion sampling strategy was used to select twelve participants who met the following criteria: employed as a faculty members at a regionally accredited institution, recipient of a doctoral degree inclusive of a dissertation requirement from a regionally accredited institution within the last five years, and earned doctorate can be classified in the Biglans Augmented Model (Drees, 1982). Additionally, the participants described their dissertation experiences with a focus on individual, relational, and structural support. Participants were encouraged to elaborate on specific interventions that aided dissertation completion.

Sample

A purposeful, criterion sampling strategy was used to select twelve participants who met the following criteria: employed as a faculty members at a regionally accredited institution and, recipient of a doctoral degree inclusive of a dissertation requirement from a regionally accredited institution within the last five years. Further, maximum variation sampling was used to select three individuals from each of the four categories with earned doctorates in disciplines that can be classified in the Biglans Augmented Model (Drees, 1982). Table 2 provides further description of Biglans Augmented Model (Drees, 1982).

Table 2

Augmented Biglan Classifications

	Nonlife Systems	*Life Systems*
Hard-Pure	Natural Sciences	Botany
	Mathematics	Anatomy
	Oceanography	Physiology
Hard-Applied	Civil Engineering	Agriculture
	Computer	Forestry
	Computer Science	Agronomy
Soft-Pure	English	Psychology
	History	Sociology
	Philosophy	Humanities
Soft-Applied	Accounting	Education
	Finance	Nursing
	Marketing	Library Science

An initial query of participants included creating a database of faculty members' credentials from higher education institutions in two states. The list of institutions from two states used in the current study was created using the inventory of colleges and institutions provided in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) search inquiry via the United States Department of Education (n.d). Faculty members with posted curriculum vitae or biographic information from the selected institutions were categorized by the earned doctoral degree discipline and placed in the appropriate Biglans category. Only faculty members with an accredited doctoral degree denoted by either of the following regional accrediting agencies were included in the database as denoted by the United States Department of Education (n.d.): Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC CIHE), New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC CTCI), North Central Association of Colleges and

Schools Higher Learning Commission (NCACS HLC), Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS COC), Western Association of Schools and Colleges Accrediting Commission for Schools (WASC ACS), Western Association of Schools and Colleges Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (WASC ACSCU) to offer doctoral level degrees.

A total of 12 individuals were identified for participation in the study. Participants were contacted using the email address on the institution's faculty directory. In order to better understand the factors that best promote dissertation completions, participants were contacted using the email address on the institution's faculty directory (See Appendix A). Selected participants were interviewed for approximately an hour by the researcher to obtain recollections and descriptions of their experience with the dissertation process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Data Collection

Interviews are the primary method to investigate an educational process via the experience of an individual (Seidman, 2013). Interviewing allows the researcher to enter into the participant's perspective. In-depth interviews assume that the participant's perspective of the research topic is meaningful. Each word that participants provide is a microcosm of their awareness on a given topic (Seidman, 2013). Participants for the current study were contacted by email to set up the face to face interview and were provided with a copy of the research purpose statement. One-on-one interviews were scheduled at a time and place convenient to the participant. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The interview protocol was pilot-tested on a recent doctoral graduate to ensure clarity of questions. There were no modifications

made to protocol after the pilot test. Permission was granted electronically by each participant to digitally record the interview for verbatim transcription purposes.

Before interviewing, each participant was given a brief overview of the study and had the opportunity to voice any concerns. The interview protocol consisted of 13 in depth questions (See Appendix B). The same questions were asked of each respondent in order to assist with comparisons during data analysis. Structured questions allow researchers to remain on topic but prompting, listening, and encouraging participants is necessary to elicit adequate feedback (Patton, 2002). All interviews were conducted in a quiet pre-determined area for each participant. Skype was used for eight participants to address geographical and scheduling constraints. Probes were used to further clarify thoughts, heighten depth of responses, and provide cues to the participant regarding the level of feedback that is preferred (Patton, 2002). Qualitative interviews are noted for pauses and probes to elicit understanding and detailed information rich feedback (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

In order to provide verbatim accounts of interviews, tape or digital recordings are customary to provide a complete account of all things discussed. Tape-recording of interviews is necessary for in depth data analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Interviews for the current study were recorded using a digital recorder. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Patton (2002) described summarization as the process of creating a summary for qualitative interviews. The findings include excerpts of each transcript in support of conclusions.

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

All participants in the current study signed a consent form after agreeing to take part in this study (See Appendix C). Participants were informed of their anonymous status for the duration of the study and permission was granted to use direct quotes regarding individual lived

experiences. Also, participants agreed to be recorded for transcription purposes with a disclosure concerning their rights to withdraw at any time from the interview. Consent forms were securely stored in the researcher's personal file cabinet. In order to maintain confidentiality a pseudonym generated by a random name application was assigned to each transcription for confidentiality purposes. As a result, participants were encouraged to provide specific details about their respective universities and names of advisors or mentors when describing their experiences as all identifying information would be masked in the results.

Data Analysis

"Qualitative data analysis transforms data into findings" (Patton, 2002, p. 432). Data analysis is a systematic method of categorizing, coding, and interpreting data to produce enlightenments of a specific phenomenon. Interviews yield a vast amount of information to be interpreted, summarized, and analyzed. Data analysis and collection are interwoven into process of organizing categories and identifying relationships and patterns. Qualitative researchers exercise tolerance and rigor to complete the data analysis process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). "Analysis began with interview transcription, as transcribing, is not an antecedent to analysis, but it is a central aspect of the ways that researchers analytically orientate to data" (Maher et. al, 2014, p. 702). The creation of categories assists with managing the voluminous amount of data provided by interview transcriptions (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Data analysis regarding the current qualitative, phenomenological study involved intellectual discipline, creativity, and rigor (Patton, 2002). The methodology of the research study compiled the vast amount of transcribed interview data and separated it into workable unites. Transcribed interviews assisted with a visual review of data collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The following concrete guidelines were used to dissect interview data in this phenomenological study. After transcribing of all interviews and summarizing information of each interview, phenomenological reduction was used to code pertinent information into smaller units to elicit the essence of the participant's thoughts and to outline meaning pertinent to the research questions. After coding of all relevant information, the next step involved eliminating redundancies by creating a list of all bracketed information. Once redundant information had been eliminated, each code was examined to determine essence of the information. Then, situation specific clusters were formed to determine essential perspectives as related to the research questions. The final stage examined all clusters of information to assist with identifying overarching themes that answered the research questions and provided support for the conclusions and results of the study (Hyncer, 1985). The findings of the research were organized into the most prevalent themes shared by all participants.

Summary

Chapter 3 details the phenomenological process used to obtain the necessary data to conduct the research study. Chapter 4 outlines the method that data were organized and coded into clusters as identified from the results of the data analysis.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This phenomenological study explored the dissertation experiences of 12 faculty members who completed the doctoral degree in the past five years. A total of 67 emails were sent out to potential participants for the study with responses from 19 faculty members agreeing to participate. The sample included 9 females and 3 males. Secondly, 9 out of 12 of the participants were Black. Five potential participants failed to setup a time for interview, and two interviewed participants completed an alternative dissertation option that did not meet participant criteria.

The 12 doctoral degrees were completed at the following institutions: Central Michigan University, Georgetown University, Georgia State University, Iowa State University, Jackson State University, Mississippi State University, Texas A&M University, University of Alabama, University of Arkansas and University of Tennessee. At the time of data collection, the faculty participants were employed at four year accredited institutions in Alabama or Mississippi. The participants were not representative of all doctoral disciplines and since participants attended different universities for their doctoral degrees, care should be taken before transferring findings to the disciplinary areas at-large.

Although emails for study participation were sent out to a diverse group of potential participants, the twelve participants were the only individuals who voluntarily consented to participate and met all criteria. An equal distribution regarding gender and racial background may have provided different insight regarding the experiences of participants. Selected participants were individually interviewed using a protocol designed to solicit information about the dissertation experience of each participant. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants in

order to ensure confidentiality. Table 3 displays demographic, pseudonym and disciplinary category of the doctoral degree specific to each participant.

