to Be (a Doctor) Or Not to Be – An Exploration of The Abd Experience of Female Minority Doctoral Students in Cacrep-Accredited Counselor Education Programs

Tracey Kim Snow
snow13728@aol.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/allgraduate-thesesdissertations

Part of the Adult and Continuing Education Commons, and the Counseling Psychology Commons

Recommended Citation
Snow, Tracey Kim, "to Be (a Doctor) Or Not to Be – An Exploration of The Abd Experience of Female Minority Doctoral Students in Cacrep-Accredited Counselor Education Programs" (2020). Graduate Research Theses & Dissertations. 7684.
https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/allgraduate-thesesdissertations/7684

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Research & Artistry at Huskie Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Huskie Commons. For more information, please contact jschumacher@niu.edu.
This is a dissertation that focuses on the lived experiences of culturally diverse female counselor education candidates on their dissertation experience. Chapter 1 addressed the background of the issue and the need for such a study. It also addresses the research questions that drove the study. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review of the main topics. Literature and research on six areas form this study’s conceptual framework: (a) “All but Dissertation” (ABD) status, (b) persistence, (c) the historical context of social justice within counselor education and supervision, (d) women’s development, (e) female doctoral students, and (f) culturally diverse doctoral students and obstacles they face. Chapter 3 addresses the method used. This is a phenomenological study that explores the lived dissertation experiences of nine culturally diverse female candidates from CACREP counselor education programs. Chapter 4 examines the themes and data that emerged from the qualitative study and Chapter 5 concludes with my analysis from the data.
TO BE (A DOCTOR) OR NOT TO BE – AN EXPLORATION OF THE ABD EXPERIENCE OF FEMALE MINORITY DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN CACREP-ACCREDITED COUNSELOR EDUCATION PROGRAMS

BY

TRACEY KIM SNOW
©2020 Tracey Kim Snow

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Doctoral Director:
Scott Wickman
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are so many people that I wish to acknowledge who have been instrumental in my journey through this doctorate program. I need to start with my children, Marina, Ben, Kaysha, David, Shayla, Steven and Kyla, who have all sacrificed precious time with me so that I could work on this endeavor. I thank you for your patience and sacrifice and my hope for you is that you are able to see that if I can do this, then there are no limits to each of you in your endeavors, goals, and dreams. Dream big and boldly and let nothing stand in your way of your own Destinies! I love each and every one of you! You are my greatest accomplishments and I am so proud to be your mother!

Mum and Dad, you gave me my intellect and work ethic to persevere despite all odds, and I would not be here if it weren’t for you. I love you.

I also need to thank my two committee Chairs, Dr. Toni Tollerud and Dr. Scott Wickman for their tireless support and dedication to my success. Toni, thank you for starting this journey with me, and for your support and friendship. Scott, thank you for your dedication and support on the final phase of my journey. I would not be where I am without your support and belief in me, and I know that many others feel the same way. I truly thank you. I also would like to thank and acknowledge Dr. Cynthia Campbell and Dr. Teresa Fisher for their support and contribution as members of my committee.

I also wish to support countless cheerleaders and supporters along the way who have been instrumental in my success. This includes Dr. Kim Lechner, I love you and have always
appreciated the depth of our friendship, support and love. Our lives continue to parallel and cross professionally and personally and I am so grateful for you in so many ways. Soon-to-be Dr. Natasha Schnell, we started this journey together and we will finish it together my friend. I believe in you and your success. Dr. Patricia Robey, Dr. Byron Waller, Dr. Hollie Campbell, and dearly departed Dr. Cyrus Marcellus Ellis, I thank you for being my colleagues and partners in this journey and for your friendship and support in my success. Thank you. Cy Snow, thank you for your tireless efforts and patience of supporting me and being that constant reminder to not forget to get this done.

I would also like to thank Robb Duffek for your friendship and constant support in this journey, always encouraging me to “get this done” and offering to be my “case study” for a dissertation project. Your humor always added levity to a heavy undertaking and your wisdom and support means so much. Thank you. Lee Gallagher, you are my soul mate. I connect with you on so many levels and am so grateful to call you my dear friend. I look forward to the next phases of our personal development and accomplished dreams. I love you!

Susan Anewalt, thank you for being my dear friend and writing partner for the final phase as we held each other as accountability partners as we each completed our writing projects. This is the first of many writing projects that we will support each other with. Thank you for your love, support, and friendship. Mariel Rinkus, thank you for being my fierce warrior friend and fellow adventurer. Your belief in me and my dreams means more than you know. Thank you. Marie Johnson, your love and positivity has always been appreciated and valued. Thank you for believing in me. Darcie Harnett, thank you for your support and friendship. Your story has evolved to one of empowerment as you have found your own voice and power. Congratulations!
The next dream come true will be what we all build together.

And finally, to the courageous women who chose to be participants in this journey and share their stories. I hope that I have done your lived experiences justice and that this work may pave the way for future women to find the support and acknowledgment they need, their voices to be heard, and their stories to be told.
DEDICATION

“We are weaving her-story into reality.

Unweaving the limiting his-stories.

Creating our-story.

Reaching beyond religion and patriarchy and capitalism and so-called democracy.

Into new ways of being and seeing.

We are the bridge between worlds

We are the ones we have been waiting for.”

– Lucy H. Pearce, *Burning Woman*

This work from my heart and soul is dedicated to my parents, David and Cindy Jones, my children and our growing family, Marina, Paul, Ella, Harper, Lola, and Rosie Fricilone, Ben, Denise, Kellan, Carter, Pippin, and Brady Mutz, Kaysha Ann Mutz, David, Ericka, and Tyko Mutz, Shayla Mutz and Ross Frankenburg, Steven, Jessica, and baby Mutz, Kyla Snow, Tony Walthers, and Skye, and Mama and Junior.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF TABLES</th>
<th>xvi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF APPENDICES</td>
<td>xviii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter**

1. **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY** ................................................................. 1
   - Problem Background ................................................................................. 4
   - The American Counseling Association and Social Justice ....................... 5
   - Counselor Education and Social Justice .................................................. 6
   - Counselor Education and the Underrepresentation of Faculty of Color ........ 6
   - My Personal Interest in this Dilemma .................................................... 8
   - Problem Statement .................................................................................. 9
   - Study Purpose .......................................................................................... 9
   - Research Questions ................................................................................. 10
   - Rationale and Theoretical Framework .................................................... 11
   - Definitions .............................................................................................. 13
   - Study Scope and Limitations ................................................................... 14
   - Summary ................................................................................................. 15

2. **LITERATURE REVIEW** ............................................................................... 17
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The ABD Crisis</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pervasiveness of ABD</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time-to-Degree</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles to Dissertation Completion</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Responsibilities</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty Working With Committee Members</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Structure and Independent Arena of the Dissertation Process</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Concerns</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Challenges of Selecting the Right Topic</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained Motivation</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance and Isolation From Campus</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Sufficient Research Skills</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence in Higher Education</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Historical Context of Persistence Theory</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Student Persistence</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Student Persistence</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence in Counselor Education</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors Affecting Female Doctoral Students</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Perceptions of the Dissertation Process</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Mentoring</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring Components</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring and Diversity</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues of Diversity and Mentoring in Professional Organizations</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring Women in Counselor Education</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Conflict</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Doubt</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfectionism</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemological Development</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. METHOD</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design – Phenomenological Interviewing</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Selection</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing Trustworthiness</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of the Researcher</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Researcher</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Biography</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Methods</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording and Managing Data</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis Procedures</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical, Political, and Multicultural Considerations</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Ethics</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudonyms</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection and Storage</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure and Informed Consent</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Profiles/Demographics</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This Is Her Story</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1, Marina</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2, Shayla</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3, Kyla</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4, Kaysha</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5, Susan</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6, Harper</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7, Ella</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8, Caitlin</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9, Cindy</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation for Pursuing a Doctorate in Counselor Education</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic Motivations</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic Motivations</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Motivation</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of the Dissertation Process</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphors</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solitary Experience</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguity of the Process</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressful and Overwhelming Process</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disconnection During Dissertation Process</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Sacrifices</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Resources</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence/Perseverance</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resourcefulness</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality/Faith</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Resources</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Support</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support From Colleagues</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support From Chair and Committee</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support From the Program</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Challenges</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Issues</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalence</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational and Time Management Issues</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Barriers</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Barriers</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigating Through the Academic Arena and Lack of Structure of the Dissertation Process</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges With Comprehensive Examinations</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic Selection/Change of Topic/Passion for Topic</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing of Committee Members</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Guidance and Support From Committee</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazing by Committee Members</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Significance of the Chair</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Mentoring for Minority Students</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistency Within the Program</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges With Writing</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Routine</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges With Candidacy Exams</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendships</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Support and Understanding</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disconnection and Distance From Campus</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Experiences</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmet Needs</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely Feedback</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice in Pedagogy</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Gender and Discrimination in Their Dissertation Pursuits</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for More Faculty Diversity</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power and Privilege in Academia</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences in Completion Based on Gender</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. DISCUSSION</strong></td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of Common Themes</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Have No Road Map – Perceptions Navigating the Dissertation Process</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why am I Doing This? Motivations for Pursuing a Doctorate in Counselor Education</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic Motivating Factors</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic Motivating Factors</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure-Avoidant Factors</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in a White Man’s World – The Patriarchal Structure of Academia</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help, I Need Somebody – The Need for Mentoring</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More of the Same – Racial Discrimination and Inequity in Education</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice and Implications Within Counselor Education Programs</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race and Gender Matter – An Honest Look at How We, as Counselor Educators, Talk a Good Game</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If We All Could Have a Wife – The Allocation of Time and Other Responsibilities</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outta Sight, Outta Mind – The Role of Geographic Distancing vs. Emotional Distancing</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do I Need This? Job Stability Not Contingent on Terminal Degree Conferment</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Findings About Barriers From This Study</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame – Something is Wrong With Me</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Firing Line – Hazing/Rite of Passage</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Reality – More of the Same</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So, What Do We Do About It?</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revisiting the Research Questions</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person-Centered Principles</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen, Don’t Assume – Empathic Understanding</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Struggle is Real – Genuineness</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See Me, Value Me – Unconditional Positive Regard</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check In or We Will Check Out – Accountability Matters!</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking the Chains That Bind Us – Hand Up,</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Hand Out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sins of Our Fathers – Stopping the Cycle and</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring for ALL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privilege Matters – Breaking the</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppressor/Oppressed Pattern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinder, Gentler Experience – Be the Model We</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach About</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Bias</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience and Snowball Sampling</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic Limitations</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for More Cultural Diversity</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of Retribution (Power Differential)</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Desirability</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications From This Study</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Counselor Education Programs and Female Candidates</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Further Research</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfectionism</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Reflection</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Participant Demographics</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Data analysis process</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. STRATEGIES FOR BRACKETING</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. LETTER TO THE DEPARTMENT CHAIRS</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. FLYER</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. CONSENT FORM</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. TABLE 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW GUIDE</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS INCLUDED WITH MEMBER CHECKS</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. CURRICULUM VITAE</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

“I could not stop talking because now I had started my story, it wanted to be finished. We cannot choose where to start and stop. Our stories are the tellers of us.”

