Barriers, Motivators, and Perceived Abilities Related to Completion of the Doctoral Degree

by

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Abstract

Student retention has been a well-researched topic in higher education for decades (Austin, Cameron, Glass, Kosko, Marsh, Abdelmagid, & Burge, 2009; Ericson & Gardner, 1992; Lau, 2002; Pang, 2009; Thompson, 2007; Wetzel, O'Toole, & Peterson, 1999). Many universities receive funding based on the number of students enrolled each term so keeping students enrolled is not only in the best interest of the institution financially but also in the best interest of overall student success (Titus, 2004). Maintaining high rankings is also vital since retention and graduation rates are widely published and many students base their choice of higher education on these rankings (Hossler, 2006).

The study of the relationship between perceived barriers and doctoral student completion rates could possibly lead to policy creation aimed at increasing student retention at the doctoral level. Since most of the retention theory and policy creation is directed toward undergraduate students, results of this study could yield implications for doctoral support programs. Research estimated that 40-60% of doctoral students do not persist to finishing their degree (Austin, et al., 2009; Bowen & Rudenstein, 1992; Cassuto, 2013; Di Pierro, 2012; Frischer & Larsson, 2000; Galima, 2013; Green, 2005; Golde, 2005; Holley & Caldwell, 2011; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Katz, 1997; Kiley & Millins, 2005; Lahenius & Martinsuo, 2011; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Stallone, 2004; West, Golkap, Vallejo, Fischer, & Gupton, 2011) and that 20% of those that advance to candidacy do not finish the dissertation phase (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Frischer & Larsson, 2000; Green 2005; Katz, 1997: Kiley & Millins, 2005). Studying the

motivating factors of students who have returned to finish their doctoral programs can seek to provide this motivation before student departure occurs.

The literature review related key departmental differences that lead to a culture within academic departments in doctoral study (Hawlery, 2003). Student socialization happens primarily at the department level (Gardner, 2007; Golde, 1998). The educational silos created in doctoral programs, leads to a sense of a community or culture of graduate study that varies per department (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Because of the community type environment created by these educational silos, the research approach used in this study was ethnography.

The defining characteristics of ethnography generally include developing a complex description of the culture of a group, identifying patterns of group activities, starting with a theory and drawing from cognitive science to understand ideas and belief, and extensive fieldwork (Creswell, 2013). The overall analysis results in an understanding of how the culture group works, how it functions, and the general way of life of the group (Creswell, 2013).

I conducted this study within the College of Education at a public land-grant institution in the southeastern region of the United States. The College of Education at this institution is comprised of three departments and one school. I recruited participants from these four disciplines because they were nearing the end of their doctoral studies or had recently graduated with their PhD.

Participants were doctoral students over the age of 19 who were currently enrolled or had just completed a doctoral program within the College of Education. I made special effort to target individuals approaching the end of their doctoral studies or new graduates. My goal was to understand the barriers and motivators that graduate students experience on the way to

completing their degree. Students closer to the end of their degree and recent graduates are more likely to have experienced both.

For this research study, analysis will begin the moment data collection begins. Analysis involved a constant jumping back and forth between emic and etic perspectives. Interpretation of data begins to happen as the interviewer and the interviewee converse. Even the method in which I transcribed the interview was a form of analysis.

The findings of this study were instrumental in understanding the cultures of the College of Education disciplines at one land-grant University in the southeastern United States. Understanding the culture within a department can aid in the development of best practices models for graduate student attrition. An important next step would be to conduct similar studies with current students focusing on the major themes identified here and work to develop a best practices model for doctoral students in different culture (departmental) groups.

Acknowledgments

For nothing is impossible with God – Luke 1:37. At many points in this journey, I have felt like quitting and hanging it all up due to the stresses and busyness of life. It is only through God's strength that I have made it to this point in my education. Philippians 4:13 says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." This has never been truer in my life. Through all of life's struggles and difficulties…through all of the self-doubt…it was God's strength, not my own, that sustained me through to the end.

To my husband Clint…we did it! Yes, we! This journey would not have happened without you. A constant source of support and encouragement, you never wandered in your belief that I could, and would, finish. You spent many nights watching all four of our children (not an easy task) so that I could take classes, write papers, and study. There is no way possible that I could have done any of this, not a single day of it, without your constant love and support. I can never repay you for that but am forever thankful for your sacrifices and support.

To my children, Walker, Charleigh, Jacob, and Joseph…I am sorry! The time with you that has been sacrificed weighs heavily on my heart. The moments I have missed, the hugs, the cuddles, the boo-boos, the bedtime stories, the tears and the laughter. I can only hope that the sacrifices that I have made and required of you will help you understand the value of commitment, education, and determination that I want for you. The sacrifices made are in part to build a better future for you and for our family. I hope you understand that and forgive me for those lost moments. I want only the best for you in life and vow to never miss a moment again!

To my parents Charles and Elaine…who taught me the importance and value of education from an early age…you literally raised me in the post-secondary environment and fostered my passion for higher education at all stages of life. Your encouragement and support have never wavered no matter what the situation or circumstance. You've shown me what it means to make a commitment and stand strong on my values and my faith. For that I am forever grateful.

To my in-laws, Richard and Terri…thank you for raising a son who has such a good heart and strong commitment to family that he would stand by me during this difficult process. Thank you for the years of babysitting and childcare that helped Clint and I both attend school.

To my committee…a special thanks to each of my committee members. Each one of you has been vital to my educational journey in a unique way. Dr. David DiRamio, you taught my first class in the program and your feedback and teaching style fueled my passion to continue. You helped shape the confidence needed to complete the program. Dr. James Witte, I do not even know what to say. You come along at just the right times to calm my "freak-outs" and provide encouraging, no non-sense advice. Dr. Carey Andrzejewski (Dr. A), you are more influential to your students than you will ever know. You take something like qualitative research, a foreign concept to most, and make it not only understandable, but fun. Your passion comes through in your teaching and transfers to your students. Your feedback and guidance are invaluable. Dr. Maria Witte, I consider you so much more than a committee chair. Your passion for education and helping others radiates from every interaction. You are a mentor, a friend, and an inspiration to all you meet. Thank you for putting up with me…mentoring me…and always being there for me, both in and out of the classroom. Dr. George Flowers, thank you for serving as my university reader. Thank you for your encouragement and support as a boss, a friend, and

a colleague. Without your unending support and encouragement to pursue professional development and higher education, I may never have started this journey.

Last, but certainly not least, to my participants…thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedules and lives to talk with me. Your stories are all so different but at the same time so familiar. I am inspired by your journey and your commitment to pursuit of the PhD. Your participation is invaluable and much appreciated.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." – Jeremiah 29:11

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Chapter I: Introduction

Student retention has been a well-researched topic in higher education for decades (Austin, Cameron, Glass, Kosko, Marsh, Abdelmagid, & Burge, 2009; Ericson & Gardner, 1992; Lau, 2002; Pang, 2009; Thompson, 2007; Wetzel, O'Toole, & Peterson, 1999). Many universities receive funding based on the number of students enrolled each term so keeping students enrolled is not only in the best interest of the institution financially but also in the best interest of overall student success (Titus, 2004). Maintaining high rankings is also vital since retention and graduation rates are widely published and many students base their choice of higher education on these rankings (Hossler, 2006).

Studies have been conducted for the purpose of understanding why certain students and certain student populations, dropout of college and the factors that influence student perseverance. For instance, Berge and Huang (2004) developed a comprehensive model of student retention factors and organized them into meaningful ways to be used in multiple ways. Tinto (1998) and Bean (1979) conducted studies and developed models of student retention based on background characteristics, educational history, and personality traits. Models of student retention have been studied and developed at many different institutions for a variety of student groups (Pang, 2009). Underrepresented student populations including minority groups (Buzzetto-More, Ukoha, & Rustagi, 2010; Fuertes, Sedlacek, & Liu, 1994; Nora, 1987; Ting 2000), individuals with a low socio-economic status (Schwager, Hulsheger, Bridgeman, & Lang, 2015; Westrick, Le, Robbins, Radunzel, & Schmidt, 2015), first generation college students (Gardner & Holley, 2011; Pang, 2009), and student athletes (Hamilton, 2005; Mendoza, Horton,

& Mendez, 2012) have also been examined (Payne & Dusenbury, 2007; Ruggeri, Diaz, Kelley, Papousek, Dempster, & Hanna, 2008; Seagram, Gould & Pyke, 1998).

There is another group of students that seems to be underrepresented in the research. Graduate students are not as widely studied in student retention research. The majority of the research focuses on college freshmen, or at least undergraduate students, and the variety of factors that influence student degree completion and/or dropout rates. Naturally, graduate and undergraduate students will face a different set of obstacles while pursuing their education. Many graduate students are also working professionals paying for their own education and facing familial obligations. Graduate programs can often be draining, not only financially, but mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. Barriers influencing graduate student retention would also vary greatly from undergraduate student barriers because graduate students have generally progressed to higher levels of cognitive, emotional, and social development (Tinto, 1988). Programs designed for graduate retention will therefore vary greatly from programs designed for undergraduate retention. An understanding of the relationship between these barriers and drop-out rates may aid in developing more effective programs for doctoral retention. An understanding of what brings doctoral candidates back to the university after a prolonged absence will also be useful in developing motivational instruments for current doctoral candidates.

Statement of the Problem

With little research focused on graduate student retention, it is important to examine the various contributing factors in graduate student attrition and dropout rates in order to develop programs for increasing retention and persistence to degree completion. Research indicates that 40-60% of students beginning a doctoral degree program will not finish (Bowen & Rudenstine,

1992; Frischer & Larsson, 2000; Green, 2005; Katz, 1997; Kiley & Millins, 2005). Much of the research aids undergraduate admissions and recruitment administrators in developing programs for student retention. Given that graduate student populations are generally smaller than undergraduate student populations, it is logical that institutions should focus on undergraduate retention. Unfortunately, graduate student non-completion is not only costly for students, but also for institutions (Lau, 2002; Longden, 2006; Titus, 2004). Compared to undergraduate students and master's level students, doctoral candidates reflect the institution's commitment to scholarly research and academics. Doctoral students consume university resources (i.e. advisor time and attention, research labs and facilities, library resources) faster than any other student population (Kluever, 1995).

A better understanding of the relationship between graduate attrition and barriers to completion may be useful for the campus Graduate School and/or individual departments in addressing attrition rates. While undergraduate attrition and retention is well researched and graduate student attrition is becoming more adequately researched, the attrition rates of graduate students have never been well documented in the research. The lack of research on graduate retention and attrition seems constant across most American universities (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Golde, 1998; Jacks, Chubin, Porter, & Connolly, 1983; Monsour & Corman, 1991).

Conceptual Framework

It is important to ground assumptions in a conceptual framework. There are three major theories of student persistence – Tinto's (1975, 1993) Student Integration Theory, Bean's (1979, 1985, 1990) Student Attrition Model, and Kember's (1989a, 1989b, 1990, 1995) model for predicting student drop out from distance programs. Adaptations of these theories work to form the conceptual framework for the organization of this study.

Tinto's Student Integration Theory, first published in 1975, described persistence as an outcome of any given student's interaction with the college or university that they attend. This model studied the relationship between student backgrounds, characteristics, and expectations and institutional characteristics. Strictly followed, Tinto conceptualized through this model that student's characteristics were important predictors of persistence. His model was important because it could help ascertain how a student's characteristics would predict how students would interact with an institutions' services and how integrated into the university they would become (Tinto, 1975). Five variables arise from Tinto's Model: background characteristics, initial goal and institutional commitments, academic and social integration, subsequent goal and institutional commitments, and withdrawal decisions (Tinto, 1993).

In later work, Tinto (1993) argued that attrition is a discrepancy between the student and the academic institution itself. A student who fails to become integrated into the institution is more likely to exhibit poor academic performance. While much of Tinto's work revolves around the retention of undergraduate student populations, many of these findings are can be generalized to graduate students to some degree. Tinto's model suggested that institutional characteristics (i.e. location, student populations, available resources, facilities, student support systems, advisors) lead to the development of an overall academic, as well as social, climate in which individual students must function.

Tinto's earliest research resulted in the development of this Student Integration Model. He based his model on a theory explaining the process that motivates students to leave college before graduating (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992). This motivation results from the interaction between an individual and his or her educational environment as well as the match between individual characteristics and those of the institution (Tinto, 1975). The Student

Integration Model has prompted several decades of expanding research on student retention (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993). Tinto's research has advanced a model of student departure that explains individual motivation in regards to leaving the university prior to graduating (Cabrera et al., 1993). The weakness in this model is the extreme focus on institutional commitment and integration with little attention paid to external factors impacting attrition (Bean, 1985; Cabrera et al., 1992; Cabrera et al., 1993; Titus, 2004).

Tinto's theory, while beneficial in studying institutional retention, fails to consider external factors influencing student persistence. For this reason, theories that take into account the influence of family, friends, work, and other external commitments are considered (Bean & Metzner, 1985). A graphic representation of Tinto's Student Integration Theory is represented in Figure 1.

John Bean, a notable retention researcher, expanded on Tinto's early Student Integration Model to develop the Student Attrition Model (Bean, 1985). Bean compared college turn over to that of organization turn over with individuals in the workforce (Cabrera et al., 1992). Bean's model recognizes the factors external to the institution that play a major role in the retention of students (Cabrera et al., 1992). Bean identified not only institutional factors (i.e. grades, academic integration, absenteeism, faculty contact, social life) but also external factors (i.e. employment, family obligations, availability of financial resources, etc.) as major factors in the beliefs, attitudes, and eventually the decision to stay or leave (Bean, 1985, Cabrera et al., 1992; Titus, 2004). Bean's model parallels the external factors that influence a worker to leave a corporation with the factors that influence a student to leave an institution (Titus, 2004). Bean's model focuses more on beliefs, which are shaped by attitudes, which ultimately shape the behavior of departing students (Cabrera et al., 1993). The beliefs, he believes, are based on the experiences

the student has with not only the different aspects of higher education, but also factors that are external to the institution (Cabrera et al., 1993).

Tinto's Student Integration Theory

Teaching, learning, support, facilities, etc.

Goal Commitment

Prior Qualifications

Individual Attributes

Family attributes
E.g. father's education

Goal Commitment

Institutional Commitment

Decision to Dropout or persist

Debt, counseling, medical Personal, family events

Goal Commitment
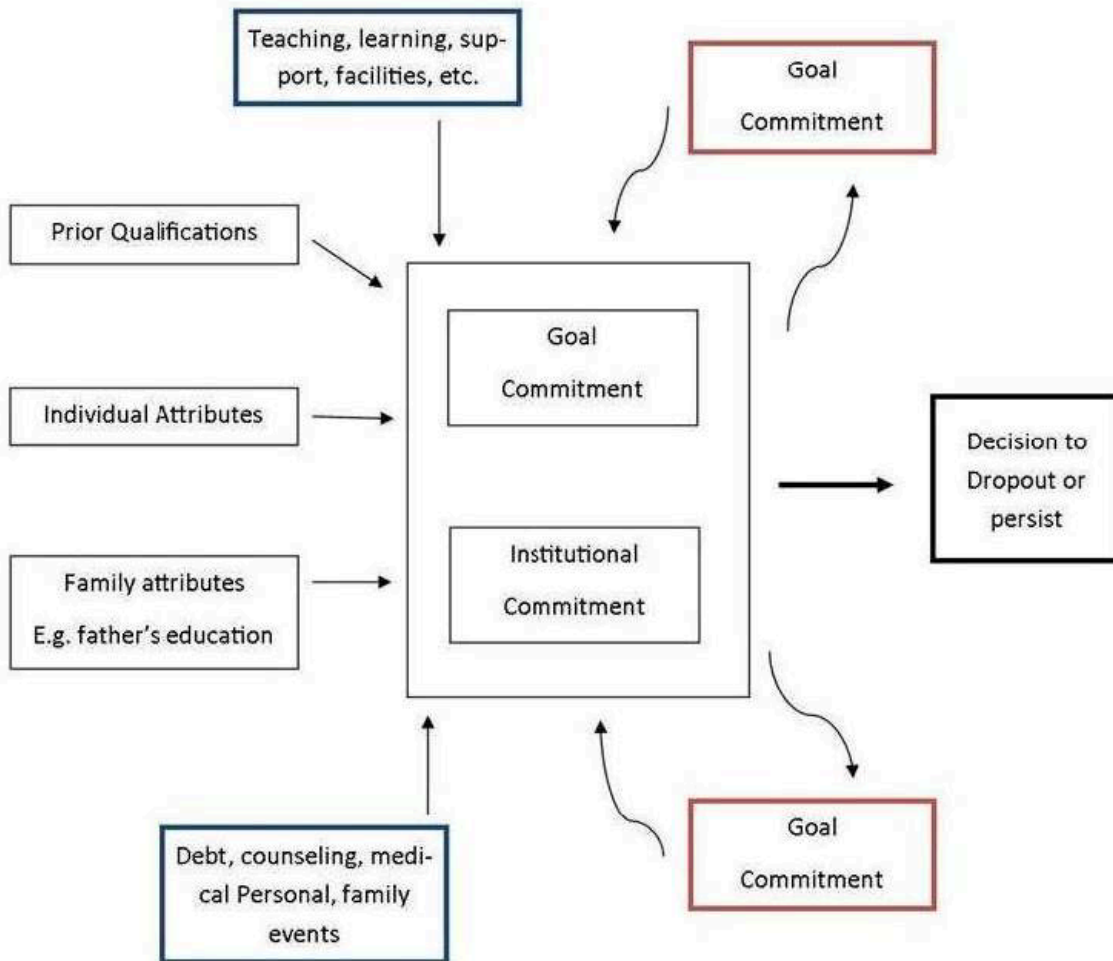
Figure 1. Tinto's Student Integration Model. This model is based on a theory explaining the process that motivates students to leave college prior to graduating (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992). Adapted from Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: a theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research, 45(1)*, 89-125.

Bean's model (1979, 1985, 1990) seeks to understand student attrition by considering the addition of external forces affecting student persistence. While Bean considered that the interactions between the institution and the individual played a vital role in the satisfaction in the college experience, which in turn affects persistence, he expanded his model to include pre-

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existing beliefs and attitudes as well as familial and other social influences.

Bean's Model of Student Attrition

A Student

Intentions; Goals and Orientations; Expectations

Traditional Measures; Abilities: Grades: Motivations, Etc.

Perceptions of Learning Environment: workload, curriculum, instruction, assessment, etc.

Approaches to Learning & Strategies of Learning

Quality of Learning Outcomes

Different Interpretations

Experiences of meaning & relevance; congruence/ incongruence

Adaptation/Giving up: Satisfaction/ Dissatisfaction
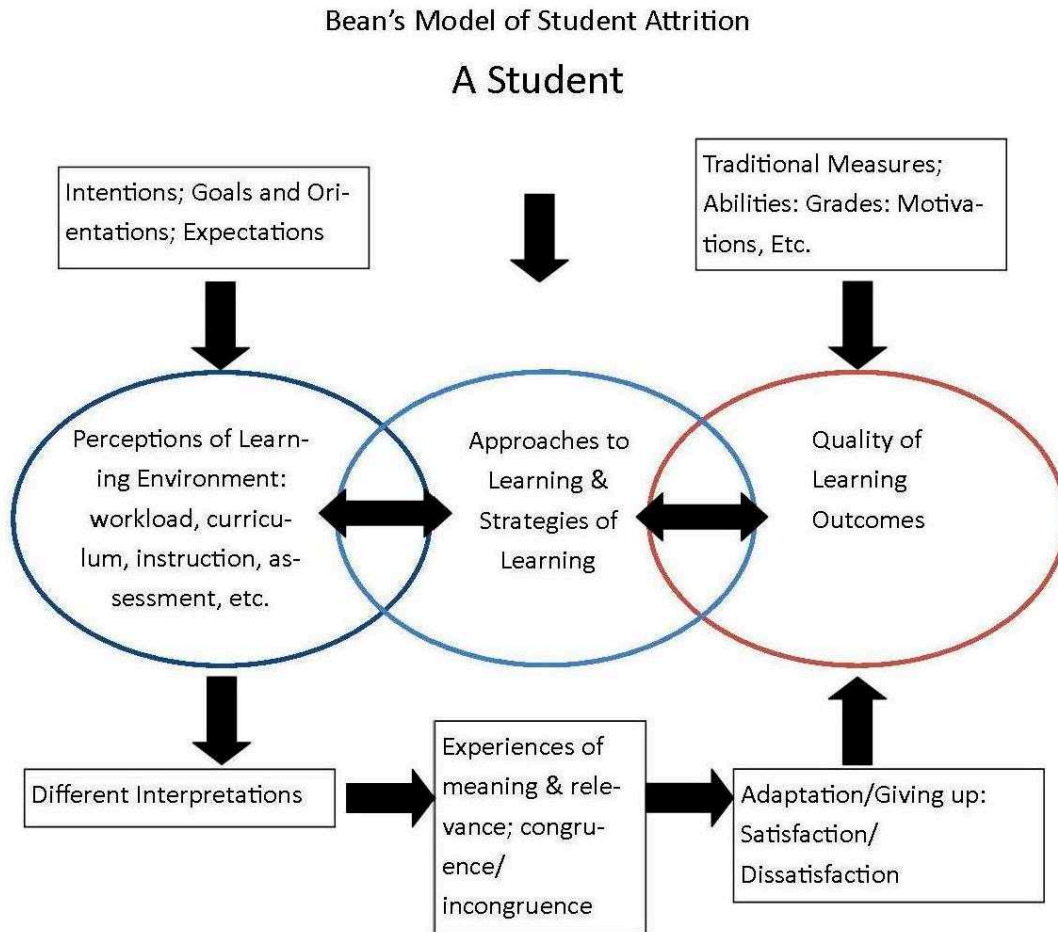
Figure 2. Bean's Model of Student Attrition. Bean's model (1979, 1985, 1990) seeks to understand student attrition by considering external forces affecting student persistence. Adapted from Bean, J.P. (1985). Interaction effects based on class level in an explanatory model of college student dropout syndrome. *American Educational Research Journal, 22(1)*, 35-64.

Cabrera, et al. (1992) further showed that matching institutional characteristics and student characteristics led to higher satisfaction and therefore higher persistence rates. An adaptation of Bean's Model is found in Figure 2.

Both Tinto's and Bean's models describe student persistence as an interaction of many factors, both personal and institutional (Hossler, 1984). More importantly, a successful match of those factors contributes to increased rates of persistence. Despite these findings, Tinto's

Student Integration Theory (1975) and Bean's Student Attrition Model (1985) focused primarily on undergraduate students. The two theories combined create a quality comprehensive framework on student attrition (Cabrera et al., 1993).

For this reason, Kember (1989a, 1989b, 1990, 1995) developed a model for adult students that expanded on Tinto's model. Kember's (1995) model argued for the importance of external factors on adult distance learning students based on Tinto's proven significance of factors for on-campus students.

The premise of Kember's (1995) model focuses on the influence of external characteristics on adult distance education students. The model developed by Kember in 1995 included background variables (i.e. work obligations, familial make up, social life, educational history, and other commitments). The foundation for this theory is consideration of the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors influencing student persistence (Kember, 1989a).

By adapting and combining the three theories/models of student attrition and persistence, assumptions can be made to guide the organization of the study. Student persistence and retention is highly impacted by institutional factors as well as personal factors as evidenced by the previously mentioned student retention theories.
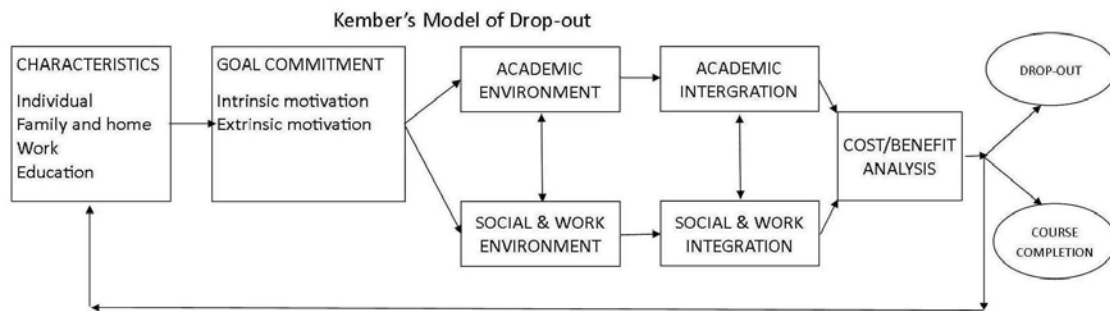
Figure 3. Kember's Model of Drop-out. Kember's (1995) model argued for the importance of external factors on adult distance learning students based on Tinto's proven significance of factors for on-campus students. Adapted from Kember, D. (1990). The use of a model to derive interventions which might reduce drop-out from distance education courses. *Higher Education, 20*, 11-24.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine factors that influenced both completion and non-completion of graduate work. The study sought to understand the relationship between perceived barriers to completion and completion of the doctoral degree as well as the relationship between motivational factors and completion of the doctoral degree. The study also identified barriers to degree completion, as identified by graduate students, specifically during the dissertation phase of their degree. The study also identified factors that have led to students' persistence to complete their doctoral degrees. What the study hoped to reveal was a practical understanding of what the institution can do to aid in student persistence and minimize barriers for doctoral students.

Research Questions

I used the following research questions in this study:

1) What are the barriers to completion of the graduate degree?

2) What are the motivators to completion of the graduate degree?

3) How do students perceive their ability to complete their doctoral programs?

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4) What are the relationships among barriers, motivators, and graduate students' perceived ability to complete doctoral programs?

Through examination of these questions, a better understanding of the relationship between not only completion and persistence towards completion, but also non-completion and barriers that influence doctoral student drop-out could be gained.

Significance of the Study

The study of the relationship between perceived barriers and doctoral student completion rates could possibly lead to policy creation aimed at increasing student retention at the doctoral level. Since most of the retention theory and policy creation is directed toward undergraduate students, results of this study could yield implications for doctoral support programs. Research estimated that 40-60% of doctoral students do not persist to finishing their degree (Austin et al, 2009; Bowen & Rudenstein, 1992; Cassuto, 2013; Di Pierro, 2012; Frischer & Larsson, 2000; Galima, 2013; Green, 2005; Golde, 2005; Holley & Caldwell, 2011; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Katz, 1997; Kiley & Millins, 2005; Lahenius & Martinsuo, 2011; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Stallone, 2004; West, Golkap, Vallejo, Fischer, & Gupton, 2011) and that 20% of those that advance to candidacy do not finish the dissertation phase (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Frischer & Larsson, 2000; Green 2005; Katz, 1997: Kiley & Millins, 2005).

Limitations and Delimitations

The results of this study are not generalizable to other institutions and student populations. I obtained participants from a pool of current students and those who have graduated within the last 4 terms and are not generalizable to other dates in history at this southeastern public four-year institution or at other institutions. I limited the participants to doctoral students for the ease of participant selection and assumption of commitment to

completion. By limiting the participants to this specific population, I was able to focus on only the barriers to completion of the doctoral process. Finally, due to the nature of one of the desired selection criteria (i.e. completed the doctoral program), it was often difficult to obtain up-to-date contact information.

Assumptions

The primary assumption for this study was that doctoral students face barriers in completing their doctoral degrees. These barriers may come in phases and in many forms throughout the process. A second assumption was that the data that is received from this southeastern public four-year university was an accurate account of doctoral student degree progression. A third assumption was that students provided open and honest feedback about their doctoral program experiences. Lastly, the assumption that students who have made the effort to return to their graduate programs were motivated by one or more factors to persist to degree completion.

Definitions

ABD – a doctoral student that has completed all of the coursework for the doctoral program and has advanced to candidacy but has not completed the dissertation phase of the doctoral degree. ABD = All But Dissertation.

Attrition – can be literally defined as the decline in number of enrolled students; used here to represent a doctoral candidate who has not completed the doctoral degree and is no longer enrolled at the University.

Degree Completion – successful completion of the dissertation process, including final defense and graduation from the university.

Doctoral Candidate – a doctoral student who has completed all required coursework and both written and oral exams.

Naturalistic Inquiry – seeks to understand the world as one individual, or a group of individuals, sees it.

Positivist Paradigm – assumes that all people experience the world in the same way (Agostinho, 2005).

Ethnography – is a qualitative design in which the researcher interprets the shared patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and languages of a culture sharing group (Harris, 1968).

Open Coding – open coding involves assigning codes or categories to the data according to the major categories/themes present (Creswell, 2013).

Axial Coding – axial coding emerges when the researcher identifies one category established in open coding to focus on and then goes back to the data to create additional codes around this one category (Creswell, 2013).

Social Constructivism – seek to understand how individuals recognize, produce, and reproduce social actions and how they come to share an intersubjective understanding of specific life circumstances (Schwandt, 2007).

Emic – the insider's view – researchers seek to understand the world views of native inhabitants of social environments (Berg & Lune, 2012).

Etic – the outsider's view – arises in the analysis produced by the researcher (Berg & Lune, 2012).

Organization of the Study

  In Chapter I, I introduced the problem, the proposed research questions, limitations, definitions and the theoretical framework in which the study will be conducted. In Chapter II, I will include a review of the related literature concerning student retention and attrition, theories of student persistence, retention and attrition, an examination of doctoral student persistence research and identified barriers to dissertation completion. In Chapter III, I will explore the qualitative methods employed in this study, including the methods of participant selection, interview question formation, data collection procedures, and data analysis processes. In Chapter IV, I will present the findings of the study. Finally, in Chapter V, I will summarize the study, present limitations and implications for this study research and includes recommendations for future research.

Chapter II: Literature Review

In this chapter, I will review the purpose of the study and the research questions. I will also provide an overview of the most notable student retention researchers before turning my focus to the area of graduate student retention. Through the process of doing a literature review, I discovered significant themes (i.e. advisor relationships, integration/isolation, support systems, and external factors) and discussed these themes as they related to my research questions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine factors that influenced both completion and non-completion of graduate work. The study sought to understand the relationship between perceived barriers to completion of the doctoral degree as well as the relationship between motivational factors and completion of the doctoral degree. The study also identified barriers to degree completion, as identified by graduate students, specifically during the dissertation phase of their degree. The study also identified factors that have led to students' persistence to complete their doctoral degrees. What the study hoped to reveal was a practical understanding of what the institution can do to aid in student persistence and minimize barriers for doctoral students.

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Student retention research has been a well-researched topic in higher education (Austin, et al., 2009; Ericson & Gardner, 1992; Lau, 2002; Pang 2009; Thompson, 2007; Wetzel et al., 1999). The current retention rates for doctoral programs range from 40-60% (Austin et al., 2009; Bowen & Rudenstein, 1992; Cassuto, 2013; Di Pierro, 2012; Frischer & Larsson, 2000; Galima, 2013; Golde, 2005; Green, 2005; Holley & Caldwell, 2011; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Katz, 1997; Kiley & Millins, 2005; Lahenius & Martinsuo, 2011; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Stallone, 2004; West et al., 2011). With nearly half of all entering doctoral students not completing their degrees, institutional programs aimed at assisting these students in the journey are necessary. In order to focus on the most motivating factors and overcoming the most hindering barriers, I conducted research on these factors.

Student Retention Researchers

Retention research has been a major focus in higher education for decades. For as long as students have been attending…and dropping out… of college, researchers have sought ways to improve retention. Early researchers such as Bean and Tinto have developed models of student attrition (Bean, 1979; Bean, 1985; Bean, 1990; Tinto, 1975; Tinto 1993). Researchers have developed theoretical models as well (Austin, 2002; Egan, 1989; Kirk & Todd-Mancillas, 1991; Soto Antony, 2002). Within the last couple of decades, the body of literature has expanded to include special populations of students (i.e. underrepresented populations, distance students, adult students, and graduate students).

Vincent Tinto.

It would be difficult to discuss student retention without mentioning the work of Vincent Tinto. Tinto, a University Professor, has studied undergraduate student retention for over 40 years. Tinto's Student Integration Theory, first published in 1975, described persistence as an outcome of any given student's interaction with the college or university that they attend. This model studied the relationship between student backgrounds, characteristics, and expectations and institutional characteristics (Tinto, 1975). Strictly followed, Tinto conceptualized through this model that student's characteristics were important predictors of persistence. His model was important because it could help ascertain how a student's characteristics would predict how students would interact with an institutions' services and how integrated into the university they would become (Tinto, 1975). Five variables arise from Tinto's Model: background characteristics, initial goal and institutional commitments, academic and social integration, subsequent goal and institutional commitments, and withdrawal decisions (Tinto, 1993).

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before graduating (Cabrera et al., 1992). This motivation results from the interaction between an individual and his or her educational environment as well as the match between individual characteristics and those of the institution (Tinto, 1975). The Student Integration Model has prompted several decades of expanding research on student retention (Cabrera et al., 1993). Tinto's research has advanced a model of student departure that explains individual motivation in regards to leaving the university before graduating (Cabrera et al., 1993). The weakness in this model is the extreme focus on institutional commitment and integration with little attention paid to external factors affecting attrition (Bean, 1985; Cabrera et al., 1992; Cabrera et al., 1993; Titus, 2004).

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John Bean, a notable retention researcher, expanded on Tinto's early Student Integration Model to develop the Student Attrition Model (Bean, 1985). Bean compared college turn over to that of organization turn over with individuals in the workforce (Cabrera et al., 1992). Bean's model recognizes the factors external to the institution that play a major role in the retention of students (Cabrera et al., 1992). Bean identified not only institutional factors (i.e. grades, academic integration, absenteeism, faculty contact, social life, etc.) but also external factors (i.e. employment, family obligations, availability of financial resources, etc.) as major factors in the beliefs, attitudes, and eventually

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the decision to stay or leave (Bean, 1985, Cabrera et al., 1992; Titus, 2004). Bean's model parallels the external factors that influence a worker to leave a corporation with the factors that influence a student to leave an institution (Titus, 2004). Bean's model focuses more on beliefs, which are shaped by attitudes, which ultimately shape the behavior of departing students (Cabrera et al., 1993). The beliefs, he believes, are based on the experiences the student has with not only the different aspects of higher education, but also factors that are external to the institution (Cabrera et al., 1993).

Bean's model (1979, 1985, 1990) seeks to understand student attrition by considering the addition of external forces affecting student persistence. While Bean considered that the interactions between the institution and the individual played a vital role in the satisfaction in the college experience, which in turn affects persistence, he expanded his model to include pre-existing beliefs and attitudes as well as familial and other social influences. Cabrera et al. (1992) further showed that matching institutional characteristics and student characteristics led to higher satisfaction and therefore higher persistence rates.

Both Tinto's and Bean's models describe student persistence as an interaction of many factors, both personal and institutional (Hossler, 1984). More importantly, a successful match of those factors contributes to increased rates of persistence. Despite these findings, Tinto's Student Integration Theory (1975) and Bean's Student Attrition Model (1985) focused primarily on undergraduate students. The two theories combined create a quality comprehensive framework on student attrition (Cabrera et al., 1993). David Kember recognized the difference in student populations between the typical undergraduate student and the more mature adult student. He took into account the external factors that impact student retention and attrition.

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David Kember.

Kember conducted longitudinal studies of student retention in the 1980s. The model developed from his research is still useful today in understanding undergraduate student retention. Tinto's Student Integration Theory (1975) and Bean's Student Attrition Model (1985) focused primarily on undergraduate students. For this reason, Kember (1989a, 1989b, 1990, 1995) developed a model for adult students that expanded on Tinto's model. Kember's (1995) model argued for the importance of external factors on adult distance learning students based on Tinto's proven significance of factors for on-campus students.

The premise of Kember's (1995) model focuses on the influence of external characteristics on adult distance education students. The model developed by Kember in 1995 included background variables (i.e. work obligations, familial make up, social life, educational history, and other commitments). Kember, Hong, and Ho (2013) suggested that the success of a student lies in how well he balances family, work, and social obligations. Kember's (1989b) model focuses less on the institutional climate and more on the external factors (i.e. individual characteristics, home and family life, work, and goal commitment). Kember focuses heavily on the goal commitment of non-traditional students. This goal commitment, according to Kember (1989a) comes in two forms: extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is primarily related to the student's interest in obtaining the goal or qualification and their commitment to accomplishing that goal (Kember, 1989a). Extrinsic motivation refers to the rewards related to obtaining the degree or awards (Kember 1989b). Additionally, the amount of extrinsic motivation that a student has is directly related to the student's characteristics in terms of other external factors (i.e. previous qualifications, age, employment situations) (Kember, 1989b). Kember (1990) later found that it is difficult for the discipline to influence the amount of

extrinsic motivation of individuals, beyond providing awards and that satisfy these motivations. Conversely, intrinsic motivation involves a student's interest in the subject for the subject's sake (Kember, 1989a). Knowles (1983) insist that adult learners be viewed as unique individuals able to determine the relevance of subject matter. In a study conducted by Kember (1989b) one participant's lack of intrinsic motivation was thought by the researcher to have contributed to the decision to drop-out. He later found that the institution has a greater chance of enhancing fulfilment of intrinsic motivation through program flexibility (Kember, 1990).

With the majority of the body of retention research focusing on undergraduate student retention, a need for more graduate student research has emerged. Undergraduate and graduate populations are noticeably different and it is therefore important to examine the various contributing factors in graduate attrition and dropout rates.

Overview of Graduate Retention Research

Research indicates that 40-60% of students entering a doctoral program will not finish and that it varies by discipline (Austin et al., 2009; Bowen & Rudenstein, 1992; Cassuto, 2013; Di Pierro, 2012; Frischer & Larsson, 2000; Galima, 2013; Green, 2005; Golde, 2005; Holley & Caldwell, 2011; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Katz, 1997; Kiley & Millins, 2005; Lahenius & Martinsuo, 2011; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Stallone, 2004; West et al., 2011). Given that graduate student populations are generally smaller than undergraduate populations it is logical that the focus of institutions should be placed on undergraduate retention. Despite this fact, graduate students, while lower in number, tend to consume more of the institution's resources (Ferrer de Valero, 2001; Willis & Carmichael, 2011). Graduate student non-completion is not only costly for the student, but for the institution (Andrea, 2002; Ferrer de

Valero, 2001; Galima, 2013; Golde, 2005; Kember, 1989a , Kember, 1989b; Lau, 2002; Longden, 2006; Titus, 2004).

A better understanding of the relationship between graduate attrition and barriers to completion may be useful for the campus Graduate School and/or individual departments in addressing attrition rates. While undergraduate attrition and retention have been well researched, the attrition rates of graduate students have only recently been examined in the research. This trend seems consistent across most American Universities (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Golde, 1995; Jacks et al., 1983; Monsour & Corman, 1991).