Table 3

Participants' Demographic Data

Gender	Race	Pseudonym	Doctoral Discipline	Biglan Classification
Female	Black	Toni	Chemistry	Hard-Pure Nonlife
Female	White	Alex	Mathematics	Hard-Pure Nonlife
Female	Black	Lala	Neuroscience	Hard-Pure Nonlife
Female	Black	Cleo	Industrial Engineering	Hard-Applied Nonlife
Male	White	Wesley	Industrial Engineering	Hard-Applied Nonlife
Female	Black	Delta	Computer Science	Hard-Applied Nonlife
Male	Black	Stuart	Psychology	Soft-Pure Life
Female	White	Krystal	Psychology	Soft-Pure Life
Female	Black	Zeta	English	Soft-Pure Nonlife
Female	Black	Mike	Educational Leadership	Soft-Applied Life
Male	Black	Zeke	Educational Leadership	Soft-Applied Life
Female	Black	Jean	Counselor Education	Soft-Applied Life

Analysis

Each interview was transcribed by the principal investigator of this study. Statements relevant to the dissertation experience were selected from each participant. Participant responses were categorized according to the research questions utilizing the social development theory: individual factors, relational factors, and structural factors that described dissertation experience. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What individual behaviors and cognitive abilities are critical to completing the dissertation process?

2. How do relational factors assist with progression through the dissertation process?

3. What departmental or institutional opportunities for support contribute to dissertation completion?

Transcripts were coded and recoded with common codes grouped into smaller units and later placed into themes. Themes developed during the coding process after transcription of all interviews were completed. Table 4 demonstrates how interview data was used to confirm final themes and conclusions.

Table 4

Matrix of Findings

Factors	Themes	Supportive Response from Participant											
Participant		T	A	L	C	W	D	S	K	Z	M	Zk	J
Individual	Career Advancement		x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x
	Family and Peer Influence	x					x			x		x	x
	Prior Knowledge	x	x	x	x		x	x	x				x
Relational	Dissertation Chair and Committee	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
	Cohort Associates		x	x		x	x		x	x			
	Family Members						x		x		x		
	Technological Communication	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
	Guidance, Feedback, Preparation		x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x	
Structural	Financial Aid		x	x			x	x					
	Streamlined Completion Process	x			x	x		x	x				x
	Institutional Resources	x	x		x				x			x	x

Individual Factors

Participants provided insight regarding individual factors that fostered the completion of the dissertation. The following themes were most prevalent: career advancement, family and peer influence, and prior knowledge.

Career Advancement

The idea of career advancement was a shared factor for many participants to complete the dissertation process. Although some participants were already working in faculty positions in various capacities prior to degree completion, they believed that the doctoral credential was

mandatory for respect, increased pay, and advancement. While all but one participant was positively motivated by career advancement, three participants described detailed reasons to finish the dissertation. Cleo stated:

> It was necessary to continue on the professional path that I was on. I relied heavily on practitioner experience when I first became a faculty member but quickly realized I lacked and needed the academic credentials to really make a difference and be respected in my field. I have taught with my JD terminal degree and with the 18 credits of graduate schooling required of adjunct professors. I began teaching college students in 2003. I also served as an assistant professor teaching law topics. But, over the years I was constantly reminded that PhDs are chickens and I was a duck. I was not one of them and had not been put through the same fire that they came through. So, after hearing that over and over, I buckled down and got it done.

Zeta also added her desire for career advancement:

> The job offerings for my undergraduate and master's major were not what I imagined doing forever, so basically I was looking for a way to use what I already had, but try something more in line with direct help to the community. A plethora of job opportunities, work security and increased pay were also attractive incentives.

Stuart said:

> I decided to pursue a doctoral degree and complete the dissertation process because it would help advance my career in mental health. Additionally, I had a lot of interest in my particular area of research, and the doctoral path was a sure way to investigate from an educated standpoint. I wanted the research knowledge and practice for personal and professional growth as a scholar practitioner.

Participants with a hard-pure background spoke heavily about obtaining the credential to further research interests. Two participants stated:

> I served as a graduate research assistant for many years, along with other doctoral students at various stages in their PhD journey. I wanted to remain in academia and to continue conducting research in my discipline. I truly enjoy being in the classroom and teaching the future professionals in my field. A PhD has assisted in these endeavors (Alex).

> I decided to pursue a doctoral degree and complete the dissertation process because I wanted to run my own research lab (LaLa).

Participants articulated the sentiments that the doctoral degree was integral for faculty positions, research agendas, and personal growth. Additional influences for completion include family and peer influence.

Family and Peer Influence

Many participants were groomed to pursue a terminal degree from childhood by family and peers. Participants spoke of honoring their families by completing the doctoral degree. Zeta stated:

> Seeking a terminal degree was a promise fulfilled to myself and my mother. My mom instilled in me that the next generation should do better than the one prior. As the granddaughter of individuals who were not afforded great educational opportunities due to the nature of the times, I wanted to fully take advantage of my freedom to learn. This was a way to pay homage to the many sacrifices of my predecessors. Simply put, I finished the process because God helped me. In my own strength, I would have surely given up at so many junctures during the process, but He helped propel me over the finish

line for a plan and purpose. When I left for postsecondary studies, I told her I would be a

doctor. At that time, I thought I would be a medical doctor but plans changed. Never

giving up on my dream, after praying and fasting, I refocused and with the support of my

mom and family, moved forward with pursuit of a terminal degree.

Delta described the influence of her great-grandparents as:

I had started a doctoral program in a similar discipline at a different school, and became

ill and was not able to finish the program. Years later, after recovery and some reflection,

I realized that if I was going to be true to myself and honor my great-grandparents (who

instilled in me the love and importance of learning, even though they were not schooled),

I needed to go back to square one, and get the PhD.

While many participants spoke of ancestors who did not have an opportunity to obtain an

education, others wanted to do it for community members.

I wanted it as not only a personal goal of mine, but to show individuals from

marginalized backgrounds from like ethnicity and socioeconomic status that they, too,

can achieve a terminal degree. I did it not only for myself, but for my people, the

collective, the young men and women of color who have been told time and again that

they aren't enough or can't do. I wanted to be that example (Zeke).

Toni further expressed:

I had heard a senior citizen at church talk about our community and what needs to done,

and I wanted to be a decision maker to affect change.

Jean said:

I was always the smart kid in class. So, my old teachers and stuff kept asking me when

would I be finished with my doctorate. I could not let them down.

Family and peer influence were major factors that influenced many participants to complete the dissertation process. Participants believed it was necessary to keep pushing in honor of their family and community who were not as privileged to obtain a doctoral degree.

Prior Knowledge

Prior knowledge of the components of the traditional dissertation was new to some participants. Participants had various levels or prior knowledge when entering the dissertation phase of their respective programs. Although some participants had opportunities to brainstorm ideas and university specific guidelines, other participants did not begin to discuss the components of the dissertation until after they completed coursework. Jean stated:

> I was a good student when it came to doing coursework when everything that just
>
> followed a syllabus from the professor, but to just tell me to write a dissertation with no
>
> experience with something like that really made me rethink my idea of pursuing this
>
> degree at one point.

Wesley stated:

> I was already working in academia as a faculty member when I began my PhD work.
>
> Therefore, I was very familiar with the thesis process which is some extent similar. So,
>
> specifically I was familiar with the general format, purpose, and content. I was lacking the
>
> university's specifics which each university has.

Delta described her experience differently due to the preparation she received before the dissertation phase. Delta saying:

> The director of our PhD program started preparing us for the dissertation phase at the
>
> beginning of the degree process. We had to explore topics of study in the first class we
>
> took, which was Quantitative Research Methods. We had to write a mini-proposal during

or first residency when we really didn't know what we were doing. We attended a

proposal defense and a final defense, so that we could see the end product. So, as a group,

we were exposed to the dissertation process early, and were constantly admonished to do

the work of the scholar.

Programs that lacked embedded opportunities for dissertation development required participants

to seek pertinent information in order to obtain knowledge regarding the dissertation

requirements. Lala stated:

Prior to entering the candidacy stage I already had knowledge of the dissertation process.