− Chris Cleave, writer and journalist

The conferment of a doctorate is the pinnacle of a doctoral student’s educational journey. A doctorate is the final destination of a years-in-the-making accolade and delineates a benchmark of knowledge and expertise few individuals attain. A perplexing dilemma for doctoral students, educators, and universities is that more than 50% of all students who enroll in doctoral programs never complete the dissertation process and linger, becoming lost in the abyss of “All but Dissertation” (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Hanson, 1992; Hawley, 2010; Golde, Walker, & Associates, 2006; McAlloon, 2004; Sternberg, 1981; Yeager, 2008). This non-completion problem is so widespread that these students have derived their own acronym, “ABD” (Hawley, 2010; Sternberg, 1981). Other research (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010; DiPerro, 2007, Flynn, Chasek, Harper, Murphy, & Jorgensen, 2012) has reported a national doctoral attrition rate between 50% to 85%, with no evidence this trend is declining. According to McAlloon (2004), ABD is “a special status—an incomplete, deficient state of ‘perpetual becoming,’ not of ‘being,’ a condition unconsciously used to torment the self and others, characterized by unrealized promise and a dogged inability or unwillingness to complete this final academic hurdle” (p. 229).
One of the highest levels of education is the doctoral program. In theory, doctoral program graduates are responsible for the thinking and research that underlie educational philosophies and theories, foundations for educational policies, structures, and programs (D’Andrea, 2002). In practice, Doctorate in Philosophy (PhD) and Doctorate in Education (EdD) program graduates are leaders and teachers who shape and mold future generations.

Research (Hawley, 2010; Lenz, 1995) has illustrated little to no difference in academic competence between students who complete the process and those who drop out, as they have comparable graduate records and GRE scores. Financial predicaments are also not necessarily the cause of students dropping out, as students on fellowships have just as high an attrition rate as those who don’t (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2005; 2013). Research (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Carter, Blumenstein, & Cook, 2013; Haizlip, 2012; Mastekaasa, 2005; Shin, 2008) bares evidence that female students drop out more than their male counterparts, and students of color drop out more often than Caucasian and international students. Hawley (2010) found “Women drop out more than men, students of color drop out more than Anglos, and Americans drops out more than foreign students” (p. 8). Female graduate student attrition rates have been an ongoing concern. The Executive Graduate School of Michigan expressed their concern in a committee report in 1974, stating:

Attrition of women in greater proportion than men at each rung of the academic ladder is a symptom of discriminatory policies and behavior within academe. The causes of this attrition include overt discriminatory acts, an absence of faculty role models, limited flexibility in administrative policies, a lack of support facilities for non-traditional students, and social pressures outside the university. (p. vi)
Holm, Prosek, and Godwin Weisberger (2014) spoke to how this phenomenon continues to be an ongoing issue, stating that although women earn approximately half of the doctoral degrees conferred in the United States, fewer women accept tenure-track assistant professor positions than their male counterparts (Holm et al, 2014; Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2009), often due to such issues as balancing motherhood and careers (Gilbert, 2008; Trepal & Stinchfield, 2012). Zeilgman, Prescod, and Greene (2015) further emphasized women of color continue to be underrepresented in academia, both as doctoral students and faculty, and have unique journeys and experiences in counselor education and higher education that have not been addressed in current research.

Attrition of doctoral students is of concern across all disciplines, but the highest attrition rates are among social sciences/humanities (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lovitts, 2001). Although universities have labored over careful selection processes, the high rate of attrition among graduate students has remained stable for the past 40 years (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Cassuto, 2013). As recently as July 2013, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* still placed the attrition rate for doctoral students at 50%. The Council of Graduate Schools conducted an extensive study on this matter in 2010 called the *Ph.D. Completion Project*. Among its findings were that in most math and science fields, students who will leave typically depart by the third year. However, humanities reveal a different story: Approximately 25% of all doctoral students drop out by the third year, and another 25% of doctoral students in humanities programs trickle out over the next 7 years, carrying an extremely heavy student-loan debt (Cassuto, 2013).
Problem Background

According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2012), the number of women enrolled in academic institutions of higher education has more than tripled in the past four decades, yet students of color, minorities, and women tend to find themselves stuck in the process of ABD status more often than their male counterparts. The ABD crisis with doctoral students has only recently started to be addressed among Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) programs (Flynn et al., 2012; Healy & Hays, 2011; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009), with even less research on females and minority doctoral experiences in CES programs (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Haizlip, 2012; Hinojosa & Carney, 2016; Zeligman, Prescod, & Greene, 2015). According to the 2016 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) Annual Report (2017), CACREP-accredited doctoral CES programs have 76.13% female students and 23.87% male students; of those students, 39.91% are minorities.

Educational policy makers, professional organizations, university administrators, faculty, and family members of these scholarly talented and able women all are troubled by the individual and societal losses when female and minority students remain educationally disempowered, underdeveloped, and underutilized (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Eccles, 1985; Hinojosa & Carney, 2016; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lenz, 1995). Counselor education, academia, and society at large suffer when critical voices are not heard and contributions to social, educational, and political arenas are lost (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lovitts, 2001). The credibility assigned to the doctorate degree might enable these ABD students the social and political voice and influence to create the changes society and the counseling profession need.
One major movement in counseling and counselor education has been the emphasis of social justice and empowerment of all individuals (Chang, Crethar, & Ratts, 2010; Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002; Ratts, 2009). The American Counseling Association (ACA) implemented a division in 1999 called Counselors for Social Justice (CSJ; ACA, 2013) to emphasize just how critical it is for counselors and counselor educators to be change agents and voices for those who have no voice or are an “at-risk” population. Shin (2008), shared his concern that:

Although there has been a rapid increase in scholarship and research focused on the integration of social justice values in the education, training, and practice of counselors and counseling psychologists, there has been less emphasis on the specific responsibilities that social justice-oriented counseling faculty have as members of institutions of higher education. Although there has been some important work done on this topic (Gloria & Pope-David, 1997; Goodman, Liang, & Helms, 2004), there is a paucity of empirical and theoretical publications in the counseling literature that have directly addressed all the areas in need of social justice within academia. (p. 180)

**The American Counseling Association and Social Justice**

The American Counseling Association (ACA) and the American Psychological Association (APA) have both endorsed professional guidelines that emphasize the roles of *advocate* and *change agent* in institutions or organizations (APA, 2002; Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2003), yet, there is still much more work to be done. Counseling and counseling psychology faculty find themselves in a “unique and influential position to identify the policies
in higher education that perpetuate oppression of certain individuals and groups and, concurrently, to provide students with strategies for empowerment and social transformation” (Shin, 2008, p. 181).

Counselor Education and Social Justice

Academia can often be viewed as a microcosm of society at large, and it often mirrors other institutions of power and privilege based on race, gender, social class, and other socially constructed values (Anderson & Collins, 2004; Robinson, 1999). The transmission and reinforcement of oppression, power, and privilege can also be found in counseling and psychology (Haizlip, 2012; Hinojosa & Carney, 2016; Chang, Crethar, & Ratts, 2010). Scholars have asserted that counselor education and its institutions also have been shaped by White privilege and mainstream societal values (Ivey, Ivey, D’Andrea, & Daniels, 1997; Haizlip, 2012; Shin, 2008); however, faculty members in counselor education programs experience opportunities to either perpetuate the status quo or advocate for social change. This study provides another opportunity for silent voices to be heard, witnessed, and shared.

Counselor Education and the Underrepresentation of Faculty of Color

This study also addresses another serious issue within academia. The underrepresentation of faculty of color in the fields of counseling and psychology continues to be a prominent issue (Carter, Blumenstein, & Cook, 2013; Mastekaasa, 2005, U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2008; Zeligman et al., 2015). In a CACREP survey of accredited CES programs, Bradley and Holcomb-McCoy (2004), Zeligman et al. (2015), and Prescod & Greene (2015) found racially
and ethnically diverse faculty continue to be underrepresented in most counselor education programs, particularly among tenured senior-level counselor educators. Recent information from the CACREP 2016 Annual Report (CACREP, 2017) indicated that faculty of color only represent 26.37% of all CACREP graduate programs, although CACREP graduate students of color comprise of 40.76% of counseling students. The CACREP Annual Report also found that although women earn approximately half of doctoral degrees in the United States (Aud et al., 2012), fewer women accept tenure-track assistant professor positions than their male counterparts (Holm, Prosek, & Godwin Weisberger, 2014; Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2009). This study intends to address the experiences and the needs of diverse female counselor education doctoral students so CES programs can better identify and address those needs and therefore lead to a higher retention and graduation rate among female minority students.