As previously mentioned, undergraduate and graduate student populations are extremely different. Many of the factors that influence the decisions of doctoral students are simply not factors for undergraduate students or at least not influential factors. Doctoral students generally have a very close relationship with their advisor or committee chair. The relationship between the doctoral student and his advisor plays a major role in the ability of the student to persist to degree completion (Austin et al., 2009; Di Pierro, 2012; Ferrer de Valero, 2001; Green, 2005; Hirt & Muffo, 1998; Kember, 1989a; Lahenius & Martinsuo, 2011; Monsour & Corman, 1991; West et al., 2011). Additionally, doctoral students, tend to feel isolated, particularly during the dissertation phase of the doctoral process (Golde, 2005; Holmes, Seay & Wilson, 2009; Katz, 1997; Monsour & Corman, 1991; West et al., 2011). This isolation can negatively impact a student's persistence towards degree completion. Another factor influencing doctoral persistence is the level of support from both family/friends and institutions (Andrea, 2002; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Ivankova, 2002; Kember, 1989a; Longden, 2006; Thompson, 2008). While doctoral students face a large number of external issues in the pursuit of their degrees, familial and financial stresses tend to hinder progress in many ways (Ehrenberg & Mavros, 1992;

Ferrer de Valero, 2001; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Golde, 2005; Hirt & Muffo, 1998; Kember, 1989a; Lahenius & Martinsuo, 2011). Understanding the reasons behind doctoral attrition plays an important role in developing programs to aid in retention at this level. In order to understand the impact on doctoral attrition, I explored these known factors.

Advisor relationship.

Undergraduate students are typically assigned an advisor within their department. The relationship that they have with that advisor is generally minimal as the advisor's role it to guide the student through the checklist of program requirements (Yarbrough, 2002). At the doctoral level however, that relationship is more personal. Typically, attention to academic advising has been highly researched and studied at the undergraduate level (Barnes, Williams, & Archer, 2010; Yarbrough, 2002). Doctoral attrition has received increasing national attention and as such has gained popularity in retention research at the doctoral level (Barnes, Williams, & Archer, 2010; Holley & Caldwell 2011; Ivankova 2002). Zhao, Golde, and McCormick (2007) describe the relationship as "one of the most important aspects of doctoral education" (p. 1). Positive relationships lead to positive outcomes while bad relationships between advisor and advisee tend to lead to more negative or at least more difficult outcomes (Barnes et al., 2010; Herman, 2011; Zhao et al., 2007).

In order to understand how the advisor/advisee relationship works, it is important to understand the role of the advisor in the doctoral process. Winston (1984) defined doctoral advisors as "faculty members who guide graduate students through their programs of study, serve as evaluators in written and oral examinations, and direct dissertations and theses" (p. 288). Holland (1998) however described the doctoral advisor as someone who "signs required documents the student may need from department personnel during the period of doctoral study"

(p. 11). As a more encompassing definition, Schlosser, Knox, Moskovitz, and Hill (2003) described doctoral faculty advisors as "the faculty member who has the greatest responsibility for helping guide the advisee through the graduate program" (p. 179). Felder (2010) described the faculty advisor as one who can mentor professional development and shape disciplinary identity. With varying definitions of the role of the doctoral advisor, it is evident that there would be a variance in the perceived influence of advisor relationships at the doctoral level. It is clear from the research that not only are doctoral students unsure of the role of their advisor, but faculty members are also unsure of what is needed from them as an advisor. Doctoral advisors are typically faculty members with little to no advisor training (Barnes et al., 2010). According to Barnes et al. (2010), the lack of formal training for faculty advisors leads to many different levels of effectiveness and satisfaction with these advisor/advisee relationships.

   Role of the advisor.

   Advisor relationships are described differently for many reasons, not the least of which is the perceived role of the advisor, the department in which the doctoral student is studying, and the match between advisor/advisee. Holley and Caldwell (2011) indicated that younger students view the role of the advisor as more of a mentor while older students are typically not looking for a mentor relationship. McLure (1989) surveyed 107 doctoral students to find out what roles they most desired in their advisor. The findings indicated that faculty advisors should serve to be role models, red-tape cutters, encouragers, and reliable sources of information. Further research suggests that doctoral advisors should be a cheerleader, coach, counselor and critic for doctoral candidates (Spillett & Moisiewicz, 2004). Winston (1984) found that doctoral advisors fulfill several essential roles such as being a reliable source of information, departmental socializer, advocate, role model, and occupational socializer. Doctoral students often desire that their

advisors help them be successful in their research goals, develop their professional network capacity, and find their passion within their field (Barnes & Austin, 2009). The complexity of the advisor/advisee relationship is multifaceted and very complex. No single study could capture the broader picture of what is desired and expected of this complex relationship.

    Advisor discipline.

    Another factor contributing to the complexity of the overall relationship is the department in which the doctoral student resides. Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) found that smaller programs complete their degrees in shorter periods than those in larger programs. Even this though, tends to vary by program. Those in social sciences tend to benefit from smaller programs while those in hard sciences do not (Stricker, 1994). Disciplines within the humanities and social sciences are often complicated by the extensive body of research and various theoretical frameworks and paradigms (Bowen & Rudenstein, 1992). The hard sciences (for example, chemistry or mathematics) tend to have a consensus on theory and paradigm and therefore have shorter research timeframes (Nerad & Cerny, 1993). Hirt and Muffo (1998) indicated that social science research tend to place emphasis on research is limited at certain points of the coursework and therefore makes the transition to the dissertation phase more difficult.

    Academic disciplines tend to operate more like communities with specific community cultures (Zhao et al., 2007). Within these communities, norms and habits of interaction are internal and often invisible to the academic outsider (Zaho et al., 2005). Even within the same institution, disciplinary cultures can vary greatly between the humanities/social sciences and the physical sciences (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Donald (2002) outlined many of the disciplinary differences as simple differences in the policies and practices of doctoral education such as

research funding, what a dissertation looks like, how topics are selected, as well as how doctoral advisors interact with their advisees.

There is also a difference across disciplines in how dissertation topics are selected. Many doctoral students feel that coursework did not adequately prepare them to conduct their own research (Hansen, 1990). Zhao et al. (2007) go so far as to say that advisor assignment and advisor behavior have a significant impact on the ability of a candidate to select a topic. Additionally, difficulty in choosing a topic can be a problem for graduate students based on home discipline (Hirt & Muffo, 1998). Disciplines differ in not only their range of topics but also in the type of work required to complete the dissertation. Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) suggest that topics are more difficult to select in the humanities and social sciences where dissertations are expected to be original pieces of research. Hirt and Muffo (1998) postulate that even the length of the dissertation varies by discipline. In general, dissertations in the social sciences are longer than are those in the physical sciences (Hirt & Muffo, 1998). These discipline differences play a large role in the advisor/advisee relationship during the dissertation phase (Stallone, 2004). Discipline differences play a role in the selection of the advisor and help to draw the blue print for the student-faculty relationship.

Advisor selection.

Another influence on the advising relationship that is impacted by both the role of the advisor and the discipline of the advisee is the process of advisor selection (Yarbrough, 2002). There is considerable difference in the way that faculty and students are paired by institution and by discipline (Zhao et al., 2007). Many departments, especially those in the humanities and social sciences assigned incoming students an advisor but fully expect that they will change advisors as they form relationships with other faculty (Zhao et al., 2007). Zhao et al. (2007) also

found that in other departments, more typically the physical sciences, faculty members choose to work with certain students as part of the admissions process. The correlation between advisor selection and advisor relationship has been relatively unexplored in doctoral retention research (Barnes, Williams, & Stassen, 2012; Yarbrough, 2002)

Fischer and Zigmond (1998) suggested that students and advisors need to find a compatible temperament and a mutually beneficial relationship. As previously mentioned, the process of matching advisor and advisee can differ greatly across disciplines (Hansen, 1990). Hilmer and Hilmer (2007) suggested that the process of advisor selection influences the quality of the advisor relationship as well as the productivity. Students reported better advisor-advisee relationships when allowed to choose advisors based on common interest or mutual respect than do those who were assigned advisors (Lovitts, 2001). Another study by Schlosser et al. (2003) found that students who were able to select their own advisor reported being more satisfied with their advising relationships than peers who were assigned their advisors upon entering their graduate program.

Like the role of the advisor, the advisor selection process also varies by discipline. As Zhao et al. (2007) found the physical science programs tend to allow students and faculty to choose each other whereas humanities tend to assign advisors upon program entry. Hirt and Muffo found the students in biology have more frequent and intense guidance from their faculty advisors which often results in quicker time to degree completion (1998). Hirt and Muffo (1998) have also found that mutual entry into the advisor/advisee relationship leads to higher quality advising relationships.

In recent years more studies are being conducted on the impact of the faculty advisor's relationship with the doctoral student and how those relationships both positively and negatively

impact graduate retention (Stallone, 2005). Models have been developed for training doctoral

advisors (Holley & Caldwell, 2011). Mentoring has become a prevalent topic of research

regarding providing more positive experiences for both faculty and the doctoral students they

advise as well (Felder, 2010). It is evident from the research that the relationship is highly

influential on the success or failure of the doctoral student.

  Integration and isolation.

  Another prominent topic in doctoral retention research is the isolation and lack of

integration of doctoral students (Golde, 2005; Holmes et al., 2009; Katz, 1997; Monsour &

Corman, 1991; West et al., 2011). Graduate education tends to operate in educational silos,

independent of one another despite being a part of the same overall institution. Departments

handle the process of receiving a doctoral degree differently and many do not address the factors

leading to the feelings of isolation along the way (Hawlery, 2003). The difference in

departmental policies and procedures, paired with the often independent nature of writing the

dissertation leads to feelings of isolation for many doctoral candidates (Golde, 2005; Nelson &

Lovitts, 2001). Lovitts (2001) found that not only is isolation an issue for doctoral students but

also that the type of isolation is the key factor; that doctoral students become academically

integrated and consider the social integration desired by most undergraduates less important.

Tinto (1993) postulated that in order for a doctoral student to be successful, he must be

integrated into both the discipline and the department. Tinto (1993) and Lovitts (2001) agree

that the institutional climate is of the utmost importance to the aspiring doctoral student. Bowen

and Rudenstine (1992) supported this claim in their findings which established that the

department, rather than the institution as a whole is the focus of control for the doctoral student.

Integration.

Herman (2011) points to the lower attrition rates in more highly structured disciplines because they often require that students and faculty members work in teams. Many academic researchers have pointed out the role of socialization theory in the attrition and retention of graduate students (Ehrenberg, Jakubson, Groen, Jeffrey, So, & Price, 2007; Gardner, 2008; Gardner, 2010; Golde, 2005; Lovitts, 2001; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Tinto, 1993). Socialization theory, in terms of graduate education, can be defined as the process by which a new graduate student becomes integrated into their department (Herman, 2011). Tinto (1993) found that students who fail to integrate into their academic departments are more likely to withdraw. Tinto's Student Integration Model postulates that student retention is based on the student's ability to successfully circumnavigate and integrate into the social and academic demands of doctoral work (Payne & Dusenbury, 2007; Tinto, 1975).

Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) stipulated that a large part of the integration of students into their departments has a great deal to do with the academic match and expectations of the student upon entering the program. Programs that take into account the individual needs of their students are generally associated with higher persistence rates (Knowles, 1980). Clark and Corcoran (1986) found that socialization is imperative to a successful graduate education. The doctoral experience is centralized within the department and the doctoral student's individual discipline (Golde, 2005). Both Golde (1998) and Gardner (2007) identified the department/discipline as the primary source of student socialization. Tinto (1993) created a longitudinal model of doctoral persistence that focuses on the academic and social interactions of students. As a founding father of retention research, Tinto's research has consistently pointed toward the interaction between the individual and the environment as a key factor in student

persistence (1993). Golde (1998) maintained that the integration of students happens in two phases; students must first be socialized into their role as a student and secondly in their role within the profession. McInnis (2003) found that the level of academic engagement within the University has a lasting impact on the persistence of first-year students.

An additional factor in the environment of the doctoral student is the source and amount of departmental integration they achieve (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). According to Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) the attributes of a doctoral applicant (i.e. learning style, intelligence, GRE, GPA, personality, and motivation) are integral to the departmental integration of students. It is important for students to become connected with their departments in the early stages of the doctoral program.

Advisors also play a key role in the integration of doctoral students, including providing opportunities that aid in reducing feelings of isolation. As previously mentioned, positive relationships lead to positive outcomes while bad relationships between advisor and advisee tend to lead to more negative or at least more difficult outcomes (Barnes et al., 2010; Herman, 2011; Zhao et al., 2007). Beyond advisor support, departments are key players in support and integration of doctoral students as well. Again, both Golde (1998) and Gardner (2007) identified the department/discipline as the primary source of student integration and key factor in reducing feelings of isolation.

Isolation.

As mentioned previously, Lovitts (2001) found that not only is isolation an issue for doctoral students but also that the type of isolation is a key factor; that doctoral students become academically integrated and consider the social integration desired by most undergraduates less important. The isolation of the doctoral student is not generally social in nature but due to the

lack of integration and the academic isolation associated with doctoral study (Holmes, Saey, &

Wilson et al., 2009).

Social isolation plays a role in the transition from more structured course work to the

independent learner phase. These later stages, particularly the dissertation phase, is often a

solitary and unstructured phase of the doctoral process (West et al., 2011). The dissertation phase

often expects that students work independently to conduct research and create knowledge

(Holmes et al., 2009). Ivankova (2002) found the lack of structure in the dissertation phase led

to an isolation that influenced nearly 50% of all ABD students in her study. Katz (1997) focuses

on the importance of making sure doctoral students realize that the dissertation experience

should include members of society, the university, and the faculty advisor, each playing their

own role. The dissertation phase can often lead to feelings that no one really understands the

difficulty of the dissertation process (Monsour & Corman, 1991). Holmes et al. (2009)

suggested that social interaction is one of the keys to success at the doctoral level. Dorn,

Papalewis, and Brown (2002) argued for a student-centered, personalized doctoral experience to

help protect against the traditional isolationism of doctoral work. Herzig (2002) suggested that

the faculty advisor is the most important person in fostering the socialization of a student into

their department. Many agree that it is the job of the university to facilitate opportunities to

develop integration and social support systems (West et al., 2011). Beyond the department and

institutional supports provided, doctoral students must rely on varying levels of outside support

as well.

Support systems.

While institutional supports are vital to doctoral persistence, many graduate students have

outside support systems as well (Austin et al., 2009; Ivankova, 2002; Kember, 1989a; Lahenius

& Martinsuo, 2011; Thompson, 2008). The majority of graduate students enter programs with the support of their previous educational preparation and personal characteristics (Barnes et al. 2010; Bean, 1985; Golde, 2005; Herman, 2011). Many graduate students have also moved further along in their family lives and have families of their own creating an environment of familial support as well as stress (Andrea, 2002; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Ivankova, 2002; Kember, 1989b; Thompson, 2008). Additionally, many doctoral students have peer support systems (Lahenius & Martinsuo, 2011; Thompson, 2008) and work support systems (Andrea, 2002; Kember, 1989a; Lahenius & Martinsuo, 2011; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). The amount of support that a doctoral student brings to the process of obtaining a doctoral degree is vital to the persistence of that student through the program. An examination of these factors will stress the importance of external supports.

Educational supports.

The educational supports provided to undergraduate students are generally in the form of advisors, tutoring services, academic coaching, etc. (Yarbrough, 2002). At the graduate level however, the primary means of education support are in the form of the faculty advisor (Monsour & Corman, 1991). Graduate students can also be given supports in the way of a doctoral committee (Monsour & Corman, 1991). Ali and Kohun (2007) found that a fundamental factor in transitioning from the coursework to the more independent research of the dissertation phase is the ability to develop social networks and access institutional programing. Many institutions provide writing workshops that address the isolation of the dissertation phase (Berger, 2007). Nerad and Miller (1997) found that these types of institutional supports (i.e. workshops, seminars, support groups) allow students to share their research, identify common themes and

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offer support. They also found that many students find these exchanges exhilarating and productive (Nerad and Miller, 1997).

Family supports.

Beyond these educational supports, the family structure of a graduate student is often more complex than that of their undergraduate counterparts. The family circumstances can influence doctoral student drop out (Kember, 1989a). Balancing the stress of doctoral studies with family stresses and relationships is a struggle across departments and disciplines (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). It is reasonable to assume that the family structure provides support and encouragement to students (Longden, 2006). Conversely, the family structure can cause stresses that pose as barriers to the persistence of doctoral students (Austin et al., 2009). Ivankova's (2002) research found that due to the numerous family commitments, and often part-time status of adult learners, graduate students were more vulnerable to these familial stresses and therefore there were barriers to their progress. Herman (2011) found that there were multiple reasons (i.e. personal factors, time constraints, family responsibilities, physical and psychological stress) for doctoral attrition. While families provide a bounty of support and encouragement for doctoral students, research has shown that going to school while balancing the responsibilities and commitments of family life is a factor in student retention.

Peer support.

Research shows that peer support plays a vital role in the persistence of both graduate and undergraduate students (Thompson, 2007). When doctoral students form social (or academic) bonds with classmates, they tend to persist, increasing retention rates (Tinto, 1998, 2005). Giddan (1988) found that students prefer peer support over more formal support systems. Tinto (2005) found that the more academic and social connections students make, the more likely they

are to succeed. Academic support among peers has the potential to be an essential component of student persistence (Thompson, 2007). Studies indicate that the presence (or absence) of human relationships is important in doctoral student outcomes (Hales, 1998; Schwarz, 1997; Stallone, 2004).

Work supports.

A significantly higher number of students in doctoral or professional programs in the education disciplines will enroll part-time, as compared to students in science related programs (Nettles & Millet, 2006; Smith, 2000). Part-time enrollment is becoming increasingly common as institutions strive to accommodate working professionals (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012). Students enrolled as part time doctoral students report less satisfaction than their full-time counterparts report (Nettles and Millet, 2006). Neumann and Rodwell (2009) found that part-time students are often viewed as less committed than their full time counterparts are as well. Davis and McCuen (1995) found that they are often perceived to be less scholarly engaged than those who studied full time as well.

According to Gardner and Gopaul's (2012) study of working students, the second most-discussed source of support came from employers and co-workers. Martinsuo (2007) found that employment support correlated with higher persistence rates among doctoral students. Martinsuo (2007) also found that students who sought employment within their academic field, were able to obtain more support and thus were able to persist to degree completion. In a study among nursing students, Malfroy and Yates (2003) found that doctoral students that included their employer in the planning and participation of their research were more satisfied with their dissertation progress and were able to persist to completion. Conversely, Kember (1989a) found that employers requiring a large amount of travel or after hours work influenced the time a

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student can spend on studying and completing projects. Malfroy and Yates support this claim when several students reported problematic tensions between their workplace and university demands and as a result have taken leave from their academic studies (2003).

The term support can be loosely used to include familial support, support from friends or co-workers, employer support, financial support, or institutional support. Regardless of the type of support, research indicates that a graduate students' ability to persist to degree completion is impacted by the amount of support received from a combination of sources (Andrea, 2002; Herman, 2011; Kember, 1989a; Kember, 1989b; Lahenius & Martinsuo, 2011; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Thompson, 2008).

External factors.

Throughout the evolution of student retention research, a variety of factors have been identified as key to the student's ability to complete the degree, at any level. Tinto's original research accounted for only academic influences (Tinto, 1975) but expanded to include external factors and apply to broader populations of students (Tinto, 1993). Bean's research also pointed to external factors similar to those that may impact an employee's decision to change jobs (Bean, 1985). Kember later addressed the impact of external factors more so than any other researcher. Kember (1990) identified previous preparation, individual characteristics, home and family life, work situations, and goal commitment as key factors affecting the decision to dropout of academic programs.

Previous preparation.

Doctoral students enter their graduate studies with some degree of previous preparation, personality, characteristics as well as the support (or lack thereof) of a family system. A wide body of research points to the previous preparation of a doctoral student playing a role in the

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success and eventual completion of the doctoral degree (Barnes et al., 2010; Bean, 1985; Golde, 2005; Herman, 2011). Grade performance in secondary schools has been directly related to post-secondary performance (Kember, 1989a). At the graduate level, factors including student-related backgrounds continue to play a role in persistence (Lahenius & Martinsuo, 2011). Lovitts (2005) conducted a study in which personal attributes such as learning style, intelligence, GPA, GRE scores, personality, etc., were positively associated with persistence.

Individual characteristics.

In the earliest of retention research, Tinto (1975) examined the primary academic factors that impacted an individual's decision to drop-out of their program. It was not long before Tinto and other researchers realized that more was at play in these decisions. Bean considered that the interactions between the institution and the individual played a vital role in the satisfaction in the college experience, which in turn affects persistence; he expanded his model to include pre-existing beliefs and attitudes as well as familial and other social influences (Bean & Metzner, 1985). These characteristics are unique to the individual. These characteristics include basic demographic data, education background, personality traits, and motivation (Bean, 1979; Kember, 1989b). These characteristics have been found to influence goal commitment, academic, social and work integration (Kember1989a, 1989b, 1990).

Home and family life.

Studies of doctoral attrition have pointed to the family environment as influential in the academic progress of students (Ivankova, 2002). In a study conducted by Giles (1983), four principal themes of family involvement were identified: 1) spousal support (financial, emotional/psychological, and basic needs); 2) marital stability (financial problems, time pressures, children, communication, sexual concerns, physical and emotional separation); 3)

social relationships (status change, absence of married peers, fears associated with terminating relationships after graduation, needs of the non-student); 4) status (living arrangements, role conflicts, locus of control, and financial conditions). Longden (2002) also found that the immediate family provides a particular type of support, encouragement, and analysis to the prospective student. Kember's early research points to the importance of the home and family environment in the doctoral student's ability to complete schoolwork as well (Kember, 1989b). Kember (1989b) goes on to state, "the problem can be particularly acute if there are young children or large or extended families sharing limited accommodation" (p. 200).

Work situations.

Doctoral students often also have the responsibility of work obligations and/or support and peer support systems (Andrea, 2002; Kember, 1989a; Kember, 1989b; Lahenius & Martinsuo, 2011; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Thompson, 2008). Doctoral students are often more mature students with work commitments that often influence time-to-degree issues (Kember, 1989a). Kember (1989a) found that in addition to the fact that work commitments exist, that the type of work was influential; employers requiring a large amount of travel or after hours work impact the time a student can spend on studying and completing projects (1989a). Londgen (2006) found that a relatively high percentage of students worked at least part time while completing their studies. The level to which a graduate student was able to work was also directly related to the financial stress of paying for graduate school (Ivankova, 2002). It has often been found that the financial pressures to pay for doctoral studies play a role in the whether or not students were able to persist to degree completion (Lahenius & Martinsuo, 2011).

Goal commitment.

Additionally motivation and goal setting, an intrinsic personality trait, is integral to doctoral persistence (Grover, 2007). Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) found that doctoral candidates who were both personally and professionally motivated were least likely to drop from their programs. The doctoral degree has many phases and inadequate preparation for the research and writing phase has been shown as a marker for student failure (Bair & Haworth, 1999; Malone, Nelson, & Nelson, 2001). Austin et al. (2009) found that students who entered graduate school with certain goals and pending benefits upon completion would eventually obtain those benefits. These personal characteristics and motivations play a key role in the support of doctoral student success.

Retention Research in Relation to Research Questions

The comprehensive literature review points to a wide variety of both factors that impact the completion of the doctoral degree. Many of these factors can be both motivators and barriers to degree completion depending on the amount or type of each one. It is important to ground that literature in terms of the research questions for this study.

Barriers to completion.

The first research question asks, "What are the barriers to completion of the graduate degree?" Many of the factors found in the literature review can be both motivators and barriers to degree completion. Doctoral student's relationships with their major professor or faculty advisor have been shown to have a large impact on the ability to persist to completion of the doctoral degree. Positive advisor relationship have been found to lead to more positive outcomes while poor relationships between advisor and advisee lead to more negative, or at least more difficult, outcomes (Barnes et al., 2010; Herman, 2011; Zhao et al., 2007). According to Barnes

et al. (2010), the lack of formal training for faculty advisors leads to many different levels of effectiveness and satisfaction with advisor/advisee relationships. A study by Schlosser et al. (2003) found that students who were able to select their own advisor reported being more satisfied with their advisor relationship than peers who were assigned their advisor upon entering their graduate program. An additional barrier noted in the literature review is the integration of a doctoral student into the discipline. Tinto (1993) argued that attrition is a discrepancy between the student and the academic institution itself. A student who fails to integrate into the institution is more likely to exhibit poor academic performance. Doctoral students tend to feel isolated, particularly during the dissertation phase of the doctoral process (Golde, 2005; Holmes et al., 2009; Katz, 1997; Monsour & Corman, 1991; West et al., 2011). This isolation can negatively impact a student's persistence towards degree completion. Tinto (1993) found that students who fail to integrate into their academic departments, are more likely to withdraw. The later stages, particularly the dissertation stage, of doctoral study are often solitary and unstructured, leading to feelings of isolation (West, et al., 2011). Ivankova (2002) found the lack of structure in the dissertation phase led to an isolation that influenced nearly 50% of all ABD students in her study. The dissertation phase can often lead to feeling that no one really understands the difficulty of the dissertation process (Monsour & Corman, 1991). Kember's research led to the discovery of the impact of external factors on doctoral completion. One of these external factors was home and family life situations. Familial and family stresses tend to hinder progress in many ways (Ehrenberg & Mavros, 1992; Ferrer de Valero, 2001; Golde, 2005; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Hirt & Muffo, 1998; Kember, 1989a; Lahenius & Martinsuo, 2011). Balancing the stress of doctoral studies with family stresses and relationships is a struggle across departments and disciplines (Spaulding & Rockingson-Szapkiw, 2012). Austin et al. (2009)

found that the family structure can cause stresses that pose as barriers to the persistence of doctoral students. Additional studies indicate that the presence (or absence) of human relationships is important to doctoral study (Hales, 1998; Schwarz, 1997; Stallone, 2004). Another external factor identified by Kember is that of the work environment. Kember (1989a) found that employers requiring a large amount of travel or after hours work affected the time a student can spend on studying and completing projects. These and other external supports can play a large role in prohibiting doctoral degree progress. However many of the things that are considered barriers to completion, can also be considered motivating factors in different circumstances.

Motivators to completion.

The second research question asks, "What are the motivators to completion of the graduate degree?" As previously mentioned, many factors can be both motivating and hindering when it comes to degree completion. The advisor relationship has been found to be extremely influential in the completion of the doctoral degree (Austin et al., 2009; Di Pierro, 2012; Ferrer de Valero, 2001; Green, 2005; Hirt & Muffo, 1998; Kember, 1989a, Lahenius & Martinsuo, 2011; Monsour & Corman, 1991; West et al., 2011). Barnes et al. (2010) found that positive relationships lead to positive outcomes while bad relationships led to outcomes that are more negative. Felder (2010) described the faculty advisor as one who can mentor professional development and shape disciplinary identity. Another study found that doctoral advisors fulfill several essential roles such as being a reliable source of information, departmental socializer, advocate, role model, and occupational socializer (Winston, 1984). The process of advisor selection, according to Yarbrough (2002), influences the advising relationship as well. Fischer and Zigmond (1998) suggested that students and advisors need to find a compatible temperament

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and a mutually beneficial relationship. Another motivating factor in the pursuit of the doctoral

degree is the integration a student experiences (Golde, 2005; Holmes et al., 2009; Katz, 1997;

Monsour & Corman, 1991; West et al., 2011). Tinto (1993) postulated that in order for a

doctoral student to be successful, he must be integrated into both the discipline and the

department. Knowles (1980) found that programs that take into account the individual needs of

their students are generally associated with higher persistence rates. McInnis (2003) found that

the level of academic engagement within the university has a lasting impact on the persistence of

first-year students. Beyond the institutional integration of doctoral students, other support

systems are extremely important to the completion of the doctoral degree (Austin et al, 2009;

Ivankova, 2002; Kember, 1989a; Lahenius & Martinsuo, 2011; Thompson, 2008). It is

reasonable to assume that the family structure provides support and encouragement to students

(Longden, 2006). When doctoral students form social and academic bonds with classmates, they

tend to persist, increasing retention rates (Tinto, 1998, 2005). Martinsuo (2007) found that

employment support correlated with higher persistence rates among doctoral students. In

addition to the support that doctoral students receive are several external motivating factors that

influence the completion of the doctoral degree (Kember, 1990). Among these external supports

are the previous preparation of students (Barnes et al., 2010; Bean, 1985; Golde, 2005; Herman,

2011), individual characteristics such as personality traits, demographics, background (Kember,

1989a, 1989b, 1990; Tinto, 1975), home and family life (Ivankova, 2002; Longden, 2002),

employment factors (Andrea, 2002; Kember, 1989a; Kember, 1989b; Lahenius & Martinsuo,

2011; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Thompson, 2008). Perhaps the largest motivating

factor impacting degree completion is the goal commitment of the individual (Grover, 2007).

Hoskins & Goldberg (2005) found that doctoral candidates who were both professionally and

personally motivated were least likely to drop from their programs.   These personal

characteristics and motivations play a key role in the support of doctoral student success.

Perceived ability to complete.

The third research question asks, "How do students perceive their ability to complete

their doctoral programs?" In order to answer this question, the researcher must interpret the

responses to the interview questions and related those answers to the categories and themes

identified in the literature. The primary factor that points to the ability to complete the degree is

the goal commitment of the individual. Kember's research focused on the external factors that

impact the persistence of students (Kember 1989a). Among these factors is the previous

preparation of the student as well as the goal commitment (Kember 1989a, 1989b, 1990). A

wide body of research points to the previous preparation of a doctoral student playing a role in

the success and eventual completion of the doctoral degree (Barnes et al., 2010; Bean, 1985;

Golde, 2005; Herman, 2011). Lovitts (2005) conducted a study in which personal attributes such

as learning style, intelligence, GPA, GRE scores, personality, etc. were positively associated

with persistence. Kember (1989a) focused heavily on goal commitment of non-traditional

students. This goal commitment, according to Kember (1989a) comes in two forms: extrinsic and

intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is primarily related to the student's interest in

obtaining the goal or qualification and their commitment to accomplishing that goal.

Additionally, the amount of extrinsic motivation that a student has is directly related to the

student's characteristics in terms of other external factors (i.e. previous preparation, age,

employment) (Kember, 1989b). Intrinsic motivation involves a student's interest in the subject

for the subject's sake (Kember, 1989a). He later found that the institution has a greater chance

of enhancing fulfilment of intrinsic motivation through program flexibility (Kember, 1990).

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The student's previous qualifications paired with their goal commitment, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation has a profound impact on the ability of the candidate to complete the degree.

Conclusion

A bounty of graduate retention research has yielded categories of factors that both hinder and aid in doctoral degree completion. The broad categories are used to guide the semi-structured interviews to aid in describing and interpreting the departmental culture as it relates to doctoral degree completion. The major themes or categories found during the course of the literature review are the advisor relationship, the isolation/integration of the graduate student, the existing support systems, and various other external factors impacting degree completion. Chapter III will discuss the specific methods used in this research study including a theoretical framework formulated from the literature review.

Chapter III: Methods

In this chapter, I review the purpose of the study and the research questions. I then establish a theoretical framework and research methodology based on the literature review findings. From there, I discuss the process of research design, participant recruitment, and participant selection. I then discuss the pilot study, the interview protocol, the informed consent and confidentiality, and the interview process. Prior to the summary, I conclude with an explanation of the data collection method and analysis, validity and reliability, and limitations of the research study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine factors that influenced both completion and non-completion of graduate work. The study sought to understand the relationship between perceived barriers to completion of the doctoral degree as well as the relationship between motivational factors and completion of the doctoral degree. The study also identified barriers to degree completion, as identified by graduate students, specifically during the dissertation phase of their degree. The study also identified factors that have led to students' persistence to complete their doctoral degrees. What the study hoped to reveal was a practical understanding of what the institution can do to aid in student persistence and minimize barriers for doctoral students.

Research Questions

I used the following research questions in this study:

1) What are the barriers to completion of the graduate degree?

2) What are the motivators to completion of the graduate degree?

3) How do students perceive their ability to complete their doctoral programs?

4) What are the relationships among barriers, motivators, and graduate students' perceived ability to complete doctoral programs?

Theoretical Framework

The distinction between quantitative and qualitative research methods and the logic behind the choice of qualitative research methods is not always easy to describe (Rolfe, 2006). According to Silverman (2004), no method is better than another. The choice of qualitative methods over quantitative allows for the use of naturalistic inquiry in the approach to understanding the culture of doctoral student retention.

Naturalistic inquiry in Higher Education is a relatively new concept (Athens, 2010). The majority of educational research is based on quantitative methods of inquiry for the purposes of calculating retention rates. In discussion of this topic, it is important to define naturalistic inquiry. It is also essential to ground the dissertation research in a methodological tradition and discuss the nature of social science interviews and the role of the researcher.

Naturalistic inquiry is the basic philosophy that stems from the denial of monism, the proposition that there is only one kind of reality (Smith, 1981). Naturalistic inquiry assumes that knowledge about human nature differs from knowledge about scientific matters (Smith, 1981). In the process of completing scientific experiments, a researcher is likely to carry out the same methods over and over. In comparison, the inquiry of the naturalistic researcher is likely to differ from study to study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that naturalistic inquiry was an alternative to the more traditional positivistic forms of inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry is a response to the form of conventional inquiry that accompanies the positivist paradigm. This positivist

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paradigm assumes that all people experience the world the same way (Agostinho, 2005). Naturalistic inquiry exists within the post-positivist paradigm; that is, in large part, simply a reaction to the failings of the positivist paradigm that precedes it (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba identified characteristics of naturalistic inquiry (i.e. natural setting, human instrument, utilization of tacit knowledge, qualitative methods, purposeful sampling, inductive data analysis, and special criteria for trustworthiness).

The post-positivist inquirer takes the more subjective view that individuals experience the world individually and differently (Agostinho, 2005). A naturalistic researcher does not seek to explain the world but to understand the world as one individual or group of individuals see it. Naturalistic inquiry uses the researcher to co-construct meanings and interpretations of the data. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) argued that since presuppositions cannot be ignored, they become a part of the interpretive story telling aspect of qualitative inquiry to co-construct meanings. This type of inquiry requires a more subjective view of human behavior than many positivists are willing to accept (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

In order to use presuppositions, existing research becomes extremely valuable in the organization of a study and the analysis of data. The process of writing a dissertation involves, to some extent, becoming knowledgeable about what the current literature says about the area of interest. The goal of a well-written dissertation is not only to obtain a doctorate degree but also to contribute to the body of literature about the topic. Through the process of writing a literature review, existing themes and/or categories should be identified to analyze the data. Some form of deductive analysis and the use of a priori coding is necessary in the analysis of dissertation data.

The four main categories identified in the previous research are advisor relationship, integration/isolation, support systems, and external factors. The theories that support these

findings are Tinto's (1975, 1993) Student Integration Theory, Bean's (1979, 1985, 1990) Student Attrition Model, and Kember's (1989b, 1990, 1995) Model for Dropout.   The literature review also revealed key departmental differences that lead to a culture within academic departments in doctoral study (Hawlery, 2003). Research indicated that student socialization happens primarily at the department level (Gardner, 2007; Golde, 1998) and that the educational silos created in the doctoral program, led to a sense of community or culture of graduate study that varies per department (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

As previously mentioned, Kvale and Brinkman (2009) argued that because presuppositions cannot be ignored, they become a part of the overall story. As a doctoral student within the College of Education, I am a part of the culture-sharing group that I am researching. According to Van Maanen, (2011) writing ethnography "requires at minimum, some understanding of the language, concepts, categories, practices, rules, beliefs, and so forth, used by members of the written-about group" (p. 13). For example, it would difficult to write about baseball without knowing the terminology associated with it. In the same way, it would be difficult to write about doctoral students without some understanding of what they go through and experience. As a part of the program I am researching, I am familiar with the language, concepts, categories, rules, beliefs, and so forth that my research participants use.

The educational silos created in the doctoral program (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012) paired with the inclusion of presuppositions (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009) and the familiarity with the cultural terminology (Van Maanan, 2011) led to the use of ethnography as the research method for this study. The post-positivist approach to naturalistic inquiry, paired with the story-telling method of data analysis makes ethnography the most appropriate method to capture the cultural within the College of Education silo.

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Research Methodology

Ethnographic research, according to Creswell (2013), is interested in evaluating a group of individuals who are likely to have shared patterns and beliefs. According to Schwandt (2007) ethnography is a particular kind of qualitative inquiry characterized by the fact that it is a process and product of describing and interpreting the behavior of a culture-sharing group. Harris (1968) describes ethnography as a qualitative design in which the researcher interprets the shared pattern of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group. In this research study, the culture-sharing group is the College of Education at a four-year public land-grant University in the southeastern region of the United States.

Scientific approaches to ethnography have expanded to include a variety of theoretical orientations and pluralistic approaches (Creswell, 2013). The defining characteristics of ethnography generally include developing a complex description of the culture of a group, identifying a pattern of group activities, starting with a theory and drawing from cognitive science to understand ideas and beliefs, and extensive fieldwork (Creswell, 2013). The interviewee responses are viewed as insider (emic) perspectives and the researcher's scientific perspective (etic) is used to develop culture interpretations (Creswell, 2013). The overall analysis results in an understanding of how the culture group works, how it functions, and the general way of life of the group (Creswell, 2013).

Van Maanen (2011) describes the origins of ethnography as well as the different types of ethnographic research. In the most general of terms, ethnography is a written representation of a culture or culture-sharing group (Van Maanen, 2011). The primary method of ethnographic research is fieldwork (Van Maanen, 2011). Fieldwork asks the researcher "to share firsthand the environment, problems, background, language, rituals, and social relations of a more-or-less

bounded and specific group of people" (p. 3). The successful field worker must display the culture of the group in a narrative or written form (Van Maanen, 2011). A successful ethnography is the result of successful fieldwork.

The study of ethnography has origins in anthropology but with the growing popularity of fieldwork, has expanded to other fields, including education (Van Maanen, 2011). According to Van Maanen (2011) producing ethnography requires the researcher to make decisions about what to say and how to say it, based on whom the writer plans to tell it to. The meanings intended by the writer are not necessarily the meanings gleaned by the reader. The type of intended reader shapes the writing style of the researcher and how the culture is archived (Van Maanen, 2011). There are three types of intended audiences, Collegial Readers, Social Science Readers, and General Readers (Van Maanen, 2011). The Collegial Reader is expected to know the jargon used in the research study. The Social Sciences Reader does not necessarily come from the field in which the study is conducted but instead reads the ethnography to be informed about certain facts. The General Reader is more of a lay audience. Researchers writing for this audience become more like storytellers (Van Maanen, 2011). The interpretation of research findings in ethnography is always subject to multiple interpretations (Van Maanen, 2011). This concept relates back to the theoretical framework of naturalistic inquiry in that it does not seek to explain the world but to understand the world as one individual or group of individuals see it and uses the researcher to co-construct meanings and interpretations of the data.

Van Maanen (2011) identifies three types of ethnographies: realist, confessional, and impressionist tales. According to Van Maanen, "the most prominent, familiar, prevalent, popular, and recognized form of ethnographic writing is the realist account of a culture" (p. 45). The realist tale is often reported in a disconnected, third person voice with an almost complete

absence of the researcher from the findings (Van Maanen, 2011). Another type of ethnography is a confessional tale. The characteristics of confessional tales are the numerous choices and interpretations involved (Van Maanen, 2011). Confessional tales, according to Van Maanen, attempt to represent the fieldworker's presence, rapport, and contact with others in the culture being described. Lastly, the Impressionist tale, like its name suggests, seeks to capture a single moment in the larger picture. Impressionist researchers set out to "startle their audiences" (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 101). Because of the informality of the confessional tale and the inclusiveness of the researcher within the culture of the participants, it is my chosen methodological framework.