The website for my university's Interdisciplinary Program in Neuroscience has a program

of study section which provides access to the IPN student handbook. The IPN student

handbook contains the official guidelines and requirements for students completing their

PhD and outlines what, how, and when things should be completed.

Other participants formulated their own opinions on the dissertation journey. Zeke said:

Honestly, the only thing I can recall knowing was that it was going to be a very lonely

process. I knew that it would be the most arduous psychological undertaking that I had

ever engaged in, and that I would have to sacrifice a lot to get through it.

Zeta used descriptive language and said:

I knew it was going to be a tedious task, a lot of hard work, and I figured sleepless nights.

Given the experience prior to candidacy, I knew it was not going to be easy but if you

stayed the course, I could finish. My peers (cohort) and I had a basic understanding of the

remaining checkpoints of the program prior to entering candidacy status; however, I

knew very few people personally who had completed the process in my program. I was

aware you had to be self-motivated, capable of establishing timelines, and diligent in

adherence to the laid out schedules to stay on track or you would quickly get off course

and hard to get back on.

Rich descriptions were used to describe the dissertation prior, during, and after writing it. The

participants of this study also provided adjectives that were classified as favorable and

unfavorable to describe their dissertation journey. Table 5 provides a dichotomized list of

adjectives.

Table 5

Dichotomy of Adjectives Regarding Dissertation

Unfavorable Adjectives	*Favorable Adjectives*
• Stressful	• Rewarding
• Lonely	• Exciting
• Exhausting	• Insightful
• Traumatic	• Victorious
• Rigorous	• Successful
• Draining	• Humbling
• Unprepared	• Prepared

Relational Factors

A second line of inquiry for the study was relational factors leading to successful

completion of the dissertation experience. Individuals provided insight regarding relational

factors that fostered the completion of the dissertation. Five themes were identified as most

prevalent: (1) dissertation chair and committee, (2) cohort associates, (3) family members, (4)

technological communication, (5) guidance, feedback, and preparation.

Dissertation Chair and Committee

Most participants recounted the dissertation chair and committee as integral to

dissertation completion. The dissertation chair was regarded as most beneficial by many

participants from the beginning to the completion of the dissertation journey. Five participants provided thick, rich descriptions of working with the dissertation chair.

Stuart stated:

> One of the most beneficial relationships that was formed during my dissertation process was with my chair. She and I had been working together for quite some time, but only in coursework. Then, fortunately, she became my chair and that took our relationship to another level. This person became my friend, my champion, as well as my mentor and advisor. My chair provided tough love for me at times when I thought I wanted to quit and chuck it all. She would not let me give up, and pushed me to keep trying. Her encouragement was above and beyond, and I am so thankful for her. Not to mention, she handled that content like a pro. The best in the game.

Wesley added his experience regarding a relatively new academic chair:

> My academic chair was relatively new to the dissertation process. I was only the second person she had chaired. What she lacked in experience she made up for in getting me prepared and setting me up to succeed. She was also very beneficial on the political spectrum as well. She served as an advocate for me with the dean's office with regards to getting a proposal and defense date that was timely.

The beneficial contributions of the dissertation chair were highlighted by participants as follows:

> The chair of my dissertation committee turned out to be the most beneficial in regards to completing the dissertation process. She had made herself available for weekly in person meetings with me to go over my data and would take time out of her schedule to prep me for conference presentations as well as presentations at my university. She also played an instrumental role in my application for financial aid (Lala).

My academic chair, who was also my lab advisor, was an important contributor while I

chose an idea and designed my study. She also reviewed all of my drafts and anything

submitted to the committee (Krystal).

My chair was perfect for me. She demanded excellence, timeliness, self-direction, and

tenacity in the process. She had a proven track record of being able to get doctoral

student through the process successfully, and my attitude was to submit to her

requirements and her style because I saw what she could do. She has also become a

mentor to me, and we have collaborated on a couple of projects (Delta).

Many participants spoke of the dissertation committee being more of an influence during

the ending stages of the dissertation process. For three participants, contact with the committee

as a whole was limited.

I did not have much contact with my committee until time for the oral defense. I

defended the proposal with them and then the final dissertation defense. I had some

assistance from my second chair, the methodologist, when I struggled a bit with the

methodology. But the primary contact was with my chair. She read draft after draft. She

would consult with the committee on certain areas of my document to be sure she was

guiding me in the right direction and so forth (Stuart).

My committee was not really involved during the writing process. When I finished the

proposal and the final manuscript, I submitted it to them for feedback, but my chair was

the captain of that ship (Delta).

I only spoke to my committee the three time that sat across the table to critique me and

that is it (Jean).

Three participants expressed that the dissertation committee provided feedback and expertise regarding their topic.

> My committee was able to provide feedback throughout the process so that the defense ran smoothly (Krystal).

> The dissertation committee served as a great resource during the dissertation phase. Members were encouraging in their own special way and provided their expert knowledge to assist my educational endeavor when requested by myself, the researcher, or from my academic chair (Zeta).

> The role of my dissertation committee during the dissertation phase was to approve my dissertation proposal, provide guidance and direction, review all data and approve my dissertation for the oral defense (Lala).

Participants also formed relationships outside of academia with peers as a relational support during the dissertation process.

Cohort Associates

Six participants in this study formed relationships with cohort members and kept in touch as they researched their respective dissertation topics. Two participants added clarity about the specific impact of relationships with peers in the cohort:

> I formed a significant relationship with another member in my cohort. She kept me on track and aware of the little things – the details. By details I mean timelines, proper forms to use, formatting guidance. We also helped each other navigate the political waters associated with the PhD process. Additionally, she served as a very meaningful sounding board (Wesley).

Zeta said:

I have a classmate from my cohort that I could not imagine going through the latter part

of the dissertation journey without. During our class time, we got along well, completed

projects/ group work together often, and things of that nature but were not what I would

define as close friends at that point. After a common experience delayed our forward

movement to the next phase, our relationship blossomed and support increased

drastically. As other significant cohort relationships fizzled, we found solace navigating

the dissertation process together. We held each other accountable even cheering one

another across the finish line of a successful defense. I attended hers and she attended

mine. She pushed me to work harder, be more organized, believe in my abilities, and

served as a constant reminder that we could not give up. She prayed with and for me

becoming an integral part of completing the dissertation process and is now one of the

greatest blessings from the experience.

Participants regarded cohort associates as family members due to the organic bond formed

during coursework. At the same time, participants recalled the influence of actual family

members as well.

Family Members

Several participants explained that a supportive family member was essential to

completing the dissertation journey. Delta stated the following about her husband:

The relationship between my husband and me became stronger during my program and

especially during the dissertation process. He gave me space and time to do my work.

When I pulled all-nighters, he would bring me coffee and food because he knew I went

all night and never left the computer. I complained about all of the obstacles I was facing,

and he listened and encouraged me. He helped me believe that I could finish. I mentioned

both my cohort and my husband in the Dedication section of my dissertation (Delta).

Zeke described the support provided by his twin brother as:

> I went through this at the same time as my identical twin brother, so I think that both his
>
> doctoral journey and mine brought us even closer together and allowed me to complete
>
> my process a year after he did.

Relational support from academic faculty, cohort associates, and various family members was

crucial to participants. Participants relied heavily on technology to communicate with other

parties during the dissertation phase.

Technological Communication

Ten participants declared that technology was a good tool of communication for

obtaining assistance for dissertation completion. Participants were able to use technology to gain

scaffolding from different people. Lala expressed.

> The methods that worked best for me when I needed assistance from an external party
>
> was the use of Skype and email.

Email was regarded as key for five participants.

> Email, email, email is the best way to communicate. I kept emails of everything and still
>
> have them to this day (Zeke).

> It was helpful for me to seek out help via email when I needed it; especially while
>
> analyzing data (Krystal).

> Communication via email works best for me when I required assistance from an external
>
> party. When the supervisor of graduate research conducted her final read, we only used
>
> email to complete the final dissertation for publication (Mike).