The ACA and CACREP have sanctioned the importance of counselors and counselor educators being change agents and voices for those who have no voice or are an “at-risk” population. The term “at-risk,” when used in education, is often associated with high school dropouts or lower social economic students who underachieve and never reach their potential. At-risk students often, by their circumstances, are statistically more likely than others to fail academically (Spring, 2010). Another “at risk” population is found in the shadows of academia—doctoral ABD students who never complete their degree (Carter, Blumenstein, & Cook, 2013; Cassuto, 2013; Germeroth, 1991; Hanson, 2000). Because approximately 50% of all doctoral students never complete their dissertation, this issue is critical—for counselor educators and counselor education.
My Personal Interest in This Dilemma

This research topic is one near to my heart and experience. I was a doctoral candidate in the process of writing my dissertation. I have successfully completed all coursework as well as my candidacy exams and have been ABD since Fall 2007. I have encountered many of the obstacles and setbacks that previous research mentioned. I understood on a personal level the anguish and disappointment that came from being veered off course of one’s destination by life’s responsibilities and challenges. My interest in this topic was threefold: my (a) attempt to understand and make sense of my ABD experience and completing the dissertation, (b) desire to gain a deeper understanding of qualitative research, and (c) intention as a counselor educator and social justice advocate to facilitate the dissertation process and ABD experience for future doctoral students. Thus, I approached this study as both a participant and an observer. I reflected upon my experience, while attempting to remain as objective as possible.

As a participant in the dissertation process, I brought my experiences, beliefs, and values into the research process. My experience with the dissertation and ABD experience up to this point was quite an ordeal. Throughout my Master’s and Doctoral program, I managed to have two full time jobs, attend full time classes, and raise six children as a single mother. For the most part, I encountered little difficulty and really enjoyed the experience of learning and progressing through the programs. I assumed that my dissertation experience would be an extension of what I had encountered on my academic journey to that date. Writing came easily and naturally to me. I had been published seven times during my Master’s and Doctoral programs, and I did not feel intimidated by the writing or publishing process.

I believed that research would also be something that I would embrace and succeed with.
I never imagined finding myself stuck and enduring the challenges that I have faced as an ABD candidate.

Problem Statement

The primary objective of this research was to give voice to those whose perceptions have not been heard. McLaughlin and Tierney (1993) addressed this issue:

In most venues, the people who are in Ph.D. programs at leading universities are competent and efficacious. Nonetheless, in the context of the university, they are relatively voiceless, stemming from their powerless, dependent position. Doctoral students meet the criteria of people who have not been heard because their points of view are believed to be unimportant or difficult to access by those in power. (p. 10)

The least-heard voices in higher education have been those of female and minority doctoral students (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Carter, Blumenstein, & Cook, 2013; Hagedorn & Doyle, 1993; Hite, 1985; Lenz, 1995; Williams, 1997; Zeligman, et al., 2015). Even though a higher number of women are enrolled in doctoral programs, the number of doctoral degrees awarded continues to be higher for males than females (Carter, Blumstein, & Cook, 2013; Zeligman et al., 2015).

Study Purpose

This study’s purpose was to explore the experience of being female, and/or culturally diverse, as ABD students in CACREP-accredited CES programs. These students were to have been at the dissertation phase of the academic journey for a minimum of three years. This study
explored the lived experience of female ABD students from a social justice perspective. I used Ratts’ et al. (2016) as a model to examine participants’ individual or personal narrative as well as the professional, the organizational (or systemic), and the societal/political levels of their stories.

Research Questions

I intended to answer the following research questions:

1. What about the lived experience of female and/or culturally diverse doctoral students can help CES programs to better address their needs and ensure higher student graduation rates?
   a. What is the unique lived experience of this population while working on their dissertation?
   b. What were some of the unique challenges and obstacles that these students faced during the dissertation experience?
   c. How did social, cultural, political, and economic factors impact their dissertation experience?
   d. What needs did they have that were going unmet?
   e. What was needed for them to be successful?

2. What are ways to advocate for this population to expedite the dissertation process using CES’s espoused position on social justice?
My intention was to explore the lived experience of these participants from the revised Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies of the American Counseling Association (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016, pp. 30–31), which focused on the following:

1. understanding the complexities of diversity and multiculturalism on the counseling relationship,
2. recognizing the negative influence of oppression on mental health and well-being,
3. understanding individuals in the context of their social environment, and
4. integrating social justice advocacy into the various modalities of counseling (e.g., individual, family, partners, group).

Rationale and Theoretical Framework

My goal was to unearth the “voices” of people not usually heard and share these stories of the ABD experience. Through phenomenological interviewing (Hays & Wood, 2011, Seidman, 1988, Sheperis, Young, & Daniels, 2010), I want to understand and explore how being female and/or culturally diverse affects ABD students in CACREP CES programs in how they navigated and made meaning of the dissertation experience and perceived the challenges and obstacles of being ABD. Although dissertation challenges were well documented (Katz, 1995; Williams, 1997; Zeligman et al., 2015), the experience has seldom been explored from the perspectives of female, culturally diverse students currently finding themselves stuck at the ABD phase.

Qualitative methodologies such as phenomenological interviewing are particularly well-
suited for the study of women’s and multicultural issues. According to Miller (1986), “quantitative methods have, for the most part, been designed by Caucasian male researchers and contain inherent biases derived from male systems of thought” (p. 48). Because women’s experiences could be very different than those of men, collecting rich data relative to lived experiences required that such information be gathered in a manner that allowed women to share their stories and concerns, thus contributing to the body of theory-building literature, multicultural issues, social justice advocacy, and women’s studies. “Feminist psychology encourages moving research out of the laboratory to look at the meaningful contexts of their [women’s] lives” (Worrell & Remer, 2003, p. 9). The ABD crisis among female graduate students gets to the very heart of the feminist and multicultural movement. “The personal is political” speaks to just that—an increased awareness of asymmetrical gender expectations and widespread discrimination and injustices for women that result because of academia’s patriarchal traditions (Worrell & Remer, 2003).

Understanding and sharing these women’s academic journeys and stories allowed for counselor educators to gain a glimpse into the female experience of the dissertation process. As Aspy and Sandhu (1999) stated,

Knowledge is power, and never before in history have women had the access to knowledge that is available today. They can restructure society not to become equals in a man’s world, but to change society to value more highly those dimensions that are associated with the feminine. (p. 11)

In this study, I also intended to explore participants’ unique lived experiences of being stuck in the ABD process through the lens of a social justice perspective. Noticeable attention
has been given to social justice within counselor education in the last 15 years (e.g., Chang, Crethar, & Ratts, 2010; Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007: Kiselica & Robinson, 2001; McWhirter, 1991; Ratts, D’Andrea, & Arrendondo, 2004; Ratts et al., 2016). The emphasis on social justice within counselor education has been generated by societal concerns, including disparities in public education (Kozol, 1991), unequal access to resources affecting those who are marginalized in society (Haizlip, 2012; Hinojosa & Carney, 2016; Smith, Baluch, Bernabei, Robohm, & Sheehy, 2003), and the growing disparity of resources between the rich and the poor within the United States (Chang et al., 2010; Collins & Yeskel, 2000). These critical concerns highlighted the need for research that assists counselor educators in integrating social justice principles into their pedagogical curriculum to enhance counselor educator preparation (Ratts, 2006). As Odegard & Vereen (2010) wrote, “much of social justice pedagogical literature in the field of counseling has theoretical basis but lacks critical inquiry into the integration of social justice principles in counselor education training curricula” (p. 131).

I intended to accentuate the voices and shed light on critical issues female and culturally diverse counselor education ABD students’ experiences.

Definitions

**ABD Status Participants** – *ABD Status Participants* are currently enrolled in CACREP-accredited Counselor Education Doctoral Programs and have completed coursework and comprehensive examinations successfully, yet have been ABD candidates for a minimum of 2 years)
**CACREP – Accredited Counselor Education and Supervision Doctoral Programs.** CACREP-Accredited Counselor Education and Supervision Doctoral Programs are doctoral-level programs granted accredited status by CACREP, a specialized body recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA; CACREP, 2017).

**Culturally Diverse** – For the sake of this study, culturally diverse shall be used to describe individuals who share one or more minority status, including being female, self-described from a racial and ethnic minority, and/or sexual minority orientation.

**Persistence** – Persistence is “the continuance of a student’s progress toward the completion of a doctoral degree” (Bair, 1999, p.8).

**Phenomenology** – Phenomenology is the study of how people describe things and experience them through their senses. A basic philosophical assumption of phenomenology is that people throughout, avoid “one” can only know what they experience by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken their conscious awareness (Husserl, [1913] 1962).

**Social Justice** – Social Justice is a process of acknowledging systemic societal inequities and oppression while acting responsibly to eliminate the systemic oppression in the forms of racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and other biases in clinical practice, both on individual and distributive levels (Crethar, Torres Rivera, & Nash, 2008).

**Study Scope and Limitations**

This study was intended to examine the lived experience of culturally diverse female doctoral students at the ABD stage of CACREP-accredited doctoral programs in counselor education and supervision. This study identified barriers and issues that obstruct female
culturally diverse doctoral students from completing their dissertation, which ultimately results in their degree. This study also examined these factors through a social justice lens as far as how discrimination and oppressive factors in academia and society at large may play a role in demise of attaining the doctorate degree. Little research has been conducted on female counselor educators and their dissertation process (Hinojosa & Carney, 2015; Holm, Prosek, & Godwin Weisberger, 2014; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). Similarly, few studies have examined social justice issues in academia (Chang, Crethar & Ratts, 2010; Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007; Kiselica & Robinson, 2001; McWhirter, 1991; Ratts et al., 2004; Ratts et al, 2016).

I hoped to supplement current knowledge and research in the domains of counselor education, women’s issues in doctoral education, social justice in academia, and multicultural education.