Confessional tale.

The flexibility and interpretive nature of the confessional tale makes it the most appropriate form of ethnography for this research study. The confessional tale emphasizes the personalized author, the fieldworker's point of view, and naturalness of ethnographic reporting (Van Maanen, 2011). The personalized authority does away with the disconnected third person of the realist tale and reports in the first person in order to establish intimacy with readers (Van Maanen, 2011). According to Van Maanen (2011), much of the work of the confessional tale is done to establish the human qualities of the researcher. One way to display oneself as a researcher is as a student of the observed culture. Another way is to become the interpreter of cultural themes and data in the field (Van Maanen, 2011).

The fieldworker's point of view is a second characteristic of the confessional tale. Van Maanen describes the fieldworker's perspective as a "character-building conversion" in which the researcher learns to see something differently by the end of the study (p. 77). The final emphasis of the confessional ethnography is naturalness. Van Maanen (2011) describes this

characteristic of confessional ethnography as "making a match" between the fieldworker and the culture being studied (p. 79). The naturalness of the confessional stems from the researcher being forthcoming about errors, misgivings, research limits, or misperceptions (Van Maanen, 2011). The confessional tale requires that researchers normalize their presence entering the field, in the field, and leaving the scene (Van Maanen, 2011). The researcher is required to "tell how they think they were received and viewed by others in the field" (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 79). Naturalness is also achieved through displays of empathy and involvement in the culture (Van Maanen, 2011).

Through the confessional tale, I will tell the stories of 12 participants in my dissertation research. As a member of their community, I possess the empathy to relate to the participants as well as the cultural insights to understand their world. I will make mistakes. I will be unable to fully capture the essence of each individual's journey to doctoral completion and will unashamedly note my successes and failures. Fieldwork is not about objective facts to be learned nor is it about cultural norms to be reported; fieldwork is an interpretive dance that mixes the emic and etic perspectives of both participant and observer (Creswell, 2013; Van Maanen, 2011).

Research Design

With a post-positivist framework and a confessional tale in mind I set forth designing a research study to aid in describing the culture of the College of Education doctoral students. My qualitative research study involved an ethnographic approach to participant description. Current research pointed to a number of factors that affect the persistence of doctoral students. These factors were included in the creation of a semi-structured interview. The questions were open-ended questions aimed at eliciting rich, descriptive responses from the research participants. In

order to ensure that I achieved the desired depth of response, I conducted a pilot study as part of a qualitative research methods course.

Pilot Study

In preparation for the dissertation study, I took a course on qualitative research design. This course explored each of the five qualitative research methods as well as interview techniques, data collection methods, analysis methods, etc. The course allowed for the creation of a pilot study to test my interview protocol. I selected and interviewed one research participant, indicative of the desired research participant. For the purposes of this course, I transcribed and analyzed the audio interview. I modified the interview protocol based on the pilot study responses in order to gain more rich, descriptive data during the dissertation study. Also during this pilot study, I became more comfortable with the interview process. My reflective journal during the pilot study indicated a great deal of doubt and inadequacy leading up to the interview but reflected feelings of comfort toward the end of the pilot study. With adjustments made to the interview protocol and interview methods more concrete, I began work on designing a dissertation study aimed at answering the research questions in my study.

Participant Selection

I conducted the study within the College of Education at a public land-grant institution in the southeastern region of the United States. The College of Education at this institution consists of three departments and one school. I recruited participants who were nearing the end of their doctoral studies or who had recently graduated with their PhD.

The College of Education contains programs in K-12 education, physical education, exercise science, higher education, adult education, sports management, and special education and rehabilitation. Within its four disciplines, the College of Education offers doctoral degrees

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in virtually every aspect of education. Narrowing the focus to doctoral students within the College of Education reduces the study to a group of students who share disciplines, advisors, curricula, faculty, and educational goals. The research indicated that the institutional disciplines operate in educational silos (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Identifying one of these silos to study helped to describe the culture of one academic discipline at a time and also made recruitment and selection more manageable.

I sought out participants who were doctoral students over the age of 19 that are currently enrolled or had just completed a doctoral degree within the College of Education. I targeted individuals nearing the end of their doctoral studies and new graduates. The goal was to understand the barriers and motivators that graduate students experience on the way to completing the doctoral degree. Students closer to the end of their degree and recent graduates were more likely to have experienced both.

Participant Recruitment

I obtained permission to conduct this study through the University's Institutional Research Board (see Appendix A). I sent an email to the Heads of the four disciplines within the College of Education (see Appendix B) requesting assistance in identifying individuals who were nearing the end of their doctoral program or had just graduated from their doctoral programs. The department response yielded approximately 40 potential applicants. I emailed these 40 potential interviewees a recruitment email (see Appendix C) explaining the purpose of the study and requesting participation. There were 15 positive responses to this recruitment email. I contacted those 15 respondents to set up an interview time (see Appendix D). Of those 15, I scheduled 12 interviews over a two-week period. The three that ultimately declined to participate did so because of a lack of availability or scheduling conflicts.

I scheduled participant interviews over a two-week period. I scheduled them at for one hour with at least thirty minutes between two consecutive interviews to allow extra time for making additional notes. I allowed the interviewees to select the location of the interview. I used an interview protocol (see Appendix E) and the interviews were semi-structured, asking the same primary questions with flexibility for follow-up questions based on the responses provided.

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Each participant received the informed consent (see Appendix A) via email before the interview and another copy the day of the interview to sign and return. A detailed explanation of the purpose of the study appeared on the form. Other items appearing on the form included:

1) The reason for the invitation

2) The purpose of the study

3) The time commitment for the study

4) The objective of the study

5) The potential benefits/discomforts of the study

6) Contact information for the researcher

I addressed confidentiality in the informed consent form as well. I reassured participants that any information provided during the interview would remain confidential during and after the study. I then informed the participants that their participation was voluntary and that they had the choice to withdraw at any point for any reason. I kept the informed consent documents, interview notes, and audio recordings in a locked file cabinet in my home. I notified my participants that the interview recordings and transcriptions would be destroyed in December 2015, upon completion of the dissertation.

Role of the Researcher

I am conducting a dissertation within the College of Education at the same University in which my participants are enrolled or have graduated. I fully expect to be able to relate to my participants. Their struggles are my struggles. Their victories are my victories. I am conducting a confessional ethnography partially because of my ability to relate to the participants and their culture and partially because of my inevitable ineptitudes in conducting research. The characteristics of confessional tales are the numerous choices and interpretations involved as well as attempts to represent the fieldworker's presence, rapport, and contact with others in the culture being described (Van Maanen, 2011).

As a graduate student myself, I was able to relate to the interviewees as they told their stories from both the emic and etic perspectives. In this research study, I was able to use the emic perspective as well to co-construct findings. The lens of social constructivism allowed for the co-construction of my and my interviewees' stories. Social constructivism posits that people do not find knowledge so much as they make knowledge (Schwandt, 2007). Constructivists seek to explain how human beings interpret or construct something. In this study, I was interested in how doctoral students interpret their ability to complete the doctoral degree in the face of various motivators and barriers during their journey. During the process of analysis, I analyzed data through a co-construction of interviewee responses and interviewer interpretations.

Data Collection Method

I designed an interview protocol partially based on an extensive literature review that addressed both the a priori factors and allowed for emergent codes. I had slightly modified the protocol from my pilot study for this research study . The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions aimed at obtaining rich, descriptive data from the interview participants. Given

that interviews were the primary means of data collection for this study, a discussion of interview design and planning is warranted. Individuals participate in interviews on a daily basis. We hold conversations for the sake of obtaining information as part of our daily interactions with others. Individuals ask their spouses, children, and co-workers numerous questions every day as a part of everyday conversation (i.e. what's for dinner?, What do you want to do this weekend?, Are you okay?, Do you want to talk about it?, did you get that information I sent you?, tell me what you think.") We all have interview experience in one fashion or another. Interviews are nothing more than a means of gathering information. The difference in many types of interviews is what we intend to do with the information gathered and the methods in which we gather that information (Josselson, 2013).

All interviews are looking to gather information. Counselors are trained to gather information for a practical purpose. Journalists are trained to gather information for an entirely different purpose. Social science researchers are trained to gather information for yet another purpose. The interview techniques used by each type of interview may overlap, and often do as they vary by interview type and interviewer as well as interview purpose (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009).

Counseling interviews often employ the techniques suggested by various counseling theories such as Psychoanalytic, Person-Centered, Existential, Gestalt, Behavioral, Cognitive-Behavioral, Reality, Feminist, or Family Systems theories (Corey, 2005). In the course of training, counselors generally select one or more theories by which they will operate. These theories are selected based on the philosophical assumptions and conceptual frameworks of the counselor. Each theory has associated with it counseling approaches, techniques, and strategies that counselors and therapist can use to elicit the information they seek. For example, Skinner's

Behavioral approach uses techniques related to operational conditioning, namely behavioral

reinforcement (Corey, 2005). Counselors may use the techniques in a single theory or combine

techniques from multiple theoretical backgrounds in order to achieve the goals set forth in

therapy. The important thing in counseling interviews is the notion that the counselor is

attempting to aid individuals in some sort of personal healing experience and is not necessarily

seeking to satisfy their own curiosity or needs. This is often done through the development of a

rapport and relationship with the interviewee. The development of rapport is a key characteristic

of the confessional tale so counseling techniques were beneficial for development of this

relationship.

Another type of interviews, journalistic, have a completely different goal in mind.

Journalistic interviews can bear a striking resemblance to research interviews. Journalists seek to

explain an event in the news. Journalists seek the facts of an event but can often conduct

interview to tell the participants' story depending on the type of journalist they want to be (i.e.

news journalist, social columnist, financial journalist). Journalistic interviews involve more of

an emphasis on fact checking and source verification. Bernard and Ryan (2010) stated "we see

no reason not to hold social scientist to the standard that good journalists face every day" (p.

110). In journalistic interviews, sources (participants) are selected purposefully in an attempt at

fact checking (search for disconfirming evidence).

Social science research seeks to explain or understand a phenomenon in human nature.

This is similar to journalistic interviewing in that the journalist seeks to explain something.

Social scientists can employ many techniques, borrowing from many journalistic techniques as

well as counseling techniques to obtain the information they seek. Kvale and Brinkman (2009)

described the various forms of interviews as "different tools that the researcher can choose

among, depending on the purpose of the inquiry, the kind of knowledge sought, the interview subjects, and the personal skills and style of the interviewer" (p. 143).

Interviews seek something and are conducted using skills and techniques especially designed to obtain that information. Daily lives involve all kinds of interviews and interview techniques. The important thing to keep in mind when conducting an interview is, "what do I want to know?" and "what do I need to do in order to find out?" (Josselson, 2013). Interviews are an extremely effective means of gathering the desired information and I used them in this study. Participants told their stories through the interview process and analysis of their collective stories yielded complex descriptions of the culture of doctoral study in the College of Education.

I scheduled interviews at a time and place convenient to the interviewee. Based on the pilot study and literature review, I created an interview protocol that I used in all 12 interviews. The interview protocol allowed for a semi-structured interview so that I asked the same primary questions with room for emergent design based on participant responses.

At the onset of each interview, I introduced myself and requested permission to begin recording. I provided copies of the informed consent via email before the scheduled interview and again at the beginning of the interview. I went over the informed consent and its contents before beginning the interview and obtained a signed copy from each interviewee before conducting each interview. I asked if each interviewee had any questions before we began the interview.

I followed the same interview script for each interview. The emergent design though allowed for a semi-structured interview. I first asked participants to tell me about their motivation for entering graduate school and pursing their doctoral degree. Based on the literature review, I asked participants about their relationship with their advisor, isolation or

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integration issues, support systems, and other external factors. I allowed the flexibility for

additional questions based on the interviewee responses. For example, one participant

encountered a great deal of personal tragedy during her doctoral journey. This category did not

fit in with prior literature so we talked at length about how that affected her emotionally,

physically, and academically. I did not discuss this with any other participant but was

undoubtedly needed for this particular interviewee.

At the conclusion of each interview, I reminded participants that the interviews were

audio taped and notes were taken. I also reiterated that confidentiality was a priority in my

research and that they were encouraged to contact me at any point with any questions or

concerns.

Analysis of Results

Analysis began the moment data collection began, if not before. I used prior research to

identify a priori coding categories used in data analysis. Bernard and Ryan (2010) discussed the

importance of having some idea of what you are going to study before your study begins. Before

each interview, I reviewed the interview protocol as well as the information that I had about each

participant (i.e. status in program). Once the interview began, I was able to immediately relate to

my participants from an emic perspective. As students in the same College at the same

institution, we share certain cultural norms within that academic discipline that allows for the

establishment of rapport quickly. Many of the participants either knew me or knew of me and I

of them. I was familiar with their advisors, faculty members, classmates, and curricula. This

helped them start the conversation already submerged in the culture of the College, the language,

and the concepts of their journey.

In order to co-construct meanings, it was also important to maintain an etic perspective. Though we share an academic discipline, in this study, I was also the researcher with certain research questions and goals in mind. As we began to converse, I began thinking back to the literature review and relating themes back to that research. I made notes during the interview that consisted of key phrases and themes as well as emergent (new) themes.

Once the interviews were completed, I allowed approximately 30 minutes to make additional notes about the interview process, what was discussed that I was not able to write, questions I had about a priori codes as well as emergent themes, and additional thoughts on the overall interview process. I also took the time to code the participant names so that I could easily identify the interviews but also so that others could not identify the participants.

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) described a "back and forth process between parts and the whole" (p. 210). As I prepared to transcribe the interviews, I listened to the audio recordings at least two times each and made additional notes about each interview. I began to transcribe the interviews and was able to transcribe only one interview before realizing that I did not have the time to devote to transcribing each interview. I had planned to transcribe the interviews so that I could continue to analyze the interview during transcription. Because this did not work as planned, I was unable to analyze the interviews during transcription. I outsourced the transcription to a professional transcription service that was able to return the transcripts to me within 48 hours.

The sacrifice in this was the loss of familiarity with my interview data as well as the sacrifice of my personal insights entered into the transcription. The benefit of the outsourcing was the timely delivery of the transcriptions and the consistency of the service provided. At this point in the dissertation process, the sacrifice was one I was willing to make. I scheduled the

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data in the interviews for destruction within the next three months and I would not have been able to accomplish the transcription myself in that timeline.

Once I received the completed transcripts from the transcription service, I continued analysis via open coding. During the first pass through the transcripts and interview notes, I looked specifically for evidence of motivating factors to my participants. A second look identified factors that posed as barriers to the completion of the doctoral degree. A priori codes from existing student retention research (advisor selection, integration/isolation, support, external factors) were used to guide the open coding process. I also used emergent codes to describe new themes within the data as they arose. One of the purposes of studying graduate student retention within the culture of the College of Education was to contribute to the body of literature surrounding the topic. Categories and themes from existing research were used but new codes emerged as well. These emergent codes may very well be undiscovered yet significant factors to doctoral completion.

Once I completed open coding, axial coding began. During this phase of the coding, I grouped clusters of similarly coded data. I again searched for themes as they emerged in the data. During axial coding, I was able to identify the specific motivators and barriers identified by interview participants. There was significant overlap in both the barriers and motivating factors of the responses. Participants identified certain aspects of the advisor relationship as positive while they described other aspects, of the same advisor, as negative. I often coded the participant responses in more than one way depending on the context in which they were answering a certain question. For example, some participants talked about their advising relationship as extremely bad and a significant barrier to their progress. These same participants talked very highly of their advisor once they changed programs and/or advisors. This led to a

discussion of both how detrimental the advising relationship had been as well as how beneficial it had been. Through axial coding, I identified both the barriers and motivators, often overlapping or existing in more than one category.

By coding the interview transcripts, I was able to categorize the data and organize my findings. This form of pre-writing allowed me to go back through the transcripts as I was writing the confessional tale and pick out the significant findings. The results of the pre-writing also allowed me to organize the data in a way the supported the confessional tale. According to Van Maanen (2011), confessional tales rarely stand-alone but generally serve to support the realist writing the researcher has already done. In my case, I did not have previous research, but I could organize the data in a way that presented more factual evidence for my findings and present that in support of my confessional tale.

The goal of ethnographic analysis is to describe the culture-sharing group and setting (Wolcott, 1990). According to Creswell (2013), analysis techniques focus on telling a story following an analytical framework, or showing different perspectives through the views of the participants. Fetterman (2010) suggested looking for patterns of thought and behavior, and focusing in on key events that can be used to analyze the entire culture-sharing group. Analysis of this data for this study sought to tell the story of the participants and identify cultural norms and patterns for use in developing programs for increased retention of doctoral students.

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative researchers use the principles of reliability (consistency and dependability) and validity (truthfulness) but because of their close relationship with quantitative research do not use the terms very often (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) notes that qualitative reliability can be address in several ways and can be enhanced by the researcher by employing a high

quality tape of the interview and transcribing the data. A focus on reliability is important in qualitative research and is often achieved through intercoder agreement. The nature of dissertation research did not allow multiple researchers to code the data but I did create a codebook (see Appendix F) based on the previous literature and the pilot study that was helpful in maintaining consistent coding.

Another important aspect of qualitative research is validity. Validity in terms of a research study indicates the accuracy of a concept or theme as well as the data obtained for analysis (Newman, 2003). Newman (2003) further states that it is an important part of qualitative validity to provide the opportunity for participants to express how they feel about the world in which they live.

The validation of research data can be obtained from multiple sources. The methods used in this research study were prolonged engagement and persistent observation, clarifying researcher bias, member checking, and rich, thick description (Creswell, 2013). I was able to achieve prolonged engagement and persistent observation by building trust with the participants and learning the culture. As somewhat of a participant observer, the interviewees understood that I was not only a researcher, but also a peer. My understanding of their journey helped the participants to open up to me about their own experiences. In describing the role of the researcher, I was able to clarify the researcher bias by detailing my experiences as a graduate student and researcher including my lack of confidence and motivation for conducting the research study. At the end of each interview, I went back over the information provided throughout the interview process and gave each participant an opportunity to correct or add anything to the information that I had obtained from him or her. This member checking was for validating the material with each interviewee prior to ending the interview. Finally, based on

the interview responses and notes made, results were written using a rich, thick description validating the participant responses.

Summary

Chapter III included a review of the purpose of the study and the research questions. I then outlined the theoretical framework that would guide the research study. Based on the literature review and the theoretical framework, I argued for ethnography as a research method and I provided a background of ethnography (specifically a confessional tale) and a justification for the use of the chosen research method. I then discussed the research design, including a pilot study conducted during a research methods course that helped guide the design of the dissertation study. I then discussed participant selection, recruitment, informed consent, and confidentiality of the research data. Next, I described my unique role as a researcher. I then discussed the process of data collection, including a design of the interview protocol. Finally, I talked about the process of data analysis including coding, reliability, and validity. Chapter IV includes a presentation of the findings of the qualitative ethnographic study. Chapter IV will also include the results of the analysis in relation to the research questions.

Chapter IV: Findings

In this chapter, I reviewed the purpose of the study and the research questions before I summarized the process of participant selection and recruitment. Using a confessional tale, I then presented my analysis and interpretation of the relationship between these motivators, barriers, and perceived abilities as I discussed the shared stories of my participants. I then discussed the findings in terms of motivating factors, barriers, and perceived abilities of the interview participants. Finally, I provided a summary of findings.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine factors that influenced both completion and non-completion of graduate work. The study sought to understand the relationship between perceived barriers to completion of the doctoral degree as well as the relationship between motivational factors and completion of the doctoral degree. The study also identified barriers to degree completion, as identified by graduate students, specifically during the dissertation phase of their degree. The study also identified factors that have led to students' persistence to complete their doctoral degrees. What the study hoped to reveal was a practical understanding of what the institution can do to aid in student persistence and minimize barriers for doctoral students.

Research Questions

I used the following research questions in this study:

1) What are the barriers to completion of the graduate degree?

2) What are the motivators to completion of the graduate degree?

3) How do students perceive their ability to complete their doctoral programs?

4) What are the relationships among barriers, motivators, and graduate students' perceived ability to complete doctoral programs?

Participant Recruitment

I obtained permission to conduct this study through the University's Institutional Research Board (see Appendix A). Once I obtained approval, I sent an e-mail to the Heads of the four disciplines within the College of Education (see Appendix B). In this email, I requested assistance in identifying individuals who were nearing the end of their doctoral program or had just graduated from their doctoral programs. The departmental response yielded approximately 40 potential applicants. I sent these 40 potential interviewees a recruitment email explaining the purpose of the study and requesting participation (see Appendix C). I received 15 positive responses to my recruitment email. I contacted the 15 interviewees via email (see Appendix D) to set up an interview time. Of those 15, 12 interviews were scheduled. The three that ultimately declined to participate did so because of lack of availability.

I conducted participant interviews over a two-week period. I scheduled the interviews for an hour with at least 30 minutes between two consecutive interviews to allow extra time for making additional notes. I allowed the interviewees to select the interview location. During the course of the interviews, I used an identical interview protocol (see Appendix D) developed through an examination of current literature and the pilot study. The interviews were semi-structured, and asked the same main questions with flexibility for follow up questions based on the response provided.

The purpose of the interviews was to identify the barriers and motivators and perceived abilities to completing the doctoral degree in the College of Education at a public land grant

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University in the southeast. The qualitative nature of this study allowed me to obtain rich,

descriptive data from participants.

Participant's Status

Table 1 identifies the various stages of doctoral study for the research participants. Of the

12 interviewees, six had graduated within the last year, three had reached ABD (All But

Dissertation) status, two were finishing up coursework and beginning to work on the dissertation,

and one was graduating the semester in which I conducted the interviews.

Table 1

Status in Program

Participant	Status in Program
Alice*	Recent Graduate
Bailee*	Graduating this semester
Charleigh*	Recent Graduate
Danielle*	ABD
Elaine*	Recent Graduate
Frederick*	Recent Graduate
Georgia*	Finishing Coursework
Harrison*	Recent Graduate
Isabella*	Recent Graduate
Jenny*	Finishing Coursework
Karis*	ABD
Lacy*	ABD

*Pseudonym

Meet the Participants

Qualitative research is highly dependent on participation and cooperation from those we study. In ethnography, this is even truer. In order to introduce the participants, I wanted to provide a brief bio on each of the participants.

Alice.

Alice is a single woman from Texas. She has graduated from the PhD program. She started in a different PhD program and ultimately decided to swap to her College of Education program in order to diversify her degrees and experience. As a student from Texas with little local supports, Alice felt the need to change her doctoral program when difficulties with the original program came up. Alice was highly motivated to finish the degree. She used terms such as, "first-generation," "I have earned this degree," and "call me Dr. Smith*" to indicate her determination to finish the degree. Alice experienced significant barriers to her degree completion (i.e. attending a program a significant distance from her family support system, changing programs in the middle of her doctoral studies) but the motivating factors (i.e. determination to finish and support of new department and advisor) and her degree of commitment to obtaining the doctoral degree aided in her successful completion.   Alice is currently working at a college in Texas working as a coordinator for community outreach activities. She aspires to move up in to higher administrative positions in the near future.

Bailee.

Bailee has completed all of her coursework and will be graduating this term (note: the semester during which the interviews were conducted has past, this participant has now graduated). Bailee talked a good bit about the barriers she faced in completing the degree (i.e. unsupportive husband, emotion issues of marriage relationship and the effects on the overall

family support system, death of several family members, time management issues, children's discipline problems) that eventually led to a leave of absence from the doctoral program. The motivating factors (i.e. positive advisor relationship, desire to obtain PhD for pay raise and teaching promotions, and various family and religious supports) led to a return to graduate studies and eventually to graduation from the program. Bailee did quit the doctoral program due to external stress factors but the motivating factors and reasons for entering the degree program (i.e. goal commitment) led to a return to the doctoral program. Her perceived ability to complete the program superseded the barriers faced by the doctoral student. Bailee is currently working as an instructional technologist doing a lot of training. She plans to continue to advance in her career.

Charleigh.

Charleigh is a recent graduate from the doctoral program. Charleigh started the program with an assigned advisor and through some difficulties made the decision to change advisors part way through the program. Charleigh's struggles with her original advisor necessitated a change during the beginning stages of the doctoral program. Through a series of events and meetings with the original advisor, she indicated a "need to change advisors" to "find somebody who will be on that team for me." Once she had a more suitable advisor, Charleigh was able to complete the degree with little to no further complications. She indicated an overall lack of barriers or ability to quickly remove barriers. Charleigh's primary motivating factors (i.e. advisor relationship and mutual respect with spouse in another doctoral program) paired with the lack of significant barriers allowed for the speedy completion of the doctoral degree. Charleigh is currently working in the community college system coordinating writing programs. She

expressed a strong desire to stay and support the community college system and use the skills and abilities to better community college students.

Danielle.

Danielle has reached the ABD (All But Dissertation) phase of the doctoral journey. She is a graduate assistant with her program and has a unique barrier. Danielle is legally blind and depends heavily on the use of aids to navigate campus as well as her program. Danielle indicated an early barrier in having to change departments partially due to changes in financial status and partially in response to a poor departmental relationship. These difficulties existed with both the department as a whole and the advising relationship.

Additional barriers discussed by Danielle included a limited support system due to a great distance between her and her family and dealing with technological modifications and accommodations due to her visual impairment. Among contrasting motivators were an extremely positive relationship with the new advisor and department, obtainment of an assistantship, and the hope of finding quality employment once the degree was completed. Despite the significant barriers, Danielle indicates a strong commitment to finishing the degree and is currently working on the dissertation phase.

Elaine.

Elaine has recently graduated from the doctoral program. During the course of her interview, she talked about her barriers in the area of picking a dissertation topic and receiving timely responses from her major professor and other committee members. Her primary motivations included being the first in her family to obtain a PhD and a strong desire to set an example for her children. While her barriers were significant, the motivators overpowered the barriers to allow for persistence to graduation.

Elaine is currently working with the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service training employees and working in personal finance training. Working in this position inspired Elaine to enter the doctoral program and use that training to perform her job better.

Frederick.

Frederick is also a recent graduate of the Educational Leadership Doctoral program. He is currently working as a headmaster at a small private school. He talked about his motivations for entering graduate school being primarily to enter law school. He experienced a change of career interest that led to his decision to enter the Educational Leadership program instead. Frederick mentioned that his main barrier was the isolation of the dissertation phase and the procrastination that came with self-direction.

Frederick did talk about a very positive relationship with his advisor and a continued relationship and mutual respect with his chosen advisor that aided in his completion of the doctoral program.

Georgia.

Georgia realized her passion for administration from a very early age. She remembered being in high school and thinking that this was something that she really wanted to do. Having that passion as a high school student fueled her desire to obtain her graduate degree in teaching and then in administration. The state mandate to teach for three years helped to pace her degree progress as well. She expressed a high degree of motivation to both enter and complete the doctoral program.

Georgia is currently teaching in a school system and finishing her Educational Leadership doctoral degree. She is completing her last two classes now and preparing for her oral exams. Georgia is a part of a cohort system in the Educational Leadership program and talked about how

incredibly motivating it has been to have peers move through the program with her and motivate her.

Harrison.

Harrison entered one program in the Educational Leadership, Foundations, and Technology program but ultimately swapped programs to finish in a different program within the same department. The decision to make this change was primarily due to a mismatch of interest within the first program. The second program, Adult education, fit Harrison's interest and future goals much more appropriately. He talked about the scope of Higher Education program was too narrow for his overall career goals and how Adult Education broadened to include his research interests more appropriately.

Harrison's background in Higher Education motivated him to further his education in that area but ultimately the narrow scope of that program prompted his move to Adult Education. Once he moved to this program, he talked about the relationship with his advisor being a huge motivator to succeed in the program. He also talked about the relationship with his spouse, who was also in a doctoral program, being a huge motivation because of the mutual respect and understanding they shared.

Harrison is currently in medical school in another part of the state. He hopes to use the skills and knowledge gained from the Adult Education program to help patients and colleagues become more educated.

Isabella.

Isabella has recently graduated from the Adult Education program. She entered the program with aspirations to become a faculty member at a post-secondary institution. She knew that she would need a terminal degree to teach and wanted to go ahead and accomplish that to

provide more career opportunities. Isabella has been working in higher education for some time

and decided to enroll in the Adult Education program not only for career advancement but also to

gain the skills and knowledge to help her in her current position as a mental heath trainer.

Isabella had a good relationship with her advisor but talked about the lack of availability

at certain times. She talked a good bit about her strong support system at home and her desire to

be a good example for her children. Through life's obligations, Isabella struggled with time

management at times but was ultimately successful in completing the doctoral program.

Jenny.

Jenny is working on finishing her coursework and preparing for her oral exams. Jenny

expressed a desire to teach from an early age and worked consistently toward that goal. She has

obtained her Bachelor's, Master's, and Leadership Certificate primarily for the purposes of

career advancement. The education system provides pay-raises for increased education and this

has been a primary motivation for Jenny. The only additional step up for her is the doctorate,

which is her primary motivation for pursuing the Educational Leadership degree.

Jenny has developed a positive relationship with her advisor that she describes as

"encouraging" and "open." Jenny also talks about additional motivators such as the cohort

system, family and friends support, and the overall departmental support. Jenny's primary

barriers are in the form of time management and isolation from peers/faculty. Jenny hopes to

finish her major coursework and begin the dissertation process soon.

Karis.

Karis is an international student working at the University in which she is seeking her

doctorate. She has finished her coursework and will be doing her oral exams this semester.

Karis entered the doctoral program in order to increase her skills and knowledge in her current

position, which requires a great deal of training. She is a doctoral student in the Adult Education program, which she says will be a "good improvement" to her current job.

Karis talked very highly of her relationship with her advisor and the support she has received from the department, her employer, her family and her advisor. She talked about the employee benefit being a primary motivation to start the program and mentioned that if it was not there, she never would have started the program. She also talked about the cap on employee hours as a barrier to how fast she was able to complete the program. She talked some about the language barrier being an issue at some points in her degree progress but the willingness of the department to work with her and be patient with her as she adjusts to American culture. Additionally she talked about the struggle to balance family, work, and school life but the support of her family, work, and department to overcome these struggles.

Lacy.

Lacy is a former university employee that started the program primarily because of the employee benefit and desire to gain additional knowledge. As a self-proclaimed "life-long learner," Lacy wanted to enhance her skills and knowledge as they related to her current position. Lacy obtained a master's degree from another institution and knew that the PhD was simply "the next step" in her journey.

During the course of her doctoral program, Lacy lost her job at the university and with that, the employee benefit that allowed her to being the program. After struggling to pay out of pocket for one semester with the help of family members, Lacy obtained an assistantship on campus that has allowed her to move more quickly through the program without the added stresses of having to find the money to pay for it.

Lacy finished her course work and her comps and is currently working on her dissertation. She talks about the self-directed study and time management during this phase as a significant barrier to her progress. She also talks about her relationship with her major professor as a hindrance to progress at times. Despite these barriers, Lacy is extremely motivated and determined to finish the program. She says that she wants to "prove to the naysayers" that she can finish the program.

The Tale

I started this dissertation with a great deal of enthusiasm. I have worked in higher education for quiet some time and have been interested in doctoral retention for just about as long. Before beginning the doctoral program, I worked with my office on campus to track and monitor doctoral student progress. I did not realize at the time that the process of tracking doctoral student success and failure was a struggle not only for my own institution but for the majority of graduate schools as well. This struggle sparked an interest in retention that resulted in my seeking a master's degree in Higher Education Administration and eventually a PhD in Higher Education Administration. I knew that I wanted to study retention but had learned through the program and through getting to know colleagues and doing research that doctoral student persistence varies greatly by discipline as well as by individual.

During my comprehensive oral exams, I proposed to my committee my plan for my dissertation research. Some committee members were hesitate to allow me to research in my own field but through discussion of my methodology, I was able to convince the committee that this was an essential part of my research methodology.

Having gained their approval, I set forth with the IRB (Institutional Review Board) process. I began writing my chapters while I waited for approval. I then began thinking through

my interview protocol, practicing interviewing, going back over my pilot study, and a myriad of other pre-research activities, all while waiting for IRB approval. Though the process was much longer than I expected it to be, my approval eventually came and I began working on selecting and recruiting applicants.

At this point in the dissertation process, I began to get anxious about the interviews and the outcomes. Up until this point, everything was just me. I was working on getting my chapters written. I was working with IRB to get that approved. I was going at my pace, doing my thing. Now, I had to depend on others to aid in the process and that thought terrified me. My nature is to work alone. I work best when given a task and when I am left alone to do it. If I need help, I will ask for it, but for the most part, I work really well and efficiently as an independent person. At this point though, I had to depend on my peers and colleagues to help me identify and recruit participants. I sent out an email to department heads describing my ideal participant and requesting assistance in identifying potential interviewees. And I waited. And I waited. Eventually responses began to trickle in. One department simply gave me a list of every student in their program and the date they started. One department requested a copy of my IRB and said they would send it out to their students and let me know if anyone responded (I never heard back from that particular department). Yet another department emailed several students/former students describing the study and inviting participation and then forwarded me the positive responses.

Over a two to three week period, I collected names and contact information for those potential applicants. The department heads and advisor helped me to identify approximately 40 potential participants. I then contacted these potential participants describing, in detail, the research study and requesting participation. After another round of waiting, I heard back from

15 of the contacted students. I contacted them to schedule their interviews and successfully

schedule 12 of the interviews. One of the interviewees scheduled but actually cancelled the day

of because of a work conflict. The two others declined to participate due to scheduling conflicts

or lack of availability.

So now that the interviews had been scheduled the real anxiety began. Many of the

participants are familiar to me in at least that I know who they are. I have had classes with many

of them and would consider a couple of them close acquaintances. This further added to the

anxiety because I did not want to mess up the interview and have my peers lose respect for me or

think that I do not know what I am doing. Many of the participants are also already graduates of

the program so there was an extra intimidation factor. I envy the fact that they are finished and

want them to view my study as relevant and beneficial to academia.

Alice.

The time finally came for my first interview. The first interview scheduled was a

participant currently living in Texas, Alice. I knew Alice from a couple of classes and did not

realize that she had already graduated and taken a job back in Texas. Through the course of the

interview, I learned that she was originally from Texas and moved back there to be near her

family.

Alice and I already had a bit of a rapport developed in the courses we shared so the

conversation started smoothly. I was a bit jealous that at one point we were at the same point in

the program and now I was interviewing her because I had not yet finished! I started by asking

about Alice's educational background. My primary reason for asking about the educational

background is to obtain a broad picture of how Alice got where she is. I wanted to know what

led to her entry into a doctoral program and what motivated her to begin in the first place.

Alice spared no detail in explaining her educational history! She talked about her community college experience in Texas where she obtained an Associate's Degree in Business and then continued to a four-year institution to obtain a Bachelor's in Business and a Master's in Fashion Merchandising. After working for a year or so in the business world and as an adjunct instructor, Alice felt a pull to return to school. There were only a handful of schools that offered the degree in which she was interested so she picked this program because it offered her an assistantship. After moving here in 2008, Alice started a program in Textile and Apparel Science with an assistantship.

I have lived in the same area my entire life. Other that one semester abroad doing ministry, I have lived within a 30 mile radius of my childhood home for the entirety of my life. I cannot imagine why someone would want to move halfway across the country, alone, to attend school. I remember making this observation in my interview notes simply by writing "why here?" in the margins. When asked, Alice talked about the particular program in which she was interested and that only a handful of schools in the southeast region had that program. She wanted to stay in the south and needed financial assistance in order to attend. Two schools offered her an assistantship and she took the best offer.

During the course of the PhD program, Alice wanted to pick up some Higher Education courses in order to better understand her position as an adjunct instructor. This is likely the reason she and I had several courses together. Alice mentioned that her "ultimate goal is to stay working at either a college or university" so she began taking more Higher Education courses than Textile courses. Alice made the decision to change programs from Textile to Higher Education stating:

I decided I wanted to pursue a PhD instead in Higher Education Administration. It did put me back a few years because of that decision, but my main focus for making that decision was that I started thinking my education could be more interdisciplinary and varied instead of having three degrees in the same thing.

The literature review pointed at four main categories that can impact degree completion: advisor relationship, support, integration/isolation, and external factors. During the course of the interview, Alice was asked about each of these factors in a way that allowed her to provide rich, thick descriptions of how each had influenced her ability to complete the degree.

When asked about her advisor relationship, Alice had two answers. She was assigned an advisor within her initial program and then a new one when she moved over to the College of Education. She describes her first advising relationship as, "there wasn't much of an advisory type of relationship." In this program, she indicates that she "didn't feel a supportive environment." These factors created a negative relationship with her major professor that acted as barriers to her doctoral progress. However, she soon changed to a new program and was assigned a new advisor. She describes this relationship as one "that I could go and talk to my professors." She elaborates by saying,

It does feel good when you have the supportive environment of your professors or instructors to be able to give you advice on things, and even now, after I'm completed, a few of my professors that were on my committee, they knew that I was applying for a position right now and did recommendations.

When talking to Alice about her relationship with her advisor, I noticed that she focused more on the department as a whole. I felt like I could get her to narrow in on her major professor

by continuing with this line of questioning, so I asked her specifically about her major professor. She described that relationship by saying:

> That was pretty good for the most part. We would stay in touch and I emailed her about things and called as well. The only thing that at one point, close to finishing, that I was kind of getting weary on was summer. I did not know that in summer, professors are not as available and I had a hard time getting in touch with her a couple of times in the summer. When I was finishing up my chapters, trying to get those reviewed…that was one of my main challenges…she was an amazing professor. She was very helpful in making sure I had…like suggesting things for me to be prepared for…suggesting what else I needed to add to this chapter and that chapter. Things turned out great. I had a goal of when I wanted to be finished, but it was kind of shaky through the summer, but for the most part, everything just worked out.

During this portion of the interview, I felt like Alice was holding back a little. I think that part of my role as a peer in the program, possibly as an employee of the university, may have limited her responses. Her initial comment, "that was pretty good for the most part" felt sincere but she quickly turned it to mostly positive aspects of the relationship. Through further questioning, she did talk about the lack of availability but I felt like she would have been more open had I not been a peer and had she now known that I knew exactly about which professor she was talking! Overall, she did indicate that her positive relationship with her advisor enabled her to further her progress in the program.

Another part of the literature review pointed toward a support system (or lack thereof) as a key element to the success or failure of a doctoral student. I talked with Alice about her

support system apart from her departmental support. She talked a lot about being from Texas and having little to no familial support here but that she did talk with her mom and her sister a good bit on the phone. She also talked about the support she received from her religious affiliation. She attended church when she was in town and not travelling. She describes it as a "local support" the helped since her family was out of town. She talked some about travelling during the breaks and that release being a good support for her as well. Finally, she talked about support she received from the Graduate School events. This led to asking additional questions about her integration into the program.