Emailing my document and receiving written feedback in return. I really grew to love

track changes (Stuart).

Email, so that there is a paper trail, as well as a place to visually see responses (Toni).

Delta described the use of use of group chat as:

Whenever I needed assistance with destressing or brainstorming, I would get on the

group chat or call my cohort family. I also began to see a network being formed – if I

needed something, and the person I asked for help didn't have what I needed, he or she

would refer me to another person, or would contact another person for me. I went to

people in my professional and personal network and asked for help (Delta).

Zeta sums up the use of technology to facilitate relationships as:

Utilizing technology was the best method of seeking external assistance with everything

being right at my fingertips. When help was needed, I would electronically communicate

with a past instructor, seek help from schoolmates, consult with assessment copyright

holders, sought help from non-institutional peers, and statistical analysis and

interpretation help through software solutions (Zeta).

Technology proved for to be an effective tool for many participants to receive guidance and

feedback in regards to editing their dissertation and communicating with others.

Guidance, Feedback, and Preparation

Participants also explored their relations with faculty as a whole in their department as it

related to dissertation preparation. Eight participants described guidance, feedback, and

preparation as positively impacting dissertation completions. Five participants provided rich

descriptions of the guidance, feedback and preparation provided by faculty in the department.

Mike said:

The faculty in my department prepared me for my dissertation experience by making assignment and activities relevant to the dissertation and practice on the oral defenses which later prepared me for the oral defense.

Faculty in my program discussed the dissertation process from the beginning of classes, they were available to listen to ideas and provide feedback, they also provided additional instruction in areas such as statistics when needed, and they provided external resources if necessary (Krystal).

All courses prepared me for my dissertation experience, through critical thinking, analytical and scientific writing, and critical course feedback to prepare me for the next steps. So, the faculty who taught the courses were purposeful in their assignments and assessments to ensure we were being challenged to the level of an independent researcher (Alex).

I had the opportunity to interact with faculty and get preparation for the dissertation experience a year prior to applying and being admitted into the program. I accepted the chance to work in one of the faculty member's labs as a research assistant so that I could gain hands on experience in a biomedical lab. During that year, I had the chance to attend the IPN seminars (called Neurolunch) with the current IPN students and get to know them. Being in the biomedical lab also allowed me to form a bond with several IPN faculty and students. Through conversations with faculty and students I gained firsthand knowledge about the program (the coursework, faculty, students, and what it took to get to the dissertation phase and finish successfully) and what the dissertation process would be like. A year later when I matriculated into the program, I was well prepared for the dissertation experience (Lala).

A couple of my seminar faculty were very direct and forthcoming with advice on how to

do scholarly research at the level of publication. That helped. The faculty that served on

my dissertation committee did a great job with reading my drafts and giving me feedback

on what revisions they wanted to see and why (Cleo).

Two participants, both from hard-applied disciplines, felt as if there was no preparation

regarding the dissertation in initial coursework provided by departmental faculty.

 Delta stated:

The faculty in the department do not provide really any preparation for the dissertation

process, as they were focused on the content they were teaching. However, I had one

professor who became interested in my topic while I was taking her class, and she

became a springboard for me, and eventually was a member of my committee.

Wesley stated:

I can't say that other faculty in the department necessarily prepared me for the

dissertation experience. They taught the courses that were related to the degree but that

was the extent of it.

Participants who did have opportunities to explore dissertation requirements and ideas seemed to

remember their experience more fondly as opposed to those who lacked guidance and

preparation prior to beginning the dissertation. The majority of participants stated that

institutional support would be very advantageous for students during the dissertation stage.

Structural Factors

The third line of inquiry used to understand dissertation experiences was that of structural

factors leading to dissertation success. Participants provided insight regarding structural factors

that fostered the completion of the dissertation. The following three themes were most prevalent

96

as a result of the analysis: (1) financial aid, (2) streamlined processes, and (3) institutional

resources.

Financial Aid

Several participants recalled the need for financial aid in order to complete doctoral

studies. Many participants relied on their respective graduate schools to assist with financial

support. Three participants discussed the financial aid provided by their respective institutions in

positive manner. Cleo expressed:

> The graduate college helped me find financial support. One of the associate deans served
>
> on my dissertation committee. My school had a dissertation reviewer, an English major,
>
> who proofread my dissertation before it could be finally approved. There was a lot of
>
> support from the institution even when I switched colleges. So, the dean of Engineering
>
> and department chair were very helpful in welcoming me and helping me to get graduate
>
> assistantships.

Krystal said:

> The university through the graduate school, provided financial assistance like dissertation
>
> scholarships, help from other departments with stuff like statistics department, and
>
> graduate school advisors that would consult with you regarding your design; after the
>
> dissertation was completed, the graduate school provided clear guidelines and a graduate
>
> school reviewer to ensure that the manuscript submission process ran smoothly.

Lala recalled:

> My dissertation lab covered me until I was awarded an Individual Predoctoral Diversity
>
> NRSA Grant by the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. The grant
>
> provided money to cover supplies needed to conduct the experiments for my dissertation

project, tuition, stipend, and money for travel and hotel accommodations to conferences

where I presented my dissertation project.

Participants reported that financial aid opportunities were beneficial when assistance

opportunities were provided by the institution. Lack of finances was regarded as one additional

hurdle when completing the dissertation.

Jean stated:

I had used up all of the financial aid that I could get in the form of loans. By the time I

finally understood the dissertation process, I was struggling to figure out how to finance

my studies. I applied for scholarships at my institution but never got them. I basically had

to downgrade my living arrangements for a while.

Streamlined Completion Process

An additional hurdle discussed by participants involved the dissertation submission

process. Participants reported that the dissertation submission process is sometimes lengthy and

updates should be conducted periodically; participants also professed that registration should not

continuously required if final editing is the only component lacking to complete the process.

Toni stated:

We have several sign-offs that can be shortened, based on change need. Much of the

process is cumbersome and not needed.

Two participants provided descriptions related to the process.

The institutional support was lacking in several areas. The poor support is what really

made the dissertation process unsettling. Outdated forms on the websites, politics

between the dean's office and the faculty, and poor support from the financial aid office

(Wesley).

I would not require a student to be registered for three credit hours if they are only editing

their dissertation (Krystal).

Participants suggested a review of the dissertation process in order to streamline the process.

Despite some of the process difficulties, participants spoke positively of dissertation resources

provided by the institution.

Institutional Resources

Six participants recalled at least one opportunity provided by the institution to assist with

the dissertation process. Two participants summed up the resources most prevalent.

Jean stated:

I used the writing center in my department all the time. It was quite and had everything

you needed right at your fingertips. We also had access to SPSS for stats and an online

library to get peer reviewed articles at no cost.

We had dissertation boot camps and workshops hosted by the graduate school. I did

attend one, and I found it to be helpful in regards to the information given (Zeke).

Table 6 lists the favorable institutional resources provided by the institution that research

participants mentioned.

Table 6

Favorable Institutional Resources

Resources
• Research Center • Writing Center • Dissertation Sessions • Statistical Software • Database Resources with Access • Dissertation Bootcamp

One participants did provide insight related to the need for additional institutional resources. Cleo stated:

> I think that the institution can do more to match up PhD students with faculty on journal articles. We need publications when we graduate. It is hard to land a professor position without journal article publications.

Summary

Chapter 4 includes the themes and results derived from analyzing the interview transcripts of with recent doctoral graduates. The first theme highlighted individual factors such as professional goals and family influence that positively promotes dissertation completion. The next theme highlighted relational factors from faculty, peers, and technological communication that influenced dissertation completion. The final theme described the structural factors such as financial aid, dissertation completion process, and institutional resources that influenced dissertation completion for participants. Chapter 5 provides recommendations and implications regarding future research as it relates to the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The input provided by the participants of this study augments the limited research related to factors that positively contributes to dissertation completion. Gardner (2010) expressed the need for increased input from faculty pertaining to doctoral completion among various disciplines and different institutions. Additional scholars suggested that faculty members have a responsibility to support and prepare future faculty members in their respective disciplines (Austin, 2002; Bergquist et.al, 2010). Faculty members' perspectives are critical due to increased retirement of faculty members, the unique challenges of aspiring colleagues enrolled in doctoral program, and heightened requests for graduate level research to assist with societal dilemmas (Bergquist et al, 2010). Thus, the implications in this chapter will expand the thematic analysis of the factors that positively promoted degree completion from participants.