Summary

The voices of many female culturally diverse ABD status candidates in counselor education programs remain unheard, and their experiences and stories remain untold (Hinojosa & Carney, 2015; Holm et al., 2014; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). Research on female doctoral student attrition, retention, and persistence indicated a lack of qualitative research and research on the student voice (Holm et al., 2014; Lovitts, 2001). One justification for this was students oftentimes leave in silence without expressing their reasons for leaving (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lovitts, 2001; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). Thus, some scholars have recommended more research be conducted to obtain the voice of these departing students (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Holm et al., 2014). In this study, I hoped to assist counselor educators in understanding this “at risk” population’s plights and journeys. This is a social justice issue. As Shin (2008)
stated, “Counseling and counseling psychology faculty are situated in unique and influential positions to identify the policies in higher education that perpetuate the oppression of certain individuals and groups and, concurrently, to provide students with strategies for empowerment and social transformation” (p. 181). By gaining a richer understanding of these educated women’s endeavors and experiences, I hoped counselor educators could better address these students’ specific needs within doctoral programs and empower them to complete their educational pursuits and further their contribution to counselor education and supervision.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

“If you can’t fly, then run, if you can’t run then walk, if you can’t walk then crawl, but whatever
you do you have to keep moving forward.”

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

Literature and research on six areas formed this study’s conceptual framework: (a) “All but Dissertation” (ABD) status, (b) persistence, (c) the historical context of social justice within counselor education and supervision, (d) women’s development, (e) female doctoral students, and (f) culturally diverse doctoral students and obstacles they face.

It is important to note that much of the research of these areas was done in the 1990s with scant research being available since then. Recent studies all cite these earlier findings.

The ABD Crisis

The Pervasiveness of ABD

Doctoral student attrition has been an issue throughout the history of academia. One such example was found at the University of California at Berkeley’s English program in the early 1960s, where only 10% of the graduate students achieved their PhDs. High attrition rates were not alarming at that time, as higher education and, doctorate programs in particular, were viewed as a “calling” that few people could attain (Cassuto, 2013). In recent times and studies, the
national attrition rate of doctoral students had remained constant at 50%. Although students leave programs at many different points in time, some 20–30% achieve dissertation status but then fail to complete dissertation requirements (Berelson, 1960; Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Davis & Parker, 1997; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lovitts, 2001; Knox, Burkard, Janacek, Pruitt, Fuller, & Hill, 2011). Attrition rates varied depending on field of study, with the highest rates in social sciences/humanities and lowest in mathematics and natural sciences (Bair, 1999; Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). Despite vigilant student selection processes, the attrition rate of 50% had remained constant over the past 45 years (Berger, 2007; Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Council for Graduate Schools, 2008; Flynn, Chasek, Harper, Murphy, & Jorgensen, 2012; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). This problem has only recently begun to be addressed in counselor education and supervision programs (Flynn, Chasek, Harper, Murphy, & Jorgensen, 2012; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; McAloon, 2004; Protivnak & Foss, 2009).

**Time-to-Degree**

Another issue that had received a lot of attention in the dissertation process and student persistence was time-to-degree. The average time to degree for doctoral students in the humanities was 9 years even in leading universities (Ehrenberg, Zuckerman, Groen, & Brucker, 2010), with some cases taking as long as 13 years (Berger, 2007; Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992). (It is important to note that these programs do refer to the entire time from Master’s through PhD, whereas in counselor education, both the Master’s and Doctorate are separate terminal degrees). Time to degree has become a national issue of accountability for universities (Council
for Graduate Schools, 2010; Gaddy, Charlot-Swilley, Nelson, Reich, 1995), and a strong positive relationship between time to degree and degree completion rates for a number of disciplines and professions has been found (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). The median length of time to complete the doctorate across all areas of psychology was 7.3 years (Council for Graduate Schools, 2010). For comparison purposes, the median time to complete the doctorate is 7.5 years for the social sciences, 6.5 years for the physical sciences, 6.2 years for engineering, 6.7 years for the life sciences, 8.3 years for the humanities, and 8.2 years for education (Council for Graduate Schools, 2010; National Research Council, 1993).

Historically, studies have attributed attrition and lengthy time-to-degree completion to a deficiency in students (Green, 1991). However, many doctoral students felt unprepared for the solitary and unstructured act of doing a dissertation (Gardner, 2009; Nerad & Miller, 1997).

Research has also found a time-to-degree increase of 10% over the past several decades (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Cassuto, 2013). As the years in pursuit of a doctoral degree increase, the odds of students finishing their degree decrease (Hawley, 2003; Holm et al., 2014). “The longer it takes the typical student to finish a program of study, the greater the likelihood that something (personal or professional in character) will cause the student to cease pursuit of the degree” (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992, p. 46).

Obstacles to Dissertation Completion

The burden of having an incomplete dissertation can be heavy for all involved. Berelson (1960) wrote “The ABD experience is uncomfortable and undesirable for all concerned. The uncompleted dissertation hangs over a candidate like a black cloud, interfering with his [sic]
career, his [sic] domestic life, even his [sic] piece of mind” (p. 171). Multiple factors may impede the dissertation progress and process for a doctorate student.

**Multiple Responsibilities**

(Berg & Ferber, 1983; Germeroth, 1991; Hagedorn & Doyle, 1993; Yeager, 2008)

In years past, most doctoral students had one role—that of student. They were more likely to have continued straight on with their education to be full time students who lived on campus. This is no longer the typical doctorate student. Several studies (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010; Flynn, Chasek, Harper, Murphy, & Jorgensen, 2012; Holm, Prosek, & Godwin Weisberger, 2014; Yeager, 2008) stated that 50% of doctoral students were over 35, 65% were married, 80% were employed full time, and 85% were studying part time. Thus, typical doctoral students from the 2000s and beyond tended to have multiple commitments, such as a full-time job and family responsibilities, in addition to the role and responsibility of being a doctoral student.

The challenge of balancing these responsibilities was especially challenging for female students who often had family and work obligations (Holm, Prosek, & Godwin Weisberger, 2014). The open-ended nature of the dissertation placed it in the very susceptible role of being placed upon the back burner once life gets too challenging and crises arise. Females have often been socialized to place everyone else’s needs above their own; family responsibilities were primary reasons why female students persisted less frequently than their male counterparts. (Holm, Prosek & Godwin Weisberger, 2014).
**Difficulty Working with Committee Members**

Another frequently discussed obstacle in the pursuit of the dissertation remained a good working relationship with one or more committee members (Flynn, Chasek, Harper, Murphy, & Jorgensen, 2012; Germeroth, 1991; Hagedorn & Doyle, 1993; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lenz, 1995). Open and clear communication, feedback, and support among students and faculty members was critical for student academic success and personal resolve, especially at the candidacy phase of the dissertation process. Inversely, negative relationships with faculty members seriously impeded student progress (Brunning, Schraw, Norby, & Ronning, 2004). According to Harsch (2008), more than 50% of doctoral students who failed to complete their dissertation attributed a poor relationship with faculty or committee members as a primary reason for their departure from academic pursuits.

There were multiple reasons for poor advising relationships between faculty and students; however, some of the most common appeared to be that students and advisers were unclear of each other’s role and have incompatible expectations (Harsch, 2008; Haizlip, 2012; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Miller, 1995). According to the Council of Graduate Programs (2010), one critical advisor role was to reduce the time students spend on the dissertation and facilitate completion by helping them to select manageable topics and realistic timelines.

**Non-Structure and Independent Arena of the Dissertation Process**

Many doctoral candidates found it hard transitioning from the structured environment of the classroom and projects or the unstructured and ambiguity of the dissertation process (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Flynn et al., 2012; Harsch, 2008; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Yeager,
2008). Although some students enjoyed freedom and lack of structure, many who lacked the discipline for independent work were susceptible to slipping away at this point (Flynn et al., 2012).

Financial Concerns

Doctoral students at this phase of their academic program needed the financial means and stability to give the time and attention their research merited (Germeroth, 1991; Lovitts, 2001; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). Additionally, students were to be enrolled every semester they were working on their dissertation, which can also be a financial strain. Because of financial obligations, most students had to work. Many sought financial aid to defray their educational expenses; however, most no longer met the eligibility for financial aid whilst they were working unless they were enrolled at least half-time. This financial quandary set many students up in a “catch-22” situation. They could not afford to not work, yet work commitments pulled them away from the time and attention necessary to complete their dissertation (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005).

A solution for many doctoral students was a research or teaching assistantship that assisted with their piling educational expenses while still keeping them involved with faculty and present on the university campus (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Haizlip, 2012).

The Challenges of Selecting the Right Topic

Another challenge that doctoral students faced was topic selection. Most students were interested in many topics and had difficulty narrowing their topic down to a manageable scope (Harsch, 2008; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Finding a topic that sustained their interest and attention was another critical factor; successful graduates tended to find their topic stimulating and interesting, whereas ABDs often reported they lacked sufficient interest in their topic of choice (Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Other researchers (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Lambie & Vaccaro, 2011) have recommended students identify research interests/topics early within their doctoral program that could have reduced the struggle alone once coursework was completed.

**Sustained Motivation**

Many students found themselves lacking the motivation necessary to sustain their dissertation process (DiPerro, 2007; Harsch, 2008; Mah, 1986; Protivnak & Foss, 2009). Sixty percent of ABDs lacked motivation and the ability to prioritize their dissertation, whereas only 38.7% of graduates shared the same dilemma (Mah, 1996). Researchers have also associated intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and internal locus of control as contributing factors to engagement with the dissertation process and completion of the dissertation (Brunning, Schraw, Norby, & Ronning, 2004; Harsch, 2008).

**Distance and Isolation From Campus**

The dissertation is a very isolating process (Flynn, Chasek, Harper, Murphy, & Jorgensen, 2012; Hanson, 1992; Harsch, 2008; Katz, 1995; Mah, 1986; Miller, 1995). According to Katz (1995), few experiences isolate people from each other for such an extended time period
as the dissertation. For many students, making the “transition from collaborative scholar to isolated writer was a difficult one” (Miller, 1995, p. 45). Many students also felt the need for a break once they completed their coursework (Holm, Prosek, & Godwin Weisberger, 2014), and if they were isolated from academia and their peers, they struggled with remaining persistent in their dissertation work (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005).