The third influential factor in doctoral student success is the level of integration into the program/department that a student achieves. As we were talking about her support system, Alice began talking about her involvement with Graduate School events and the Graduate Student Council. She expresses a desire to be more involved as well:

> I didn't participate much in that, but I should have when I look back, and I guess now because in my position I have, I encourage a lot of participation in community involvement and association with community engagement…but I don't know for sure…but I do know that I participated a little bit and I think if I were participating before that would have helped as well.

It was interesting to me that Alice had been involved in Graduate School events. As a graduate student myself, I am rarely aware of things going on that are targeted toward graduate students. I also thought it was interesting that she was currently working in a capacity to encourage student involvement and that this is a key factor in her own success. It is encouraging to see that this is a lesson she has learned from her own experience that she now has the opportunity to pass on to other students.

The last thing that the literature review indicates as a significant factor in doctoral retention or attrition is the influence of external factors. This is the most difficult factor to assess as it includes many things in and of itself. Kember (1989a) identified the external factors as things such as, previous preparation, individual characteristics (i.e. intrinsic/extrinsic motivation), home and family life, work situations, and goal commitments. Even these categories can include many sub-topics. In order to identify as many external factors as possible, I designed a series of questions that asked specifically about the external factors in such a way that allowed the participant to talk openly about it as either a barrier or motivator. I also asked several times about "any other barriers" or "any other things that were particularly motivating" in between these questions so that they would have the opportunity to think of things as the interview went on.

I started by asking Alice to tell me about her coursework. I had talked with her already about her educational background leading up to the doctoral degree and now wanted to hone in on her coursework in preparation for the degree. These questions aimed to identify how well she felt she was prepared for completion of the doctoral degree as well as document how her previous preparation had gotten her to this point. In Alice's case, she indicated that the coursework was not particularly difficult but that certain aspects of certain courses were challenging.

> For instance, one example was a class where we had some case studies and group work. Yeah. One of the challenging things of the program was group work…there's all that collaboration and working with colleagues and things but the group work was challenging, because we all had different schedules and trying to figure out when to get together and we had these case studies.

A second challenge was trying…to get back into the hang of it (statistics). It was a challenge for me because (I took it) while working on my masters and then had a gap of time and not taking anything and not staying up on statistics so it was challenging trying to get back in the hang of things and figuring things out.

The difficulties Alice experienced with coursework are certainly a barrier to course completion. The schedule of a graduate student often includes many more things than going to class so scheduling would certainly be an added difficulty. I interpreted from this that Alice would prefer to do individual work and not have to worry with scheduling time to work with others. I see the benefits of both approaches (individual and group work) as did Alice, "you should have that trait to be an individual, but you should also be able to collaborate and work with people," but also see the challenges that it presents for busy graduate students.

Another external factor included home and family life, which includes the financial stresses of doctoral study. Talking about finances is never a comfortable topic but it is a significant issue for most. I wanted to give participants an opportunity to talk freely about their financial situations so I phrased the question in such a way that they had the opportunity to talk about the barriers and benefits of their finances. I asked Alice how the current economic climate impacted her ability to attend and/or complete her program. She had already mentioned that her choice to come to this institution was based on the financial benefits when weighed with her other options. This line of questioning allowed her to elaborate on the impact of her assistantship and other financial factors. Alice again talked about obtaining the assistantship that brought her here and the decision to give up that assistantship in order to move to the new program. I have known many graduate students in my career here but have not known many to

give up an assistantship to pursue what they thought was best for them. Most are focused

primarily on the financial benefits of the assistantship rather than their intended degree. Alice

however, gave up her assistantship to pursue what she thought would be more beneficial to her

professionally and academically. She says,

> That was something to consider, but like I said I mainly went ahead and did it and
>
> then just if I had to obtain any type of loans or whatever, I guess I had to because
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> I needed to change over and I guess I made the best decision…because I was
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> limiting myself to only being able to work in one field and now I can work in two
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> or pretty much three…so the outcomes outweigh the losses…of course I lost the
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> financial assistance, but I think to gain another degree in a different field was
>
> worth it…

The loss of financial security, especially in a struggling economy, is a major factor to

doctoral student attrition. Alice was able to weigh the factors in giving up her assistantship

versus the benefits she would gain in the new program and make the decision that she felt was

best for her long-term goals. This also speaks to Alice's personality and individual

characteristics.

Kember's research indicated that the personality or characteristics of a doctoral student

play a major role in their ability to complete the program. The primary part of the personality

that affects completion or non-completion is the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In order to

find out what these motivations might be, I asked Alice about her reasons for entering the

doctoral program in the first place. She mentioned the extrinsic factors of wanting to be able to

teach, to move up in her job, and to do what she set out to do. Alice initially entered the program

because of her "interest in research" and due to the encouragement of her colleagues while

working as an adjunct instructor. Throughout the program, she developed a new passion for teaching and wanted to earn the PhD so that she could expand her employment options to include being a professor.

In order to get at the deeper motivating factors, I asked Alice to tell me about a time or a situation in which she may have considered quitting the program and then to tell me what it was that kept her from doing it. Though Alice indicated that she, "didn't think about not pursuing a PhD" she did talk about how her enrollment in the first program made her "think about quitting that one and trying to figure things out." Alice eventually did quit that program and begin another one but never thought about quitting completely. Alice talked in depth about the things that motivated her to stay in the program.

> …being a first generation to graduate with my Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD, there's a lot of unknown…but it's along process, this is my choice, this is my life, so I'll go through the process to get where I want to be…

she also states:

> …because I know I have it…it's on paper…I received it…I already have a sign for it, so I made it very clear that I want to be called Dr. Smith, as a sign of respect for what I've earned.

Alice seems to have a high degree of extrinsic motivation; she is highly committed to receiving that degree and being called Dr. Smith. This high level of motivation plays a major role in her ability to overcome certain barriers when they arise and persist toward degree completion.

Because of the broad category of external motivators, I wanted to make sure that the interviewees were able to talk about all of their barriers and motivators. I did not want to appear

to be leading them to talk about things that were not particularly motivating or hindering, so I tended to ask broad, open-ended questions with the flexibility to ask follow up questions throughout based on the responses provided. One of the broadest questions asked was, "Are there any other barriers that you encountered that we have not yet talked about?" I wanted Alice to be able to talk about anything, not just the topics that I found in the literature review. I knew that the chances were high that Alice, as well as the other participants would talk primarily about the factors found in the literature review; they were prominent in the literature for a reason after all. But I also wanted to allow for emergent themes that may be factors for students at this institution or in this particular program.

When asked this question, Alice mentioned a difficulty dealing with her family not understanding the differences between the kinds of doctors. Many of her family members, "thought I was going to start applying for positions at a hospital." She also mentioned that many family members over the years had commented about how long she had been in school and did not really understand the process. She also mentioned the struggle she has had with getting people to call her Doctor and the frustration that it has caused. Though this is a factor with her post-graduation life, she talked about it for a good while before moving on to another topic indicating that this was a primary motivation for her in getting her degree. Finally, Alice talked about the difficulty in managing her time. She stated, "I was working full time, completing my degree...trying to make sure I balanced my time."

As we were wrapping up the interview, Alice remembered something that she had thought of earlier and forgotten. She talked about her home and family life some more,

>last year, my mom was in the hospital three or four times in the emergency
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>room…I didn't plan on quitting, but it just made me wonder if I was going to

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delay or what I was going to have to do, because my mom was in the hospital a few times last year. That was a bit of a challenge for me as well.

I can only imagine that the distance from her family worsened this situation. As a student from Texas, Alice had very little local supports and had to deal with significant family issues from hundreds of miles away.

Overall, Alice displayed a high degree of motivation and goal commitment to finish the degree. She wanted the title of Doctor, wanted to expand her professional opportunities, and has the encouragement of supportive department in her degree program. Many of her barriers were temporary or she was able to remove them. She was able to obtain student loans to offset the financial help of the assistantship. She was able to exit a program in which she did not feel supported and enter one where she was able to develop a close relationship with her advisor and the department as a whole. The largest barrier for Alice was her lack of local supports but she was able to talk with her family on the phone and develop a relationship with her department and gain support through a local religious affiliation. Alice never waivered in her perceived ability to complete the program. Through the barriers, the advisor change, the family situations, financial situations, Alice never thought about quitting the program. Her goal commitment and extrinsic motivation led to her successful completion of the program.

During the course of this interview, I became more comfortable with the interview process. Alice was located in Texas so I conducted the interview via telephone. The benefit of this was that I was able to interview her via telephone rather than lose her participation due to location but the sacrifice was the lack of face-to-face interaction. Because it was a phone interview, I made substantial notes about tone, volume, inflections, etc. I wanted to be able to listen to the audio recordings and be able to visualize the conversation as if it was in person. The

phone interview was beneficial in that it definitely made me more comfortable with the interview

process. I was encouraged by the interview. Alice provided a depth of information and enabled

me to start my interviews out with what I considered a successful one.

Bailee.

With one interview under my belt, I set forth with my second. This interview was with

Bailee. I was not familiar with Bailee; had never heard of her or had a class with her. Though I

was becoming more comfortable with the interview process, this was my first interview with

someone that I did not already know and only my second since my pilot study nearly a year ago.

Bailee was a very friendly participant that quickly put me more at ease. I thought that was my

job! She was a great participant though. Following the same interview protocol, I started by

asking Bailee to talk to me about her education background and motivation for entering the

degree program.

Bailee received a Bachelor's Degree in teaching and quickly obtained a job in a local

school system as a teacher. She set a goal for her to teach for two years and then return to obtain

her Master's degree. She stated,

> The reason why I wanted to go back to school is because I knew that I wanted to
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> teach, but I knew I didn't want to stay at the high school level. The only way that
>
> I could advance in my career is by obtaining an advanced degree.

Once she received her Master's Degree Bailee received a position at a community college

within the state. She indicated that at this level in education, "it was a little bit competitive" so

she knew she would need to further her education to move up. At the time of the interview,

Bailee had not yet graduated but by the time the study is over, she will have obtained her PhD.

Her ultimate career goals include working at the state department. I was inspired by Bailee's

patience in moving through the program. A good bit of time had passed since the obtainment of the Bachelor's and Master's degree and she has been working to increase her education and experience consistently since that time. With her ultimate education goals in mind, Bailee has been positioning herself to move into the roles in which she believed would get her where she wants to be.

Moving on in the interview, I asked Bailee to talk to me about her relationship with her advisor. Bailee talked very positively about her relationship with her advisor. Bailee says this of her major professor:

> I have the best relationship with my major professor. You can't really ask for anybody better…A great heart. They love and care about students. They're going to stick with you through it all, through all of your difficulty. They never pass judgment on anyone. They can be firm, but they're fair. They're really student driven. Once you get in the program, they want to se you make it, and whatever it takes, whatever they have to do to get you to that point where you can see the end of the tunnel, they're with you every step of the way.

Though Bailee used "they're" a good bit, I knew that she was talking primarily about her major professor, the advising roles within this department seemed overlap so while she was using the plural terminology, I feel confident that she was talking primarily about her major professor but felt the same way about both professors within the program.

Once we had established that the advising relationship was a positive one, I wanted to talk to Bailee about her external support systems. She made it very clear that she felt supportive from an advising or department standpoint, so now I wanted to hear about her other supports. She seemed to have a good amount of support, as indicated by the following:

Starting out, support-wise, I'm married, and my husband, he was very supportive in the beginning, and he still is. I don't want it to seem like he's not supportive at all, but he was supportive. I had support from my mom. My sisters were very supportive. My brothers were very supportive, because at that time, I had a son and a daughter. My daughter was about 3 and my son was 6, so having to drive down to Auburn when I leave work, I would need somebody to keep the kids, get the kids after school. My husband was there. Family-wise, I had family, and then I had a couple friends that they were there if I needed them as well.

I noticed that Bailee seemed hesitant when she talked about her husband's support and made a note to bring this back up later if she did not expound on it soon. As an interviewer, I both do and do not want to pry into their personal lives. The doctoral journey is a very personal one and a big part of their successes and failures are their personal lives.

Moving on from this, with a note to come back to it at a more appropriate time, we began talking about those individual characteristics that might have influenced Bailee's success. I asked the same questions about coursework and motivations to enter the program. Bailee indicated that the coursework really "helped my in the area that I'm in." She went from teaching high school students to teaching adults and her "teaching style has changed." About the overall program, Bailee says, "getting in that program really gave me insight on how to handle certain situations and basically how to effectively teach adults."

Bailee expressed both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations during this portion of the interview. Though she initially entered the program in order to advance in her career and satisfy a goal set for her, she also found through the program that the knowledge she was gaining was

extremely beneficial to her current position. This intrinsic motivation helped her through the coursework and dissertation phase of the doctoral process.

During the dissertation phase, Bailee talked about the difficulty of picking a topic, "what do you want to do your research on? Has a study already been done on this?" She ultimately decided to study student retention so that she could apply the research to her current position at a community college. The movement from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation is an interesting one and not something that I had seen before in my previous interviews. Her interest in the program changed, or at least added, a "knowledge for knowledge sake" aspect that helped her through the isolation of the dissertation phase. Alice displayed a high degree of extrinsic motivation but failed to speak to the intrinsic factors that may have been at play in pursuit of her PhD. This was a notable moment for me. There becomes a point in the learning process that the journey becomes about the journey and not so much the destination.

After noting the personal "ah-ha" moment I had just had, I moved on in the interview protocol so as not to miss any of my key points. I asked Bailee about the impact of her finances on her degree progression. She indicated that finances were never really a factor for her family:

> Finances really have never been a problem, simply because we were able to take out student loans and, if needed, pay out of pocket. One of the, I guess I should say benefits of being able to pay out of pocket is because I was still able to work full-time and with financial assistance from my husband, finances were never really an issue when it came to school.

I did not want to pry into the financial situation of the participant but I remember thinking that this as an odd response. To me, taking out student loans is a financial factor…perhaps not now, but in the future. I would consider that a barrier to completion or at least a factor in how

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quickly I was able to move through the program. While I wanted to ask if the thought of paying back student loans ever crossed her mind, my southern filter prevented me from doing so. I did not want to offend her and did not want to hinder the progress of the interview either.

My next question asked Bailee to talk to me about a time when she considered quitting the program and what motivated her to stick with it. I do not know why, but I was not expecting what came next. With Alice, it was simple, she had never thought about quitting. I expected the same response from Bailee given that she was graduating the semester in which I was conducting the interviews. What I got was a very candid answer about the trials and struggles of real life.

Bailee talked about the "strenuous" nature of the doctoral program and the general stresses on life. She then talked about her husband. I had made a note to come back to this if she did not and it looked like we were about to go into it more deeply. Bailee talked about meeting her husband, his career as a professional football player, and his support as she entered the doctoral program. She then tells the following story:

> I wasn't gone a lot, but I think that over time, when things settle I should say, and the limelight is gone, my husband turned to drinking, and it had really become a problem in our house. Plenty of times, I couldn't concentrate, I couldn't study. I did everything I could do to be there to support him and get him the help that he needed. After that, it was on the news for DUI and it was hard because I didn't want to leave him, because I knew it could be fixed. He wasn't abusive, he wasn't violent but when he drank, he would drive. It was just one DUI after another, and it was just really hard on me, hard on my family. It was hard on the kids because when it came to talking about divorce and splitting up, it just drove them crazy, so I didn't say that. So you do what any mom would do, you do

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what's best for your kids. They live in a nice home, the environment was great, except he would drink. With rehab failures…and it just felt like my whole life was falling apart. With continued support from family and friends, I did have to leave the program, because there was just no way I could concentrate…and just focus.

After much prayer, he did get rehabilitated. I just kind of got back into the swing of things because I just felt like this is something that I wanted to do, I needed to do for my family, and it would help in my career.

Along with that (the husband), I had a brother get killed. My best friend died in a car accident. My mom passed. My grandmother passed. I had two nephews to die tragically, one was shot an done was stabbed. All of this while trying to finish school. I just had to get on my knees one night and just pray really, really hard that God would give me the strength. Miraculously, He did and I just made up my mind that now I'm going to buckle down and finish it. Whatever comes my way is out of my control, so I just asked God to give me the strength and just accept whatever's in His will. That's how I was able to make it this far.

Wow. That was my response to Bailee after nearly every revelation. I cannot fathom the inner strength and motivation that it would take to overcome so many obstacles. I have not experienced that degree of tragedy in my life, combined, much less in the course of my doctoral journey. It was clear to me that Bailee was highly motivated to finish the degree. Whether it was her goal commitment or her determination or a combination of both, she was going to finish

this degree. The counselor in me wanted to break down the issues and talk more about them but again, I didn't want to pry too much into her personal life. She had given me what I asked for, if not more and her level of openness has indicated that she would not tell me something she didn't want to. This made me realize that I probably should not pry more into her life. If she wanted to tell me about it, she would. I do not know if this was the appropriate call from a research standpoint, but I wanted the focus to stay on the completion of her doctoral degree and not become more about her life outside of academia.

As with Alice, I wanted Bailee to be able to talk about all of her barriers, not just the ones about which I had specifically asked. I asked her to talk to me about additional barriers that we may not have covered. She mentioned an external barrier that fell under the category of home and family life. We spent a great deal of time talking about her marriage relationship and though she had mentioned them briefly, we spend little time talking about her kids. She talked about them here though as a challenge in the journey saying,

> My kids. I think with working and being in school, I felt like I was missing out.
> Now I tried to make every field trip, every event…I was a strong advocate in the
> school. They were in private school, and my presence was known in school. I
> did a lot for the school just to try and make up for some of the time that I'm not at
> home. They'd see me a lot at school. Sometimes the kids they were acting out,
> and that was another thing. So worrying about them and trying to stay close to
> them, that was a problem as well….I think as they got older, they understood.
> What I tried to explain to them is what I do is not for me, the whole family's
> going to benefit from it. I just had to keep giving them a pep-talk. I figured, now
> I've got to reverse it because they see mom going to school, trying to make

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something out of herself, I was hoping that would pass along to them, and it did. I think they're going to be successful.

Bailee was an exceptionally interviewee. She exhibited a high degree of openness with me as an interviewer, especially since we had never met before. We were able to establish a quick rapport and I felt like she was extremely open and honest about her journey, the good and the bad. Bailee will have graduated by the time my dissertation is published and I could not be happier for her. As a fellow student, I applaud her ability to overcome the barriers in her path and complete the degree. As a researcher, I am dumbfounded at the number of barriers she was able to overcome. All logic points to her failure as a doctoral candidate but due to her motivation and commitment to her goals, she was able to push through and complete the degree. This speaks to the importance of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of the doctoral student. In an environment wrought with trials and struggles, Bailee was motivated to finish the degree. She even quit the program at one point to focus her energy on a family situation and returned to the program to finish. This interview as incredibly inspiring and I learned a great deal about the importance of the personality and individual characteristics of a doctoral student.

As I moved on to my third interview, I am gaining comfort with the interview process. I am beginning to see myself as more of a researcher instead of "just another student." The response from my interviews have been more open and honest than expected which gives me a bit of confidence that I might actually be doing something right. Given Bailee's responses, I no longer pretend to have a clue, or even an educated guess, at what might be going on in the lives of my participants. With my new open-mindedness discovered, I move on to interview three.

Charleigh.

Charleigh is an interviewee with which I was very familiar. We started the program in the same summer with the same class and the same advisor. Throughout the program, she and I had several classes together and had an already well-established rapport. She was excited about helping out a classmate and was very enthusiastic about helping me and even in helping me recruit additional participants. Charleigh had just finished the program and was already working in a different part of the state doing retention work for a community college. Knowing this of course made me wonder how she was able to do it so quickly given that we started at the same time. I often forget that some students are full-time students and move through the program at a much faster rate.

So moving into my interview with Charleigh, I am feeling confident. My third time through the interview protocol and I am likely to have it perfected. I already have a rapport with Charleigh so a lot of the initial awkwardness is not present with her. Like the other participants, I start my interview by talking about the informed consent, purpose of the study, etc. I then move directly into the reasons that Charleigh entered the doctoral program section. Charleigh had an interesting response to her reasoning for entering:

> I kind of always just sort of thought in the back of my mind that that's what I
> would do. I never really talked about it much, or had really solid plans even when
> I would study. It just kind of felt like something I would do at some point. It
> really just worked out where we were working full time at a college and my
> husband found this program and he was interested in it. The more I thought about
> it, I think like in the line of interest that I had, that I could go ahead and go for it,

but I never knew exactly what I would study or do. It was just always kind of felt

like that's something I would do at some point.

Charleigh's nonchalant approach to entering the program took me off guard. In my experience, doctoral students have a goal in mind or a purpose for pursuing such a prestigious and challenging degree. Charleigh proved otherwise. Though the goal of obtaining a PhD was "something I would do at some point," she had not thought much beyond that in terms of reasoning. My curiosity was peaked. I asked Charleigh what she was doing with her degree now that she had graduated. She talked about her work in a community college working with retention programming. I asked if this was something that she saw herself doing long term and she responded, "you know, I don't know. I really like the message of the community college, and I really like this population." Throughout the interview, Charleigh talked a good bit about retention and writing programs at the technical and community college level. Her dissertation topic was also in this area and the writing program paired perfectly with her undergraduate degree in English. It was interesting to see how her progression through the program helped to dictate her area of interest. She entered the program with only the extrinsic motivation of completing the program but ended up developing an interest in something that propelled her through the program in just three years. Much like with Bailee, Charleigh developed the intrinsic, "knowledge for knowledge sake" motivation that helped her navigate through the few barriers that she had.

As we progressed through the interview, we began to talk about Charleigh's relationship with her advisor. She was assigned an advisor upon entry into the program and the match was not one that was made in heaven. She describes the relationship as very negative and demoralizing,

When I first began my program, I was assigned a professor. Each time I met with

him, it would be very long, an hour and a half to two hours and he would tell me

lots of stories. I wouldn't always get my questions answered, or if I came in with

a question or an idea it would be returned to me. Either way, I was too young to

know anything.

The original advisor wanted me to do like a practice dissertation…where I would

do a complete dissertation doing his research for him and not get credit for it.

Before I earned the right to do my dissertation, because I was so young that I

needed to prove I was capable of doing it.

I kind of just continued to see like this wasn't the path I wanted…I kept

mentioning things I wanted to do, which he wasn't interested in. I was just kind

of feeling like I needed to make a change. He probably wouldn't even care if I

graduated.

During this explanation, I was very interested in hearing the stories. My own morbid curiosity

about the other advisors in my program and how they operate took over and I felt myself

becoming offended for her. I noticed that she talked about being "too young" more than once

and made a note to question this later on. I wondered if this was her own self-consciousness

about her age or something that this advisor genuinely displayed to his advisees. She described

the advisor as an "older gentleman" so I wondered if the age gap in the advising relationship was

an issue for other doctoral students as well.

As Charleigh continued to talk about her dissatisfying relationship with her advisor, she got to the point of changing advisors. She talked with many peers and professors about how to go about this before realizing that it was as simple as requesting that a different professor serve as her committee chair. Later in the interview, I asked Charleigh what advice she would give entering students, she talked primarily about the importance of finding a match between your interest and the interest of your advisor and making sure that that relationship is built upon mutual respect.

Though Charleigh's initial advisor acted as a barrier to her degree progress, often actually discouraging her from taking classes, she was ultimately able to change advisors and found a much more positive relationship with the new advisor. She describes the environment as,

> They created an environment where they wanted you to succeed. If you were willing to do the work, and be on time, or whatever it is, if you had a deadline you were pushing for, they would do their best to kind of help meet you were you were. They were just very, very helpful, accessible, talkative, and really just made the program a pleasure to be a part of.

It is clear from the way that Charleigh talks about her new advisor that the relationship is a positive one and is actually motivating. The relationship with her previous advisor was hindering her ability to move through the program but selecting a new advisor with more similar research interest seemed to motivated her to complete the program. Charleigh stated, "Having them as advisors is really what made a big difference for me to have a good captain kind of running my team. A good coach." Charleigh was able to land in a supportive relationship within her department. Next, I wanted to hear about her support systems outside of that advising relationship.

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Charleigh talked about her husband, also in the program, as a primary support system for her. She says, "there was really a great thing going…we understood each others schedules." She goes on to say, "when one of us was working on a project, we understood that…and we were supportive of each other's time." She talks about hearing stories of colleagues and classmates dealing with various struggles including spouses who were not 100% supportive of what they were doing and reiterates that, "we were very supportive to have each other in that way."

Supports that move beyond the marriage relationship included an on-campus internship that allowed her to quit her full-time job and focus on school full-time while paying for classes and allowing the flexibility to attend classes and work on projects. She also talks about the support that both she and her husband had from their family members. Charleigh indicated that her husband's family both have higher education degrees and that her side of the family was "just always supportive of whatever I wanted to do." She goes on to say,

> We kind of just had people who were supportive of what we were doing. They
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> didn't ask a lot of questions, but that they just you supported us. Then great work
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> environments, and having really strong people in classes.

Once Charleigh overcame the advising situation in which she entered the program, she seemed to be able to move through the program quickly due at least in some part to the lack of barriers she encountered. She had a strong support system of a spouse that also served as a peer in the program, and a supportive and financially beneficial work environment on campus. Charleigh's barriers at this point seem almost non-existent.

Determined to make it through the interview, despite the enviably smooth process for Charleigh, I moved on to the questions that related to her personal attributes and goal commitment. When asked about the difficulty of the coursework, she talked about only one

course that proved difficult: a statistics course. This seemed to be a reoccurring theme as one participant had mentioned this already as a source of hindrance in pursuit of the PhD. I asked her what made this course so difficult and she responded that, "I had an instructor who pretty much just taught us how to use SPSS and didn't really explain things. He wrote his own text book and it was very difficult to figure out what was going on."

I made a note in my margins to come back to the statistics issue. I wanted to listen to my interview tapes again because I knew that a previous interviewee had mentioned her difficulties with this course as well. I wondered if this would be a recurring emergent theme in my study. Again, I made my note, both physically and mentally and continued to talk with Charleigh about her coursework. This eventually led to discussions of the dissertation phase.

You will remember that Charleigh entered the program with no research or career goals in mind. She simply wanted to get a PhD and had only her past experience to help her narrow down her focus. In the discussion of the dissertation phase, Charleigh talked about one course, a dissertation seminar that helped her narrow in on a topic and manage her expectations of the dissertation phase. She describes the breakthrough like this:

> For me, something that was really helpful, was the summer dissertation that is offer within our program. They helped us really break down the different sections, and get an idea of how long it should be and what's expected of different sections. Kind of having it laid out I think was one of the most helpful things that I did, because it really helped me see that I could break down this project into different chunks.

She also describes the experience and insights from the course as "really helpful" and "encouraging." She said it was encouraging to "just kind of have someone who's gone through it all before to kind of encourage, and remind you that everything is okay when you get worried."

Talking to Charleigh about this course was a good reminder for me. We took the course together and I remember thinking it was incredible as well. I was not quite as close to doing my dissertation as she must have been at the time because the majority of the encouragement gleaned from the course had long since evaporated from my mind. However, it was a good reminder of the resource provided in this department and I thought to myself that if the department controlled when students took this course (i.e. after coursework was completed), it may help speed the process of completing the often isolating dissertation. I made a note in the interview notes to talk with the department about this at some point.

As we moved through the interview protocol questions, Charleigh was not giving me much room for follow up questions. She was answering my questions thoroughly, but without much room for elaboration. For example, when asked what the most difficult part of the program was, she told me…exactly. She described her struggles with the statistics course as the most difficult part of her process and explained why. There was little room for alternate interpretation of those facts. This led to a somewhat fast interview and I began to worry if I was getting so comfortable with the interview that I was rushing through it without properly assessing responses for follow ups.

We moved on in the interview anyway. I began asking question about external factors. The first is how the economic climate influenced her ability to complete the degree. As seems to be the consistent theme, finances were not a barrier for Charleigh. She and her husband were able to secure on campus assistantships that covered tuition and a stipend for many of their

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expenses. What the assistantship did not provide, Charleigh's husband was able to provide through a part-time consulting job. She describes her experience,

> We got really lucky because we both quit our jobs, and then got an assistantship.
> My husband picked up part-time consulting work that paid pretty well. By him
> doing that on the side, we were able to be in a good economic spot. We realized
> that was a really big blessing. It's not something that was common at all, to not
> have to take out lots of loans, or really worry about rent payments. That was a
> really great thing that came at the right time for us that really helped out a lot.

Charleigh speaks very positively about her journey through the doctoral program. I knew that the answer to my next question would likely be non-existent or extremely short, but to be consistent with my questions throughout all of the interviews, I knew I had to ask anyway. I asked Charleigh to tell me a time she might have thought about quitting the program and what factors prevented her from doing so.

"I don't think that there was a point of quitting, because from day one I kind of got out my plan of study, I was constantly looking at what I had left to take, and what I had to do." Charleigh knew that this was something she always wanted to do and never waivered in her determination do it. She does however talk about her frustrations with the first advisor:

> I guess, there was one point when I got frustrated, and that's what really helped
> me see that I might need to change advisors. It was one summer, there weren't
> enough classes for me to take. Whatever was being offered I'd already taken it,
> but I still wanted to be able to move forward and get these credits taken care of.
> My advisor was kind of like oh well I guess you'll have to wait. I went and talked
> to some other people, and found out that I could do things like independent study.

I was able to set up an internship for myself on campus, and do some other things that I could get course credits for. I guess, that was very frustrating, and when I really realized like I need to make a change from this person. If not, like can you get me out of here, and I need to find somebody who will be on that team for me.

Charleigh's negative relationship with her first advisor had the potential to slow her progress through the program but due to her determination to finish and goal commitment, Charleigh was able to eliminate this barrier in her journey and replace it with a motivating relationship with a new major professor.

As with the other interviewees, I wanted to give Charleigh an opportunity to talk about anything else that either hindered her helped her progression through the program. She talked about her journey as a "smooth, easy ride" and how she was "surprised by how hard it wasn't." In a last ditch effort to obtain some sort of barrier or motivator from Charleigh, I asked her what advice she would give entering students. She again talked about the mismatch between herself and her original advisor and stressed the importance of knowing that "I didn't have to necessarily have that person be my dissertation chair." She also talked about her first assistantship as being a "really bad match" and providing much "emotional hardship outside of class." Finally, she mentions that she wishes she would have "attended more conferences" and do more "professional development within our program." This points toward a deeper integration into the program, which Charleigh had not yet talked about in the interview. It did not seem to pose as a barrier to her completion, but she noted its absence and its presence may have been an additional motivator for her.

Overall, the interview with Charleigh was the shortest of the three interviews. I feel like she was more prepared for the questions and since undergraduate retention was her dissertation

focus, it is likely that her familiarity with my topic aided in a more succinct interview. I did not feel that I used many follow-up questions with her but looking back over my notes and listening to the recordings again, I do not feel that I needed to. Again, her familiarity with the terminology and process may have helped her provide more focused responses.

After three interviews, I am clearly out of my league. By this point, I am expecting to see repeating patterns and themes. I am not. Alice, a single woman, living hundreds of miles from the place she calls home experienced significant barriers yet was able to move through the program with relative ease. Bailee, a married with two kids, educator from an instate community college experienced so many stresses and struggles that she was forced to quit the program. However, her determination and persistence led to her return and eventual graduation from the program despite her circumstances. Charleigh, entering the program with her husband with little direction or goals in mind, was able to eliminate all of the potential barriers to her progress, find a career interest and land a job before graduating from her program. Three interviews, three very different stories, but three very similar outcomes. At some point, the themes will emerge and I will be able to link these scenarios. At the current point in my interviews though, I am starting to think that the barriers are not at all important in the overall process. They may influence the journey to completion, but the students' motivation to complete is the primary factor that impacts the final outcome. Can any barrier be overcome with the proper type and amount of motivation?

Heading in to my fourth interview, I was much more comfortable with the interview process but had a new perspective on what "matters" to graduate student retention. I of course wanted to continue with interviews to see if this new theme continued across multiple participants. I knew I had to stick to my interview protocol and set up for my fourth interview with a renewed enthusiasm.

Danielle.

Danielle is a graduate student in the Adult Education program. She started the program in Rehabilitation Counseling, another program within the College of Education but as her story unfolds, she moved into the Adult Education program where she is currently working on her dissertation. As with the other interviews, I started by asking Danielle why she decided to pursue a doctorate degree. Danielle obtained a Bachelor's from a school in the northwestern United States and moved to the central United States to obtain a Masters in Voice Performance. Though Danielle expressed a great deal of interest in Voice Performance, she "decided not to finish that because I wasn't sure I could get a job, because I knew I wasn't going to be an opera diva." As she explored career options, she knew she wanted to teach and began working on a dual Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and Counseling for the Blind. Danielle told me a bit about her background but did not mention her reasoning for entering the doctoral program. I asked her specifically about this so that she could expand on her education choices and background.

> As I was working my last job, I was a supervisor and I was supervising case managers and counselors and was on the leadership team at the agency where I worked. I kept feeling like we were putting into place all these programs but we didn't have a way to really know whether they were effective. I decided to go back to school, not only to do something to enhance my direct service to clients but also to be able to better evaluate whether what I was doing professionally was effective.

Danielle's response indicated a high degree of both extrinsic (goal oriented) motivation as well as intrinsic (skill and knowledge enhancement) motivation. With past interviewees, the presence

of high motivation seemed to propel them through the doctoral process despite the number of barriers they may have faced. In Danielle's case, I looked forward to hearing about her journey.

In order to find out what other motivations or barriers Danielle had faced thus far, I began asking her about the various factors that may or may not have affected her progress. When asked about her advising relationship, Danielle responded:

> Oh it's fabulous. In this department, I feel very supported. If I have a question, I get an answer. I switched departments partway through and it was not like that in the department I came from. I almost was as a point where…I would send emails and not get answers and when I changed advisors in that department, the person I changed to was also not supportive and would not provide as much guidance about the whole process of presenting at conferences and doing dissertation type stuff. It was sort of like you were expected to figure it out.

Danielle's experience with her first advisor is similar to that of Alice. She started in one program and through some difficulties with the department and the advisor, decided to change. The negative relationship with the first advisor created a barrier for Danielle in that it slowed her progress, created a discouraging environment, and left her feeling unsupported. Once she changed to the new program, the advising relationship became a more positive, supportive, and motivating relationship. She went on to say,

> When I changed…and now all of the people that are on my committee…all four of them have been very helpful and it's been fabulous…much, much easier to stay motivated.

The related literature on doctoral attrition repeatedly points toward the advising relationship as an extremely influential factor in the pursuit of the doctoral degree. Danielle was

assigned an advisor within one department and did not have a good relationship her. She requested a change to a different advisor and again had trouble establishing a positive relationship. She ultimately decided to change programs, due in part to the advising difficulties, resulting in a more positive experience for her. Just as with Alice, she was able to take a negative situation and eliminate it to create a more positive and motivating experience for her.

Moving through our discussion, Danielle and I began talking about her support systems, personal characteristics, and previous preparation. Danielle attended school in the Northwest, Mid-west, and eventually the mid-south region of the United States before settling here in the Southeast. Because of her constant moving around, Danielle does not have a strong support system. She also talks about her family being far away. She says of them: "none of them live here, but my parents are supportive and I can talk to them and I have very good friends who just kind of encourage me and I feel like I have people kind of rooting for me."

Danielle indicated that the coursework was not altogether difficult and provided a "lot of good practical information." One thing she did find somewhat difficult was the dissertation phase. Many of the difficulties with the dissertation have come in the date gathering portion. She talks about working with state agencies to obtain her data:

> The project I'm doing is using a data set that already exists from an agency and so
> I got one last summer, it took forever for the agency to get me the data and then
> when I got this data, they weren't complete because the agency had gone to an
> only system a few years ago and so the instructors were gradually getting more
> and more used to getting consent, so I decided, I kind of did a pilot study with that
> stuff last fall, then it took them a while at the state agency for the blind to figure
> out how they were going to get the information, what procedures and how to

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run…I feel like I've kind of had starts and stops, maybe had I picked a different

topic or was generating my own data, it might not have happened that way, but in

another way it will make life easier, so I don't know…

Given that Danielle was dependent on already existing data to complete her pilot study

and dissertation research, she encountered a barrier while waiting on other people to supply her

what she needed. At the time of the interview, she was waiting on the data to come back to her

so that she could begin analysis and start writing. This dependence on others was not something

that the previous research had pointed out and something that was new in my findings.

Continuing through the protocol, I gave Danielle an opportunity to talk to me about

additional barriers she experienced throughout the program. We had talked about issues with her

advisor but not yet talked about why she changed programs altogether rather than finding a more

suitable advisor within her original department. I knew there was more to that story but had

wanted to leave room for Danielle to tell her story rather than me ask pointed questions about

certain things. I asked Danielle to talk to me about additional difficulties in finishing the PhD.

She talked about both departments:

It's totally different now that I've transferred departments. Before, I would've

said I felt like there was a lot of hoops to jump through and I felt like…now it's

more trying to figure out getting myself to stay organized and be in a panic about

getting my data set and all of that. One of the reasons I changed departments

wasn't just because of my experience with the faculty over there, but because

when federal legislation changed regarding the qualifications required for rehab

counselors, I thought universities may not be hiring as many faculty to teach in

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graduate programs…because they were no longer maintaining that qualification, I

kind of switched because I thought it would broaden out my marketability.

The barriers that Danielle faced in the original program extended past her relationships

with faculty to her employability after graduation. One of the primary reasons that Danielle

entered the program was to increase her skills and knowledge and be able to obtain a position

teaching and training. When she learned of the changes made to federal legislation she saw this

as a hindrance to her ability to achieve her future employment goals. Danielle was fortunate

enough to have been referred to a new department and new advisor so that she could switch

programs rather than quit the program she was currently in.

Another barrier mentioned was the financial struggles through the program. The first

program acceptance came with an assistantship funded through grants. The department's shift in

federal legislation resulted in a loss of these grants and therefore a loss of the assistantship that

she was counting on. She describes the experience as stressful saying,

I got an email two weeks before saying I didn't have an assistantship when I

thought I had one…because they didn't have grants, they didn't have contracts

were I was working so it was like 'whoa!' All of a sudden I had anticipated a

certain income and to be able to take my classes and then that semester, I could

not.

The next part of the interview protocol asked Danielle about a time that she had thought

about quitting the program and what kept her from doing so. She had already touched on this a

little as she talked more about her difficulties in her first program. She reiterated that the only

time she thought about quitting was when the "assistantship was yanked" and she "didn't get a

lot of support from the department." She expressed her disappointment with the department by

saying, "I was emailed. I didn't even have a meeting with the person." For an out-of-state doctoral student, financial assistance would be a vital motivator in progressing through the program. For Danielle, she had to take a semester off because of the lack of financial support from her department. This led to thoughts of quitting the program. She talked to me about the experience below.

> I thought about just saying well, maybe it's not meant for me to do this, but I stayed around and then that Spring I was still in that department and I had got an assistantship when one of the instructors needed help evaluating course materials. I was taking a class and somebody said you need to talk to the professors in Adult Education…you might really fit into that program…and thinking about that along with the marketability kind of thing was what helped me stay. I realized that one of my graduate advisors had that degree and it really helped me gain a different perspective and that just changed what I needed to do.