Specifically, the findings provide insight as it relates to the research questions: (1) individual behaviors and cognitive abilities critical to completing the dissertation; (2) relational factors that assist with the progression through the dissertation process; and (3) departmental or institutional opportunities that support dissertation completion. Social development theory offered a blended theoretical framework for researching the multilevel influences affecting dissertation achievement in the same manner a previous study (Liechty et al., 2009). The results of this study provide several implications for policy, practice and future research.

Implications for Doctoral Students

"It is the responsibility of the student to commit to scholarly habits that make success possible" (Liechty et al., 2009, p. 493). Successful doctoral completion can take up to ten years

(Barnes & Randle, 2012). Forty-one percent of enrolled doctoral students complete doctoral studies in 7 years and 57% have a success rate in 10 years (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012). Although the doctoral experience has never been described as a monolithic task, doctoral students must find their individual path to completion (Gardner, 2009). A thematic analysis of participant responses yielded several personal factors that assist with dissertation success. Motivation, persistence, and focus can be summarized as integral as aspiring doctoral students begin the dissertation journey.

Internal Drive

Doctoral students must be resourceful after assessing their current cognitive development regarding the dissertation process. Participants of this study shared an internal drive to continue regardless of their prior knowledge of the dissertation. Not completing the dissertation was not considered an option for these participants. They used networks, tutoring services, seminars, and writing schedules. One participant gave the following advice:

> Stay the course. Use your networks. Don't be afraid to ask for help. If you are in a cohort, engage your cohort. If you're not in a cohort, find a group of like-minded people like a Facebook doctoral group to give your insight and encouragement. When you are at the dissertation phase, you are too far into the process not to finish. I had to keep reminding myself that ABD means nothing to me or anyone else. I had to finish what I started (Delta).

Another participant stated the following:

> Get tutors when you need to. Understand that it is a process and game and a tunnel that you need to get through. I went to seminars designed for third and fourth year students during my first year because I wanted a strategy (Cleo).

Participants possessed various levels of prior knowledge as it related to their respective programs; however all of the participants filled any void of preparation with outreach to external resources to augment their current cognitive development. The goal for most was to begin their careers in academia with credible research even if the process was long and arduous.

Trust the Process

Many students spend several years gathering historical data associated with their respective dissertation topics (Schuman, 2014). The dissertation requires doctoral candidates to contribute researchable, original work to the field. Dissertation topic selection lacks specific criteria although most universities require that topics are focused on the student's doctoral concentration (Black, 2012). The participants from all disciplines were challenged to find new insights and thoughts regarding their research interests during the dissertation phase. Two participants said the following:

> The dissertation process was much more than researching, writing, collecting and
> analyzing data, and determining findings; it was an instrument of revelation into my
> potential as a voice in academe (Delta).
>
> I would tell students entering this phase of the process to be persistent, be prayerful, and
> be patient. You are your biggest advocate so do not be afraid to stand your ground when
> needed. Pick a topic area you love as you will spending countless hours on the subject
> matter. Choose between primary and secondary data collection very carefully.
> Same applies to exploring the pros and cons of quantitative and qualitative research since
> this can have a major impact on the direction and length of your research endeavor. Value
> the expertise and recommendations from all your committee members, but prioritize and
> hold dear the tutelage from your committee chairperson. Do not get caught up in the

politics with the safest option being silence at times. And lastly, remember that the

successful dissertation defense is the last hurdle to obtaining your goal (Zeta).

Doctoral students historically undergo a developmental process as motivations and needs

differ appreciably through the various stages of doctoral study (Rose, 2005). A participant from

the study encouraged doctoral students to persist regardless of the circumstance.

I woke up one day with no money, but I had dreamed that same night of walking across

that stage with my degree in my hand. I did not worry about my friends going out and

eating at nice restaurants. I knew that this degree had to be earned (Jean).

Also, intervening life occurrences such as death, illness, birth, marriage, job promotion, job loss,

or faculty sabbatical as individual barriers that could impede persistence (Spaulding &

Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). The dissertation process, although rewarding, was equally

characterized as draining by many participants, who in the current study often reflected on times

where enthusiasm and motivation were lacking. One participant stated:

I had a schedule that I would write on Saturdays for a minimum of three hours. I knew

that Sunday was off limits due to church. So working five days and week and spending

my one free day writing was the most dreadful season of my life (Mike).

Although most graduate students have the ability to finish the degrees and contribute a modest

amount to existing literature, their motivation and enthusiasm will impact the quality and nature

of the contribution to a specified research inquiry (Lovitts, 2008). Persistence was a constant

need for the participants in the current study.

Persistence

The current study unraveled the notion that successful completers were always motivated

to finish the course. One participant stated:

I took a year off for a mental break. Don't do that. Don't be me (Zeke).

The lack of motivation can be a major barrier to doctoral student success. Doctoral students who are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to progress further through the dissertation process are most successful (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Although students who are extrinsically motivated by grades, evaluations, and monetary rewards have an increased probability of completing an independent research problem, those who are highly internally motivated spend increased time exploring various aspects of an independent research assignment (Lovitts, 2008).

Similar to findings in existing research, one participant just felt unprepared.

Jean stated:

It took me so long to graduate because I honestly had no idea what I was doing for at least three semesters. So, I just ran in circles until I finally read other dissertations on my topic. I learned a lot from just seeing completed ones.

Golde and Dore (2001), in a landmark study, found that many doctoral students felt inadequately trained to write a dissertation, coursework failed to provide an adequate foundation for completing independent research, qualifying exams and orals were unhelpful and arbitrary. Less than half of survey respondents reported feeling prepared to publish after doctoral program completion. The scholars recommended that departments explore the intended purpose of doctoral coursework and qualifying exams (Golde & Dore, 2001).

According one participant of the current study, the process is crafted to exert pressure on students. It tests relationships because of the amount of time devoted to writing independently. It is also recommended to form relationships peers as a major resource to complete the task.

My advice for students in the dissertation stage is to get to know students who are further

along in this stage and ask for advice and recommendations. Relationships with students

further along in the dissertation stage, students who have already defended their

dissertation as well as faculty are great resources and are key to successfully completing

the dissertation stage (Lala).

Existing qualitative and quantitative research of doctoral attrition indicates that beginning

doctoral studies is a high-risk decision (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

One participant thoughts regarding persistence included:

Keep going. Do not get discouraged. Develop a good writing schedule and stick to it.

Learn to say no. This is only temporary, so that party or happy hour can wait. Take

breaks. Celebrate small victories along the way. Stay in the research—talk about it at

any opportunity, keep reading, and keep writing. Enjoy the process. I really enjoyed the

data collection and analyzing portion of the dissertation. Writing chapter 5 was an

awesome experience and I finally felt like the expert. The oral defense was no longer a

scary or daunting event, I looked forward to it. Cry when you need to, laugh at yourself

often, defend your position to your Chair when needed, and keep going (Stuart).

Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) reported that a successful dissertation defense and

subsequent degree completion leave doctoral students with a huge sense of accomplishment and

relief. Doctoral completers report a degree of pride associated with obtaining the highest degree

in their respective fields.

Reap the Rewards

Doctoral degree attainment has been a historical predictor of increased lifetime earnings.

The acquisition yields positive returns for the economy and lifetime earnings for recipients (Abel

et al., 2014; Fatima, 2009; Walker, 2009). Groenvynck, Vandevelde, and Rossem (2013) link doctoral achievement with the geographical potential of an advanced workforce. American employment statistics suggest workers with a doctoral degree will be in demand for knowledge based jobs of the 21st century (Cross, 2014). One participant described career reward as:

> Let me just say that I am still not rich in money, but I am rich in knowledge now. The lessons I endured manifests with my current job all the time. I get to help students like me. It was just worth all the nights I cried about my struggle (Jean).