Most students created supportive relationships with other peers while enrolled in courses, which provided motivation, accountability, and encouragement (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). Often, once classes were completed, doctoral students had little-to-no contact with classmates and faculty and often felt themselves behind in their day-to-day responsibilities (Hanson, 1992; Harsch, 2008). As more time passed, everyday life demands tended to govern more time and attention, making getting back on track to complete the dissertation difficult (Harsch, 2008; Tluczek, 1998).

Some students were proactive by starting their dissertation while still completing their coursework. This strategy provided an avenue of support. Programs can assist by providing dissertation seminars (Katz, 1995), establishing peer support groups, and finding ways to keep the dissertation students connected with the faculty, their peers, and the program (Bruce, 1995; Haizlip, 2012).

**Lack of Sufficient Research Skills**

Many students felt unprepared to conduct research alone. Although they had coursework on research methods, few conducted research independently (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Lovitts, 2001). The dissertation process was uncharted territory for all doctoral candidates, and
there appeared to be a developmental process that all must endure and grow through. Moreover, females tended to diminish their research skills and had less self-efficacy as far as viewing themselves as a scholar (Holm et al., 2014; Katz, 1995). Scholars such as Katz (1995), Yeager (2008), and Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) provided suggestions to remediate these students’ lack of research skills which included; reinforcing research expectations through the coursework, requiring independent studies and hands-on experiences, supporting students who present at conferences, involving students in the faculty research projects and holding department or university opportunities for students and faculty alike to present their work.

Summary

The information shared illustrates just how extensive the issue of attrition is for doctoral students and the multiple factors that may contribute to this epidemic. Obstacles include issues, such as the time to degree, multiple responsibilities, interpersonal difficulties with committee members, lack of structure of the dissertation process, financial obligations and responsibilities, difficulty in choosing the right research topic, sustained interest and motivation, distance and isolation from campus, and real or perceived lack of research skills (Flynn et al., 2012; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Yeager, 2008).

Persistence in Higher Education

Completing a dissertation represents the final and most pivotal effort in doctoral student persistence; as such, the process of researching and writing a dissertation can be viewed as a persistence issue. Persistence research in higher education focused on why some students
graduated whereas others do not. This question and others like it resulted in the formulation of persistence theories and models to address this age-old and perplexing issue. The primary theories and models of persistence were based on traditional-aged undergraduate students (Bean, 1980; Spady, 1970, 1971; Tinto, 1975, 1987). However, in recent years, other models have sprung up that address graduate student persistence (Bair, 1999; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005).

The initial segment of this section provides an overview of the major theoretical influences in persistence theory, starting with research and models on persistence with traditional aged undergraduate students, and then proceeding to persistence theory with doctoral students and nontraditional higher education students.

The Historical Context of Persistence Theory

Spady (1970, 1971) was credited with pioneering persistence theory with his conceptual work on the model of student departure. Spady used Durkheim’s (1951) theory of suicide to postulate that students’ withdrawal from school bore similarities to individuals’ withdrawal from society via suicide. According to Durkheim (1951), an individual was more likely to withdraw from society by committing suicide when there was a conflict in values between that individual and society-at-large. Intrigued by Durkheim’s work, Spady (1970, 1971) believed that there was a correlation with the conflict in values between students who drop out of school and campus society. Although the conflict in values was the basis of Spady’s work, he also recognized other factors such as students’ past and present experiences also affected their decision to leave or withdraw from campus life.
Tinto’s Student Integration Model (1975, 1987) built upon Spady’s (1970, 1971) and Durkheim’s (1951) theories and explored the complex reasons for student withdrawal and departure. Like Spady, Tinto emphasized the roles of academic and social integration in student attrition; however, his model was longitudinal, more linear and simplified. Tinto first conceptualized his model in 1975 but then further refined it in 1987. Drawing from the work of 20th century Dutch anthropologist, Van Gennep’s study of tribal rites of passages, Tinto created a similar stage theory for explaining college students. This longitudinal and explanatory model has been tested and critiqued over the years by many researchers (Getzlaf, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980). Some noteworthy criticisms of Tinto’s work were that it minimized factors outside of the university environment in student persistence (Cabrera, Castanada, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992), lacked cultural sensitivity and awareness (Tierney, 1992), and did not take into consideration the experiences of female and nontraditional aged students (Spanard, 1990). Despite its limitations, Tinto’s theory is still widely used and pivotal in explaining student attrition and its casual factors.

Tinto (1975, 1987) described student attrition as a longitudinal and systemic process whereby student background characteristics, intentions and commitments, and other members of the academic and institutional systems all interact and play a role in a student’s decision toward persistence or attrition. Students’ background characteristics and personal attributes (i.e., gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, ability, and self-efficacy) all interplay in the students’ level of commitment to educational goals and attainment. These personal commitments then interplay with the institutions’ academic and social expectations resulting in differing levels of academic and social integration.
According to Tinto (1975, 1987), social integration was the culmination of students’ academic performance, interactions with faculty and staff, and participation in extracurricular activities and peer relations. Oftentimes, student success was determined by the match or “fit” between the student’s individual characteristics, the personalities and dynamics of the committees, and that of the institution’s academic and social lives.

Other researchers have described complementary relationships among Tinto’s variables (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980). For example, when students had low levels of social integration, academic integration had its strongest positive influence. Conversely, as students’ social integration increased, the positive influence of academic integration on persistence became less pronounced. Other variables interacted in similar ways, revealing that a student’s decision to leave or persist is determined by a combination of factors (Stage, 1989).

Bean’s Student Attrition Model (1980) provided another explanation of student persistence and attrition based upon process models of organizational turnover and models of attitude-behavior interactions. Bean contended that student attrition was related to turnover in work organizations and emphasized the significance of behavioral intentions (to stay or leave) as predictors of persistence behavior. Bean addressed a major gap in Tinto’s model (1975), where there was a lot more emphasis placed on external factors playing a prominent role in shaping perceptions, commitments, and preferences which influenced the persistence decision-making process (Cabrera et al., 1992).

Pascarella’s Student-Faculty Informal Contact Model (1980) emphasized the importance of informal relationships between students and faculty members. Pascarella inferred outside-of-
classroom contact between faculty and students is critical in student retentions. This assertion had important applications for doctoral student persistence as relationships with faculty members at the dissertation phase tended to be much more informal than in classroom environments. If those relationships were nurturing and supportive, doctoral students had stronger chances of overcoming the obstacles faced at this critical time in their academic journey.

Bean and Metzner (1985) were the first theorists to propose a theoretical model on nontraditional undergraduate student persistence. Because the majority of female counselor education students were nontraditional, many of these findings were noteworthy. In critiquing other persistence models, Bean and Metzner noted that “one defining characteristic of the nontraditional student was the lack of social integration into the institution” (p. 489). They contended that nontraditional students are more affected by their external environment than by social integration, which is just the opposite of traditional students. A later study by Bean and Metzner (1987) found nontraditional students dropped out of college for reasons unrelated to social factors at school, further supporting the notion that external factors play a significant role in student persistence or attrition among nontraditional students.

**Graduate Student Persistence**

Although there was significant research in undergraduate student persistence, research was lacking in graduate student persistence, in particular doctoral student persistence. Tinto (1993) surmised that the lack of research in this area is due to the lack of a comprehensive model or theory of graduate persistence to guide researchers. Interestingly, almost all the research that has been done on doctoral attrition in the recent years has been done by doctoral students
themselves, rather than faculty members (Mah, 1986; Williams, 1997). Jacks et al. (1983) implied that so little research has been done because it reminds faculty members and academia of their failures.

According to Girves and Wemmerus (1988), the doctoral attrition process has not been subjected to careful and systemic examination. Mah (1986) alleged that methodological challenges may have been responsible for the lack of research. Brown and Slater (1960) shared that attrition studies were difficult to research in the short-term unless they were done retrospectively. Identifying and locating former doctoral candidates who had dropped out of their perspective programs was a definite limitation in the persistence literature. Tinto (1993) concluded,

Given the importance of graduate education, it is surprising that so little research has been carried out on the process of graduate persistence. Relative to the knowledge acquired from the extensive body of research on the process of undergraduate persistence . . . we have gained little insight into the forces that shape graduate persistence. . . . In most countries, the more selective the level of education, the higher the rate of student completion. In the United States, the reverse is true. The higher and more selective the level of education, the lower the rate of completion. (p. 230)

Although estimates of doctoral attrition rates varied from university and course of study, a conservative estimate was 40%–50% (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Cassuto, 2013; Council of Graduate Schools, 2010; Tinto, 1993). Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) contrasted the high doctoral attrition rate with the completion rates of other professional schools of law, business, and medicine, which often exceeds 95%.
Girves and Wemmerus (1988) proposed a two-stage model that addressed the issue of graduate persistence. The first stage examined such variables as student characteristics, department characteristics, students’ views about their relationships with faculty, and financial support. These four factors were predicted to interplay with second-stage variables, which included involvement in the program, satisfaction with the department, student grades, and alienation. It was apparent that Girves and Wemmerus (1988) drew heavily on Tinto’s Model of Student Integration (1975, 1987, 1993), as student involvement and grades align directly with Tinto’s concept of academic integration and the satisfaction and alienation variables relate to his concept of social integration.

Although both Girves and Wemmerus (1988) and Tinto (1993) contended that graduate student persistence was a longitudinal process, with different factors influencing students’ decision-making at various points throughout the process, research in this area has been scant at best (Williams, 1997). Tinto (1993) directly addressed the issue of doctoral student persistence and viewed this process as having three distinct stages. The first stage is that of transition and adjustment; the second is that of attaining candidacy or acquiring competence, and third, the completion of the research project culminating in the granting of the doctoral degree. According to Tinto (1993), the primary stage of transition typically occurred during the first year of doctoral study.