Through the loss of her assistantship and financial support and the difficulties with the major professors in her department, Danielle experienced significant barriers to her doctoral completion. She was able to overcome these barriers through maintaining focus on her reasons for entering the program as well as a shifting perspective on her future goals. Much like with Alice, the initial reasons for entering the program were to obtain a doctorate within a given field. Through trials and different difficulties in that program, both Alice and Danielle were able to shift their perspectives, modify their extrinsic motivations and find a place in a new, more positive program.

I have a lot of admiration for Danielle. She navigates campus with the help of a seeing eye dog and makes it look effortless. Despite her difficulties with the Rehabilitation program,

she never mentioned her disability as a barrier to her degree progress. At this point in the interview, she, nor I, had mentioned the fact that she was blind or how it may have impacted her progress through the program. This is not something that I was completely comfortable talking about and I was not sure how to bring up the situation. The only way I knew to bring this issue up was to again ask about any other barriers that we have not yet talked about that she might have faced. Danielle talked about how navigating through the program with a physical disadvantage:

> I would say that I've had wonderful help from faculty in overcoming it because campus is not fully accessible to folks who are visually impaired so, some tasks, I'll try to do them and they don't work well or what have you, so I've had professors be very flexible about how I submit things or even now that I'm co-teaching, we have our students just email us directly.

I was impressed with Danielle's ability to move through the program with relative ease. As an out-of-state student with a significant visual disability, living alone with a relatively small support system, Danielle experienced a number of blocks in her pursuit of the doctoral degree. Her motivation to finish the program allowed her to overcome and remove many of the barriers in her way to get to the dissertation phase of the program. For the fourth interview in a row, the motivation seems to be the driving force in the successful completion of the graduate degree. Danielle entered the program with both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators and was able to shift those goals and motivations to fit her changing needs. Her strong motivation to finish the degree paired with her discovery of a strong supportive advising relationship really helped Danielle get to where she is in the program despite her minimal support system and other barriers.

I am gaining confidence in my interviews and learning more and more what I can ask my participants to elicit the most rich, descriptive stories from them. The interview protocol is becoming second nature to me now but I do not want this familiarity with the protocol to lead to my overlooking questions that I deliberately put there. I have a couple of hours until my next interview so I made my notes on my interview with Danielle and then reviewed my interview protocol to see if any questions needed to be added, adjusted, or taken out.

Elaine.

With a fresh perspective in mind, I set up for my next interview. Elaine is a recent graduate of the Adult Education PhD program and currently works for the Cooperative Extension System, which provides a variety of services to rural counties in this state. Elaine and I developed a quick rapport and I immediately felt comfortable around her. I felt that she was equally as comfortable as we talked about the informed consent and prepared for the interview. The first thing I asked of Elaine was to tell me about her educational background and what led to her deciding to start the PhD program.

Elaine received scholarships for her undergraduate degree in agriculture and then returned to the same institution for a Master's degree in Agribusiness because was offered a scholarship for that as well. Once she had completed the Agribusiness degree, Elaine entered the workforce putting to use the skills she had learned in her previous degrees. Throughout her career, Elaine had been employed at a couple of higher education institutions where she used her agricultural background to help with university farming programs. Elaine stayed in the workforce for a number of years before taking a job with the Cooperative Extension System. She describes this employment change as, "kind of like a career change in way." Elaine had primarily worked in agriculture before joining the Extension System but was given the

opportunity to learn the consumer and personal finance aspects of rural program management in this new position.

> I'm working in the area of consumer clients and personal finance. I was hired in this position because…I was working with farmers and now I've spoken with local communities, city managers, and done account work with them and their groups.

Elaine has worked with the Extension System for many years and returned to school at some point. She talked as if it was just a decision she made one day, "Then I decided to go back to school," without much prior thought or consideration. When she started her master's program she had two children and then added a third just before starting to work in the discipline. She talks of her plans to attend school:

> I had three children and wanted them to be a little older, so when all of them went to high school, I decided to go back to work on my EdS, which I started in 2003 and finished in 2007. Then I started the PhD program and graduated in 2014.

Part of this initial question asks participants to talk about why they decided to enter the doctoral program. Elaine simply stated, "then I decided to go back to school." While her answer was very matter of fact and her decision was clear, I was not clear on the motivation that led Elaine to pursue the degree. The other interviewees talked about it as if it was a step toward career advancement, something they have always wanted to accomplish, or a necessary step to achieve their future goals. Elaine did not talk about this so I used a follow up question to find out what she planned on doing with the doctorate hoping that answer would provide me some insight into what motivated her to begin this grueling process.

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I have a degree in adult education. Currently I've been working with adults for

years and I've worked with kids some too. What I plan to do with this degree is

move up in the Extension System to continue working with adults and children.

The extrinsic motivator of career advancement is a consistent motivator in all of the interviews

so far. Though it may not be the primary motivator for all participants, it is certainly a factor, on

some level, for them all.

Now that I had gotten Elaine to talk to me about those vital motivations for starting the

program, we began talking about the factors found in prior literature. I asked Elaine about her

relationship with her advisor. She describes the relationship with hesitance:

My major professor was very professional. If I needed anything she was there to

give me assistance. I began as a distance student who was off campus, and, of

course hours away. Sometimes she would make it where everything's all online.

Elaine described the relationship as asked, but I didn't get the open and honest answer

that I was expecting. I knew that there was more to a relationship than distance accommodations

so I decided to pry into the relationship. I asked Elaine to talk to me more about her relationship

with her advisor; was it particularly supportive, did you have any struggles, was there anything

that could have been better? I wanted to allow her to answer the question honestly but wanted to

let her know that I was fully prepared for both positive and negative aspects of the relationship. I

sometimes felt that participants were hesitant to speak negatively about the advising relationship.

I think this was because of the relationship that I had with the department as well as the overall

awkwardness of speaking negatively about someone. I felt like Elaine opened up to me after

this. I gave her some examples of both positive and negative relationship aspects that I believe

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helped her realize that I was looking more for honesty than professionalism. Elaine was able to open up more about the relationship.

> Yes, I guess when it came to the point of my analysis, getting that data together, she gave me someone to help but I didn't feel like that person was a big help, so I had to find someone local. And when it came to writing, I felt that my progress might have been slowed down just a bit as she was assigned so many students at one time. The ones who were in school the longest, it seemed like they were put first. The ones who came in later, we had to wait …it seemed like almost a whole year went by before some of my work was looked at.

This is the first time that a participant had talked about the faculty workload as a struggle for them. I identified it in the literature as a significant part of the advising relationship but thus far, no one had mentioned it. It was interesting that Elaine seemed to have a professional and respectful relationship with her advisor but at the same time had struggles with the relationship. It served as both a motivator and barrier at different points in her doctoral journey. I saw this with Alice and Charleigh as well but they spoke of two different advisors; one negatively and one positively. In Elaine's case, she talks of the same advisor in both a positive and negative way. This is my first experience with this and my immediate thought during the interview was how I would code the data, as positive or negative. I made a note in the margin to code it both ways and moved on to the next interview questions.

I asked Elaine about her support systems outside of her department.

> My husband was being supportive in raising our children. I had a co-worker who was my lead support and then the county extension office provided a lot of support as well. There's a particular teacher at a local high school that go into the

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graduate program years earlier and helped me, even so far as being an editor for

me and by just proofreading my chapters as I got finished.

Elaine had previously mentioned that she had three high school and beyond aged children. The

support of her family and husband seemed adequate but she talked primarily about the support

she received from her employer.

What I did appreciate is that my employer, which is the Cooperative Extension

System, set it up where we didn't have to travel as much. They would have the

instructor come to a building on campus and we were taught via satellite. That

way we were able to participate in class.

In the literature review, the primary support systems identified were educational, family, peer,

and employer. Charleigh briefly mentioned the benefits of having on campus employment with

a flexible schedule so that she could work, study, and complete projects. Elaine is the first to

mention the overwhelming support of her employer as a major motivator in helping her move

through the program. I was encouraged to see the elements of my literature review appearing in

the interviews.

The literature review was the most unpleasant part of this dissertation process. A huge

part of me did not care what prior research said about my topic. I just wanted to dive in and see

what my participants had to say. I understood that the literature review was part of the

dissertation process and resigned myself to the grueling and exhaustive task. I was glad to have

done it though. Do not get my wrong, I did not enjoy it, and I do believe that I would have found

the same categories and themes had I skipped the literature review altogether. However, by

identifying popular categories and themes in doctoral research, I have been able to look

specifically for things not already researched. Finding those items that were discovered in the

literature review helps to affirm the prior research but knowing what is prevalent in research also highlights what is not prevalent in current research.   As Elaine talked about her employer support, this became more evident to me and I was thankful for the opportunity to learn my lesson.

Continuing through the interview protocol Elaine and I talked about her coursework. She indicated that "it did what it was supposed to do" and that she had no problem moving through the coursework. We also talked about how her finances had influenced her degree progression.

> My employer paid for the first half of the semester of courses but I did not want to make a career out of going to school so I decided to take nine to twelve hours every semester…although I didn't personally have the funds to pay for it, I had loans to cover what my employer didn't. To me, it all worked out. I was able to get through my process and reach my goal by taking those extra hours.

For Elaine, the financial support of her employer paired with her willingness to take out loans when necessary helped her progress through the program at a faster rate than otherwise possible. As with Alice, Elaine did not mention the prospect of paying back the loans after graduation but it crossed my mind as a graduate student as well.

Other barriers mentioned by Elaine were the significant sacrifice of full-time employment during one of her terms as student, the lack of peer support, and working through her data analysis process.

> I did have to take off one semester to go to campus and take four classes. I did that one time instead of dropping out. That worked out well for me.

I asked Elaine why as a distance student she chose to take a semester off from working to attend course on campus. At the time, the program was not fully online and those four classes were

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only offered on campus. Instead of drawing out the program, Elaine decided to make sacrifices in other areas in order to attend full time and mark more courses off her check list.

Additionally, Elaine talked about her desire to develop closer relationships with her peers due to being a distance student.

> I just wish I had the opportunity…being so far away…it was kind of hard to develop relationships with people in your class. I knew of them, but I didn't get to know them through our time online together…but I just wish I had more relationships with the class. When it came to statistics, instead of me having to go through someone else, I could have gone to someone in my class to ask for extra help.

Elaine's struggle to develop these relationships is a significant barrier for many doctoral students as they enter the isolation of the dissertation-writing phase. For Elaine though, even developing relationships in classes became isolating because she received the majority of her instruction via satellite with little to no interactions with her classmates.

During the course of the literature review, I discovered a great deal of research about the retention of adult distance education students. I made a note in the margin to review this research as I went through Elaine's interview for analysis. Distance education students struggle with isolation more so than their on campus counterparts for obvious reasons. Whether a student was primarily distance or on campus did not play a factor in my selection and recruitment process, but looking back, it likely should have. The barriers and motivators for distance versus on campus students is likely vary just as widely as those within different disciplines, a factor I did consider in participant selection.

The final barrier that Elaine discussed had to do with her statistics course and data analysis. Not only did Elaine struggle to find assistance with her statistical analysis but she struggled in the area of confidence in her end product.

> I guess I feel that there's a certain point when interpreting my data…I was afraid that it wasn't going to be right. I had a number of statisticians look over it to make sure I interpreted correctly…that was a relief. I was just so afraid that it might not be what they wanted.

I interpreted this as much as insecurity with her research experience as a statistical deficiency. Elaine had access to statistical faculty who could help with accuracy but talks as much about her fear that it wasn't going to be what they were looking for as she does about a fear that it wasn't being done correctly. I think this must be a common insecurity for doctoral students. For many, this may be the first major research project in which they have been the primary investigator and that can be scary. This was not something I had found in prior research, so I made a note of an emergent theme. Fear of inadequacy; I think many doctoral students can relate to Elaine – I certainly could.

At this point in the interview, we had talked primarily about things that had hindered Elaine's progress. We touched on the positive aspects of her advising relationship and her support systems outside of her department but I wanted to hear more about what kept her moving through the program. When asked about a time she thought about quitting and her reason for persisting in the program Elaine responded:

> What kept me motivated is that I am the first person in my family, from my mom's side, as well as my dad's, to acquire a PhD. One of my cousins who is about eight years older than I am acquired hers the following month, I feel like I

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am making history for the family and setting an example for my children. You

always want your children to do better than what you did…that kept me

motivated. I didn't want to give up because if I had given up, then I was like,

'what would I be doing then when times get hard?'

Elaine did not talk about a time when she thought about quitting but talked a lot about her

motivation. This is a strong personally trait that served as a motivator that propelled Elaine

through the program. Her goal commitment and determination enabled her to look past her

isolation, insecurities, advising hurdles, and financial commitments to finish what she had

started. She additionally talked about a time when she was receiving her EdS and she saw the

PhD candidates being hooded.

…every time things get hard, I always remind myself…I saw myself standing

right there with those professors and they were going to hood me with my

doctorate…

Elaine was able to visualize herself reaching her goal and that mental image helped push her

through the harder moments of her journey.

Elaine's interview was inspirational to me for a couple of reason. First, I felt a

connection with her through her open and honest answer and her genuine concern for my success

as well. Secondly, from a research standpoint, Elaine provided some interesting data. The

connection that I felt with Elaine is not something that I can adequately describe. She was open

and honest and her story was inexplicably uplifting. Perhaps it was the tone of her voice or the

positive attitude that she displayed…I am not sure what it was but throughout the entire

interview, I grew to have more respect and concern for Elaine. She solidified this feeling of

connectedness when the interview was over and she took the time to encourage me saying,

I just want to encourage you to continue what you're doing…and see yourself up

on that stage being hooded…you might run into some challenges as you try to do

your writing but don't give up because you came too far. You sat there and went

through all those classes that you already have the time and money invested and

you can do this.

Elaine is not someone that I knew before meeting her for the interview. I had never even heard of her and our differing programs means we've likely never had a class together, that I can remember anyway. I was encouraged that she would take the time to speak to me in such a positive and uplifting way. I could not help by think that her positive attitude played a role in her overall outcome in the doctoral program. I also made a note of this as a personality characteristic that I had not yet seen from any participants.

This interview was inspirational to me for a second reason as well. Elaine's interview provided some never seen before (by me) opportunities for data analysis. She spoke of her advisor in both a positive and negative way indicating that this relationship served as both motivating and hindering at different stages and in different situations. She also was the first to talk about many of the a priori categories identified in the literature review and provided emergent topics as well. Elaine talked about the support she received from her employer, the employment sacrifices made to move through the program, the faculty work load as a barrier to progression, and isolation as barriers. These were present in the literature review and legitimized, at least for me, that the use of a priori coding was helpful in the analysis process. Elaine also provided a wealth of emergent themes such as her struggles as a distance student and her fear of failure or inadequacy. The isolation of the dissertation phase is a known barrier to degree completion but this barrier compounded by non-residency student status created a new

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level of isolation that I had not yet come across with other participants. Her fear of getting her

data analysis wrong is something that I would imagine many doctoral students experience, but

none had yet mentioned. This could very well be grouped in with external barriers such as

previous preparation but since I had not yet seen this in my data, I chose to bring it out and

classify it as an emergent theme instead.

At this point, I had a day before my next interview and was coming down with a cold. A

big part of me wanted to call it quits at five interviews and move on to transcription. Given my

last interview with Elaine though, I knew that I had not yet reached saturation. Her interview

provided new and emergent codes as well as solidified some of the not-seen-before a priori codes

from my literature review. One of the pitfalls of qualitative research I suppose is the need to

carry on, through rain or shine. At this point, I was fully engulfed in the culture and process. I

had made contact with all of my participants and set up meetings with them. I had to follow

through even though I wanted to end on a good note with Elaine's interview.

Frederick.

As I prepared for my next interview, I had a new challenge to contend with. The next

interviewee was my first male participant, Frederick. I did not know Frederick and to my

knowledge had not crossed paths with him in any prior coursework. I did know that he was a

recent graduate and from his email signature, could tell that he was working as the Headmaster at

a small private school. As with all interviews, I tried to follow the protocol as closely as possible

with follow up questions used to elicit more clarity if needed.

Frederick talked about his educational background very matter of fact. He talked about

his pursuit of education as a trial and error process. He was denied from his first choice

undergraduate institution and forced to attend a different school for one year before transferring

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back. Once he received his Bachelor's degree, Frederick moved to a neighboring state to obtain his Master's degree. After entering law school for one semester and ultimately not liking the choice, he began working in a K-12 school system. His move to K-12 education from public administration/law led him to the pursuit of a PhD in Higher Education and then ultimately to a K-12 Leadership program. Frederick talks about his experience in this way,

> To be 100% honest, my original graduate degree was nothing more than an aid to help me get into law school…my undergraduate GPA was so low I knew I wouldn't be accepted…so at that point in my life, the only reason that I pursued that [first] graduate degree was for, to get into law school. The reason I pursued the PhD, I guess, a career opportunity. If I wanted to be a Head of School, I would prefer one and I would ultimately need one to be a professor.

Frederick talked about the extrinsic value of possible career advancement as a significant motivation for entering the degree program. I considered the fact that the degree would aid in the accomplishment of future career goals (i.e. becoming a Head of School and a professor) an extrinsic motivator. Frederick did not mention, at the time, the existence of any intrinsic motivation. The reasons were all primarily goal oriented, even his pursuit of the first Master's degree was for getting into law school.

Frederick talked about the degrees as though they were simply hurdles to jump. From my interpretation of his response, I drew the conclusion that Frederick was interested in the PhD in so much that it would aid his future goals. I did not get a sense that Frederick had put much thought into the long-term pursuit of the PhD but again, more of a hoop to jump through on his way to where he actually wanted to be. Given that this was the first male I had interviewed I made note of this gut feeling and wrote "bias" beside it. Was I somehow more judgmental of

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men who were goal oriented than I was of women in the same situation? I wanted to go back and look at the other interviews to see if I missed anything during this particular response.

In order to gain more insight into why Frederick sought the degree and what his future goals were, I followed with a question asking him what he was doing with his degree and what he had plans to do with it in the future. Frederick indicated that he was currently the Headmaster as a small private school and that he intended to, "continue as a Headmaster moving around to different schools for a while and then hopefully pursuing the rest of my career in higher education as a professor, and work my way up to administration." I again got the gut feeling that Frederick viewed the doctorate degree as a stepping stone, followed by the stepping stone of being a Headmaster for a set number of year, and then stepping into the role of a professor for long enough to move into administration. With the other participants, I got a feeling of passion for their discipline and service to their populations. I did not get this feeling with Frederick. I interpreted his responses as him viewing the process as a means to an end without the necessary passion of the pursuit. Again, I noted my possible bias and moved on in the interview protocol. At this point, I was more concerned that Frederick would be able to sense my hesitation than I was with getting interview data. This was a first for me as an interview. It led me to follow the interview protocol more strictly than I had with the other participants.

I asked Frederick about his relationship with his advisor. His response gave me some relief in its sincerity.

> Okay…my main relationship with my chair, so I chose her out of mutual interest in a [dissertation] topic and respect for her wanting to better the institution, her department, and every student. We worked well together from the time I asked her to be my chair and I still call her and I guess consider her a mentor and friend

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at this point. She was always there with my questions…would be candid and understanding with the writing process, subject matter, details, everything. That's why I'm blessed to have the relationship I have with my chair.

I was encouraged by Frederick's remarks about his advising relationship. It seemed that the positive relationship that he was able to develop was sincere and served to motivated him to degree completion. One thing that I noted in his comments about his advisor was the fact that he stated, "I chose her out of mutual interest…" I identified advisor selection as a factor in the level of satisfaction with the advising relationship of doctoral students. Of the entire interview process so far, Frederick is the only one to have mentioned that he selected his chair instead of being assigned one. I also noted that Frederick was the first Educational Leadership student. The prior participants were from not different programs within the College of Education but also a different department. This fact led me to question the selection of the entire College of Education. The culture varies so greatly by discipline that even within the four disciplines of the College of Education there are additional cultural differences. Was Frederick's advisor selection an anomaly or was this standard practice within his department?

I asked Frederick about this. He indicated that he was assigned an advisor when you enter the program but that that person is just an advisor. The major professor is not chosen until later in the program and could be your assigned advisor, but did not have to be if your interest better aligned with someone else. In Frederick's case, he chose an advisor primarily out of a "mutual interest in a topic."

I then asked Frederick about his external support systems. He talked primarily about his relationship with faculty within the department:

The main professors in the department, and then I had fellow classmates. We had

the cohort model…because of the friendships, and the same boat, everyone has

the exact same problem, at the exact same time…going through them together,

they served as a great support system.

Frederick talked about his education supports and peer supports but had not mentioned an

employer or family support systems. I did not know if this was because he simply didn't think

about them or because he didn't consider them particularly supportive. My initial thoughts were

that those individuals whose family members played a vital role in their ability to complete could

not possibly forget about them when asked about support systems. I had to check my bias here

and continue with a follow up question about family supports specifically. Frederick stated,

I had great parents, and I'm one of seven children. I'm right there in the middle,

so cheerleading support from the younger siblings and then the graduate school

support as well.

Compared with other participants, Frederick did not talk much about his family as a

support system or as a non-supportive element. In the cases of Alice and Danielle, they talked

about the distance from their families being a factor in their supportiveness. Bailee talked about

her family situations and extended family support, as did Charleigh and Elaine. Frederick

however, barely mentioned family supports when asked specifically about them. This was

puzzling for me. My inexperience as an interviewer likely kept me from prying for more

information but I did note the lack of mention of support from family members.

My confidence in interviewing was beginning to waiver with Frederick. I felt like I was

getting closed answers to open ended questions. I was asking the same questions I had asked of

other participants but receiving very short, matter of fact answers with little elaboration. I was

having to ask a lot of follow up questions just to get the original question answered fully.

Looking back through my transcription, Frederick did not even use complete sentences most of

the time. His responses were short and choppy, very to the point without the rich, thick

description that I sought. What was I doing wrong here? The fact that this was my first male

interviewee was not lost on me. I made note a couple of times to remind myself of the

differences between men and women. I wanted to note that one of the limitations of interview

data collection might possibly be the personality of the participant. A more experienced

interviewer may have been able to use additional techniques to elicit responses that are more

descriptive but in this case, it is likely that I will need to check my bias and consider the overall

response type when analyzing the interview data.

Next, I talked with Frederick about how the coursework prepared him for the dissertation

phase as well as the dissertation. His answer was a very insightful:

> The course work did prepare us…from learning, to practice, and all aspects of
>
> adult learning and higher education, back to K-12. It definitely prepared me.
>
> What didn't prepare me for, it gave me a mindset to solve the problem or better
>
> understand the issue so that I can solved the problem. I don't necessarily think a
>
> class has to be difficult for you to gain experience or more understanding of your
>
> field. Education is a lot of reading, a lot of presentation, a lot of group work,
>
> which in K-12 education really helped us be more collaborative.

Frederick's response to this question brought forth some of the intrinsic motivators that

were missing from his motivations for entering the program. Much like Bailee, it appears that

his reasons for entering the program expanded to include a desire for increased knowledge and

skills as well as the goal attainment aspect. We moved from coursework into the dissertation

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phase of our questions. Frederick is a "self-proclaimed procrastinator" and talked about the

dissertation phase as extremely "long, longer than I thought it would be."

As the interview went on, Frederick began providing responses that were more

descriptive. He continued to talk about his dissertation-writing process describing is not only as

long but fraught with obstacles.

> I didn't realize how much went into a dissertation. Having had classes, I
>
> understood what one was and what I had to do. I thought I was going to love it
>
> and then the research component…there were just so many obstacles. I
>
> remembered distributing my surveys, and I just realized it took me a lot longer
>
> because people weren't responding…just a lot of smaller obstacles that I didn't
>
> foresee.

He continued talking about obstacles in the dissertation phase by talking about the isolation of

dissertation writing.

> At that point [you] become distant from your support system, so you meet with
>
> your chair, but not on campus. You go from one, two, three times per week while
>
> you're on campus but once the coursework if finished, it's very easy to fall into
>
> the rhythm of the job, and the rhythm of all the same thing.

The isolation described by Frederick here is a common barrier for many doctoral students and

one mentioned in the literature review. The integration into the department through the cohort

system and advisor selection process helped Frederick through the coursework portion of the

degree but the isolation so often associated with the dissertation phase acted as a barrier for him.

When asked about the impact of finances on his pursuit of the doctoral degree, Frederick

responded, "no." I was taken aback by the shortness of his answer. My question was not a yes

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or no question. I asked open-ended questions in order to avoid yes or no answers. I asked

Frederick to expand on his answer and he simply responded with a longer version of his first

answer, "no, it was never a barrier." I was not sure how else to ask this question without

seeming to pry into why financial considerations were not an issue. I could make assumptions

about his financial situation but decided that if he was adamant that there were no financial

burdens then this simply was not a factor for him. I realized through analysis, listening to the

audio recordings and notes I had taken, that I had assumed that finances were an issue for all of

the participants. I made this assumption because I too am a poor graduate student struggling to

make ends-meat. I forgot that not all students are created equal and just as an alcoholic spouse is

not a barrier for all participants, financial struggles are also not a barrier for all participants. This

was an important realization for me, as I knew that I needed to stick to my interview protocol

and seek information about each of the a priori themes but also be aware that not all are present

for everyone. I needed to adjust my expectations of the participants and instead listen to their

stories with their motivations and their struggles.

I continued in the interview with Frederick by asking him to tell me about a time he

might have considered quitting, or became extremely frustrated, and what kept him from

quitting. Frederick, as predicted stated, "I never thought about quitting, never. People might not

believe that, but I just never really thought about it." He expanded, with my prompting, to say,

> The most frustrating would be the dissertation and the countless hours in the
>
> library. At home, having to read on family vacations, family events, Christmas,
>
> Thanksgiving, to get back to writing and trying to concentrate at home or in
>
> various situations. It was just frustrating…I personally had to set it down

sometimes to get a fresh perspective…so I would set it down for two weeks and it

would be hard to jump back into, especially the researching part of it.

I appreciated Frederick's honesty and openness about his struggles during the dissertation phase.

I could relate to him as I was in the same situation and appreciated where we had come from

since the beginning of the interview. Part of me wanted to ask some of the questions again so

that I could obtain this kind of depth in his responses. I can only assume that the level of

comfort with the interview had increased leading to the more descriptive responses.

I wanted to allow Frederick the opportunity to talk about any barriers or motivators that

we had not yet talked about so I allowed him to talk about anything else that he felt comfortable

talking about. I also wanted to give him a chance to expand on the rather short responses that he

had provided before.

In his expanded answers, Frederick brought up the fact that he was employed full time

during his doctoral studies and this led to a lot of hectic traveling back and forth from work and

struggling to make it to class on time. Travel is something that one other participant also

mentioned and something that the previous research had not addressed. I made a note of this.

He also talked about how he had "wished I would have paid a little more attention in my

statistics class." He indicated that he "thought it was a course he could get through, not

realizing that I personally had to use and understand it for my dissertation."

More than one interviewee mentioned difficulty with their statistics courses. I noted this

on Frederick's interview notes and after the interview, went back to look at the others. Of the

five interviews already, Charleigh, Elaine, and now Frederick had mentioned a difficulty

grasping the use of statistics. This is not something that I had encountered in prior research but

something that I imagine is a factor in many disciplines but that varies greatly by discipline.

What mean by that is that I would suspect that disciplines more familiar with calculations (i.e. hard sciences) would be better prepared for the formulas associated with statistics? Conversely, doctoral students in the human sciences, or soft sciences, have likely not been exposed to this form of inquiry before and therefore have a more difficult time understanding it, depending on their educational background and previous preparation.

Frederick indicates that the distance between his taking the statistics class and actually needing the knowledge gained in the course was too great for him to retain that information effectively. Perhaps requiring research methods courses more toward the end of coursework, in preparation for the dissertation phase, would be helpful in knowledge retention and overall understanding of statistics.

So Frederick had talked to me about additional barriers he had experienced. I was grateful for the expanded responses but also wanted to make sure he was allowed to talk about any additional motivations he encountered. I was glad that I asked the question because Frederick talked more about his reasons for entering the doctoral program. This was a primary concern for me at the beginning of the interview because I felt like Fredrick's answers were not complete or authentic. His explanation here helped fill those gaps in his original answer:

> The reason I went in was because I didn't agree, or necessarily agree with my bosses treatment of students or how they ran the school…it angered me…so I wanted to learn a positive way to see that my students succeed through the education process and are able to ask for help.

Frederick's previous response indicated a desire to move up in his career and seemed only interest in career advancement and goal fulfillment. Seeing his interest in bettering the lives of

his students provided me with the confidence that I needed to believe that Frederick was sincere in his responses.

The beginning of the interview was a shaky process. It took a bit longer to develop rapport with Frederick than the other interviewees. Was it because he was male? Was it because I wasn't feeling well? Was it because he was in a different program from the participants I had already interviewed? I am not sure. I would like to think it is a personality difference between male and female conversational styles but I am not sure. I am looking forward to interviewing my next male to explore the notion of gender bias on my part or gender differences in interviewing.

Georgia.

Unfortunately, my next interview was with a female, not a male. The next morning, I interviewed Georgia. Georgia is finishing her coursework and preparing for her oral exams in the Educational Leadership program.   One of the things I had noted in the interview with Frederick were the departmental differences between Educational Leadership interviewee and the interviewees from the Adult and Higher Education, that I had already talked with. Though Georgia was not male, she was in the Educational Leadership program, which would allow me to explore some of those discipline differences. Georgia was also the first participant that had not yet reached the dissertation phase and was still finishing her program coursework. This would present new data for analysis.

Georgia talked about her reasons for entering the doctoral program as a desire that had been with her since high school. She obtained a Bachelor's in Elementary Education and knew that she had to teach for three years before getting her next teaching certificate. She worked for about three years and then entered the Master's program in Instructional Leadership. After

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obtaining this degree in 2012, Georgia immediately joined the Educational Leadership doctoral cohort and chose to pick up her EdS along the way. She provided me with a great deal of her educational background but I wanted to know more specifically, why she chose to enter the program. She had mentioned career advancement but only briefly.

I asked Georgia to tell me why she decided to pursue a graduate degree and specifically the PhD program. Her response is one I had not yet heard:

> Well, it kind of all excited me when I was in high school. Then I wanted to do administration. I wanted to go into teaching, but I also wanted to do administration. I kind of had this thought as a tenth grader standing in the office of my high school, and it just stuck with me. When I graduated with my undergraduate, I wanted to push forward and get my graduate degree but like I said, I had to wait for three years.

This type of long-term goal commitment was an unprecedented motivator in my interviews. I was excited to see that Georgia had brought up something else that I had not yet encountered in my data collection. I felt that Georgia's interview would go differently than the others but could not quite figure out why.

As Georgia continued to talk about her desire to return to school for her Master's degree, she touched on a number of issues that I had not yet asked about.

> I taught for those three years and at the end of that three-year period, in January, before I started my Master's, I had my first child. I thought it would be difficult to go back with an infant…that had always been my goal and my plan. I've been with my husband a long time…we decided…he was definitely behind the opportunities to go back. We knew that we would make certain sacrifices…since

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my daughter was so young, she wouldn't realized that I was not home…she

wouldn't miss me…I started in on my Master's.

In addition to her strong commitment to pursue her education and substantial support from her

spouse, Georgia also volunteered information about her additional supports:

I had been very close with my Master's cohorts, some of the professors were

encouraging us to go back for our PhD. I took their encouragement and positive

feedback that they thought I could handle a PhD…which had been in the back of

my mind but I wasn't sure. I pushed forward and applied and at that time, found

out that I was pregnant with my second child, not planned at all. I had been going

this whole time with my other child…I had supportive parents, so I kept going

straight through. I had him, right after my first set of doctoral classes and did not

take a semester off. It's just been something that I'm just going to go with life. I

had a lot of problems staying awake but I just kept pushing through it.

At this point in the interview, I felt that the controlled questioning was getting away from

me. For the first time, I had a participant spouting information quicker than I could process it. I

felt like I needed to reign in the conversation a little and get us back on track. I did however,

note the issues mentioned by Georgia so that we could talk more in depth about them at a later

point in the interview.

I asked Georgia to talk to me about her relationship with her advisor. She describes a

unique relationship with not only her advisor but another important member of her support

system:

Well, there's really two of them. One is not my major professor except she talked

about doing a kind of partnership between her and another professor where she

would really be there for me but the other person would be my actual advisor. I

like that because she was kind of, definitely over burdened and the other teacher

and I had a really good relationship. The first one, she'd been with me through the

Master's, EdS, and Doctoral classes. She's just been phenomenal in the fact that

she is very quick on feedback and that positive feedback that I have gotten has

pushed me forward to keep going.

I did not know what to do with that. I have experienced an interviewee with a positive

relationship with their advisor, a negative relationship with their advisor, and a combination of

positive and negative factors affecting the relationship, but I had not yet encountered a

participant with two advisors. For the ease of transcription, I advised Georgia not to name names

that I would have to change anyway. I regret this. The way that Georgia talks about her dual

advisors quickly became confusing. I understood that her officially assigned advisor was,

according to Georgia, "overburdened" and that an additional advisor (unofficially) was selected.

This presents two factors for consideration. The perceived barrier that Georgia's advisor was

overloaded led potentially led to delays in her progression through the program. Conversely,

Georgia's advisor selection proved to be a motivation for Georgia who states, "it's really kind of

pushed me forward to keep going." She talks about her unofficial advisor in a very motivating

way. "What I really like is she is very down to earth…she is easy to talk to. She is always open

to constant emails…I've already had a few meetings with her this semester."

Georgia displayed a high degree of departmental and advising support so I wanted to hear

about her other support systems. She primarily talks about her relationship with her husband.

I would mainly say family. Of course we have friends, but, well, family wise I

have a very supportive husband. We've been together a long time, I know my

faults and his faults. We support each other and then some. So each time that I

need, 'Hey, I got to get to work on this paper, its going to take me all day

Sunday,' he is up for the task. Sometimes he pushes me past that procrastination.

He pushes me to get things done.

She goes on to talk about her family supports.

My parents and his parents…this couldn't have been done without them. They

have had countless times of picking up my kids, babysitting my kids when my

husband couldn't be there to get them. At one point, he worked pretty far away

from where we live so I had to really lean on my parents and his parents to help

me with the kids when I had to go to class.

Georgia also talks about support she received from a friend and a fellow classmate.

I would say friend-wise, I have one friend from the Master's level. At some point

we worked well together and we tend to get along, she's been a huge support.

We've been through everything together. We are hoping we can graduate at the

same time.   We're pushing each other to get it done, like tonight, Wednesday

night, is my dissertation night. My husband and I have decided to make every

Wednesday night my "class" night. I come every Wednesday to work on my

dissertation.

Georgia is touching on all the key factors that I identified in the literature review. She is

going into detail about her motivations, her struggles and her journey as a whole. I continued

with the interview questions by switching gears slightly. I asked Georgia about her coursework

and previous preparation for the dissertation. Georgia described mix feelings about her level of

preparedness by stating, "at times I feel like I get it, I've been prepared and then other times I'm

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sitting there looking at a blank page." Her answers at this point begin to move off topic as we

talk some about her "dissertation night" and move into areas of family and home life as she talks

about life with two children.

Though I felt that Georgia was moving around a good bit in her answers, she was telling

her story in her way and I did not want to disrupt that for the sake of my interview question

order. I allowed her to talk about her family and home life difficulties even though I had not yet

asked her about this.

> I am definitely not a morning person, I am a night person. I had heard of people
>
> getting up in the morning and working on their dissertation and that's just not me.
>
> Having two kids, ages two and four, some nights you can't really get anything
>
> done. My infant didn't want to sleep through the night, so there were times that at
>
> night I was basically exhausted.

Without my prompting, Georgia then started to describe her integration into the

department as a significant motivation for her. She talks about her unofficial advisor as a

catalyst for her involvement in departmental functions and meetings.

> She invited me to meet with her and some other cohort members to have a kind of
>
> sit down meeting and I was introduced to several students that were beyond the
>
> point that I was. Listening to their struggles, during the process, really helped me
>
> be aware of what was going to happen.

Georgia has done a decent job of leading the interview thus far but I wanted to make sure

that we talked about both barriers and motivators during the interview. Georgia had provided me

with a wealth of information of those things that had helped her through the program and

motivated her to finish, so I wanted to ask specifically about any barriers to degree completion

that she might have experienced. In order to allow for a variety of answers, I asked Georgia to tell me the most difficult part of finishing the PhD thus far.

> I think one of the difficult parts for me is feeling that, 'am I doing this right?,' 'Is this enough?,' 'Is it going to actually add anything to the table?.' I kind of struggle with…I kind of know what office that I want to go with…I've been researching a long time. I kind of have a little bit of spin on it but I don't feel my topic is relevant. That has been a little bit of my unease.

Another participant broached the topic of research insecurity and I made note of it then. I made note of it again here as a I actually got excited that a new theme may be emerging.

When I asked Georgia specifically about the economic impact on her graduate studies, she indicated that it has not influenced her ability to come to class or attend courses but that it has impacted her family situation. She talked about her scholarship during her Bachelor's and part of her Master's program. She took out loans to finish the Master's but had it paid off before beginning the PhD. At the PhD level, Georgia admits that she has "taken out more [loans] than it actually cost" justifying the decision by explaining the cost of "books, because there's so much travel involved…we got my computer that way". She goes on to say, "right now, I don't feel the impact, I know when I have to starting paying back the loans, it's going to be a big struggle."

In talking about her financial struggles, she actually reveals another motivation for entering and finishing the degree program. As a teacher, pay raises come with the attainment of additional degrees. Georgia hopes that "because she has gotten an advanced degree" that she will "get a pay raise." She also states, "there's no scholarships for the graduate level," indicating that perhaps her financial burden would have been lessened with the availability of scholarships.

As we continued to talk about barriers to degree completion, I asked Georgia to tell me about a time when she might have considered quitting and what motivated her to stick with the program. She joked that her husband "will tell you that the beginning of every semester I contemplated quitting." She explained this by revealing that she took three courses every semester, "which is a lot, but I wanted to get done." The thought of quitting at the beginning of each term came with the first look at the syllabus for each course and contemplation of all of the assignments, "the big projects, and the "papers getting longer and longer." She also thought about quitting for a short time after the birth of her son, the second child. She talked about this time in her life as stressful, describing it as very difficult.

> So I had a one month old, I have a not yet two year old, I have all of this work and I physically remember crying to my husband saying, 'I don't know how I'm going to do this.' You're already sleep deprived because of the infant. That was very difficult. On top of two kids and the doctorate, I have a full-time job. I have to teach the whole time. There are papers to grade…lesson plans to make. This is the first year that I am not a classroom teacher…not that my workload has changed.

Before I could ask what it was that kept her going through this difficult time, Georgia reiterated the support she received from her husband. "That's when that support, my husband really, still told me 'we're going to get through this, we'll make it work.'"

Georgia described her main barrier as "staying a parent and working full-time." "You can't put school work in front of being a teacher." One way that she combated the conflict between schoolwork and teaching duties was to be very upfront with her students about going back to school. Countering their complaints about their "twelve-paragraph essay" with her own

"twenty six page paper" helped to "lighten the mood" and help her students realize that every level of education has a struggle.