The unemployment rate for doctoral recipients is less than 6% (Abel et al., 2014). The participants of this study also reported that obtaining a terminal degree is a worth enduring the process. The career opportunities and the denotation of being an expert in the field were motivators for many who have earned the doctorate degree. Wesley stated:

> Not a lot of fun while I was going through it but in hindsight it was a rewarding experience. It has prepared me to properly conduct research. I have also been fortunate to travel internationally to discuss my dissertation research. Overall, I would categorize it as a necessary evil if you plan to work in academia and or research.

The joy of successfully defending a dissertation and participating in a doctoral graduation exercise is noted positively by doctoral graduates. One participant stated:

> The day of my defense I called my pastor and asked for prayer. I walked in the door and I surprised myself with the way I discussed my topic. When it was over, I sat in the parking lot. I was so proud of myself (Jean).

In addition, the lifetime initials behind the name and the doctoral title is regarded as the high point for doctoral graduates (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Furthermore, highly

educated doctoral graduates often have higher rates of workforce production due to increased generalizable abilities and higher level thinking skills (Fatima, 2009).

Implications for Faculty Members

The implications of the current study coincides with the historical research as it relates to the importance of faculty member support and feedback. Participants regarded that technological interaction is a favorable method to gain guidance and feedback. One participant stated:

> I would go weeks without actually seeing my advisor when I was in school, but whenever I sent an email I got a pretty quick response. I would say emails provided more detail than anything (Krystal).

Academic institutions are becoming inundated with technology, student diversity, enhanced workloads, evolved expectations, emphasis on student's needs, and a changed labor market. An increasing number of institutions are offering virtual course options. Thus, future professors will be expected to incorporate technology rich instruction in order to meet the standards and pressures from undergraduates' parents, employers, and legislators. As a result of the new higher education infrastructure, the customary tenured faculty position is evolving (Gillespie & Robertson, 2010). One participant stated:

> My cohort started a GroupMe account during our first semester during my doctoral program. It was the most valuable tool. I recommend my students now to start one. It keeps them from emailing the same questions and provides collaboration at all time (Zeta).

Scholars have also insisted that it is important to create a supportive and cooperative departmental climate with opportunities for institutional and peer support during the preparatory stage of doctoral education. Student productivity was linked to psychosocial assistance such as

role modeling, counseling, and empathizing (West et al., 2011). Existing literature indicates that the absence or presence of external relationships with faculty highly influences the doctoral experience (Stallone, 2011).

Faculty Support

A summarization of participants' responses suggests that an advisor who is knowledgeable and interested in students' research foci and methodology provide the best support. According to Main (2014), faculty advisors most often are coupled with students centered on factors such as availability, similar research interests, programmatic necessities, and funding opportunities. Hilliard (2013) also states the advisor should establish a professional relationship where feedback is constant. One participant stated:

> Timely feedback would have really helped me those days when I was lost on my journey. I spent a lot of time correcting things that I had sent questions about with no response (Jean).

Participants' comments aligned with existing literature including doctoral candidates and post graduates suggestions that advisors need to be encouraging and nurturing during the dissertation process (Hilliard, 2013; Yarwood-Ross & Haigh 2014). Doctoral students typically work with an advisor in order to develop the necessary skills to move toward becoming an independent researcher (Golde & Dore, 2001; Main, 2014). The following participant confirmed prior research regarding faculty support when stating:

> My academic chair functioned as a God send. He went above and beyond, offered sage advice on major and minor matters, helped me stay focused, never wavered in being supportive, served as a resource and invaluable advocate, and was brutally honest at times (Zeta).

Yarwood-Ross and Haigh (2014) reported that doctoral students desire an advisor who is reliable, knowledgeable, encouraging, and informative. Scholars found that doctoral degree completers report a more positive relationship with advisors than non-completers (Barnes & Austin, 2009). Participants in current study regarded advisors or chairs as the most beneficial person related to dissertation completion. One participant describes an advisor relationship as:

> For the most part, they know what they're talking about and have your best interests at heart. There are some horror stories where they are not cooperative. If that is the case, have a conversation and switch chairs. Own your process (Zeke).

Yarwood-Ross and Haigh (2014) report that experiences with external relationships during the dissertation phase can have negative effects as well. Mizzi (2014) suggested that some doctoral students regard feedback from faculty as a frustrating and emotional experience. "In addition, students may not be willing to share negative information about their supervisory experience due to concerns regarding anonymity and the need for continued good relationship throughout their academic careers" (Vanstone, Hibbert, Kinsella, Mckenzie, Pitman & Lingard, 2013, p. 44). Zeta shared the following perspective:

> Value the expertise and recommendations from all your committee members, but prioritize and hold dear the tutelage from your committee chairperson. Do not get caught up in the politics with the safest option being silence at times.

Stuart also recognized that the advisor and student relationship was not always harmonious:

> At the beginning stages I often took offense to the changes and suggestions from my chair. But once I realized she was being critical to help and not to hurt me and it was not personal, I was able to accept the process and my position in it and then move forward. I

have to admit though, submitting five pages or however many and then being told to start

over or make so many changes you might as well start over, was a tough pill to swallow.

Cleo offered advice for doctoral candidates regarding complaints of faculty:

> Do not openly complain about professors that frustrate you to others at the school. If you
>
> need help with dealing with people issues, characterize it as your frustration and that you
>
> need mentoring and advice. But, be careful and not too trusting of who you talk to. The
>
> process is designed to shape you and see if you can be a trustworthy, technically
>
> competent, ethical colleague worthy of serving the academy or in some other research
>
> role. So, when you understand that, you know that you need to look and act the
>
> part; and fit in. I would suggest finding an additional mentor outside of the university to
>
> assist with completing process if needed.

The mentor and advisor roles are not always exchangeable (Barnes & Austin, 2009).

Advisors are required to participate in the formal capacity to approve coursework while mentors

can be sponsors, teachers, or role models who develop a relationship that positively impacts the

completion of the dissertation. Although the doctoral student is paired with a faculty advisor

during the dissertation phase, a mentoring association offers professional and personal support

that goes beyond the customary advising requirement (Barnes & Austin, 2009; Holley &

Caldwell, 2011).

Implications for Institutions

The program structure and type has a significant impact on the integration and experience

of students into the program and university. Doctoral students equate a strong orientation

program that outlines procedures, expectations, and process as favorable and a great introduction

to the culture of the university. Students in distance programs report an elevated feeling of isolation due to limited access with faculty and peers. One participant stated:

>It is important to do your homework before starting a program. Online is not for everybody. I have colleagues who were disciplined enough to finish a dissertation without actually stepping foot on campus. I respect them because, I needed more structure than that. I packed up and moved when I started my program (Wesley).

Zeta stated:

>I am thankful for my process but I probably could have done a little more research before starting. A lot of things were different that the information printed on the website. I needed a less traditional program.

Furthermore, adult learners have been most persistent in program with flexible curriculums that are relevant to their current careers (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Vygotsky's social development theory rests on providing the learner with a community of assistance (McArthur, 2012).

Because dissertation students are likely to form an organic bond if given the opportunity to work together, institutions are encouraged to schedule communication of cohorts throughout the dissertation process. Students who are assembled for a common purpose in a cohort report the opportunities for collaborative learning and shared accountability whether deliberate or inadvertent. In addition to providing accountability, cohorts assist with the commitment to time management both as a collective and individual goal for students. Delta noted:

>The most significant relationship I formed during the dissertation process was with my cohort, a collective person. My cohort became my family, and some members even closer than family because we understood what the others were going through. While we were

in coursework, we would call each other almost every day. We created a group chat so

that we could check in with each other. We bonded over the two summers of residency,

which became something akin to a family reunion. The dissertation portion of the

program was the lonely part of the journey, but I knew that I could always touch base

with cohort members and get needed encouragement.

The mutual influence of cohort members assist with completing the dissertation (Holmes et al.,

2010; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Additionally, Ali & Kohun (2007) have been

long time supporters of the cohort approach as a method to decrease isolation associated with

doctoral students. Although many doctoral programs offer supportive measures in the initial

stages of the program via orientations and cohort formations, support diminishes when students

enter the independent dissertation phase (Holmes, Robinson, & Seay, 2010).