This time was characterized by the student becoming acclimated to the academic and social life at the institution and finding their bearings. What was paramount at this stage were the informal and formal social and academic interactions among students and faculty members, especially members within the same department. Zwick (1991) shared that student persistence at
this stage was contingent on the level of individual commitments to completing the doctorate in general and the students’ own career goals.

The second stage of Tinto’s model (1993) occurred as students acquired the knowledge and the skills sets necessary for conducting doctoral level research. This stage concluded as students attained doctoral candidacy once they have completed and defended candidacy examinations. Tinto found a blurring of boundaries between academic and social integration at the stage because student academic and social communities were heavily steeped with the department, both with faculty and peers. Interaction within the classroom greatly impacted both social and academic integration at this point, thus social relationships developed during this period played a more critical role for doctoral students than for undergraduates.

Tinto’s final stage was doctoral candidacy, whereby the focus was on the dissertation research. This was the stage where students were in jeopardy of not completing the dissertation, as their journey shifted from being a very social and academically involved and supportive community to an isolated journey of working on ones’ own with relatively few interactions with faculty (only those who serve on the students’ committees). These faculty members were very influential in the students’ performance in the program as well as serving as the link to future employment opportunities. Tinto (1993) concluded that “persistence at this stage may be highly idiosyncratic in that it hinged largely if not entirely upon the behavior of a specific faculty member” (p. 237).

Conversely, this time was also where external commitments such as additional work and family obligations emerged. These external factors also played a significant role or whether a doctorate student persisted.
Girves and Wemmerus (1988) applied the concept of “degree progress” rather than an end goal in conceptualizing their model of graduate student persistence. Their model entailed five stages in the graduate degree process; two at the master’s and three at the doctoral level. The master’s level phases included (a) courses taken but no degree is earned, and (b) the master’s degree was conferred. The doctorate level stages consisted of (c) completion of the coursework beyond the master’s level, (d) completion of candidacy exams and the award of candidacy, and (e) the completion of the doctorate (research and degree). The final three stages correlated with Tinto’s work.

**Doctoral Student Persistence**

There were multi-tiered reasons for studying doctoral student persistence and attrition. One of the most critical reasons was the personal cost and loss to doctoral students who failed to complete their degree (Flynn et al., 2012; Lovitts, 2001). Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) described these students’ accounts to leave a doctoral program as “personally devastating, leaving them depressed and sometimes suicidal” (p. 175). A second reason was the extensive work and effort put forth by faculty members and dissertation Chairs who worked with doctoral students (Berelson, 1960; Flynn, et al., Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lovitts, 2001). Universities were also impacted when students didn’t complete their dissertations, as academic institutions incurred financial costs in educating these students, (Cook & Swanson, 1978; Flynn et al., 2012; Lovitts, 2001; McAloon, 2004; National Science Foundation, 1998; Nerad & Miller, 1996; Pauley Cunningham, & Toth, 1999), and finally, the loss in the U.S. society of the most highly trained individuals (Flynn et al., 2012; Lovitts, 2001, Tinto, 1993).
Persistence in Counselor Education

Student-faculty interactions played a pivotal role in the satisfaction, support, and academic persistence of graduate students (Flynn et al., 2012; Harsch, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978, 1979; Tinto, 1975) within their perspective programs. However, there remained an inconsistency within the field of counselor education regarding how counselors were taught to interact with clients (empathic, supportive, attentive, etc.) and how graduate students were supported and empowered. Counselor educators did not always practice what they preached/taught (Chang et al., 2010; Heppner, Wright, & Berry, 1990; Kottler, 1992; Zeligman et al., 2015). Counseling journals, newsletters, and books offered little information on how counselor education programs attended to the experience, maturity, personal, and professional needs of counselor education students (Flynn et al., 2012; Hinojosa & Carney, 2016). The 2014 Code of Ethics of the American Counseling Association (ACA) addressed the need for counselor educators to “actively attempt to recruit and retain a diverse student body” and “to provide appropriate accommodations that enhance and support diverse student well-being and academic performance” (Section F.11.b, p. 15), yet research continued to point to lower retention rates and levels of persistence among diverse and female counselor educator doctoral students. Descriptive studies (Antonio, 2004, Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Haizlip, 2012; Johnson, Bradley, Knight, & Bradshaw, 2007) approximately 3.4% of counseling faculty out of an approximately 1,200 in CACREP-accredited programs identified themselves as African Americans, yet of the 29 CACREP-accredited doctoral programs in counselor education that responded to the study, 17.9% of students were African American; with 5.3% being men and 12.6% being women (Johnson et al., 2007), and African Americans comprised 6.9% of all doctorates in 2009.
(National Science Foundation, 2010). Furthermore, Hinojosa and Carney (2016), stated that Hispanic faculty are underrepresented compared to other counseling faculty, highlighting this point by emphasizing “Actual numbers of graduate counseling students and faculty from the 2014 CACREP annual report were so insignificant that it was necessary to combine the population as Hispanic/Latino/Spanish American. Together, members of this population made up only 7.75% of counselor education students and just 4.84% of counselor education faculty (p. 198).

More counselor education research on student faculty interactions is needed (Flynn et al, 2012; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005); however, the current 2016 CACREP standards (2017) integrated professional service and advocacy in counseling as requirements for faculty members. Furthermore, under Section 6: Doctoral Standards for Counselor Education and Supervision, “Doctoral degree programs in Counselor Education and Supervision were intended to prepare graduates to work as counselor educators, supervisors, researchers, and practitioners in academic and clinical settings” (p. 34). The intention of 2016 CACREP doctoral programs was to prepare graduates to work in the field, as well as, the emphasis on programs supporting faculty and students in publishing and presenting the results of scholarly inquiry spoke to the need for research on persistence and support of ABD students. This was also stated in section B. Doctoral Professional Identity, whereby “Doctoral programs in counselor education address professional roles in five doctoral core areas: counseling, supervision, teaching, research and scholarship, and leadership and advocacy. This proposal addressed all five areas as it addresses understanding the needs of female ABD students and their successful navigation through the dissertation process.
Factors Affecting Female Doctoral Students

Understanding female doctoral students required an overview of female development as well as an examination of factors that face female doctoral students. Areas that arose from the research included (a) relationships, (b) mentoring, (c) role strain/conflict, (d) self-doubt, (e) perfectionism, and (f) epistemological development.

**Relationships**

The emphasis that women placed on interpersonal relationships was a critical factor to understanding how female doctoral students made meaning of the dissertation process. The significance of relationships was emphasized in all studies of women’s development (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Hinojosa & Carney, 2016; Holm et al., 2014; Josselon, 1987; Worrell & Remer, 2003; Zeligman et al., 2015). An overview of these developmental theories laid the foundation for viewing female doctoral students.

Chodorow’s (1978) study of separation-individuation provided the groundwork for much of the research on women’s development. Because most developmental theories used male subjects as the focus of most of their research, developmental tasks, such as attaining autonomy and independence had been culturally accepted as the norm and necessary for healthy human development in Western cultures.

However, Chodorow contended that the separation-individuation task occurs differently for males and females. Her theory stated that because females were typically cared for by a same-sex caregiver, their mother, they often developed an identity within the context of that relationship without having to separate from their mothers. Males, however, had the need to
separate from their primary relationship with their mothers, so that they could establish their own separate identity as a man.

Chodorow (1978) believed that female development was more fluid or continuous because of the constant connection to mothers. Since females did not have to separate from their primary caregiver to establish their identity, the relationship was often associated with connection, joining, and affection. Chodorow asserted that this primary connection carried over to other relationships that women had in their lives and helped explain the fundamental role that relationships play for women.

Likewise, Gillian (1982) found that the early development of women played a critical factor in choices women make in her breakthrough study on women’s moral reasoning and decision-making. She found that most men and women tend to operate from very different perspectives when making decisions. Gillian referred to the female manner of decision-making as the “care” and “responsibility” voice (a “different” voice), while the male voice was one predicated on “rights” and “justice.”

Gilligan’s (1982) conclusions had major implications for female doctoral students and their committee members at the dissertation stage. Conflicts that arose between the students and committee member often resulted in differences in perspectives or different voices. Individuals who operated from a “justice” and “rights” perspective tended to view situations objectively and typically made decisions based on logic and reasoning. They were steered in their decision-making processes by rules, which superseded relationships. Inversely, those who operated from a “care” and “responsibility” voice tended to be very attuned to relationships and these relationships became the primary factor in decision-making and supersede rules. The
relationships were of primary concern and were kept intact, often resulting in mediation, compromise, and negotiation as means to maintain relationships.

Josselson’s (1987) study on women’s identity development also echoed the findings of Gilligan and Chodorow. Josselson developed the term “anchoring” to describe the emphasis on connection in women’s development. She maintained that as women develop and are separated from their primary identification with mothers, part of their continuing identity development was the transference of this primary identification onto other significant others within their lives. According to Josselson (1987, p. 175), “Who a woman is reflects her sense of what she means to others.”

Because relationships were such a critical characteristic of women’s development and self-worth, these relationships may be a central concern for female doctoral students during the dissertation phase (Holm et al., 2014). Female students at the dissertation stage were faced with maintaining existing relationships in their personal and professional lives, while also developing and maintaining good working relationships with their committee members. These relationships with faculty may have been a critical source of support and encouragement for female doctoral students. Both personal and professional growth depended on good faculty-student relationships (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Holms et al., 2014).

Kuperberg (2009) reported that the rates of motherhood during graduate school were increasing when compared to the rates of motherhood for the general comparable population of women. However, graduate mothers reported feeling guilt and pressure to be a good parent while still maintaining and juggling the multiple responsibilities of being a graduate student (Khadjooi, Scott, & Jones, 2012; Trepal, Stinchfield, & Haiyasono, 2014). Furthermore, due to constraints
of childcare and trying to establish a work-life balance, doctoral students have often felt unable
to share in the same academic activities as their peers, which often resulted in them feeling more
of a personal and professional disconnection (Khadjooi et al., 2012). Stinchfield and Trepal
(2010) found that women in counselor education reported higher rates of caregiving, and
household responsibilities, as well as finding more balance between work and family in later
stages of their careers.