Georgia moved herself through the interview protocol pretty well but I wanted to make sure that she not only had the opportunity to discuss any barriers we did not talk about but that she had the opportunity to add to or expand on the motivators we'd already talked about. I am glad that I asked this question because Georgia provided an answer that hit on both an external motivation for entering the program and a source of support that motivated her through the program.

Her source of support was again, her husband. "He keeps encouraging me to get it done." However, the external motivation mentioned is the impact that her education will have on her children. Her goal commitment and determination to be able to provide a better life for her children serves as source of motivation throughout the doctoral program. She talks about the difficulties in missing moment with her children in pursuit of the degree.

> I knew that I was taking moments away from my children and I've heard from many people that they're going to resent me for it. I did everything that I could to do my schoolwork when they were asleep. I have tried to make it where schoolwork is not done on their time. I know that after I have the PhD, I can get a higher paying job and although it may come with more work, I would like to still have a shot to provide for their needs…to take them on more trips…maybe do more things with them.

Georgia's interview ended much the way that it began, with her taking about her determination to complete the degree. Georgia is a new mom, working a full-time job and taking a full load of course every term. She is often overwhelmed by her responsibilities but stays

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consistent in her determination to achieve her goals. Her goal commitment presented at a very young age and I wonder what impact this has on her level of determination and motivation in this regard. In contrast, Frederick entered a graduate program for the purposes of raising his GPA and ended up changing careers and his life goals in the process. His goal commitment developed as he moved through the program where as Georgia's presented before she was a high school graduate. What impact does the length of time one commits to the desired outcome play in the fulfillment of those goals?

Earlier I mentioned that I felt that Georgia's interview would go differently than the rest. Georgia's personality allowed for the free flowing of information rather than the use of multiple open-ended questions and follow up questions. However, it was more than that. Georgia answered most of my questions before I answered them and answered them well. Her story was intriguing to me and all to familiar. Her story is similar to my own journey which created a situation in which I had to be careful not to interject with my own anecdotes or chime in with a "me too" with each new similarity. Up until this point, I had not been able to relate to a participant like I had with Georgia. I had felt a supportive connection with interviewees but felt a true kinship with Georgia. I had trouble differentiating between the emic and etic perspectives in Georgia's analysis. So much of her story matched my own that putting my own interpretation into it would have been the most natural thing to do.

I cannot help but think that this is what ethnography is about. I had reached a point in my interviews were I was beginning to feel a part of the world of the participants. I knew from the beginning that I was technically a part of their culture and world, but I did not view myself as such until my interview with Georgia. I did not view myself as above the participants by any means but as the researcher, established myself as the dominant figure in the process. In

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interviewing Georgia though, I felt like I became a part of the culture. I was not talking to research subjects; I was talking to my people. They were not telling only their story, they were telling our story. And for the first time, I felt like a part of it.

Harrison.

As I learned new things with each interview, I forged on to my next. I knew Harrison from several courses we had together as well as some work we had done together professionally. Harrison has secured an assistantship on campus and as a staff member at the University, he and I had worked together a few times. Harrison had graduated from the Adult Education program but initially entered the Higher Education program.   He was only my second male participant and gave me the opportunity to explore the gender differences in interviewee responses.

As with the other interviews, I started by asking Harrison to tell me a little about his educational background and his reasons for entering the doctoral program. Harrison had obtained a Bachelor's degree in Communication as well as a Master's degree in Family Therapy. Harrison sought his Master's degree out of a desire to "interact with people in a meaningful way." After graduation from his Master's degree, Harrison began working at a higher education institution in the field of resident life. He had done volunteer work in a group home as well as in resident life during his undergraduate program. His pursuit of a therapy degree was fueled by his previous experiences and strong desire to "understand how people work." Through his position in resident life, Harrison became more interested in, "student development" and "how individuals grow and mature and learn in general." This peaked interest led to his eventual pursuit of the doctoral degree in higher education administration.

Harrison "knew he wanted to do educational studies" but was not really sure what Adult Education was so he chose Higher Education. "It made sense…I was working in Higher Education…so the program made sense."

> As I was going through the Higher Education program…it felt a little too narrow for where my interest were. It just didn't click…didn't fit. As I was learning about the programs in my department, I learned that Higher Education and Adult Education were closely linked. What I liked about Adult Education was that it was broader and incorporated things that happen outside of the university as well. I really liked that component of it…so I was able to switch to the Adult Education program.

Harrison seemed to possess the intrinsic motivation of a strong desire for knowledge. He did not mention his pursuit of the PhD in terms of goal attainment but instead talked about his interest in the topic and in learning about the subject matter. This is something that no other participant had mentioned at the onset of his or her doctoral journey as a primary factor for entering the program in the first place. Harrison however did not mention any type of extrinsic motivation but simply a desire to learn more.

Moving forward with the interview, I asked Harrison what his future goals were. He is currently in Medical School. Here is person with a PhD pursuing a Medical Degree as well. It was not what I expected. Harrison talked about the skills and knowledge he learned in the Adult Education program being beneficial to him in the Medical field as well.

> Relationships are all connected. In Higher Education, you are still using the Adult Education principles and skills. I ultimately wanted to obtain a Medical Degree. I needed those skills…not only personally but professionally…being

able to help my patients and my peers in medical school be able to learn. I

wanted to help support…help my peers learn and feel supported and those Adult

Education principles are vital to helping me do this. I also want to be able to have

the opportunity to teach a Medical population at some point in my career and

again, needed to know how to do that effectively. In the medical field, every

person you interact with is an opportunity to provide them with education. All of

those skills, I have been able to learn through Adult Education…how people

learn…how they take in information, digest it…and use it. Having an

understanding of that process through the Adult Education PhD will be a great

resource.

Harrison's thirst for knowledge is impressive. His high degree of intrinsic motivation and focus

on the more long-term career goal of becoming a physician enabled him to move through the

program with relative ease. Through the remainder of the interview, I learned more about

Harrison's drive and determination as he talked about his motivations and barriers.

Harrison described his relationship with his advisor as extremely positive and

"respectful."

My primary advisor…we had an incredibly respectful…just a great relationship

overall. I don't know that I would have completed the program if it was not for

the way that he supported me and encouraged me…not just me but the way that

he encouraged my thought process. He never created roadblocks…he helped me

think through things in a creative way…but he never created roadblocks. He was

so helpful. Both Adult Education professors just provided instruction and support

that allowed me to do what I did in the fashion that I did it. It didn't always make

sense on paper, but it made sense to me and they let me go with it and supported

me.

I next asked Harrison about outside support systems he might have had. He talked about his wife being in another doctoral program at the time and that relationship being supportive because they "understood what the other was going through." He expands on his support systems to include other supports as well. "So that was nice…very helpful and supported…and we didn't really have any distracters outside of each other, so that was nice." He also talks briefly about his familial support system saying, "my external family, primary family…they were all very supportive as well." Harrison's description of his support systems were not quite as in depth as I would have expected but I wanted to make sure he was telling me what he wanted to tell me and that I wasn't forcing him to talk more highly of something that he wanted to. I knew that Harrison and his wife were both on campus students with assistantships, they were in similar programs with similar coursework and likely were able to survive through the support they had from one another.

I wondered how much of my knowledge of my participants outside of my dissertation research influenced my ability to effectively interview them. If I had not known what I did about Harrison's background family situation, would have I have pressed more about his support systems or lack thereof? I knew that Harrison and his wife had no children, were highly driven, and were supported by strong advisors and on campus employment. Because I knew this, I did not push Harrison to talk to me about his support system. If a participant with whom I might not have been as familiar had talked as little about their support systems as Harrison had, would I have assumed that it was because they did not have them? I did not know the answer to that. I

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could only make notes of my questions and discoveries to look for in future interviews and learn from for future research.

Moving on in the interview, I asked Harrison about external motivations (i.e. personal characteristics, previous preparation, and financial impact). Harrison entered the program primarily for the attainment of knowledge. His description of the coursework supports his intrinsic motivation to gain knowledge for knowledge sake.

> There were certain courses that I was of course attracted to. I would say that there were some that I found to be incredibly helpful and some that I just found I had to get through. So for example…I took my statistics course and didn't really have a background in that, but the professor made it relatable…not necessarily easy, but relatable. That was a big…it kind of brought things together for me. I would say it was one of my best courses. So then the Adult Education courses…they were very timely. That's what I was looking for. I wasn't looking for something where you take a test every week. I was looking for something that provided me practical ways to approach how people learn and learning how to teach you how to learn but how to learn myself.

Harrison's continual mention of his strong desire to learn information, not necessarily obtain the degree, but to gain knowledge, points back to his goal commitment and intrinsic motivation.

As Harrison and I continue to talk about his coursework, we reached the point where he is entering the dissertation phase. He "didn't really have a clue what he wanted to do" but had been getting really interested in "social policy and the impact on individuals."

> So I began getting really excited about those issues but didn't really know how to approach that educationally so I started thinking, everything is related to

education in some way so I brought the idea to my advisor and my committee and they really helped me think through the issues and clarify my approach to my interest. So then I took that summer dissertation class that helped me create a strong foundation. So one of the things with my dissertation is that I used existing data so that I did not have to go out and collect data. I was able to use current information and different stats from qualified and verified sources so that created a time advantage. So then, the dissertation process…one of the things that helped was that my advisor didn't create any roadblocks. What I mean by that is that whenever I would provide him with a draft, I would get feedback within a week, if not before. I know that he had other students and other things to do but I didn't have that big time lapse between giving him a copy of my dissertation and getting that almost immediate feedback was extremely helpful. That was a huge gift…to have an advisor that provided me with immediate feedback…help me think through different things…give them another copy…and get additional feedback and continue through that same process. It happened a little bit quicker than I expected but a lot of that had to do with my advisors and the relationship that we shared.

When asked what the most difficult part of obtaining the PhD was, Harrison talked about his experience in the Higher Education program.

It was really hard mentally. I was going to classes and there was some interest there, but I wasn't…I couldn't find any connection between what I was doing and what I wanted to do. So that was really tough. Once I switched to the Adult Education side, things just started to click and that part became pretty easy. There

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were different challenges and things you had to overcome, but I enjoyed it, it was

easy because I was engaged.

As Harrison began talking about his struggles in the Higher Education program, I was reminded of one of the factors that served as a barrier to completion: program mismatch. Harrison's long-term interest did not align with his current program. He entered Higher Education because it made sense to him. He was working in Higher Education and his work there had sparked an interest in student development and growth. As he moved through the program and developed as a person, he discovered his interest were broader than Higher Education. Once Harrison eliminated the barrier of program mismatch, he was able to move through the program with minimal barriers. His discussion of barriers turned quickly to a discussion of his fit with his current program and the ease with which he was able to move through it.

I followed the interview protocol by asking Harrison about the financial impact of his doctoral studies. He immediately indicated that he was "very fortunate." He was able to secure an assistantship, as did his wife, that paid for his tuition and provided a stipend. He also worked part time on the side to provide extra income and create "stability" for he and his wife. He described the tuition waiver as a "huge gift" and did not perceive any financial barriers during his doctoral studies.

During the course of the interview, I did not see that Harrison struggled through the program in many areas. He was able to quickly overcome anything that might have gotten in the way. My next question asked him to tell me about a time when he might have considered quitting and what his motivation for persistence was. I knew that he had not thought about quitting and prefaced my question with this. I instead asked him about a time that he may have considered quitting or at least became extremely frustrated and/or discouraged with his program.

As expected, Harrison had not thought about quitting, but found that his initial program mismatch caused a great deal of stress and confusion for him. He talked to me about the struggle he experienced and described the decision to change programs.

> So I was sitting in the library on a Sunday afternoon and becoming more and more frustrated. I knew that program didn't match my interest, it was too narrow but I didn't know what to do about it. I grew more and more frustrated. I started thinking about my wife. She had taken a class in Adult Education and had told me a lot about the class…so that had been in the back of my mind. I got on the website and started looking at the Adult Education program and reading more about it. I realized that this sounded more like me. It was a Sunday afternoon and I was in the library. I looked up the number for the department and was going to call and leave a message. He answered his phone and told me to come on over. He sat down with me for an hour or so and talked about it and it just seemed to click. It was one of those moments where I went from 'wow, this isn't working, I don't know what I'm going to do' to 'wow, this came together.' And that was a key moment for me.

I learned a good bit about Harrison's goal commitment and determination through this story. Though he had not thought about quitting, he was frustrated that his program was not meeting his needs and fitting his research interest. He knew what he wanted to learn and he knew he was not meeting those needs in this program. Rather than quit the program, Harrison sought solutions and found a program more suitable to his goals. He entered the program to learn about how people develop and grow but has experienced his own development and growth in that process.

In a last-ditch effort to establish significant barriers to degree completion, I asked Harrison to tell me about any other barriers he experienced that we had not yet talked about. He continued to state, "he was very blessed" to have been able to "eliminate barriers." "Financially we were fine…I got quick feedback…we just didn't have a lot of hurdles." He talked about the year or so that he was in the wrong program and struggled with what he would do with the program but even this he eliminated with his move to another program.

He indicated that he was not that involved in the campus community or external community and that this is a decision he regrets.

> I didn't really give myself the opportunity to get involved in things happening on campus. That would have been nice. I was working a lot, I had my assistantship job and my consulting work and then classes. Outside of that I didn't really get involved in the University at all.

Integration was a factor found in previous literature. Integration within the department has been shown to have a positive impact on the retention of doctoral students. In Harrison's case, he did not have adverse side effects of his lack of integration but did exhibit an unfulfilled desire to have been more involved.

Harrison entered the program motivated by the attainment of useful knowledge. He was motivated by the prospect that "this is a degree that whatever I end up doing in life…this is useful." He also talked about the fact that once you get your PhD, "no one can take that away from you." He talked about how privileged he felt to have been provided the opportunity to obtain his PhD and now that he has, he knows he has worked for it and no matter what happens, it is his, he earned it.

My interview with Harrison accomplished a couple of things: I was able to address my gender concerns and I interviewed a participant with unique motivations. I entered the interview interested in finding out if I had any sort of bias toward male participants. My first interview with a male doctoral student did not go as expected. I felt like I was pulling answers out of him and really drilling into already answered questions seeking a depth that he was just unwilling to provide. I felt like his motivations were based primarily on career advancement and lacked the passion that I had seen from other participants. I thought that this may be a bias that I had toward males or that it could be a personality difference between men and women. I waited until my second male interview to explore these questions.

Harrison's interview went much differently than my interview with Frederick. I immediately felt more passion for knowledge and helping students from Harrison. His intrinsic motivation strongly overpowered his motivation for goal attainment. In fact, it was not until the last five minutes of my interview with Harrison that he mentioned obtaining the degree of PhD. Up until that point, his interest was in gaining knowledge and aligning his program with his interest. Obtaining the PhD for the sake of completing the PhD did not seem to factor into Harrison's decision to pursue the degree. With the ultimate goal of becoming a physician, Harrison's attainment of another doctorate degree was not necessary if his goal was to become a Doctor. His interest in the program was purely for gaining practical knowledge about adult learning and growth.

Harrison displayed a lack of barriers or at least an ability to quickly eliminate barriers during his degree progression. My interpretation of this was that he was not under any self-inflicted pressure to obtain a degree or to stick to a time line. Harrison wanted the increased education, skills, and strategies and focused more on the journey through the program rather than

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the result. Is this something that would be consistent for other participants? Are many of the barriers we perceive in our journeys because of the pressure that we put on ourselves?

At the conclusion of Harrison's interview, I had much to ponder. I no longer felt like I had a gender bias. Harrison's open and honest interview responses did not mirror those of Frederick. At this point, I feel that the difficulties with Frederick may have been about personality; an issue I will continue to explore as I conduct more interviews.   I also had new questions about the existence of motivation and what type of motivation is most influential in persistence for doctoral students.

Isabella.

My next interview was with Isabella, a recent graduate from the Adult Education program. Isabella's interview was one of the quicker interviews. I expected, during analysis to find that it lacked the depth I desired. Instead, I found that the answers she provided were simply more succinct and well thought out. Isabella talked a great deal of determination to complete the degree in the face of a good many hindrances.

I asked Isabella to tell me about her educational background and her decision to enter the graduate program.

> I got a degree in Human Resource Management in 2005 and then a Master's in
> Public Administration in 2009. In 2011, I received a graduate certificate in
> government contracting which led to my enrollment in the PhD program here. I
> had been working and had developed an interest in Higher Education. I really
> wanted to pursue becoming a faculty member. Because both of the programs
> where I had already obtained a degree required a terminal degree to become
> faculty, I decided to enroll in the Adult Education program. My ultimate goal was

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to go into teaching. When I graduated, I started a new position where I wasn't considered faculty per se, but it did involve a lot of training and a lot of educational training for mental health providers. I'm happy doing what I'm doing…I enjoy it but would like to pursue some online teaching in addition to what I'm doing already.

For Isabella, the pursuit of her doctorate degree was a necessary step to achievement of her career goal of becoming a faculty member. This kind of extrinsic motivation has been found to be extremely helpful in moving students through their programs. My interviews thus far have also supported this claim.

I talked with Isabella about her relationship with her advisor as well. She described the relationship as "pretty friendly." As she expanded on the relationship, I noticed the existence of relationship characteristics that could cause stress for a doctoral student.

My relationship was pretty friendly. I had a lot of resources available to me, however, one of the downfalls was that because they were so busy, they really don't have the time to dedicate their time just to you. So they're overwhelmed. They're teaching…they're writing…they're publishing and presenting at conferences. It's just a lot of work on their end, but as far as everything I would need it was great, it was just limited.

I remembered from a previous interview that advisor availability had become a barrier for another of my participants. I decided to ask Isabella about her advisor's availability directly. I sensed that she wanted to talk about it but that she was hesitant to say anything negative about her advisor. I sought clarification by repeating my interpretation of her comments so that she could continue to talk about it and make sure I understood her correctly.

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> I don't want to say that she wasn't available…it's just that…well I guess it's
> true…but not that she wasn't available, it's just that she had so many other
> obligations.

I identified faculty workload and availability as advisor relationship characteristics during my literature review. It was comforting to see that primary things that I had identified in the research to continue to appear in my findings.

Isabella went on to talk about her support systems. She identified her family, her husband, and her two children as major supports for her. She speaks to the level of their support as being, "the only reason that I was able to get through it in three years." While her answers were shorter than previous participants, I felt that she answered the question and could rarely find a reason o follow up with additional questioning. I felt a rapport with Isabella that gave me confidence that if she wanted to say something she would and my prying was unnecessary.

We then moved to a discussion about her external supports (i.e. previous preparation, individual characteristic, and finances). Isabella talked about her coursework as "not necessarily difficult" but "rigorous."

> It was just rigorous because of managing my fulltime job and my personal
> obligations. I also commuted about an hour twice a week for three years so I
> wouldn't say that the coursework was difficult, it was just a challenge for me to
> be able to juggle so many responsibilities. I did feel like a lot of the coursework
> did prepare me for the writing process because I was so aware of the theories in
> relation to what I was going to be writing about…so it really helped me to be able
> to pull from previous assignments, things we had done, and things that we had

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learned…just being able to plug some stuff in when I was starting the writing

process.

Listening to Isabella talk about her coursework brought to light a couple of factors. First, she had a difficult time with time management. This is a external barrier identified in prior research and one that is particularly influential for doctoral students because of their progression in life. The number of married and married with children as well as working students at the graduate level is significantly higher than the number of married and married with children undergraduate student. Managing life's obligations posed as a barrier for Isabella. However, she also mentioned being able to pull from past coursework as she began her dissertation writing. The freedom to research and tie coursework into her research interest helped her when it came time to complete the dissertation.

As Isabella continued to talk about her journey, she talked about the writing process as enjoyable. This speaks to her individual characteristics and served as a motivator during a time of her doctoral journey when many students become discouraged.

> Actually I love writing, so I started when I was in my courses. What really jump-started my writing process was the seminar course I took in the summer. It was really the perfect class to kick off the dissertation. We completely wrote Chapter one and got a good start on the other chapters. This kind of jump-started my process so I just kept writing in the midst of taking classes and working. I enjoyed that process. I enjoyed delving into the research and the literature and pulling it all together and making it my own. It was a good process for me.

In keeping with the consistency of questions asked, I began talking with Isabella about the financial impact of her doctoral studies. She, like many participants talked about the sacrifice of obtaining student loans.

> My finances didn't prevent me from completing my degree but it made it a bit of a challenge because we have so much debt from student loans. When I came here, I was a 4.0 student and when I left I was a 4.0 student. I feel like there should have been more resources or scholarships and awards for students that had a good GPA. Finding those was very rare and certain departments only got a certain amount of funding. I definitely felt it was something that would prevent others from finishing. From the financial side, it's a sacrifice. You enroll in a doctorate program and then have to pay all that money back. It would be great if the university could kind of make it more affordable or make more awards available to students.

While talking to me about her financial stresses, Isabella did not indicate that they were a barrier obtaining the degree but if I understood her correctly, she did feel that they were now a burden as she had to repay them.

Isabella seemed extremely motivated to finish her degree. When I asked her about a time she thought about quitting, she relied that she "never thought about quitting."

> The school part was really an escape from everything else. I never thought about quitting but I was very frustrated at times. It wasn't necessarily the educational experience, it was just my personal stuff…managing so many life obligations because I'm not a traditional student…we have a family and kids and I'm working 40 hours.

For the second time, Isabella talked about her time management as a significant barrier to her progress. Her home and family life while providing support also provided hurdles. Isabella continued talking about her decision to stick with the program and never quit by talking about her primary motivation.

> I knew this was a life goal and I felt like this would open doors for me in the future. The idea of completing the process would help me in the game so much more by achieving this goal.

I appreciated Isabella's forthrightness with her personal struggles. I have four kids, a husband, and a full-time job myself so I could relate to her stresses and frustrations. Interacting with other doctoral students who share life situations, goals, struggles and victories has the potential to act as a motivator for doctoral candidates. For me, Isabella's story allowed me to realize that I am not the only one struggling through this. It is not the academic part that is difficult…it's life. Making sacrifices for the long-term benefit is a choice that Isabella made. She sacrificed time with her family, her children, and her personal finances to be able to do something that she believed would "open doors for her in the future."

When asked about her support system, Isabella talked about her family, husband, and children. Later in the interview, I asked her about her biggest motivation and she talked about the support she received from her peers.

> I would say the camaraderie that I had with a couple of my classmates, because we kind of started around the same time. We took a lot of classes together, so that's been there, the team, being a part of a team…that kind of helped motivate me as well.

At the conclusion of the interview, I asked Isabella what she might have done differently if she had it to go over again. I find that this has been a good way to prompt participants to talk about a better way to do things which leads to a discussion of things that might have stood in their way. Isabella has previously mentioned finishing the program in three years and when asked what she would do differently, quickly replied "she wouldn't have pushed herself to write while taking classes." She describes her experience as "pretty stressful" due to the stress she had put on herself to finish so quickly. She reiterated her struggle with time management and urged entering doctoral students to allow plenty of time in their schedule so that you won't get overwhelmed with all of the personal obligations.

Jenny.

My next interview was with Jenny. Jenny is working on finishing her last bit of coursework for the PhD in Educational Leadership. From the outset of the interview, Jenny talked a good bit. I did not feel that I would have a problem getting descriptive responses from Julie during the interview and proceeded with confidence.

Jenny told me about her educational background in Elementary Education. She obtained a Bachelor's and a Master's in this area and then sought a certification in administration. After working for a short time, she felt the pull to return to school and obtained an EdS in Elementary Education as well. She is now seeking the PhD in Elementary and Secondary Administration. She talked to me about the sequence of events that led to her decision to enter the doctorate program.

> Well, at first, I went back for my Master's, I really didn't want to go back for my Master's but did and I really enjoyed school. I would have to say that I did it to better myself. I knew one day I would be in a position that would be in charge of

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making bigger decisions for education and for our children and I wanted to make

sure that I had the degree to back me up…to give me that support.

She continues talking about her motivations saying,

My plan has always been…I'm an assistant principal now…I've always planned

to be, this has just been my plan that … I know things don't always work out like

they're supposed to…but to be an assistant principal and then principal. Then

getting my PhD as a principal or even afterwards now…then moving on to the

central office or the state department and then eventually to go back to the college

level to teach.

Jenny had clearly thought about her progression through the educational system and what she

would need to accomplish to achieve each goal. This high degree of extrinsic motivation has

proven beneficial in other participants that have already graduated with their doctorate degrees.

Having a clear plan and path both academically and professionally allows students to move past

barriers as they arise.

As Jenny and I continued to talk, we moved into a conversation about her advising

relationship. She spoke very highly of her advisor, describing her as "awesome." The

relationship was very encouraging and motivating for Jenny.

The best thing about her is that I can go to her with anything and she will help me

figure it out. She really listens to what is going on. It's very open, very

supportive, very encouraging. If I needed a push in the right direction or to get on

the right path or even if I needed to focus somewhere else, then she directed me

toward that.

Additional supports included Jenny's peers in the cohort model. Frederick had talked about his

relationship with the classmates in his cohort as well. The Educational Leadership program

seemed to be the only one that admitted students into a cohort and this seemed to be a source of

support for their students.

> Well my cohorts with the EdS, since we started together, that's been the biggest
>
> thing. In the PhD cohort there's been seven of us from the EdS that have stuck
>
> together…we have really built connections with each other…and these are people
>
> that I didn't even know. I mean we met each other in class and formed these
>
> friendships where we could call each other and depend on each other.

Jenny's relationships with her peers served as a motivator for her. Many other participants

mentioned the support of peer relationships as well but her description of the friendships she

developed went beyond the academic relationship between classmates. She described her peers

as friends who could call and depend on one another. This type of peer/friend support is

important to her and is a result of the use of the cohort model of student progression.

Jenny also talked about the support she received from her department, describing the

professors as "encouraging." She felt that she could contact them and talk with them regularly

about anything. She briefly mentioned the support of her friends and family before returning to

the overwhelming support of her fellow classmates by declaring "the ones that are really

supportive are the ones that are in the program with you."

Jenny had thus far provided a great amount of detail of her doctoral journey. I could tell

that the interview was going to be one of the longer ones and felt the need to reign in the

conversation just a little bit. To do this, I tried to stay on point with my interview protocol by

moving on to the next set of questions. These questions addressed the external factors

influencing Jenny's degree progression either negatively or positively.

   We started by talking about her coursework and preparation for the dissertation phase of

the PhD. Jenny talked about her experiences in tackling the coursework and how she felt about

her preparation for the dissertation.

> The only thing I would say would be good is that…we started off with easier
>
> assignments…then you notice as you were going on like with your main classes,
>
> main professors, that they would give you harder assignments. And all along, they
>
> are telling you 'you probably need to write about this' or 'you might want to
>
> change the way you're saying it.' I feel like they are building you essentially to
>
> get ready for the PhD. …I did tons of research for my Master's so it wasn't hard
>
> but you have to get adjusted to what they are expecting.

Jenny also talked to me about the struggle to balance the obligations of her work and home life

with those of her doctoral pursuit.

> It was really challenging for me to get my schoolwork and my assistant principal
>
> duties done as well. I think it's just the role of assistant principal and not
>
> knowing what's coming. You don't know when you're going to be in a meeting
>
> until 5:00 and you don't know when you're going to have to do this or that and so
>
> forth. That's been the biggest thing…it's just been chaotic. You just have to
>
> know what you have to get done and you've got to get it done.

Jenny also talks about the financial impact of her doctoral pursuit.

> Basically, having a full time job, I couldn't have an assistantship or anything, so I
>
> had to pay for it myself. That really hasn't affected it at all though. I am

fortunately to where we can pay for it on our own. But we choose not to just

simply because we don't want to have to worry about having to make the

mortgage and plus if we wanted to go out and shop. If I want to do something I

can still do it because we took out loans so it has not really been a big issue at all.

Additional barriers for Jenny included her travel back and forth to classes. Her commute was

about an hour and fifteen minutes one way and she often made that drive two to three times per

week. For her it "isn't as bad as it seems" but she did think it significant to bring up when asked

about additional barriers.

Moving on from the barriers to her success in the program, I talked with Jenny about her

primary motivations during the process. Jenny stated quite simply, "I wanted to have my

doctorate." When asked to elaborate, Jenny described herself as "just determined…highly

motivated and determined…I'm not one to start something and quit."

As the interview went on, Jenny and I talked about her last few courses and when she

anticipated graduating from the program. She talked about something she hadn't mentioned

before but that I considered significant. Jenny obtained her Bachelor's, Master's, Specialist

degree in Elementary Education. She talked about a frustration at not getting better advisement

to vary her programs. When she graduates with her PhD, she will essentially have four degrees

in one field and has learned through the process that it would have been beneficial to pursue

degrees in different areas of education in order to better prepare for administration. She talks

primarily about her frustration with the school from which she obtained her Bachelor's and

Master's. She feels like she was misinformed about the expectations of administrators and the

usability of her degree once completed. This misinformation did not necessarily slow her

progress toward completion but did create a frustration that could have been easily avoided.

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Jenny also mentioned that she wished her program had more opportunity for involvement. When she entered the EdS cohort, they met with existing members of the previous cohort to ask questions and get to know their peers. This experience was beneficial to Jenny because she was able to learn about the program from those who had been in her shoes. This was a positive experience for Jenny but there had been no other such functions or involvement opportunities for her cohort. She feels that a better integration into the department may be beneficial and encouraging for students.

Karis.

My next interview was with Karis. I was excited about this interview. Karis is an employee of the University but also came to the United States as an international student. Though her status as an employee exempts her from many of the struggles a typical international student might have, I hoped she would be able to talk about her integration into not only her department and university but also the country as a whole. Karis has completed her coursework and her oral exams and is currently working on her IRB process.

Having worked in the university setting for several years, I had encountered many international faculty and students. The language barrier had rarely been an issue, but I also did not have to transcribe those conversations for later use. I was a little anxious about Karis' accent…not so much that I could not understand her…but that I could not understand her well enough to transcribe the interview. I did not want to have to ask her to slow down or speak more clearly because I wanted her to be comfortable. Seeing no way around this, I began my interview with Karis.

When I met Karis and began speaking with her, I quickly realized that her English was likely better than my own. There was still an accent but my anxieties were relieved very quickly

after meeting her. Apparently I was not the only one that had thought about this because Karis quickly offered to talk more slowly and repeat anything if necessary. She stated, "I know you have to transcribe this, so please let me know if I speak too fast."

I started talking with Karis about her educational background and motivations just as with the other participants. Karis had obtained an undergraduate degree in her home country of Turkey, "a long time ago." When she moved to the United States, she decided to go back to school and started the Master's of Adult Education degree. Once she obtained that degree, Karis moved into the PhD program, also in Adult Education. I asked her why she decided to pursue a doctorate.

> Well, that was always in my mind, I wanted to do it. At the time I couldn't because I was raising my children and only one of us could go to school at a time…so financial issues…I had to wait until I had enough money to go back to school and I have been an employee for four years. That kind of helped me think about getting back into education…the employee waivers helped with tuition which is really what kept me going.

In one question, Karis had already talked about her financial, familial and employment factors. She had answered the question about motivation for entering the program but provided a glimpse into her journey that I made sure to note. I then asked her what her future goals and how she planned on using the doctorate degree.

> Well, right now I am an employee and training adults, so this will help me do my job better, with training adults anyway. I am able to learn the science behind it and be able to apply whatever I am learning to my job. I am hoping I will be

better at my job and maybe later on when I've graduated I'll look at my choices.

So far, I'm looking for the immediate improvement to my current job.

Karis indicated that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors served as motivators for her. She not only wanted to gain knowledge and skills to aid her in her current position, but she looked forward to the job possibilities after attaining the degree as well.

I asked Karis to talk to me about her relationship with her advisor. At this point, I had interviewed a number of Adult Education students and had learned the typical response to this question from those particular students. Karis began by exclaiming, "I love my advisor!" She continued to describe her experience with her advisor as motivating and encouraging.

She is really helpful and she's the reason why I'm still in the program and trying

to finish it. She makes things so much easier, she understands. She advises really

good and she encourages me all the time. You know, at this age, I am a little

older learner, so at this age its easy to give up and she always pushed me to try

and beat that all the time. I have a full understanding of the program, she knows

the area, knows what we are supposed to be doing, so she is a great help.

I then moved on to asking Karis about other support systems. Karis pointed to her employer support as a primary motivation. I had had other participants mention the support they received at work as encouraging, but none talked about her work situation in quiet the same way as Karis.

I am working at a department here and several employees in my department are

also in graduate programs…so I have a great support system at work also. I have

been really lucky with a couple of my research bosses that they really encourage

me to go into the field and do more, as much as I wanted to. They really made it

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easy for me, so they support from here, from my friends and colleagues and of course my advisor.

Hearing Karis talk about her employer support reminded me of something I had discovered in the literature review. Martinsuo (2007) found that employment support correlated with higher persistence rates among doctoral students. He also found that students who sought employment within their academic field, were able to obtain more support and thus were able to persist to degree completion (Martinsuo, 2007). Karis' situation supported this claim. She was not only supported but also encouraged to use her experiences at work to further her academically. This must have been incredibly motivating for her.

I started to talk to Karis about her external support but felt the need to change directions a bit. At this point I departed from my interview questions for a moment because I felt that Karis had a situation that no other participant would have had to deal with. I didn't want to avoid the topic so I asked Karis to tell me how it has been adjusting to an American university as an international student. She had already talked to me about her language barrier so I did not feel that the question would make her uncomfortable. She talks about her experience with me.

> You know as an international student, language can be a main barrier in a lot of things, especially during coursework because being a graduate student requires you to read a lot and understand better and than can be a little challenging sometimes. You know, you have to use another language, understand it, and try to have perspective on it…so that is a challenge. As you read more and more, you use the language all the time and you kind of over come that difficulty over the years.

She also talked about her adjustment to the American university system.

The system is different. The whole graduate school system is kind of different than what we know back in my country, so I have to learn a lot about the rules and regulations and follow it.

I realize that I departed from my interview protocol but wanted to make sure that we had the opportunity to talk about how her international background might have impacted her studies. Now that we had, I jumped right back into my questions. I felt that the departure was warranted in her case and that the issue, whether it was motivating or hindering, would have qualified as an external factor.

Other external factors would have been her view of the coursework and how well it did or did not prepare her for future research. She felt that the coursework had been particularly helpful because she "had many projects for class work that I can actually use at my work." A primary part of Karis' job involved training others so she felt that she had been able "to use and apply a lot of the stuff I had used in the classroom at work too." She talked about her preparation for the dissertation phase through the support of her advisor.

Actually the guidance I got from my major professors was wonderful. She gave me the opportunity to take this summer course that prepared us with a checklist of stuff that we were supposed to do one at a time and I still keep going back to it. Every time I do one step, I check one off. There are due dates and dates that have to be met and things to be done so I really like the way this course presented this material to us. I don't have to stop and think 'what's next?' I just continue on through the list.

Karis is currently working on her IRB but is preparing for the dissertation. She described the experience to me in detail.

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I haven't been quite that far yet, but the writing part [is the most difficult]. I am

not really worried about the IRB process and I'm not really worried about doing

the study but I am really worried about writing the dissertation. Like I said, the

language can be a barrier sometimes and I do not write that much in my current

work….nothing beyond short emails…so actually writing my dissertation is kind

of challenging.

Karis and I then began a discussion about the impact of her finances on the pursuit of her

graduate degree. She had already mentioned that she was delayed in starting the program due to

the need to send her children to school instead. She has also mentioned the importance of the

employee waiver on her ability to attend courses and even begin the program. I knew that

finances had played a role in her decision to enter the doctorate program but didn't know to what

extent they slowed her progress until she opened up to me about it.

Well, it took me several years to do my Master's and my PhD, not because I was

dumb or anything, just financially that is all I could do. The university pays five

credit hours per semester and I was able to take two classes (6 hours) most

semesters and pay a little on top of the what the university pays and get by with it.

That's the main reason I was able to do it, otherwise I had two kids in college then

and couldn't pay their tuition and my tuition to be able to finish it if the university

wasn't helping. So that was a challenge for years and years. The university

always encourages us…my workplace encourages us…there are several ladies in

my department in graduate programs and we're getting really good

encouragement from the department in that. Over the years, I was busy with child

raising and financially I did what I could do to finish my PhD.

Karis talked about the employee benefit being one of the primary reasons for her entry into the Master's program and her continuation into the Doctoral program. I asked her if she thought she would have pursued the degree if she did not have the financial support of her workplace. She said, "Probably not because I would have been worrying about my kids' tuition, not mine at that point." She said that even if she had entered the program, if the university had not been paying for some of her coursework, she would not have been able to stay in the program.

In a related topic, Karis talked about her financial limitations drawing out the program longer. She says that she was able to take only two courses per term and pay a little on top of the employee benefit which made it "take much longer." She did say that it also helped make it more "manageable." Karis was working full time while pursuing this degree and felt that it would have been difficult to take course full time as well. She seemed thankful not only for the financial assistance of the university but for the limitations this placed on the number of courses she could take. She said it was "manageable with my work that way." She says, "it's nice that I could only take two classes because that's what I could handle, physically, so it worked out pretty good." Karis was able to take something that she initially viewed as a barrier (the limitation on how many courses she could take) and turn it into a positive that helped her manage her external obligations to work and family.

I asked Karis about a time that she might have considered quitting. Her answer came rather quickly and matter of fact. I was startled by the quickness of her response.

> It's just my personality…I'm not an easy quitter, period! I had some challenges
> in the past, I've had to take some family time and put it into studying and getting
> ready for classes or tests or whatever, but I was able to manage it. I'm not going

to quit at this point, I don't see myself quitting and it's just my personality. I'm

not easy to give it up.

Karis talked about her strong personality and sense of determination. Her ability to overcome

obstacles grew from a part of her personality that is drive to succeed.

As the interview ended, I asked Karis about any other barriers or motivators she might

have experienced that we had not yet discussed. She mentioned struggles she has heard about

from other classmates but had no additional barriers herself. She talked about, for the first time,

the support that she received from her family, specifically her kids and husband.

In the back of my mind I was kind of setting up a good example for them also,

you know that I feel I have to finish and show them that it can be done at any age

you want it to, as long as you want and stay on it. I think my support from my

husband and support from my workplace and my bosses really kept me going.

In her final thoughts about her own motivating factors, Karis talked about her family and her

desire to set an example for her children. These supports played a vital role in Karis' ability to

enter and progress through her program. Her innate desire to motivate her own children to

succeed served as a motivation in her own journey.

Karis' interview opened my eyes to the struggles that an international student may face.

Even though Karis has been in the United States for some time and her spoken English was

nearly perfect, she still described the presence of a language barrier when it came to the

academic world. For other international students, those just entering the United States, these

barriers are likely to be multiplied. This interesting finding could lead to a separate study of

international students in various disciplines. Karis also talked a lot about the overwhelming

support she received from her major professor and employer. These encouraging factors, paired

with her strong personality and "don't quit" attitude led Karis to strongly believe that she would soon finish the program.

Lacy.