Campus Wide Initiatives

Tinto (1993) suggested that the institution plays a major role in student retention.

Institutions are encouraged to distinguish how campus wide actions impact drop out decisions

for students. Effective retention initiatives are dedicated to the welfare of all students over other

university goals. One participant stated:

I worked as a graduate assistant for a while, but even if I was new to the university, I

would say that orientation procedures for new doctoral students were superb. They laid

out everything, and it was just support from the department all time (Alex).

Doctoral program admission and curricula are a multifaceted process based on criteria evaluated

by university, faculty, and professional standards. Departments at individual institutions vary

considerably based on the stringency and nature of the workload distributed to students. Internal

factors affect the socialization of doctoral students including the capacity to adequately

understand material, the capacity to adjust to professional norms, and the capability to communicate needs (Weidman et al., 2001).

First year doctoral students experience a new routine, environment, and people. Orientation programs to assist with any misconceptions about doctoral programs and process or clarify any issues prior to the beginning of the program (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011). Zeta suggested the following:

> I would add more structure to my dissertation process. Although the writing part is very much independent and my chair, committee members and past instructors were never far from reach in theory that is since I relocated after finishing coursework. There was no concrete layout of the candidacy process or departmental dissertation guidelines other than send me a scholarly written proposal and dissertation in a timely manner- that was the expectation.

Mike added that:

> I wish administration who have completed the process would take a note on structuring classes. The progression should allow students to take classes in the order to best prepare them for the dissertation process. I made the mistake of taking statistics too early (Mike).

Wesley added:

> I would also like better support from the university's staff and the dean's office.

Researchers also indicate that full-time enrolled doctoral students are more likely to finish the program compared to part-time students. Also, students who receive some portion of financial support are more likely to persist through the program (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012).

Financial Burden

Graduate students acquired more than 35 billion dollars in private and federal loans during the 2011-2012 school year alone (Belasco, Trivetter, Webber, 2014). One participant stated:

I will probably be paying student loans until the day that I die (Jean).

Some institutions are combatting the issue by enrolling fewer students in order to provide greater levels of departmental financial support. Although funding remains available via stipends and assistantships, pressure to produce quick results has caused a decrease in effective faculty mentorship (Johnsrud & Banaria, 2004). Willis and Carmichael (2011) found that students would be better served by participating in a doctoral program that provides ample financial support. Students receiving sufficient financial aid completed doctoral studies at a higher rate than those who did not receive aid. Furthermore, students receiving financial assistance through fellowships or assistantships were more likely to complete and develop lasting connections with faculty (Willet, 2014).

Financial barriers for students are historically the result of rising costs of higher education coupled with reduced contributions of public higher education institutions (Johnsrud & Banaria, 2004). Participants reflected favorably when describing various institutional assistance while as a graduate student. Cleo stated that:

Early on, when I was looking for housing, a Director helped me find community services that helped people with bad credit get low income rental housing while writing my dissertation. The service helped me find a landlord that was willing to work with me and he rented a house to me. He also put me in touch with a Director of a high school program that helped me get my daughter into a STEM school.

Doctoral students have traditionally depended on financial support via graduate teacher assistantships, fellowships, and research assistantships. An increasing amount graduate students use personal resources and sustain debt while completing degree requirements. Approximately, 40% of graduate students were unsure about methods to fund dissertation research (Belasco et. al, 2014; Golde & Dore, 2001).

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Recommendations for Future Research

</div>

The use of social development theory as the framework for phenomenological inquiry revealed several opportunities for future research. The following areas are ripe for additional study: career opportunities and advancement for doctoral graduates, faculty member perceptions of doctoral attrition, and faculty experiences serving as dissertation chair.

Career Advancement

Fatima (2009) concluded that a doctoral education has a positive effect on workforce productivity and suggested that doctoral degree provide recipients with the skills of production, diffusion, and transmission of knowledge. A future avenue regarding the current research foci could explore the career and academic opportunities available after doctoral degree completion. Faculty members would be a beneficial resource to provide insight regarding research and education requirements for employment in academia. Further research in this area could prove valuable information to doctoral students who wish to join the professoriate or explore pathways to career advancement.

Faculty Experiences as Dissertation Chair

The dissertation chair was the most talked about person during all the interviews. The organic bond created between dissertation chair and student was regarded as most beneficial to successfully completing the dissertation. "We know that the supervisor can make or break the PhD student" (Maher et al., 2013, p.701). Vygotsky (1978) believed that it was necessary to

actively support learners in order to enhance cognitive ability, others denoted the faculty advisor

relationship as pivotal to the dissertation process (Barnes & Austin; 2009; Columbaro, 2009;

Holley & Caldwell, 2011). The major role of the advisor is to ensure that the doctoral student

successfully finishes the degree requirements (Hilliard, 2013). Several research studies make the

claim that relationships with external parties are pivotal to the success of the doctoral student

(Barnes & Austin, 2009; Columbaro, 2009; Hilliard, 2013; Holley & Caldwell, 2012; Maher,

Feldon, Timmerman & Chao, 2013; Main, 2014; Yarwood-Ross & Haigh, 2014). As a result,

insight from the faculty advisor would assist with framing the dissertation experience. Faculty

members could detail characteristics of dissertation experiences and expectations for completion

as it relates to working with doctoral students. These data could inform the line of research by

giving information that could be used to decrease attrition during the dissertation phase.

Faculty Thoughts on Dissertation Attrition

Participants reported faculty members as very crucial to the dissertation process. The

experience earned while working as faculty member would serve as great resource to assist with

reducing attrition. The 50% attrition rate of doctoral students has been fairly constant for the last

four decades (Johnsrud & Banaria, 2004; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Burkholder

(2009) implied that faculty members could provide beneficial insights regarding retention and

attrition rates. Historical perspectives of faculty members denote a shortage of obligation to

endure the meticulousness of doctoral education as the leading reason of attrition (Ali & Kohan,

2007). Burkholder (2009) further asserts that doctoral persistence, attrition and retention are

nuanced and complex themes to explore. As a result, more research regarding faculty member

perspectives could prove beneficial when exploring doctoral attrition statistics.

Conclusion

Chapter 5 outlines implications for doctoral students, faculty members, institutions, and recommendations for future research regarding dissertation completion. Although the results present themes associated with the majority of the participants, they do not negate that each participant has unique dissertation experiences. Limitations of purposeful sampling technique and time are important factors to take into consideration for future research. As principal investigator of the current study, my desire is to provide insight regarding the successful completion of the dissertation from those who were able to complete the process.

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119

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Participation Recruitment Email

From: Tanika Lankford-Mitchell

Subject: Research Study Request

Greetings:

My name is Tanika Lankford-Mitchell. I am a doctoral candidate at East Tennessee State University. I am contacting you to request your assistance in participating in my doctoral research project titled, "Dissertation Experiences from Doctoral Graduates Across Disciplines: A Phenomenological Approach." The purpose of this study is to explore the dissertation experiences and perceptions of faculty who completed the doctoral degree in the past five years. The findings of the study could prove beneficial to aspiring doctoral students, students currently in doctoral programs, graduate school faculty, and higher education administrators.

My project is a qualitative study so I will be using interviews to gather data. I am guessing the interview will take about 60 minutes. The interview will be recorded. All data in the interviews are confidential and abide by the IRB regulations of East Tennessee State University. Names will also be confidential. Please respond to this email in seven days or less if you are interested in participating in this study. My advisor on this project is Dr. Bethany Flora. If you have any questions for me or Dr. Flora you can contact Dr. Flora at 423-439-7609. I can be reached at 601-917-7365 or by responding to this e-mail.

Thank you in advance for participating in this research project.

Tanika Lankford-Mitchell

Doctoral Candidate

East Tennessee State University

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Individual Factors

1. What did you know about the dissertation process prior to entering the candidacy stage?

2. During the course of your dissertation phase, what adjectives would you use to describe your experience?

3. Describe the reason that you decided to pursue a doctoral degree and complete the dissertation process?

Relational Factors

4. Describe a significant relationship formed with a person that proved beneficial in regards to completing the dissertation process?