Women’s Perceptions of the Dissertation Process

Women shared various perceptions of the dissertation process. Some viewed it as a
challenge and a rite of passage.

Not all women view the process in a positive light. William’s (1997) research reflected
the displeasure of one of the female participants as she shared her perception:

I think the dissertation is America’s way—no, not necessarily America’s way but our
culture’s way of separation. The original dissertation was not meant to serve the purpose
that it is serving today.

Her fury was evidenced as she continued,

It’s all about the product. It’s all about . . . dissertation and academics than it is about
process. I am for that part, and I think research needs to be there but, but I don’t think
that’s all of it. I think [the dissertation process] is a blending, a marriage of the masculine
and feminine, and I think we attend to the masculine way of life, and I think we are raped
by it. And I feel enormous rage as a woman, and no, I have not been physically raped, but
our institutions themselves are masculine in nature and our life is masculine. And it’s all
focused om the product and performance and you lose your soul. (Williams, 1997, p. 165).

Mentoring

Mentors are those individuals who had an ability to see the greatness within others and to nurture and cultivate those abilities that individuals may not even see within themselves (Jacobi, 1991). Effective mentors can encourage and enhance their protégés to develop skills, confidence, and competency beyond their natural paths and also are instrumental in developing leadership skills and opportunities for their protégés (Holm et al., 2014; Lynch, 2008; Schweibert, 2000).

There has been much research about the efficacy of mentoring relationships and programs within the business arena, but recently there have been similar findings that indicated that counselors and counselor educators also benefitted from effective mentoring experiences (Anderson & Shannon, 1988; Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Holm et al., 2014; Jacobi, 1991; Johnson & Huwe, 2003; Kram, 1988; Lynch, 2008; Philips-Jones, 1982; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000). Holm et al. (2014) found that mentoring was the salient protective factor in women and doctoral mothers being successful their academic program. Similarly, Lynch (2008) attributed faculty involvement and emotional support led to increased graduate student satisfaction in their doctoral programs. Literature stated that mentored junior faculty in counselor education programs “become more productive scholars and more confident teachers, feel less isolated and have more collegial relationships with other departmental faculty, report higher career and job satisfaction, and experience greater career advancement” (Borders, Young, Wester, Murray, Villalba, Lewis, & Mobley, 2011, p. 171). Jacobi (1997) described mentoring as
“the forgotten fourth leg in the academic stool” (p. 486), implying that although there was countless research stating the merits and benefits of mentoring, it is seldom computed into the faculty expectation of teaching, research, and service. Johnson purported, “A stool (or an academic career) supported entirely by research, teaching, and service is incomplete (and structurally less stable) than one bolstered by attention to strong student-faculty relationships” (Johnson, 2007, p. 5).

Mentoring programs (both formal and informal), created conditions for success in higher education and have served to (a) integrate a student into the fabric of the department, (b) cultivate essential social and professional networks, (c) aid students in acquiring core research competencies, and (d) pave the way for placement in the work force upon matriculation from school (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001). Phillips-Jones (1982) suggested that mentors helped their protégés by sharing knowledge and expertise, providing emotional support, serving as successful role models, advocating for their protégés, and working collaboratively with their protégés in the areas of teaching and research. As cited by Johnson (2007), quality mentoring relationships:

. . . promote socialization, learning, career advancement, psychological adjustment and preparation for leadership. Compared to non-mentored individuals, those with mentors tend to be more satisfied with their careers, enjoy more promotions and higher income, report greater commitment to the organization or profession, and are likely to mentor others in return. (p. 4)

Counselors’ careers and leadership experiences are also enhanced by several other important factors. According to Johnson and Huwe (2003), effective mentors also provided
protégés with opportunities for recognition and encouragement, honest feedback, advice on balancing responsibilities, and knowledge about the informal rules of the organization. Mentors also used their contacts and resources to include their protégés in such opportunities as joint projects and research opportunities, introduced protégés to top authorities within the field, nominated protégés for awards and recognitions, and supported the protégés for promotion. Finally, the protégés may have benefitted indirectly from the reflected power of the mentor. That is, because the mentor was usually a powerful and respected member of the organization, the protégés frequently enjoyed a special status and acceptance through association with the mentor which directly impacted their ability to develop as leaders in the professional field (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990).

Mentoring is both a relationship and a process. It is a dynamic relationship between an individual with more knowledge, ability, influence, and achievement (mentor) and a person with a less of these variables (protégé or mentee). This relationship can vary in accordance with the differences in experience, rationale, and commitment from both the mentor and protégé (Schweibert, 2000).

Types of Mentoring

There are two kinds of mentoring experiences. Informal mentoring relationships develop based on mutual interests or developmental needs (Kram, 1988). These relationships were usually unstructured; the partners met as necessary over the course of the relationship, which generally lasted between 3 to 6 years. Informal mentoring relationships were generally focused on achieving long-term career goals and tended to be the most effective (Johnson, 2007).
There were also formal mentoring relationships and programs. Formal mentoring occurred when protégés and mentors (sponsors) were matched or assigned by a third party (Kram, 1988). Such mentoring relationships tended to be structured, lasting between 6 months and a year with infrequent or sporadic contact, and were often dictated by a contractual agreement. The focus may have been on new employee-orientation or career goals that were short-term and applicable only to the protégé’s (mentee’s) current position. Formal mentoring programs that have had informal relationship components (such as voluntary participation, choice in matching process, and focus on protégé career development goals) have been linked to positive career and job attitudes (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000).

**Mentoring Components**

Though there have been many published descriptions and dimensions of mentoring relationships, Jacobi (1991, p. 513) tended to be most recognized for her depiction of the five general components of mentoring:

1. Mentoring relationships were usually focused on achievement or acquisition of knowledge between the mentor and protégé. An important aspect of the relationship was the assistance and support provided by the mentor to the protégé. Most often, the mentor helped the protégé to achieve long-term and comprehensive goals, in contrast to a teacher or sponsor who may have assisted with specific activities or short-term tasks.
2. Mentoring consisted of three broad components: emotional and psychological support, direct assistance with career and professional development, and role modeling.

3. Mentoring relationships were reciprocal in nature—both mentor and protégé receive either tangible or emotional benefitted from the association.

4. Mentoring relationships were personal in nature, involving direct interaction between the mentor and protégé.

5. In comparison with their protégés, mentors had greater experience, influence, and achievement within a particular organization or environment.

Mentoring and Diversity

Mentoring programs have also been seen to be especially effective for women and diverse populations, who were often less likely to have some of the same opportunities within the professional world or academia (Holm et. al., 2014; Williams-Nickelson, 2009). Despite research stating the importance of mentoring programs, often students of color did not have the same opportunities to become involved in mentoring relationships (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Smith & Davidson, 1992; Zeligman et al., 2015). In one study, one third of African American graduate students surveyed reported that they had received no mentoring support or guidance in their programs (Haizlip, 2012) and women also cited a lack of mentors as a difficulty in academia (Bruce, 1995; Catalyst, 2000; Hill, 2004; Holm et al., 2014; Williams-Nickelson, 2009; Zeligman et al., 2015). There was also discussion about how culturally competent some mentors may be in dealing with women and diverse populations (Borders et al., 2011). This has
had profound implications for the field of counseling since many women and students of color were less likely to receive any mentoring and thus will have fewer opportunities to become leaders within their field of study.

Mentorship was especially important to women of color entering academia, as they feared isolation with their peers during the experience, and women of color stated faculty support, both formally and informally, and mentorship were primary factors in promoting self-confidence while in graduate school (Miller & Stone, 2011). With the scarcity of mentors in graduate programs who were knowledgeable about culturally appropriate ways to guide women and students of color, these students were at greater risk of not receiving sufficient training in research and specialized content areas, not completing their degree areas, and not being well positioned to succeed in their future careers (Zeligman et al., 2015). Esposito (2011) described unspoken messages, many of which were not positive, regarding race and class on campus. Esposito spoke to these unspoken messages as a “hidden curriculum,” or the lessons that students learned about race and gender by viewing interactions between faculty and students, and witnessing the power differentials, sexism and racism that existed. This hidden curriculum can be a contributing factor to a potentially hostile academic environment, where minority student populations found themselves without support and empowerment (Esposito, 2011; Pittman, 2012). Joseph (2012) contended that these factors attributed to nearly two-thirds of Black women who start a doctoral program not completing it.

Issues of Diversity and Mentoring in Professional Organizations

The American Counseling Association (ACA) and its state divisions have stressed and
called for a promotion of more diversity and multicultural awareness within the counseling professional organizations (ACA, 2006). This call for diversity was also addressed in the mission statements of the organizations. ACA and the Illinois Counseling Association (ICA), a division of ACA stated the following: “The mission . . . was to enhance the quality of life in society by promoting the development of professional counselors, advancing the counseling profession, and using the profession and practice of counseling to promote respect for human dignity and diversity” (ACA, 2011; ICA, 2011).

Evidence also bore that there were a limited number of counselors of color who belonged to ACA. In May 2004, only 13% of the membership of the American Counseling Association was described as ethnically or racially diverse, whereas the U.S. Census Bureau (2000) showed 31% of the overall U.S. population to be African American, Asian American, Latino Americans, and Native American (Bemak, 2005). No research was found that speaks to the diversity of counselors who are not ACA members or why the profession of counseling attracts limited numbers of ethnically or racially diverse individuals.

**Mentoring Women in Counselor Education**

The aforementioned research has focused on mentoring in general and education; however, many scholars have pointed to the need for research focused on the expectations of women in counselor education (Bruce, 1995; Hinojosa & Carney, 2016; Holm et al., 2014; Zeligman et al., 2015). These studies indicated that women may have different needs for mentoring than men. These results stressed the importance of the relationship and stressed the significance of encouragement and support, role models, and professional development for
female doctoral students (Bruce, 1995; Hinojosa & Carney, 2016; Holm et al., 14; Zeligman et al., 2015).