In my final scheduled interview, I met with Lacy. Lacy, a former university employee, is currently preparing for her oral exams and hopes to begin working on her dissertation in the coming months. She is a student in the Higher Education program. In the discussion of her educational background, I learned that Lacy had obtained both a Bachelor's and Master's degree already. After she completed her Master's degree, she began working at a higher education institution. Once she had been working here for a couple of years, she decided to go ahead apply for the PhD program.

I asked her why she pursued the PhD and why she chose her particular program. She touched on several important factors that I made note of before moving on. She mentioned that enrollment was one of the "perks" of working here, that she was a lifelong learner, and she picked Higher Education because her position dealt with a lot of programming and administration.

Lacy described her ideal career goals as very fluid.

> You know, it keeps changing. When I was working at the university, my goal was to run my department. Now that I am no longer working there, the goal is just to run a program at the university. I have not yet found the one place that I want to be…student affairs is attractive to me…so is athletics…and I'm sure there are numerous other places that I just haven't had a chance to explore yet.

I hoped to clarify Lacy's intentions by asking if her if her intent was land in a position in which she could use her degree practically rather than the other end of the spectrum of becoming a life

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long researcher. Lacy quickly replied, "oh yes, the thought of research scares me, I do not want to do that."

In talking about her relationship with her advisor, Lacy had mixed responses. I could tell that she was hesitant to say anything negative about the advisor but that she wanted to provide me with the information I was asking.

> You know, it's not like a big relationship. And I have her because I originally had another advisor but had a personal conflict with that advisor that I thought would created a strange relationship so I asked to change and ended up with her. She's been so encouraging and she's just a positive person but I don't feel like I have a full relationship. It isn't what I expected…not that I know what I expected either though. It's good; I just don't feel like it's full.

Clearly, Lacy's relationship with her advisor could be more motivating and encouraging but she did not speak of it as a barrier either. She sounded more as if she longed for a closer relationship with her in the hopes that it would be more encouraging and motivating. I got the impression that she felt like she was missing out on something because of the casual, rather than close, relationship she shared with her major professor.

From the advising relationship, Lacy and I began talking about her other support systems. She mentioned friends and family as supporters of her degree attainment but did not talk at length about her support systems. She stated, "Really just friends and family...people who think I am better than I am. They just provide verbal support when I get discouraged." Lacy did not say much about her support system and I made note that this may not be something that she has a lot of. She didn't say that she didn't have much support but she also didn't say that she had a lot

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and when asked specifically to elaborate on the types of support she received, she didn't provide much more insight.

The external factors for Lacy were numerous. We talked first about her preparation through the completion of coursework. Lacy talked about her progression through the program and the moment she was able to "see what it's all about."

> Up until the last semester, I did not think it was as challenging as I had expected. I mean I pretty much learned something, just a little bit of something in every class, but there was some that I didn't…I don't know…they were just there. I had undergraduate courses that were harder. But my qualitative research courses there toward the end…they kind of made me see, okay, this is what it is about. This is what I'm trying to learn. Here are some of the things that I am being challenged to think about.

As a qualitative researcher, I try not to reduce my participants and their responses to a set of numbers but that is exactly what Lacy did when I asked her about her preparation for the dissertation phase. The question asked of her was, "do you feel like our coursework content prepared you for the dissertation phase of your PhD?" Lacy's response was, "on a scale of one to ten, probably about a four." Again, there was a reason that I chose qualitative research but Lacy's response was revealing of her thoughts on her program's coursework. She felt like she could have been better prepared for research and that the coursework did not adequately prepare her for what was to come. As she expanded on her experience with the dissertation-writing phase, she talked about her anxiety with research. She had already mentioned this when I asked her about her career goals. She clearly wanted no part of being a career researcher. She describes her feelings this way:

Well you know, I try to…well first of all I am just so glad to be done with

coursework. And then…well, I don't know, its kind of scary because it's all self-

directed. You don't have that one class where you have your weekly stuff do. I

now can see a little bit more why some people do quit the program at this stage or

stay ABD for a while. I have heard of people being ABD for five…six…seven

years and now I can see why to some extent. But I don't think I would ever find

myself in that situation, if there weren't extenuating circumstances.

Lacy also mentions another barrier found in the literature review: isolation. Much of the

dissertation-writing phase of doctoral study is self-directed and many candidates do tend to lose

motivation and direction during this phase. Lacy has just finished her oral exams and obtained

ABD status and she is already able to related to those feelings of isolation and fear of self-

direction. I interpreted this to mean that Lacy may have a issues with time management and self-

management that she knows will become a barrier for her during this process.

Lacy goes on to talk about her most difficult experience within the PhD program and it's

impact on her retention. The hardest thing for Lacy was "juggling the work-life balance"

between home, work, family, classes, etc. I took the opportunity during this moment to ask Lacy

if time management was an issue for her either now or in general. She indicated that a lot of her

time is managed for her but it is mostly a matter of having so much to do and finding the time to

do it all.

As we proceeded through the interview questions, we came to the point where I asked

Lacy about the financial impact on her graduate studies. I knew that she was a former employee

but did not realize that she no longer worked for the university (something I learned early on in

the interview). As an employee, her tuition would have been waived (partially) so I knew that at

some point there was a financial adjustment but I wasn't sure if it ever became a factor for her.

> I would have never started if the employee benefits weren't there. Once I started I
>
> was determined to finish but even when I lost my full-time job and lost those
>
> benefits…I did one semester on my own with the help of my family and then got
>
> a graduate assistantship. I pleaded for one because otherwise I wasn't going to be
>
> able to finish it financially.

Lacy's pursuit of the degree was contingent on financing from her employer. When she lost that

job, she had to depend on the support of family members to continue in the program. Ultimately

Lacy was able to find an assistantship (which waived tuition) so that she could finish the

program. In the face of her financial barrier, Lacy was able to secure on campus employment

that both paid for her courses but also paid her a salary. She does indicate that had it not been for

the assistantship, she would not have been able to stay in the program so the stresses of her

financial situation were extremely influential in her ability to complete the program.

Overcoming this financial barrier took a great deal of motivation from Lacy.

I asked her to tell me about at time that she thought about quitting the program and what

motivated her to stick with it. She again talked about the loss of her job and her perseverance

and determination to finish.

> The only time, I lost the job and had to pay for that one semester myself. I didn't
>
> really have the funds for it. I wasn't sure if I was going to stay here or what I was
>
> going to do. And then now, every now and then, I think about the fact that I'm
>
> not doing the writing that I should be doing everyday. But it all goes back to,
>
> 'I'm not a quitter, I'm going to finish this.' What keeps me from quitting is that

> I'm one of those that started and I'm going to finish. I've spent too much time to quit.

Lacy's strong personality and the 'don't quit' attitude is likely to carry her through a host of obstacles in pursuit of her doctorate degree.

As Lacy and I began to wind down our interview, I gave her the opportunity to talk about any other obstacles or supports that we had not yet discussed. She talked about her home and family life and the struggle to manage those life obligations. Like so many other participants, life happens and Lacy struggles to manage the many roles that she plays.

> Right now, I am a single parent of two kids, two very active kids, and it's hard to juggle going to class and making sure that they are taken care of and going to their activities but I just have finish.

Lacy stated later that her biggest motivation was the determination to show people who didn't think she could finish that she was going to do it. This attitude of determination will help Lacy overcome a myriad of obstacles on the way to obtaining her PhD.

So that's it. That is my tale of doctoral persistence in the College of Education. As my confessional ends, I am pleased with the interviews and the participants. My journey through this process has not been flawless. I have discovered many mistakes, many areas for improvement, and noted more questions than I probably answered. I learned a good bit about my participants, their programs, what drives them, what blocks them, what factors are most important to them, and so on. I have learned a good bit about myself and I've been encouraged through the entire process as I learned that we are indeed kindred spirits. We share the same journey with varying motivations and obstacles in our paths.

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One of the things that I discovered while researching in preparation for writing the confessional tale is that a true confessional is often a supplement to a realist tale; a more factual account of the researchers finding. When I first started this process, I used a codebook to categorize the content of the interviews. This helped me to break down the content into manageable chunks and extract emergent themes while at the same time, identifying a priori codes. Using this codebook and the transcriptions, I created a series of tables that presented a more factual account of the interviewee responses. In some ways it could be considered a highly detailed codebook with the categories being the research questions.

Findings Overview

As a novice researcher, I did not know how else to organize my data. I knew that my goal was to answer the research questions. By my interpretation, I think I have done that through my confessional tale. However, the quantitative part of my psyche wanted to see the data in table form as it directly related to the questions asked. I include this in my research findings to provide additional support for my confessional tale as I have likely failed to adequately report my findings for at least one person reading this dissertation.

Findings in relation to research question one.

Research Question 1 asks, "What are the barriers to completion of the graduate degree?" There are many barriers to doctoral degree completion. The literature points to a negative relationship with the faculty advisor as a key factor. This section outlines participants' responses that indicate that advisor relationship hindered their ability to move forward with the degree process. Overall, half (6 of 12) of students reported having a negative relationship or interaction with an advisor at some point in their doctoral studies that slowed them down or hindered them in some way. It should be noted however, that two of the participants started in another program

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outside of the College of Education and due at least in some part to their difficulties, changed to a different program and therefore a different advisor. Three of the participants requested a change from their originally assigned advisor to a different advisor by the end of their programs. Table 2 shows evidence of the findings discussed above via exerts from the participants interviews.

Table 2

Advisor Relationship as Barrier

Participant	Advisor Relationship as Barrier
Alice	When I was in the first program I was in, there wasn't much of an advisory type of relationship where the committee members or actually the professors pretty much stayed in touch with you, see where you're ... Of course I do know at the level of being a PhD, you need to take, at any level of school, you have to take ownership for your own progress, but it does feel better and it's helpful when you did have a supportive environment. In the PhD program I was originally in, I didn't feel the supportive environment. Once I moved over, it was good for the most part, but in the summer, professors are not as available and I had a hard time getting in touch with her a couple of times.
Charleigh	When I first began my program, I was assigned a professor…each time that I met with him, it would be very long, a hour and a half to two hours, and he would tell me lots of stories. I wouldn't always get my questions answered…I was too young to know anything. This original advisor wanted me to do a practice dissertation, where I would do a complete dissertation of doing his research for him, and not

get credit for it. Before I earned the right to do my dissertation because I was so young that I needed to prove that I was capable of doing it. I kept mentioning that there are things I wanted to do, which he wasn't interested in. I just was kind of feeling like I needed to make a change.

Danielle   I switched departments partway through and it was not like that in the department I came from. I almost was at the point where I would send emails and not get answers and when I changed advisors in that department, the person I changed to was not supportive, would not…didn't provide as much guidance about the whole process of presenting at conferences and doing dissertation type stuff. It was sort of like you were expected to figure it out.

Elaine   I feel like my progress might have been slowed down just a little bit, as she was assigned so many students at one time. The ones who had been in school the longest, it seemed like they were put first. It seemed like almost a whole year went by before some of my work was looked at.

Isabella   I had a lot of resources available to me; however, one of the downfalls was that because they were so busy, they don't really have the time to dedicate their time just to you. So they're overwhelmed…they're teaching…they're writing…they're publishing their papers…attending conferences...it's just a lot of work on their end, it was just limited. It's just that she had so many other responsibilities.

Lacy	It's not a big relationship. She's been encouraging but I don't feel like I have a full relationship. It's not what I expected. I originally had an advisor that was married to my current boss, I felt that would create an odd relationship so asked to switch.

The responses provided by interview participants also supported the research findings that lack of support is a barrier to graduate degree completion. Table 3 shows participant responses that supported this finding. During this study, only 3 of the 12 respondents indicated that the lack of support, from friends, family, employer, or otherwise, was an influential factor in the pursuit of their doctoral degree.

Table 3

Support as Barrier

Participant	Support as Barrier
Alice	I'm from Texas and that's where my family lives. That's a little support but they aren't there physically. I talk to them on the phone though.
Bailee	He (my husband) was supportive when I went back to school for my EDS. Then once I got into the doctorate program, he was not. I was gone a lot, but I think that over time, my husband just turned to drinking and that had really become a problem in our house. It was just hard on me; it was hard on the family. I did have to leave the program, because there was just no way I could concentrate.
Danielle	Well, my family, none of them live here, but my parents are supportive, just not here.

Prior research also indicates that academic integration and isolation played a role in the ability of the doctoral candidate to complete his degree. Table 4 outlines interviewee responses that support this research.

Table 4

Isolation as Barrier

Participant	Isolation as Barrier
Alice	Now I'm actively participating in a few organizations that I wasn't a part of when I was working on both of my graduate degrees, so now I'm more active in a few organizations and that's helpful, because you meet different people. You can't continually socialize, work full time and complete a degree, whether it's a PhD or a Master's.
Danielle	Trying to remain disciplined and stay focused and produce what you're wanting to do because that's one of the things about being a grad student. You have so much time that you have to control where as an undergrad, or even doing my master's, the schedule is much tighter. Where doing the PhD, I have a lot of down time.
Elaine	I just wish I would've had an opportunity…being so far away it was kind of hard to develop relationships with people in your class. I knew them but I didn't get to know them. When it came to statistics, instead of having to go through someone else, I could've went to someone in my class to ask for extra help.
Frederick	I'm a self-proclaimed procrastinator. I didn't realize how much went into a dissertation. There was just so many obstacles. The whole process, at the point (the dissertation) you become distance from your support system. You met with

	your advisor one, two, three times while you're on campus but once you're done, it's very easy to fall into the rhythm of the job and the rhythm of all the same thing.
Harrison	I wish I had given myself the opportunity to become more involved in the department and the university.
Isabella	I would say definitely have a support system because there will be times when you feel like no one understands the experiences you are going through. It is definitely good to have someone to talk to who may have experienced something similar to a professional program.
Jenny	I think if you don't have anybody and you're in this program, you need to make friends.
Lacy	It's kind of scary because not it's all self-directed. You don't have that one class. You don't have your weekly deadline. I find it a little bit harder to stay focused. I can see how it would take five, six, seven years to finish.

Additionally, research indicates that external factors are significant in the pursuit of degree completion. Table 5 displays the responses that indicated external barriers became a factor in the completion of the doctoral degree. I identified the external factors in the literature review as previous preparation, individual characteristics, home and family life, and work situations. I broadened the external factors to include financial concerns due to the loose interpretation that the work situation and home/family life were likely factors in the student's financial stability and/or stress during the doctoral program. I should note that all 12 participants exhibited at least one external barrier. This points to the variance of situations, personalities, circumstances, and commitments that play a role in the life of the doctoral student.

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Table 5

External Factors as Barrier

Participants	External Factors as Barrier
Alice	Let me see. Well, actually when I changed over from the first program to the other program, I didn't have an assistantship to the program that I graduated in, I didn't have an assistantship, because I lost it when I changed. That was something to consider, but like I said I mainly went ahead and did it and then just if I had to obtain any kind of loans or whatever, I guess I had to, because I needed to change over and I guess I made the best decision, because I was limiting myself to only being able to work in one field and now I can work in two or pretty much three. I can pretty much do a few more things, so the outcomes outweigh the risk. Of course I lost the financial assistance, but I think to gain another degree in a different field and then, so that the outcomes outweigh the risks.
	A second challenge was … I like statistics … but getting back into the hang of things was a challenge for me. It became a challenge because of the gap of time between taking it and needing it.
	I would say family…and the reason I say family is because …the didn't make me feel like I wanted to quit, but being a first generation to graduate with my Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD, there's a lot of unknowns and a lot of misunderstandings.
Bailee	We were able to take out student loans and if needed, pay out of pocket. I still had to work full time to be able to pay out of pocket.

The hardest part was just having to come up with a topic.

It was just one DUI after another and it was really hard on me, hard on my family. It was hard on the kids when it came to talking divorce, it just drove them crazy...I did have to leave the program because there was no way I could concentrate.

Charleigh   I'll say that the hardest thing is just trying to get through your stats classes and then apply them in a way that was helpful.

The first assistantship that I took was a really bad match. That was just a really hard emotional thing outside of class.

Danielle   I got an email two weeks before [I started] saying I didn't have an assistantship when I thought I had one. Because they didn't have grants, they didn't have contracts where I was working, so it was like 'whoa'! I had anticipated a certain income and to be able to take classes and then that semester, I could not.

I'm working on a project using a data set that already exist…it took forever for the agency to get me the data and then when we got the data it wasn't complete

Elaine   My employer paid for the first 5 hours, then we have to pay for anything above that. I did not want to make school last forever, so I decided to take nine to twelve hours every semester. Although I didn't personally have the funds, I had loans in order to cover that. To me, it worked out overall as long as I could pay those loans back.

It was a little scary in the beginning (the dissertation phase)…you have to figure it out.

There was a certain point with interpreting my data that I was afraid that it

wasn't going to be right. I was just so afraid that it might not be what they wanted.

Frederick   I am a self-proclaimed procrastinator and I didn't realize how much went into a dissertation.

The most frustrating would be the dissertation and the countless hours in the library…having to read on family vacations, at family events, Christmas, Thanksgiving…to get back to writing when it was hard to concentrate at home. I personally set it down to gain a fresh perspective and it would be hard to jump back into.

Having a full time job while working through my program, It involved me getting on the road right after school let out and head straight to class. It just became very tedious.

Georgia   With the amount that I have taken out, student loan wise. I have taken out more than the actually cost. Because of books, because there is travel involved, and then there is,... we got my computer that way. I don't know what I would have done without getting that new computer, when I started. Right now, I don't feel the impact. I know when I have to start paying the loans it's going to be a big struggle. I'm not looking forward to that at all. My hope is that because I have gotten advanced degrees, each advanced degree I get, because I am in education, I do get a pay raise.

There would be times when I felt like I was prepared and then times where I was staring at a blank page.

Having two kids, ages two and four, some nights you just can't get things done.

One of the difficult parts for me is feeling that 'am I doing this right?' 'Is this

enough?' 'Is it actually going to add anything?' I kind of struggle with that.

Harrison   As I was going through the Higher Education program…it felt a little too narrow

for where my interest were. It just didn't click…didn't fit.

Isabella   My finances didn't prevent me from completing my degree, but it made it a bit

of a challenge because we have so much debt from student loans. When I came

to Auburn I was a 4.0 student and when I left I was a 4.0 student. I feel like

there should have been more resources for scholarships and awards for students

that had a good GPA. Finding those was very rare and certain departments only

got a certain amount of funding, but I just felt like that was definitely something

that would prevent others from finishing. The main thing I would say would be

the financial side of it because the sacrifice that you enroll in a doctorate

program and to pay all the money back, it would be great if the university could,

you know, kind of make it more affordable or make awards more available to

students.

I would say that the coursework is not really difficult; it was just rigorous

because of managing my full-time job and my personal obligations.

Jenny   It was a real challenge for me to get my [school] work done and do my assistant

principal duty

I would say travel. It takes about an hour and fifteen minutes one way.

Karis   Well, it took me several years to do my masters and my PhD…just financially

that is what I could do. The university pays 5 graded hours per semester and I

was able to get two classes and pay a little bit on top of what the university pays

for and did fine with it. I had two kids in college then I couldn't pay their tuition

and my tuition to be able to finish it and the university was not helping, so that

was a challenge for years and years.

You know as an international student, the language can be a main

barrier…especially in coursework…it requires you to read a lot and understand

and try to relate to it.

I'm really worried about writing the dissertation. I do not write that much in my

work, just mainly short simple emails so actually writing my dissertation is kind

of challenging.

Lacy   I would never have started if the employee benefits weren't there. I did one

semester on my own with the help of my family, and then got an assistantship

because otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to finish it financially.

The thought of research scares me.

Right now, I am a single parent of two kids, two very active kids, and it's hard to

juggle going to class and making sure that they are taken care of and going to

their activities but I just have finish.

I also identified other barriers during the course of the research study. I outline the

barriers mentioned in the research study but not identified as major factors in prior research in

Table 6 below. Many of these barriers fall under what Bean would label as external factors (i.e.

family, work, personal issues) and some are unique to certain individuals (i.e. language barrier).

It is important to note that I coded many of the barriers in more than one way. For example,

participants may have talked about a non-supportive relationship. I would this as a support

system barrier. However, the circumstances that led to that lack of support may have included

family tragedy or relationship struggles and therefore coded as either external (if it dealt with home and family life) or additional barriers (if it dealt with something not mentioned in prior research. Much of the evidence I presented can be interpreted in a variety of ways, none of which is exclusively right or wrong. For this reason, it was not uncommon to see the same evidence in support of more than one barrier or motivator.

Table 6

Additional Barriers

Participants	Additional Barriers
Alice	One other barrier was just time. Trying to make sure I balanced my time. I think you maybe were going to ask that if I be then went into something before you were going to ask it, but just down to my time. I was working full time, completing a degree and then ... Oh, what I was going to mention about family as well, is that last year my mom was in the hospital three or four times in the emergency room and then I was completing my degree, so that was a major issue. I, of course, didn't plan on quitting, but it just made me wonder if I was going to delay or what I was going to have to do, because my mom was in the hospital a few times last year. That was a big challenge for me as well.
Bailee	School can be strenuous and it could be a strain on your family. My husband turned to drinking and it had become a problem in our family. It was hard because I didn't want to leave him because I knew it could be fixed. It was hard on the kids because when it came to talking divorce and splitting up, it just drove them crazy. I just felt like my whole life was falling apart. Along with that, I had a brother to get killed, my best friend died in a car accident, my mom passed, my

grandmother passed, I had two nephews to die tragically, all of this in the middle

of me trying to finish school. My kids themselves were a barrier as well. I felt

like I was missing out. I was a strong advocate in the school, I did a lot for the

school just to try to make up for some of the time that I'm not at home. They'd

see me a lot at school but sometimes the kids were acting out and that was

another thing so worrying about them and trying to stay close to them, that was a

problem as well.

Danielle   I would say that I've had wonderful help from faculty in overcoming barriers –

sometimes campus is not fully accessible to folks who are visually impaired so

some tasks, I'll try them and they don't work well or what have you. Even in co-

teaching, we have our students just email us directly, we just use canvas to post

things for them, so that I don't miss anything accidently.

Elaine   The thing that made it somewhat more difficult was the travel. I would get off

work early and ahead to class and get there just in time for class.

Georgia   Really, my main barrier that I've tried to overcome has been staying a parent,

working full time, are really my main things. You can't put school work,

education work, in front of being a teacher.

Isabella   Time management. Sometimes you just get overwhelmed with all of your

personal obligations.

Jenny   I would say travel. Travel back and forth to classes.

Lacy   I'm a single parent of two kids, very active kids, so it's hard to juggle being able

to go to class and make sure that they're taken care of and going to all of their

activities. The most difficult part was just juggling, you know, family, classes,

work.

Findings in relation to research question two.

Research Question 2 asks, "What are the motivators to completion of the graduate

degree?" In contrast to the barriers to doctoral completion, there are motivating factors as well. I

identified the advisor relationship as one of the most important factors in the doctoral process.

This can be both a barrier and a motivator. Table 7 outlines the interviewee responses that

support the claim that a positive relationship with the major professor results in a motivating

factor toward completion of the doctoral degree.

Table 7

Advisor Relationship as Motivator

Participant	Advisor Relationship as Motivator
Alice	I felt that I could talk to my professors, which I did…even outside of class or email them if I had questions about something and so I feel like I can most likely contact them right now and they know who I am. It does feel good when you have the supportive environment of your professors or instructors to be able to give you advice. My advisor, she was an amazing professor. For the most part, everything just worked out.
Bailee	I have the best relationship with my major professor. You can't really ask for anyone better. A great heart. They love and care about students. They're going to stick with you through it all and through all of your difficulty. The never pass judgment. They can be firm but they're fair. They want to see you make it and whatever it takes, they help you get to that point.

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Charleigh	They created an environment where they wanted you to succeed. If you were willing to do the work, and be on time, or whatever it is, if you had a deadline you were pushing for, they would do their best to kind of help meet you where you were. They were just very very helpful, accessible, talkative, and really just made this program a pleasure to be a part of.
Danielle	I feel very supported. If I have a question, I get an answer. All of the people on my committee have been very helpful and it's fabulous. Much easier to stay motivated.
Elaine	My major professor was very professional. If I needed anything, she was there to give me assistance. I was often off campus and hours away and she would make it where I could watch classes while they were happening and be a part of the class.
Frederick	So I chose my major professor out of a mutual interest in a topic for dissertation, respect for her wanting to help students and wanting to better Auburn University and her department. We worked well together from the beginning and I still call her and guess consider her a mentor and friend at this point. She was always there with any questions. She would be candid and understanding with the writing process, subject matter, details, everything. I'm blessed to have the relationship I have with my chair.
Georgia	She's been with me throughout the Master's, EDS, and PhD. She's just been phenomenal in the fact that she is very quick on feedback and that positive feedback that I have gotten every time. She really pushed me forward to keep going. She always pushed me to think beyond what I can think. I want to do it

and do it well. That kind of partnership with her, possibly giving me critical feedback making me really think clearly about the present matter. What I really like is she is very down to earth, she is easy to talk to, I've already had a few meetings with her this semester.

Harrison   We had an incredibly respectful … just great relationship overall. I honestly do not know if I would have ended up completing the program if it wasn't for the way that he supported me. The way that he encouraged my through process and my interest. He never created roadblocks. He helped me refine my thinking and never created road blocks.

…just provided me with the structure and the support to do what I did in the time fashion that I did.

Whenever I would submit a draft, I would get immediate feedback, within a week, so that was definitely a big help.

Jenny   I love my advisor. She is awesome. The best thing about her is that I can go to her with anything and she will help me figure it out. If I'm worried about something, she'll help me figure it out. She really listens to what's going on. It's very open and very encouraging. She also helped me too, whenever if I needed to be …if I needed a push in the right direction or get on the right path or if I needed to focus somewhere else then she'd direct me towards that.

Karis   I love my advisor. She is really helpful and she's the reason I'm still in the program and trying to finish it. She makes things so much easier, she understands. She advises really well and encourages me all the time. She always pushes me to try and beat that (giving up) all the time. She is a great help.

Beyond the advisor relationship are other motivating factors. When asked what the main motivator in the process of completing their doctoral studies was, interviewees provided a variety of responses including institutional supports and integration. Table 8 shows the responses as provided by the participants.

Table 8

Integration as Motivator

Participant	Integration as Motivator
Bailee	Every opportunity that I had as far as conducting professional development or putting on a workshop, coming back to school, being at school during the summer, I took advantage of those opportunities.
Charleigh	I was fortunate to have an internship on campus, and I was a [graduate] assistant on campus and that's how I was able to work part-time, getting tuition paid, and really having plenty of time, and a flexible enough schedule…to be able to block out time to really just get my dissertation done.
Georgia	I have a friend, a classmate and we're pushing each other to get it done. Wednesday night is dissertation night, we come every Wednesday night to work on my dissertation.
Isabella	The camaraderie that I had with a couple of my classmates, because we kind of started around the same time. We took a lot of classes, together, so being able to be a part of a team, that kind of motivated me as well.
Jenny	Well, my cohort, since we started together…that's been the biggest thing…we really built connections with each other. …with my professors…I stay in contact with them, and we just talk to each

other, not every week, or every month, but we keep in contact.

Based on the literature review, not only were advisor relationship and integration important, but support was a vital part of doctoral degree completion. I asked participants to talk about their support systems and their impact on the doctoral progress. Responses from interviewees that talked about their support systems as a source of motivation are tabulated below.

Table 9

Support as Motivator

Participant	Support as Motivator
Alice	One was my mom and my sister…I was able to talk to them all the time on the phone. That was one thing that was able to help me was my support system of a few family members.
	Another thing was my religious affiliation.
Bailee	I had support from my mom. My sisters were very supportive. My brothers were very supportive. My husband was there too.
Charleigh	My greatest support system was my husband. There was really a great thing going, that we understood each other's schedules.
	I was fortunate enough to have an internship on campus.
	Our families were supportive as well.
Danielle	In this department, I feel very supported. My parents are supportive and I can talk to them and I have very good friend who just kind of encourage me and I feel like I have people kind of rooting for me.
Elaine	My husband was being supportive raising our children. I had a co-worker who

was my lead support and then the county extension office (where I work).

Frederick   The [support from the] main professions in the department and then [from] fellow classmates. Because of those friendships and being in the same boat, everyone has the exact same problems, at the exact same time. Going through them together. They served as a great motivator. I had a great parents, and I'm one of seven children. I'm right there in the middle, so cheerleading support from other siblings.

Georgia   I would say mainly family…I have a very supportive husband. We've been together a long time. We support each other and then some. Sometimes he pushes me past that procrastination.

Then my parents and his parents, this couldn't have been done without them.

Harrison   My wife was in the doctoral program with me and that was nice because we were able to support each other and really understood what the other was going through. My primary family was all very supportive as well.

Isabella   Definitely my family, my husband and my family definitely supported me. We have two children so I had a huge support system and I know that's the only reason that I was able to get through it in three years.

Jenny   Friends and family, they're supportive, but the ones that are really supportive are the ones that are in the program with you.

Karis   I am working in a department and several employees in my department are also in graduate programs, so I have a great support system at work also. I have been really lucky with a couple of my research bosses that they really encourage me to go in the field and do more, as much as I wanted to. They really made it easy for

	me, so the support here from my friends and colleagues and also my advisors made it easy.
Lacy	Really just friends and family who just encourage and think I'm better than I am.

Beyond the advisor relationship, integration, and support systems of the doctoral candidate, a number of external factors impacted the motivation toward degree completion. Kember addressed the impact of external factors more so than any other researcher. Kember identified previous preparation, individual characteristics, home and family life, work situations, and goal commitment as key factors influencing the decision to dropout of academic programs (Kember, 1990).   Due to the large number of external factors, I provided the evidence in shorter quotes taken from participant responses unless clarification was needed through additional context.

Table 10

External Motivators

Participant	External Motivators
Alice	Religious affiliation…I did attend church and that helped.
	Wanted to be called Doctor.
	Had an assistantship for part of it.
Bailee	Keep advancing.
	Just pray really really hard that God would give me the strength.
Charleigh	Internships on campus.
	Flexible work schedule.
	Tuition paid for.
Danielle	Different perspective [when changing degree programs].

Allow me to teach and work with students or get back into the career world.

Elaine   I plan to move up.

[my work] paid for the first 5 hours and then we paid for anything above that.

I saw myself standing up there being hooded.

Frederick   Career opportunity.

Wanted to be a professor.

[in response to finances being a barrier] No, it was never a barrier.

Georgia   I wanted to do administration.

I would definitely like to be a principal and turn that at some point into a central

office level.

That kind of partnership [with a professor] .

Each advanced degree I get, because I am in education, I do get a pay raise.

I've been able to research what I want to research.

I can get a higher paying job…to have a shot to provide for their needs.

Harrison   I got interested in Adult Education through working in residency life. I wanted

to know more about student development, how students grow and learn. I wanted

to learn how adults learn so that I can teach them.

Some professors just made the concepts relatable…not necessarily easy, just

relatable. The courses were practical…they provided me with practical ways to

approach how people learn.

Very fortunate to be able to work with the office of university writing…in

addition to that, I had a consulting business, so economically, we were relatively

stable. Assistantships provide tuition remission so that was wonderful.

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Occupationally, I saw myself going to medical school…in that setting, every interaction is an opportunity to educate…having an understanding of how adults learn will be a great resource.

Isabella   I wanted to really pursue to become a faculty member.

I knew this was a life goal and would open doors for me in the future.

Camaraderie of my classmates.

Jenny   I really enjoyed school.

To better myself and find a position that would be in charge of making bigger decisions for education and for our children.

To be an assistant principal…then as a principal…then moving on to a central office or state department…and then eventually go back to the college level to teach.

I'm fortunate to where we can pay for it on our own.

I wanted to have my doctorate.

Highly motivated and determined…I'm not one to start something and quit.

Karis   I am hoping I will be better at my job and maybe later on when I've graduated I'll look at my choices.

I have a great support system at work also.

I have done a lot of projects for class work that I can actually use at my work.

The university pays for 5 hours per semester…that's the main reason I was able to do it.

I'm not an easy quitter.

The support that I get from my family and my friends and my workplace and my

boss is really the main thing that kept me going.

Lacy   To just move up at the university.

            I would never have started if the employee benefits weren't there.

            Just to prove to all the people that don't think I can do it that I can.

Findings in relation to research question three.

Research Question 3 asks, "How do students perceive their ability to complete their doctoral programs?" I asked opened-ended questions with the aim of enabling the participants to talk freely about their experience in the doctoral program. As a part of this experience, interviewees identified a number of both barriers and motivators. During the semi-structured interview, I asked the participants questions that sought to establish their commitment to finishing the degree in relation to those barriers and motivators. Table 11 outlines interviewee responses that speak directly to their most motivating factor(s) in pursuit of the doctoral degree.

Table 11

Most Motivating Factor

Participant	Most Motivating Factor
Alice	I want to be called Dr. Smith. I want that title, I want that respect.
Bailee	I just had to get on my knees one night and just pray really, really hard that God would give me the strength. Miraculously he did and I made up my mind that now I'm going to buckle down and finish it. Whatever comes my way is out of my control, so I just asked God to give me strength and just accept whatever's in his will.
Charleigh	I just always thought in the back of my mind that that's what I would do. It was

just I always kind of felt like that's something I would do at some point. I never really thought about quitting, I would just get frustrated.

Danielle   I realized one of my previous supervisors had an Adult Ed degree and she was doing what I wanted to ultimately do, so it helped me have a different perspective and just changed what I needed to do. My biggest motivator has been the hope of being able to get a job that will allow me to teach and work with students or get back into the career world.

Elaine   I would say that when I received my EDS and I saw them hooding the doctoral graduates, I wanted to be standing there. Every time things get hard, I always remind myself that I saw myself standing there and they were hooding me with my doctorate.

Frederick   Never thought about quitting, it just wasn't an option. My biggest motivation was to be able to …the reason I went in was because I didn't agree with my bosses treatment of students or how they ran the school angered me so I wanted to be a positive voice for the students. I want my students to come to me for help.

Georgia   My biggest motivator is a person, my husband. He keeps encouraging me to get it done but on the flip side my children are also motivation for me. I've tried to do this on the fast track. I knew that I was taking moments away from my children and I've heard from many people you're going to regret that. I did everything I could to do my school work when they were asleep. I know that after I have this PhD, I can get a higher paying job, although it may come with more work I would still like to have a shot to provide for their needs...take them

	on more trips…the thought of I'm going to make more money because of this
	degree has definitely been a contributing factor.
Harrison	Knowing that this is the degree that is applicable to whatever I end up doing in
	life…that was nice.
	Once you get your PhD, nobody can take that away from you.
Isabella	I knew this was a life goal and would open doors for me in the future. The idea
	of completing the process would help me in the game so much more by
	achieving this goal. Also, the camaraderie that I had with a couple of classmates,
	because we kind of started around the same time. Being able to be part of a
	team…that kind of helped motivate me as well.
Jenny	I wanted to have my doctorate. I ought to get my doctorate. I'm just determined.
	Highly motivated and determined. I'm not one to start something and quit.
Karis	Well, my personality, I'm not an easy quitter period. I don't see myself quitting
	and I think it's just my personality.
Lacy	To prove to all the people that think I can, that I can and did finish.

I also asked participants about a time that they had considered quitting the program and what kept them from doing so. The aim here was to identify what motivated the student to continue when they really wanted to quit their programs. The researcher looked at both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations in these responses. I should note that not all participants had contemplated quitting their program. Seven of the 12 interviewees identified an event or series of events that led to their possible resignation from the doctoral program. Of the seven that had thought about quitting, two ultimately did quit their current programs and moved to a different doctoral program within the College of Education. Only those participants that had thoughts of

quitting were asked to explain why they ultimately decided not to do so. Table 12 outlines the responses.

Table 12

What kept you from quitting?

Participants	What kept you from Quitting?
Alice	I couldn't just quit – I wanted that PhD. I eventually did stop that program and enter a different one because I couldn't just quit.
Bailee	With continued support from family and friends, I did have to leave the program because there was just no way I could concentrate and just focus. I just kind of got back into the swing of things and because I just felt like this is something I wanted to do, I needed to do for my family, and it would help in my career.
Danielle	I just stayed around and one of the instructors needed help evaluating course materials so I got an assistantship doing that and then someone suggested I talk to these other professors and it just worked out.
Elaine	What kept me motivated is that I'm the first person in my family, from my mom's side, as well as my dad's to acquire a PhD. I feel like I am making history for the family and setting an example for my children.
Georgia	That's where that support, my husband really still told me, 'we're going to get through this,' 'you can do this,' 'we'll make it work.'
Harrison	I was sitting in the Library on a Sunday and just started thinking about how I was going to use my degree and just got frustrated. So I got on the website and did some research and called the Adult Education program director and we met that day for an hour or so. It just came together – it was a big moment for me.

| Lacy | I'm not a quitter. I wasn't sure if I was going to stay here or not, but I'm just not |
| | a quitter. |

Research question 3 aimed to answer the questions, "how do students perceive their ability to complete their doctoral programs?" In a quest to answer these questions, I had to view the responses from both the emic and etic perspectives. Much of the analysis of this research question relied on my interpretation of the interviewees' responses to my questions.   The primary factor in how a student perceives their ability to complete a program presented itself in the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that are present. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation plays into the level of goal commitment of a student (Kember, 1989a). The level of goal commitment of doctoral students directly impacts their ability to complete the program (Kember, Hong, & Ho, 2013). Students with significant barriers were able to overcome with a counterbalance of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Conversely, the slightest barrier could distract students who lacked significant motivation. In Tables 11 and 12, I outline student responses when asked about their motivation and commitments.

Findings in relation to research question four.

Research Question 4 asks, "What are the relationships among barriers, motivators, and graduate students' perceived abilities to complete doctoral programs?" Throughout the interview, I asked participants about various barriers and motivators. I also asked participants about difficult moments in their degree completion process and what factors kept the student engaged in the program. For each participant I analyzed the perceived barriers, motivators, status in program, and my interpretation of their perceived ability to complete in order to explore the relationship between these responses. In order to explore this relationship, it is important to revisit that Participant's Status table (Table 1).

Table 1

Status in Program

Participant	Status in Program
Alice	Recent Graduate
Bailee	Graduating this semester
Charleigh	Recent Graduate
Danielle	ABD
Elaine	Recent Graduate
Frederick	Recent Graduate
Georgia	Finishing Coursework
Harrison	Recent Graduate
Isabella	Recent Graduate
Jenny	Finishing Coursework
Karis	ABD
Lacy	ABD

For the seven students who had graduated (or have now graduated) it is more comprehensible to explore the relationship between their responses and the outcome of their program. We can examine these relationships easily because we have all of the information. For the remaining five participants, their future remains unknown. We can only use the findings from the seven that we know to have been successful and the relationships between their positive and negative experiences to draw conclusions for the remaining participants. A discussion of these relationships follows:

Alice.