5. What method works best for you when assistance was needed from an external party?

6. What was the role of your academic chair and dissertation committee during the dissertation phase?

7. Describe how faculty in your department prepared you for the dissertation experience?

Structural Factors

8. Describe the institutional support you received during your dissertation process?

9. Do you have any suggestions for additional institutional support related to the dissertation process?

10. What changes would you have made to your dissertation process at your institution?

Overall Experience

11. Describe your overall dissertation experience?

12. Do you have any advice for students in the dissertation stage?

13. What would be the one thing you would change about your dissertation process?

APPENDIX C

Consent for Voluntary Participation

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

PURPOSE

This Informed Consent Document will explain about being a participant in a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer. You have been recommended for participation in this study because of your knowledge and experience as a person who has earned a doctoral degree. Your participation is important, as your perspective may prove beneficial to aspiring doctoral students, students currently in doctoral programs, graduate school faculty, and higher education administrators. There is no direct benefit to the participants involved in this study.

DURATION

If you choose to participate in this research study, you will be interviewed for approximately 60 minutes by the researcher in order to obtain recollections and descriptions of your experience with the dissertation process. All participants will be at least 21 years of age, and all participants will be graduates from various universities. Approximately, 12 participants will be involved in this research study.

PROCEDURES

For this study, you will describe your dissertation experience with a focus on individual, relational, and structural support received during the course or your journey. You will be encouraged to elaborate on specific interventions that aided dissertation completion. Participants will be interviewed for approximately 60 minutes by the researcher in order to obtain recollections and descriptions of their experience with the dissertation process. Participants for the current study will be contacted by email to set up the face to face interview and will be provided with a copy of the research purpose statement. One-on-one interviews will be scheduled at a time and place convenient to the participant. Each interview will last approximately one hour. In order to provide verbatim accounts of interviews, digital recordings will be produced to provide a complete account of all things discussed. A pseudonym will be assigned to each transcription for confidentiality purposes. As a result, participants will be encouraged to provide specific details about their respective universities and names of advisors or mentors when describing their experiences as all identifying information would be masked in the results.

Interviews will yield a vast amount of information to be interpreted, summarized, and analyzed. The creation of categories will assist with managing the voluminous amount of data provided by interview transcriptions. After transcribing of all interviews, phenomenological reduction will be used to code pertinent information into smaller units to elicit the essence of the participant's thoughts and to outline meaning pertinent to the research questions. After coding of all relevant

information, the next step will involve eliminating redundancies by creating a list of all bracketed information. Once redundant information had been eliminated, each code will be examined to determine essence of the information. Then, situation specific clusters will be formed to determine essential perspectives as related to the research questions. The final stage will examine all clusters of information to assist with identifying overarching themes that answered the research questions and provided empirical support for the conclusions and results of the study.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no known or expected risks/discomforts related to participation in this study. However, you may choose not to participate at any time.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

Your participation is important, as your perspective will prove beneficial to aspiring doctoral students, students currently in doctoral programs, graduate school faculty, and higher education administrators. The data analysis of the current provides an explanation of dissertation experiences, thoughts, and perceptions from doctoral graduation across disciplines.

COMPENSATION FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT:

East Tennessee State University (ETSU) will pay the cost of emergency first aid for any injury that may happen as a result of your being in this study. ETSU makes no commitment to pay for any other medical treatment. Claims against ETSU or any of its agents or employees may be submitted to the Tennessee Claims Commission. These claims will be settled to the extent allowable as provided under TCA Section 9-8-307. For more information about claims call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board of ETSU at 423/439-6055.

FINANCIAL COSTS

There will be no cost to you as a result of participation in this research study.

COMPENSATION IN THE FORM OF PAYMENTS TO RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Compensation will not be provided to the participant as a result of participating in this study.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research experiment is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time. You may quit by calling Tanika Mitchell, whose phone number is 601-917-7365. You will be told immediately if any of the results of the study should reasonably be expected to make you change your mind about staying in the study.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, problems or research-related medical problems at any time, you may call Tanika Mitchell at 601-917-7365, or Bethany Flora at 423-439-7609. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 423/439-6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423-439-6055 or 423-439-6002.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored locked file at the home of Tanika Mitchell for at least 5 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, ETSU IRB and personnel particular to this research (Bethany Flora) have access to the study records. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. You have been given the chance to ask questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator. You freely and voluntarily choose to be in this research project. Informed consent forms for participants utilizing technology will be scanned and returned via email from the participant and the principal investigator.

_____
SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT   DATE

_____
PRINTED NAME OF PARTICIPANT   DATE

_____
SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR   DATE

_____
SIGNATURE OF WITNESS (if applicable)   DATE

APPENDIX D

IRB Approval Letter

EAST TENNESSEE STATE
U N I V E R S I T Y

Office for the Protection of Human Research Subjects • Box 70565 • Johnson City, Tennessee 37614-1707
Phone: (423) 439-6053 Fax: (423) 439-6060

IRB APPROVAL – Initial Expedited Review

November 15, 2016

Tanika Lankford

Re: Dissertation Experiences from Doctoral Graduates Across Disciplines: A Phenomenological Approach
IRB#: c1116.6s
ORSPA#:

The following items were reviewed and approved by an expedited process:
- new protocol submission xform, CV of PI, interview questions, email to participants, informed consent version 11/8/16

The following revisions were received and approved as part of the requested changes:
- Site permission from John C. Stennis Career Technical Center

On **November 14, 2016**, a final approval was granted for a period not to exceed 12 months and will expire on **November 13, 2017**. The expedited approval of the study and requested changes will be reported to the convened board on the next agenda.

The following **enclosed stamped, approved Informed Consent Documents** have been stamped with the approval and expiration date and these documents must be copied and provided to each participant prior to participant enrollment:
- Informed Consent Document (Informed Consent ver 11-8-16 SA 11-14-16)

Federal regulations require that the original copy of the participant's consent be maintained in the principal investigator's files and that a copy is given to the subject at the time of consent.

Projects involving Mountain States Health Alliance must also be approved by MSHA following IRB approval prior to initiating the study.

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others must be reported to the IRB (and VA R&D if applicable) within 10 working days.

Proposed changes in approved research cannot be initiated without IRB review and approval. The only exception to this rule is that a change can be made prior to IRB approval when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the research subjects [21 CFR 56.108 (a)(4)]. In such a case, the IRB must be promptly informed of the change following its implementation (within 10 working days) on Form 109 (www.etsu.edu/irb). The IRB will review the change to determine that it is consistent with ensuring the subject's continued welfare.

Sincerely,
Stacey Williams, Chair
ETSU Campus IRB

cc:

VITA

TANIKA LANKFORD-MITCHELL

Education:	Ed.D. Education Leadership East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee 2017
	Ed.S. School Counseling Mississippi State University, Meridian, Mississippi 2009
	M.Ed. School Library Media University of West Alabama, Livingston, Alabama 2004
	B.A. Elementary Education Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama 2003
Professional Experience:	Library Media Specialist, T.J. Harris Elementary School; Meridian, Mississippi, 2004-2013
	Behavior Counselor, G.W. Carver Middle School; Meridian, Mississippi, 2013-2014
	School Counselor, Kemper County High School; Dekalb, Mississippi, 2014-2016
	Career Technical Educator Counselor, Stennis Career Technical Center; Dekalb, Mississippi, 2016-Present
Publications:	Lankford, T.(2011). Sweet Tea. Xlibris Corporation
	Wozny, D. A., & Lankford, T. (2010). Building effective components of a campus suicide prevention program website: A focus group approach. Retrieved from http://www.counseling.org/docs/vistas/vistas_2010_article_60.pdf?sfvrsn=3
Honors and Awards:	2009 Martha Garrett Research Scholarship. Mississippi Counseling Association, Mississippi State University
	2012 Invited Presentation. Addressing Sensitive Issues with Children Books, University Southern Mississippi.