Alice has graduated from the PhD program. As a student from Texas with little local supports set up and a student that changed doctoral programs at one point while at this university, Alice displayed a high degree of motivation to complete the degree. Terms used to indicate this include, "first-generation to graduate with my Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD," I have earned my degree, respect it and call me Dr. Smith," " I wanted to teach and needed a PhD." Despite the significant barriers (i.e. attending a program a significant distance from family support system, changing programs in the middle of the doctoral studies), the motivating factors and Alice's degree of commitment to obtaining the doctoral degree aided in the successful completion of the graduate degree.

Bailee.

Bailee displayed a significant amount of barriers to completion (i.e. unsupportive husband, emotional issues of husband with effects on overall family support system, death of several family members, time management issues, children's discipline issues) that eventually led to a leave of absence from the doctoral program. The motivating factors (i.e. positive relationship with advisor, desire to obtain PhD for the purposes of teaching and pay raise, as well as various religious and familial supports) led to a return to graduate studies and eventual graduation from that program. In this instance, Bailee left the doctoral program due to external stress factors but the motivating factors and reasons for entering the degree led to a return to the graduate program. The perceived ability to complete the degree superseded the barriers Bailee faced.

Charleigh.

Charleigh indicated a lack of barriers. She substantiated this by saying,

> Like I said, we were really fortunate that we kind of either didn't have, or we
> were able to remove a lot of barriers just to be able to get these programs done.
> Great people in classes, really wonderful instructors on a regular basis. Like just
> the professors in the classes for the most part were really engaging and fun.

Charleigh did indicate that a change in advisor was necessary during the beginning stages of the
doctoral program. Through a series of events and meetings with the original advisor, the she
discovered a "need to change advisors" to find "somebody who will be on that team for me."
Once a more suitable advisor was assigned, she was able to complete the degree with little to no
further complications. Charleigh's motivating factors (i.e. advisor relationship, mutual respect
with spouse also in the program) outweighed the barriers to allow the speedy completion of the
doctoral degree.

Danielle.

Danielle indicated an early barrier in having to change departments partially due to
changes in financial status and advisor relationship:

> One of the reason I changed departments wasn't just because of my experience
> with the faculty over there, but because when federal legislation changed
> regarding the qualifications required for rehab counselors, I thought universities
> might not be hiring as many faculty to teach in graduate programs.

I would say there was one semester, I got an email two weeks before saying I

didn't have an assistantship when I thought I had one because they didn't have

grants, they didn't have contracts where I was working, so it was like 'whoa!' All

of a sudden, I had anticipated a certain income and to be able to take certain

classes and then that semester I could not.

I would send emails and not get answers and when I changed advisors in that

department, the person I changed to was not supportive…didn't' provide much

guidance about the whole process of presenting at conferences and doing

dissertation type stuff. It was sort of like you were expected to figure it out.

Additional barriers presented by Danielle included a limited support system due to a great

distance between her and her family and dealing with technological modifications and

accommodations due to a visual impairment. Among contrasting motivators is an extremely

positive relationship with the new advisor and department, obtainment of an assistantship, and

the hope of finding quality employment once the degree is completed. Despite the significant

barriers, Danielle indicated a strong commitment to finishing the degree and at the time of her

interview was beginning her dissertation phase.

   Elaine.

   Elaine talked primarily about her barriers in the area of picking a dissertation topic, and

timely responses from committee members.

   It was a little scary in the beginning. You have to figure out, 'where do I start?

I felt like my progress might have been slowed down just a little bit, as she was

assigned so many students at one time. The ones who had been in school the

longest, it seemed they were put first. The ones who came in later, we had to

wait. It seemed like almost a year went by before some of my work was

reviewed.

The motivating factors for this participant included being the first in the family to obtain

a PhD and a strong desire to set an example for her children.

I feel like I'm making history for the family and setting an example for my

children. You always want your children to do better…that kept me motivated. I

didn't want to give up, because if I would have given up, then I was like, 'what

would I be doing then when things get hard?'

The barriers, while significant, were not as powerful as the personal motivating factors

talked about by the participant. The overpowering motivators paired with the ability to complete

the degree enabled the participant to graduate from the doctoral program.

Frederick.

Frederick, also a graduate of the doctoral program, discussed strong support system,

strong relationship with advisor and department, high degree of motivation, and lack of financial

barriers. The reasons for entering the graduate degree consisted of a desire to enter law school

but morphed into a desire to obtain gainful employment in the field of K-12 employment. A

strong desire to become a college professor, for which a PhD is required, was also listed as a

strong motivator for finishing the PhD. Frederick suggested that there were few, if any barriers

to completion of his doctoral degree. He also identified the dissertation phase of the doctoral

degree as the only difficult part of the process. The high level of motivating factors and low

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level of barriers, led to his speedy graduation from the institution with the desired doctoral degree.

>   *Georgia.*

Georgia indicated a strong desire to pursue a PhD from as early as high school and indicated that throughout her personal and professional life the desire to obtain that degree has always been a factor. Georgia also expressed that her strong relationship with not only one but two department faculty, one of which served as the major professor, was extremely encouraging. Additional motivators included the strong support from the spouse and other family members and classmates as well as the possibility of a higher paying job once the PhD is obtained.

> Well, it kind of all excited me when I was in high school. I kind of had this thought as a tenth grader standing in the office of my high school and it just stuck with me. That had always been my goal and my plan.

> She talked about doing a partnership between her and another teacher, another professor. Where she would really be there for me but this other person would be my actual advisor. I had a really good relationship with her. She's been with me through my master's, EDS, and doctorate. She's just been phenomenal in the fact that she's very quick on feedback and that positive feedback that I've gotten every time, it's really kind of pushed me forward to keep going.

> I have a very supportive husband. We've been together for a long time, we support each other and then some, so each time that I need, 'hey, I got to work on

this paper, it's going to take me all day Sunday,' he is up for the task. Sometimes he pushes me past that a little bit.

…then there are my parents and his parents. This couldn't have been done without them. They have had countless times in picking up my kids, babysitting my kids, when my husband couldn't be there to get them. They have been a major source of support in that realm.

I have a classmate from my master's level. We tend to get along and she's been a huge support. We've been through everything together. We're pushing each other to get it done. We read over each other's writing and keep pushing forward that way.

Georgia indicated very few barriers. The barriers that seemed to be a factor for her were the management of time and doubts about her own abilities. The barriers that indicated a feeling of inadequacy are indicated by key phrases such as: "am I doing this right," "is this enough," "is this going to actually add anything," "don't feel like my topic is usable." Barriers that indicated a struggle with time management include the following statements:

That was very difficult. On top of two kids and the doctorate, I have a full time job. I have to teach the whole time. There are papers to grade, lesson plans to make…This was the first year I was not in the classroom as a teacher though my workload hasn't changed. That definitely was a very difficult time.

For Georgia, the strong advisor relationships, support systems, and long-time desire to enter the doctoral program have led to a strong belief that she could finish the program. At this

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time, the participant is finishing her doctoral coursework and preparing to enter the dissertation phase of obtaining the doctorate degree.

Harrison.

Harrison has graduated from the doctoral program and moved on to a medical program in another part of the state. He talked about the overall absence of barriers to success and strong motivating factors. Harrison was able to finish the degree program in about three years. Statements supporting the low barrier/high motivator relationship are as follows:

> My advisor didn't create any roadblocks. We had an incredibly respectful … just great relationship overall. I honestly do not know if I would have ended up completing the program if it wasn't for the way that he supported me. The way that he encouraged my through process and my interest. He never created roadblocks. He helped me refine my thinking and never created road blocks.

> …just provided me with the structure and the support to do what I did in the time fashion that I did.

> Whenever I would submit a draft, I would get immediate feedback, within a week, so that was definitely a big help.

> I was able to secure an assistantship with the University Writing Center and in addition to that, I had a consulting business on the side. With the assistantship comes tuition remission so there were no financial burdens.

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Knowing that this is the degree that is applicable to whatever I end up doing in life…that was nice.

Once you get your PhD, nobody can take that away from you.

Similar to Charleigh, this Harrison was able to eliminate the few barriers that existed and create an environment of success in order to persist to degree completion. (I should note here that Charleigh and Harrison are married and pursued degrees at the same time in different areas. They both speak highly of the support they have in one another.) Harrison is highly educated and highly motivated. The relationship between his ability to persist and his ratio of motivating factors to barriers created an environment in which he was able to advance through the program and graduate quickly.

Isabella.

Isabella possessed many motivating factors, starting with the desire to become a faculty member, a strong support system, ease of coursework completion, and a strong love of the "process" of writing the dissertation.

Because both of the programs where I had already obtained a degree required a terminal degree to become a faculty member, I decided to enroll in the Adult Education doctorate program.

Definitely my family, my husband and my family definitely supported me. We have two children so I had a huge support system and I know that's the only reason that I was able to get through it in three years.

I would say that the coursework was not necessarily difficult. I did feel like a lot

of the coursework did prepare me for the writing because I was so much more

aware of the theories in relation to what I was going to be writing about, so that

really helped me to be able to pull from previous assignments that we had done

and to be able to just plug some stuff in when I was starting the writing process.

Actually I love writing, so I started when I was in my courses. What really jump

started me was the seminar course that I took one summer. That kind of jump

started my process so I just kept writing in the midst of taking classes and

working, I enjoyed that process. I enjoyed delving into the research and the

literature and putting it all together and making it my own. It was a good process

for me.

While Isabella identified many motivating factors, there were also substantial barriers to

degree completion. She mentioned an issue of availability with her major professor as well as

significant time management issues in dealing with personal obligations.

My relationship was pretty friendly. I had a lot of resources available to me,

however one of the downfalls was that because they were so busy, they really

don't have the time to dedicate their time just to you. They're overwhelmed,

they're teaching, they're writing, they're publishing their research for

conferences. It's just a lot of work on their end.

It was just rigorous because of managing my full time job and personal

obligations. I also commuted from Montgomery twice a week for three years so I

would say that it was just a challenge for me to be able to juggle so many

responsibilities. Managing so many life obligations because I'm not a traditional

student because we have family and kids and I'm working forty hours. The school

part was really an escape for everything else.

The presence of overwhelming commitment to degree completion (i.e. "I knew this was a

life goal and I felt like this would open doors for me in the future. The idea of completing the

process would help me in the game so much more by achieving this goal.") led to her eventual

completion of the doctoral degree.

Jenny.

Jenny is currently finishing the coursework required for the doctoral degree in

educational leadership. Her motivations include a desire to earn the PhD in order to obtain the

job she eventually wanted, a very strong relationship with her major professor, and a strong

support system including friends, family, and cohort members. Many of the barriers mentioned

by other participants (i.e. finances, family obligations, etc.) were not factors for Jenny. With an

array of motivating factors and support systems in place, and an absence of notable barriers,

Jenny was able to move through the degree process with ease.

I want to have my doctorate. I've taught college level and I've taught courses at

the high school level, and I've had stuff published. I just always thought, 'I ought

to get my doctorate,' I'm just determined. Highly motivated and determined. I'm

not one to start something and quit.

Karis

Karis, an international student and university employee, faced many barriers in the

pursuit of the PhD. As an international student, the language barrier was an issue. Karis talked

about her finances as a barrier that slowed the start of the program as well as completion of the program. She also mentioned anxiety over the dissertation writing process.

> I am kind of international and my background is Turkish. You know, as an international student, language can be a main barrier in a lot of things, especially during course work, because you know, being a graduate student requires you to read a lot, and understand better and that can be a little challenging sometimes. You know, to have to use another language, understand and try to have a perspective on it

> Well {getting the PhD} was only on my mind, I wanted to do it but I couldn't because I had another child in school at one point and only one of us could go to school so financial issues kind of decided that I had to wait. And I've been a student for four years. It took me several years to get my master's and now my PhD, just financially that's all I could do. The University pays 5 graded hours per semester and I was able to get 2 classes per semester and pay a little bit on top of that and did fine with it. Otherwise I had two kids in college then and I couldn't pay their tuition and my tuition to be able to finish.

> I'm really worried about writing the dissertation. Like is said, language can be a barrier sometimes. I do not write that much in my certain work, you know, just mainly simple short emails, stuff like that, so actually writing my dissertation, scientific dissertation is kind of challenging.

Karis indicated a strong relationship with her faculty advisor, positive support systems including family, friends, and her current employer, and a strong personal motivation to finish.

>I love my advisor, she is really helpful and she's the reason why I'm still in the program and trying to finish it. She makes things so much easier, she understands. She advises really good and she encourages me all the time.

>I am working in a department at the university and several employees in my department are also in graduate programs, so I have a great support system at work also. I have been really lucky with a couple of my research bosses that they really encourage me to go in the field and do more, as much as I wanted to do.

>I was thinking the support that I get from my family and my friends and my workplace and my boss is really the main thing that kept me going.

In contrast to the significant barriers (i.e. language, finances, writing anxiety), Karis also expressed a great deal of internal motivation. The student indicated that she was "not an easy quitter." She stated, "I'm not going to quit at this point, I don't see myself quitting and I think it's just my personality, I'm not easy to give up."

Lacy.

Lacy's barriers included a fear of research, a mediocre advising relationship, financial burdens, and familial obligations. The motivators mentioned include a strong degree of commitment to finishing, finding an assistantship, and a status as a self-proclaimed life-long learner. There was a strong expression of commitment and determination in many of the Lacy's responses.

The thought of research scares me. It is not my forte.

It's not a big relationship. He's been encouraging but I don't feel like I have a full relationship.

I would have never started if employee benefits weren't there. I did one semester on my own with the help of my family and then got an assistantship because otherwise I wouldn't have been able to finish it financially.

Juggling your life, you know…family, classes, work. Time management is an issue. I'm a single parent of two kids, very active kids, so it's very hard to juggle being able to go to class and make sure that they're taken care of and going to all their activities.

I'm not a quitter. I'm going to prove that I can finish.

I am a life-long learner, so I do like to continue to learn things. I already have an MBA so a PhD was the next stage.

Summary

I asked the 12 participants the same interview questions with the same wording. The first group of questions sought to identify the general motivation for entering the program doctoral program. The second set of questions aimed to identify the barriers and motivators encountered while pursuing the graduate degree. Six of the participants had already graduated with their

doctoral degree. Three of the interviewees had finished coursework and completed their oral comps putting them in the ABD category. Another two participants were finishing coursework and beginning to work on their dissertation and/or oral comps. One participant was slated to graduate the semester during which I conducted her interview.

In the first set of questions, I sought to identify why students entered the graduate degree program in the first place. All 12 participants identified some variation of career advancement as a motivating factor in beginning the PhD. Responses included career advancement, better job, more pay, and increased experience or education.

By asking the next question, I sought to find out how the advisor relationship impacted the students' abilities to complete their degrees. Seven of the students indicated that the advising relationship, or at least some aspect of it, was a barrier to degree completion or progress. Conversely, Six respondents indicated no negative issues with their major professors. On the other side of that question was the motivation provided by the major professor. Of the 12 respondents, ten reported positive aspects of the relationship at one point or another. I should note that two of the respondents experienced poor relationships with their initial professors and requested a change. Once changed, the relationship became more positive. Two of the 12 participants reported a relationship with their major professor that hindered or was hindering their ability to complete their degree.

In the next set of questions, I sought to identify how the themes verified in previous literature had influenced or aided in doctoral completion for the study participants. These themes included support systems, external factors, and isolation/integration issues. Three participants indicated that the lack of a reliable support system was a barrier for them. All 12 respondents reported an external barrier in the area of preparation, home and family life,

employment, or finances at some point in their doctoral studies. Eight students indicated that the isolation of the dissertation phase or lack of integration into the department/university contributed to their degree completion progression. Not all interviewees that talked about integration identified it as a barrier. Two of the participants talked about their lack of integration as something they regret that might have helped them in their program. I gave the participants the opportunity to identify other barriers not already discussed. Eight of the respondents also mentioned a barrier that was not already included in the interview protocol or from previous research. These barriers included time management, unique family issues, personal disabilities, travel, and employment issues.

My next set of questions allowed students to talk about their most motivating experiences/factors in completion of the graduate degree in the College of Education. Again, six of the participants indicated a completely positive relationship with the major professor or department. These participants had no negative comments about their relationship with the advisor. Ten interviewees reported at least some positive aspect of the advising relationship even if there were some negative aspects as well. The most motivating factors in completion of the degree, as indicated by participant responses include prayer (religious dependence), personality, the hope of obtaining gainful employment, positive visualization, making a difference, spousal support, higher paying job, accomplishment of a life goal, determination, and to prove to naysayers that I can do it.

When I asked about a time when the student thought about quitting, seven students indicated an event or series of events that led to thoughts of quitting the program. I also asked respondents to identify what kept them from quitting when these events occurred. One student reported that she changed PhD programs because she could not continue in that program but

didn't want to quit entirely. Another responded indicated that she just "stuck around" trying to figure out what to do next and in the meantime. Two other interviewees responded that the overwhelming support from family and friends kept them going through the program. One indicated that she would be the first person in her family to obtain a doctorate and she wanted that accomplishment for herself and for her family.

In my final set of questions, I asked participants to provide advice for students just beginning their doctoral programs that may aid in the successful completion of that degree. Their responses yielded a compilation of what the participants viewed as the most beneficial factors in completion of the doctoral degree.

- Staying connected with professors and departmental networks

- Stay focused and get a good support system

- Consider the time investment and make sure you're committed to doing it

- Get to know your classmates and get to know campus, build community

- Set goals and hold yourself accountable

- Do not procrastinate

- Dig deep and get it done

- Pair them with a mentor

- Get to know the library and learn about research

- Take it one day, one class at a time and keep going

Conclusion

In Chapter IV, I discussed the findings using a confessional tale. As a current graduate student myself, I was able to fully engage with my participants as they talked about their doctoral journeys. To supplement the confessional tale, I provided a more realist account of the findings

as well by using tables. In this presentation, I included evidence to support the fact that I

adequately answered the research questions during the course of the research study. Chapter V

will include a summary of the completed dissertation study, including the findings, implications,

and limitations.

**Chapter V: Summary, Implications,
and Recommendations for Future Studies**

In this chapter, I summarized the complete dissertation study, including the findings, the

limitations of the study, the implications of the study, and my recommendations for further

study. I again presented the purpose of the study for review and restated the research questions

for clarity. I then reviewed the research methods used and results that I presented. In this

chapter, I also discussed the limitations of my study and the implications of the research.

Finally, I discussed my recommendations for further study.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine factors that influence both completion and non-

completion of graduate work. The study sought to understand the relationship between

perceived barriers to completion of the doctoral degree as well as the relationship between

motivational factors and completion of the doctoral degree. The study also identified barriers to

degree completion, as identified by graduate students, specifically during the dissertation phase

of their degree. The study also identified factors that have led to students' persistence to

complete their doctoral degrees. What the study hoped to reveal is a practical understanding of

what the institution can do to aid in student persistence and minimize barriers for doctoral

students.

Research Questions

I used the following research questions in this study:

1) What are the barriers to completion of the graduate degree?

2) What are the motivators to completion of the graduate degree?

3) How do students perceive their ability to complete their doctoral programs?

4) What are the relationships among barriers, motivators, and graduate students' perceived ability to complete doctoral programs?

Research Methods

For this study, a naturalistic inquiry approach is used. Naturalistic inquiry is the basic philosophy that stems from the denial of monism, the proposition that there is only one kind of reality (Smith, 1981). Naturalistic inquiry assumes that knowledge about human nature differs from knowledge about scientific matters. In the process of completing scientific experiments, a researcher is likely to carry out the same methods repeatedly. In comparison, the inquiry of a naturalistic researcher is likely to differ from study to study. This type of inquiry requires a more subjective view of human behavior than many positivists are willing to accept (Guba and Lincoln, 1982). In fact, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that naturalistic inquiry was an alternative to the more traditional positivistic forms of inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry exists within the post-positivist paradigm; that is, in large part, simply a reaction to the failings of the positivist paradigm that precedes it (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba identified characteristics of naturalistic inquiry (i.e. natural setting, human instrument, utilization of tacit knowledge, qualitative methods, purposeful sampling, inductive data analysis, and special criteria for trustworthiness). Another aspect of naturalist inquiry discussed by Bowen is the data or theoretical saturation needed to produce a theory grounded in the data (2008).

Summary of Related Literature

Student retention has been a well-researched topic in higher education for decades (Austin et al., 2009; Ericson & Gardner, 1992; Pang, 2009; Thompson, 2007; Wetzel et al.,

1999). Studies have been conducted in order to understand why certain students, even certain student populations, dropout of college and the factors that influence student perseverance. Models of student retention have been studied and developed at many different institutions for a variety of student groups (Pang, 2009). A great deal of attention has been paid to underrepresented student populations including minority groups, individuals with a low socio-economic status, first generation college students, and student athletes (Buzzetto-More et al., 2010; Gardner, & Holley, 2011; Payne & Dusenbury, 2007; Ruggeri et al., 2008; Seagram et al. 1998). There is another group of students that seems to have been underrepresented in the research. Naturally, graduate and undergraduate students will face a different set of obstacles while pursuing their education.

Summary of Results

I asked the 12 participants the same interview questions with the same wording. The first group of questions sought to identify the general motivation for entering the program doctoral program. The second set of questions aimed to identify the barriers and motivators encountered while pursuing the graduate degree. Six of the participants had already graduated with their doctoral degree. Three of the interviewees had finished coursework and completed their oral comps putting them in the ABD category. Another two participants were finishing coursework and beginning to work on their dissertation and/or oral comps. One participant was slated to graduate the semester during which I conducted her interview.

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Throughout the interviews and the analysis, I found that many of the responses overlapped with one another. For example, an interviewee would mention the existence of a negative advisor relationship but would later talk about the same advisor as a positive aspect.

Often times, the relationship would change over time or the student was able to replace a barrier with something more motivating.

Limitations

Limitations for this study are those things that the study failed to accomplish. Generally speaking, the results of this study cannot be generalized to another other department on this campus or at any other College of Education at other universities. However, the intention of this project was not to create generalizable results but to create a depth of understanding about the culture group within the College of Education. This narrowed scope was a significant part of the design of the research study. However, the results of the study indicated that the scope may not have been small enough. The intention was to examine the relationship between barriers and motivators for a specific group of students. Even within this narrow scope, the findings indicated departmental differences even within the College of Education that influenced the outcome of the study (i.e. advisor selection differences).

The previous literature found that departments and disciplines within higher education operate in educational silos. Just as I found departmental differences within my narrow scope (i.e. Higher Education assigned advisors where as Educational Leadership allowed students to pick one), this study repeated in another discipline would likely yield different results. For instance, a study conducted within the College of Math and Sciences would likely produce a very different set of barriers and motivators thus influencing the students' ability to graduate. As discussed in the literature review, disciplines within the humanities and social sciences are often complicated by the extensive body of research and various theoretical frameworks and paradigms (Bowen & Rudenstein, 1992) whereas, the hard sciences (for example, chemistry or mathematics) tend to have a consensus on theory and paradigm and therefore have shorter

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research time frames (Nerad & Cerny, 1993). Even within the same institution, disciplinary cultures can vary greatly between the humanities/social sciences and the physical sciences (Becher & Trowler, 2001). These statements are consistent with my findings. Even within the small scope of the College of Education, there were certain departmental differences that impacted those students.

An additional limitation of this study is the limited amount of participants. The number of participants was low compared to the number of students currently in the programs and recent graduates from the program. Qualitative inquiry generally sacrifices the quantity of participants in order to achieve a higher quality of interaction and results that are more impactful.

Implications

The findings of this study were instrumental in understanding the culture of the College of Education at one land grant University in the southeastern United States. Understanding the culture within a department can aid in the development of "best practices" models for graduate student attrition.

The results of this study have yielded the following implications:

1. The match between advisor and advisee is extremely influential in a student's ability to complete their degree. Equally important is the match between a doctoral student and his or her discipline. Better effort should be made to match applicants with a doctoral programs and advisors that fit their educational background, future goals, and research interest.

2. The existence of a support system is vital to the success of the doctoral student. Providing a mentoring relationship among peers within the department can aid in doctoral student success.

3. An explanation of the doctoral process near the beginning of the doctoral program would be beneficial in aiding doctoral candidates in their research. Knowing when to pick a topic and having assistance in doing so early on can kick-start a student's dissertation phase before advancing to candidacy.

4. The isolation of the dissertation phase is noted as being a significant barrier to degree progress. Developing a mentoring program or fostering closer relationships with committee members and former classmates may ease the loneliness of dissertation writing.

5. The goal commitment and presence of extrinsic and intrinsic motivators is vital to the success of a doctoral candidate. Doctoral students should have a clear understanding of why they are doing what they are doing and their level of commitment to it.

6. The overlap of findings is not something identified in current literature. The overlap is significant in analyzing the impact of motivating factors on existing barriers for the program.

Recommendations for Further Study

Based on the findings of this study, I made the following recommendations for further study:

1. Based on the research, the academic climate varies by educational department. This study could be replicated within different disciplines and would likely yield similar yet varied results based on the cultures in those departments.

2. Dependence on departmental faculty to aid in recruitment of participants significantly delayed the recruitment process. Relationships should be developed with institutional

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sources and/or researchers at the university to aid in getting data more quickly and may result in a larger pool of potential participants.

3. Advisor relationship was identified as a major them in both the prior research and the study findings. Additional studies should be conducted focusing only on advisor relationship and advisor/advisee match.

4. Both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations played a large role in the level of goal commitment of each participant. Studies that focus on only the motivations and commitments of doctoral candidates should be conducted and may present key insights into candidate selection during the admissions process.

5. Graduate School administrators could use the results of this study to design studies for other departments on campus an use the overall findings to create retention programs tailored for each department and its students.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Informed Consent

AUBURN UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Informed Consent

For a research study entitled

Barriers and Motivators to Doctoral Degree Completion in the College of Education

You are invited to participate in a research study to explore the perceived barriers to doctoral degree completion and the motivating factors impacting a student's completion of their graduate program. Researchers will examine student reported barriers to degree completion as well as student reported motivational factors impacting completion of the graduate program. This study is being conducted by Jennifer Lovelace, a PhD candidate in Educational Leadership, Foundations and Technology. Research participants must be 19 years older. You were selected for the study because of your status as a current or former doctoral student within the College of Education.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked participate in an interview. The total time commitment will be approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be recorded via digital voice recorder for the sole purpose of transcription and some notes may be taken. Once transcription has occurred, the recordings will be destroyed. Your identity will not be revealed in the presentation or publication of the study findings. No information will be included in publications, presentations, or reports that could be used to personally identify you.

No risks or discomforts are anticipated with participation in this study. There will be no compensation for participating. Additionally, there is no cost for your participation in the study.

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University.

No personal information about you will be disclosed at any time. The notes and transcripts will stored in a secure location and will not be linked to specific participants. The findings of the study will be used to complete a dissertation and may be used for publication in a professional journal and/or presented at a professional meeting.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Jennifer Lovelace at jmlovelace@auburn.edu/334-844-2134. **If you have questions about your rights as a research participant,** you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTCIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTCIPATE.

_____   _____
Participant Signature   Date   Researcher Obtaining Consent   Date

_____   _____
Printed Name   Printed Name

106 Hargis Hall, Auburn, Al 36849-5122; Telephone 334-844-4700, Fax 334-844-4348

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Appendix B

Email to Department Heads/Advisors Requesting Assistance

Email to Department Heads/Advisors Requesting Assistance

Greetings! I hope this email finds you doing well. My name is Jennifer Lovelace. I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership, Foundations, and Technology Department. I am doing my doctoral research in the area of Doctoral student retention and persistence. I am writing to you to request your assistance in recruiting potential participants for my study. I have an approved IRB (#......).

The ideal participant will be a doctoral student, at least 19 years of age, who has recently graduated with the doctoral degree within the College of Education OR a doctoral student nearing the end of their coursework and entering the dissertation phase OR a doctoral candidate working on their dissertation.

At your earliest convenience, could you help me to identify potential participants within your department? Once identified, I will contact the participants with additional recruitment and participation information.

Please let me know if you have any questions or need additional information.

Best Regards,

Jennifer M Lovelace

Appendix C

Initial Email to Potential Participants

Initial Email to Potential Participants

Greetings Kindred Spirits! My name is Jennifer Lovelace. I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership, Foundations, and Technology Department seeking a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration. My research interest is in the area of Graduate Student Retention and Persistence. You, as either a recent graduate in the College of Education or a graduate student nearing the end of his doctoral studies, can be of tremendous help in this endeavor.

I am requesting your voluntary participation in an interview process. The total time commitment will be approximately 60 minutes. We can conduct the interview in my on campus office or at a location of your choice. The interview will be audio taped and some notes will be taken. Once transcribed, both the audio recording and the notes will be destroyed. Any identifiers or names will be removed or replaced with pseudonyms during transcription. Participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any point.

If you agree to participate, a follow up email confirming your participation will be sent. The follow-up email will contain more information regarding scheduling your interview and a consent form providing more details about the study. A signed consent form will be required on the day of the interview.

As a current or former doctoral student, I know you understand and appreciate the importance of voluntary participants in a study. Please consider participating in this study and let me know if you have additional questions or concerns.

Best Regards,

Jennifer M Lovelace
Doctoral Candidate
Auburn University

Appendix D

Email Confirming Participation

Email Confirming Participation

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my dissertation research. As you well know, research volunteers are highly valued and appreciated. Your willingness to participate is greatly appreciated!

Interviews are tentatively scheduled for the week(s) of September 8th-10th and 15th-17th. Interview times will be every hour on the hour from 9am until 3pm. While these are our target dates and times, we are willing to be flexible so as not to lose your participation if these dates do not align with your availability. Please contact me as soon as possible with your ideal interview time and again, thank you for your willingness to cooperate.

Please find attached a copy of the consent form. This consent form will provide you with an overview of the research project, data collection methods, storage procedures and confidentiality information. This form also contains contact information. This is a copy for you to keep for your records. You will be asked to sign a copy at your scheduled interview time. I will also provide a hard copy at this time if you need it.

I cannot express to you how appreciated your participation is. Please feel free to contact me directly with any questions or concerns you may have about this research and your participation in it.

Best Regards,
Jennifer M Lovelace
Doctoral Candidate
Auburn University

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Introduction: *Welcome, I first want to introduce myself and ask if we can begin recording the session for record keeping purposes. My name is Jennifer Lovelace and I am a graduate student in the Higher Education Administration program. May we begin recording?*

    a. Purpose of the study: *My dissertation research seeks to identify the unique barriers and motivators attributed to Graduate Students. A lot of research has been conducted concerning undergraduate retention but Graduate Students have not been as adequately studied. Graduate Students are a different population of student and will undoubtedly have different struggles and motivations throughout their degree completion process.*

    b. Informed Consent: *You are invited to participate in a research study to explore the perceived barriers to graduate degree completion and the motivating factors impacting a student's completion of their graduate program. Researchers will examine student reported barriers to degree completion as well as student reported motivational factors impacting persistence in pursuit of their doctoral degree. The study is being conducted by Jennifer Lovelace, a PhD candidate in Educational Leadership, Foundations, and Technology. You were selected for the study because of your status as a current doctoral student or a recent graduate of a doctoral program within the College of Education.*

    c. *If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview. The total time commitment will be approximately 1 hour. The interview will be recorded via digital audio voice recorder. Notes will also be*

taken. Your identity will not be revealed in the presentation of the study findings.

No information will be included in publications, presentations, or reports that

could be used to personally identify you.

No risks or discomforts are anticipated with participation in this study.

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your participation at any

time without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate will not

jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University. The findings of this

study will be used for the completion of a dissertation and may be used for

publication in a professional journal and/or a presentation at a professional

meeting.

You can read this information here (hand copy of consent to student) *and I ask*

that you sign this copy for me to retain.

II. Warm-up: *Again, this study is a study for my dissertation. The topics we will discuss will*

include questions about your reasons for entering graduate school and some of the

barriers you've faced while pursuing your degree.

III. Easy-non threatening questions:

    a. *Talk to me about your educational background*

    b. *Tell me why you decided to pursue a graduate degree*

    c. *What do you plan on doing with your degree or your career once you've*
       graduated?

    d. *Talk to me about your relationship with your advisor.*

    e. *What kind of support system do you have (i.e. friends, family)?*

IV. More Difficult Questions: *Now I'm going to ask you some questions that may jump around a little bit. I would like to talk about some of the things that may (or may not) be hindering your ability to complete your degree.*

    a. *What state of your program are you in (i.e. still doing coursework, working on dissertation, finishing up, just graduated).*

    b. *Do you feel that the coursework has been difficult?*

    c. *How has the current economic climate impacted your graduate studies, if at all.*

    d. *Tell me about a time when you might have considered quitting your graduate program. What kept you from doing it?*

    e. *Are there any other barriers we have not talked about that you have faced?*

V. Wrap up:

    a. *If you had it to do over again, knowing what you know now, what would you do differently, if anything?*

    b. *What advice would you give students just starting their graduate programs?*

VI. Member Check: *Some of the things we have talked about are:……. Is there anything you'd like to add?*

VII.   Conclusion: *Just to remind you, this interview was audio recorded and will be transcribed. Once transcribed, the audio recording will be destroyed. The purpose of this interview was simply to gain an understanding of what drives graduate students to complete their programs and what barriers might get in their way during that process. I appreciate your participation in this interview. Your assistance has been invaluable. If you have anything else that you think of or if you have any*

questions about your participation, please feel free to contact me. My contact

information is on the consent form.

Appendix F

Codebook

Codebook

Barriers, Motivators, and Perceived Abilities Related to Completion of the Doctoral Degree

Codes	Definitions of Codes
A Priori Codes	
Advisor as Motivation (AM)	
Communication	Participants mention positive communication issues with major professor/committee
Support	Participants mention supportiveness of the major professor and/or committee
Overall Relationship	Participants describe the overall relationship with the major professor as positive
Research Interest	Participants discuss a match in research interest between themselves and the advisor
Feedback	Participants talk about the feedback and criticism provided by the advisor as positive and constructive
Respect	Participants express an attitude of mutual respect from their advisor
Availability	Participants discuss the availability of the advisor as a positive aspect of the advising relationship
Support as Motivation (SM)	
Immediate Family	Parents/Siblings/Children
Extended Family	Grandparents/Aunt/Uncles, Other Family
Spousal Support	Husband or Wife
Departmental Support	Support from the department in which the doctoral student currently resides
Employer Support	Support from the employer of the doctoral student
Support from Friends	Support from friends or classmates not related to the doctoral student
Integration as Motivation (IM)	
Professional Development	Participants mentioned attending or participating I professional development activities as motivating
On-Campus Employment	Participants mentioned gaining on campus employment (internships/assistantships) as a motivating factor in their doctoral journey
Supportive Classmates	Participants describe the relationships with their classmates as a positive influences on the doctoral degree journey
Cohort System	Participants describe their involvement in a cohort system as a positive influence on their ability to complete the degree and develop relationships with fellow classmates.
External Motivation (EM)	
Financial Security	Participants mentioned the prospect of financial security as a primary motivation to start and/or finish the doctoral program

	Personal Desire for Knowledge/Skills	Participants discuss a personal desire to learn more about their field or skill enhancement as a primary motivation to start and/or finish the doctoral program
	Personality	Participants mention innate personality traits as primary motivation to start and/or finish the doctoral program
	Finances	Participants mention that the ability to pay for courses were a motivation to finish the program more quickly or that the lack of financial barriers motivated them to finish the program
	Employee Benefits	Participants discuss the availability of their employee benefit as a primary motivation to start and/or finish the doctoral program
Advisor as Barrier (AB)		
	Overall Relationship	Participants mention negative aspects of the relationship with her advisor
	Need to Change Adv.	Participants express a desire to change
	Lack of Availability	Participants express a difficulty in getting or keeping in touch with their advisor
	Research Misalignment	Participants mention a disconnect between their own research interest and the interest of their advisor that impact their ability to perform
	Faculty Workload	Participants expressed concern over the workload/advisees assigned to their advisor as a reason for not being able to establish a more beneficial relationship
	Lack of Communication	Participants describe miscommunication or misinformation as a regular part of their advising relationship
Support as Barrier (SB)		
	Long Distance from Fam.	Participants expressed that the distance of family and /or friends from the student was a barrier to receiving appropriate support
	Lack of Supp. Classmates	Participants expressed a desire for closer, more supportive relationships with fellow students but a failure to achieve these
	Family Difficulties	Participants expressed personal/family issues, tragedies, stresses, etc. that impacted support systems
Isolation as Barrier (IB)		
	Lack of Social Time	Participants indicate that they do not have the social time that they need in order to "relax" and decompress from the stresses of doctoral study
	Minimal Classmate Relationships	Participants discuss a desire to develop relationships with fellow classmates but a lack of ability to do so due to the various demands of family and doctoral life
	Distance from Support System	Participants indicate that the distance from their primary support system was often a barrier to their ability to stay connected to their support system.
	Lack of Departmental	Participants indicate a lack of departmental integration (i.e.

Involvement	Conferences, workshops, seminars, etc.) that they feel would have helped them in their journey.	
Self-Direction/Isolation	Participants talk about the isolation of the doctoral journey, particularly the dissertation phase.	
External Barriers (EB)		
Finances	Participants mention the financial strain or the decision to obtain student loans as a significant barrier to entering and/or finishing the doctoral program	
Time Management	Participants mention the stresses of managing their time with other school and other issues as a significant barrier in the completion of the doctoral degree	
Spousal Strain	Participants talk about the strain on the primary support relationship (spousal) as a stressor that acted as a barrier to completion of the doctoral degree.	
Employment Issues	Participants mention issues related to their current employment as barriers to degree completion	
Children	Participants mention the impact of having and/or caring for children during their doctoral studies as a significant barrier to degree completion	
Emergent Codes (EC)		
Lost Assistantship	Participants mention the failure to find an assistantship or having one and losing it as a significant barrier to doctoral completion.	
Personal Tragedies	Participants mention significant personal tragedies during the course of the doctoral program that slowed or otherwise impacted the completion of the doctoral degree	
Travel	Participants discuss the distance between their home towns/work and attending classes as a source of stress that poses as a barrier to completion of the doctoral degree.	
Religious Affiliation	Participants mentioned a reliance on religion or religious affiliation as a means of motivation	
Career Advancement	Participants mentioned the prospect of career advancement as a primary motivation to start and/or finish the doctoral program	

Research Question #1
What are the barriers to the completion of the doctoral degree?

	Alice	Bailee	Charleigh	Danielle	Elaine	Frederick	Georgia	Harrison	Isabella	Jenny	Karis	Lacy	Madison
AB	X		X	X	X				X			X	X
SB	X	X		X									X
IB	X			X	X	X		X	X	X		X	
EB	X	X		X	X		X		X		X	X	
EC	X	X		X	X		X		X	X		X	X

Research Question #2
What are the motivators to completion of the doctoral degree?

	Alice	Bailee	Charleigh	Danielle	Elaine	Frederick	Georgia	Harrison	Isabella	Jenny	Karis	Lacy	Madison
AM	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		
SM	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
IM		X	X				X	X	X	X			
EM	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
EC	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X

Research Question #3
How do students perceive their ability to complete their doctoral programs?

	Alice	Bailee	Charleigh	Danielle	Elaine	Frederick	Georgia	Harrison	Isabella	Jenny	Karis	Lacy	Madison
Extrinsic Motivation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X
Intrinsic Motivation	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	