Garofolo and Hansman-Ferguson (1995) explored the barriers that prevent women from successful mentoring relationships in their doctoral programs. “Establishing mentoring relationships is important in the academic environment, but, unfortunately for women, initiating and keeping a relationship with a faculty mentor in the academic environment can be problematic” (Garofolo & Hansman-Ferguson, 1995, p. 94). Some barriers cited include the “good old boys’ network,” multiple role responsibilities, lack of female mentors, and issues with men mentoring women. Garofolo and Hansman-Ferguson’s study also identified the lack of time as a major barrier for women in establishing mentoring relationships. This lack of time was attributed to the multiple roles and responsibilities that these women have outside of the academic setting.

Cross-gender mentoring was addressed in studies by Bruce (1995) and Garofolo and Hansman-Ferguson (1995). Their findings illustrated the divergent communication styles between men and women and how this disparity may have affected the feedback for female students. Bruce emphasized, “Counselor educators and supervisors must recognize barriers in cross-gender mentoring, then openly discuss strategies to legitimize and appropriately handle such relationships” (p. 148). Peer mentoring can be a significant source of support and stress for female doctoral students (Bowman, Bowman, & Delucia, 1990; Bruce, 1995; Carter et al., 2013; Garofolo & Hansman-Ferguson, 1995; Zeligman et al., 2015). Informal groups where female students could have discussed their dissertation research and experiences provided an excellent supportive environment, particularly at the dissertation stage.
These peer relationships have also been a source of stress during this time (Carter et al., 2013; Follett, Andbert, & Hendell, 1982; Hite, 1985). For example, relationships with male students may have been a source of stress because of a perceived negative attitude toward women in graduate school. Some male students had stereotypical expectations of female counterparts as less competent (Carter et al., 2013; Flynn et al., 2012).

Mentoring relationships can play a significant role in the success of female doctoral students during the dissertation phase. It is important, however, to note that faculty members may have had different strengths. Some faculty members may have been strong in the mentoring component, however not effective in directing the dissertation process. For example, a mentor may have been very competent at encouraging students in professional involvement, serving as a role model and assisting students at networking, yet not meeting student needs at the dissertation phase. Oftentimes, it was advisable for the student to have different mentors at different phases of their development who served different roles (Flynn et al., 2012).

Role Conflict

One of the major obstacles to establishing mentoring relationships for female students was lack of time due to multiple commitments and responsibilities (Garofolo & Hansman-Ferguson, 1995; Carter et al., 2013; Flynn et al., 2012). Female doctoral students often reported conflict in trying manage and integrate their personal and professional life roles (Carter et al., 2013). Dublon (1983) defined role strain as a situation in which too many responsibilities caused role overload. Adding doctoral students to responsibilities with little modification to other tasks often resulted in role overload and role strain (Worrell & Remer, 2003). Female students sought
to balance their various roles as a student, worker, parent, friend, partner, daughter, significant other, and citizen (Flynn et al., 2012; Holm et al., 2015).

According to Hite (1985), “Women pursuing doctoral study in any field experienced more conflict in integrating the student role into their lifestyle than males at the same educational level” (p. 62). As mentioned earlier, given the centrality of relationships in women’s lives, it was understandable that women would have struggled more with the multiple roles and responsibilities because of the significance and identification of relationships. From the male perspective, it was easier to be objective and to have compartmentalized the different aspects of one’s life. However, from the female perspective, this proved to be much more difficult.

Female doctoral students may have been juggling multiple roles; however, the roles surrounding family issues appeared to be the most challenging (Carter et al., 2013; Hinojosa & Carney, 2016; Hagedorn & Doyle, 1993; Hanson, 1995; Holm et al., 2015; Kaplan, 1982; Zeligman et al., 2015). Although being married was usually associated with higher persistence among undergraduate men, it was often related to lower completion rates among married undergraduate women (Carter et al., 2013; Holm, et al., 2015). Role conflict was particularly challenging for cultures (e.g., Hispanic, Asian American) that emphasized the nurturing role of women (Hinojosa, 2016; Worrell & Remer, 2003). Because gender-role socialization varied among minority groups, minority women experienced the home-career-school conflict with various degrees of intensity (Holm et al., 2015). African American women have had less home-career-school conflict than Caucasian women, andLatinas have had higher conflict (Fassinger, 2001; Haizlip, 2012; Hinojosa & Carney, 2016; Stitt-Gohdes, 1997).

Garofolo and Hansman-Ferguson (1995) and Holm, Prosek, and Godwin Weisberger
(2015) discussed the impact that these conflicting responsibilities and roles may have on female doctoral students. Because of the multiple roles, lack of time was identified by female doctoral students as a major obstacle in developing positive, mentoring relationships with faculty as well as supportive peer relationships. Often students are viewed only as students, rather than from a more inclusive view that takes into consideration the contexts within which the student was immersed. For female doctoral students struggling with role conflicts, the priority of the dissertation may be different than a student who did not have as many responsibilities. The fact that female doctoral students have multiple roles did not indicate that the dissertation was not important, but rather, that it was viewed in the context of the student’s life (Holm et al., 2015; Zeligman et al., 2015).

**Self-Doubt**

Several researchers have indicated female students tended to underestimate their actual abilities (Alder, 1976; Carter et al., 2013; Hanson, 1995; Hinojosa & Carney, 2016; Holm et al., 2015; King & Bauer, 1988; Smart & Pascarella, 1987; Zeligman et al., 2015). High achieving women often felt fake or pretentious regardless of their achievements (Clance, 1985; Clance & Imes, 1978). Clance and Imes (1984) termed this experience, the *imposter phenomenon*. The imposter phenomenon describes “an internal experience of phoniness common among high achieving women who persist in believing that they are not bright, capable, or creative, despite ample evidence to the contrary” (p. 69). *Imposters* tended to be anxious about failure when faced with evaluation or new tasks, they had difficulty internalizing positive feedback, underestimated their own abilities and chances for future success, minimized their successes (attributing it to
luck and hard work), avoided certain accomplishments, and set goals below their potential
(Carter, et al., 2013; Worrell & Remer, 2003). Even for female doctoral students who have been
academically successful, a lasting fear of being “found out” seemed to linger with many of them
(Carter et al, 2013).

Ewing, Richardson, James-Meyers, and Russell (1996) examined the imposter
phenomenon in African American graduate students. They revealed that academic self-concept
and being in the immersion-emersion stage of racial identity were significant negative predictors
of feeling like an imposter. Haizlip (2012) asserted that the internalized effects of both racism
and sexism contribute to the imposter phenomenon in African American women.

Women were socialized to be cooperative and nurturing, whereas men were socialized to
be achievement-oriented, competitive, and intelligent (Bernard, 1981; Gilligan, 1982; Carter et
al., 2013). In a related study, Hobish (1979) asserted that traits such as assertiveness and
dominance, typically considered masculine, are required for success. He further asserted,
“Clearly (completing the doctorate) is a style of achievement that is antithetical to the stereotypic
femininity in our society” (p. 12). According to Hite (1985), female students often thought that
their professors did not believe that they had the ability or motivation to succeed and did not see
them as competent, capable professionals. Alder (1976) noted that women themselves often
believed that they were less competent and less able to succeed professionally than men.

Because of the “imposter phenomenon” and society’s perceived negative view towards
them, many female graduate students often experienced stress and lack of motivation to continue
in their studies (Carter et al., 2013). Female doctoral students may have perceived a lack of
support and encouragement in mentors and role models (Carter, et al., 2013; Hite, 1985; Lynch,
2008). Many women who could have potentially become role models themselves dropped out, thus depriving future female students a mentoring opportunity. Hite suggested that such a sequence perpetuates the cycle of underachievement among female students.

**Perfectionism**

Closely associated with female graduate students’ self-doubts and fear of failure was the tendency towards perfectionism. “A woman who lives with the fear of failure can never rest; she can never fully be herself or be at peace with herself because she holds herself to a standard that demands no less than perfection” (Yuen & Depper, 1988, p. 21). Perfectionism is a well-documented issue with female students at the dissertation phase (Carter et al., 2013; Bell, 1990; Germeroth 1991; Katz, 1995; Lynch, 2005). Bright, motivated, achievement-oriented women working to achieve high standards of performance may likely suffer from perfectionism (Carter et al., 2013). Perfectionists have had a hard time completing a dissertation; there was always one more citation, another section of literature to review, another type of methodology to explore. Things could always be improved (Carter et al, 2013; Madsen, 1983; Williams, 1997).

In her 1991 dissertation completion study, Germeroth contended that perfectionism was a critical barrier in dissertation completion. Perfectionism was also found to be a greater barrier for women than men. Although she didn’t delve into the reasons for higher levels of perfectionism in women, Germeroth did offer several elucidations for this finding. The first contention was that women may have felt the need to overcome prior stereotypes and discrimination by proving their legitimacy. A second explanation was that women have a fear of fulfilling another stereotype—that they will waste their training by getting married and raising children rather than putting their
credentials to use. The emphasis women placed on relationships also impacted perfectionistic tendencies. Women were naturally more sensitive to the needs of others, had a need to please, and thus, were responsive to the expectations of others. For perfectionists, pleasing others meant being perfect (Bell, 1990; Williams, 1997).

Hendlin (1992) described perfectionism as being “consciously and unconsciously built into the very cultural, psychological, and religious foundations of our achievement-oriented upbringing” (p. 5). Given these contexts, as well as the pressures and achievement-oriented arena of academia, in particular doctoral education, it seemed inevitable that perfectionism would be problematic during the dissertation.

Women tended to have fewer role models in doctoral programs, therefore, female students had no gauge against which to measure their performance (Lynch, 2005). Many females set unrealistic goals for themselves and tried to achieve those unrealistic goals perfectly (Lenz, 1995) while struggling on their own. Lenz found that all the female doctoral students in her study exhibited perfectionistic tendencies. Similarly, Germeroth (1991) noticed two themes related to dissertation writing and perfectionism: Female candidates either (a) decided to not start writing until they knew the end result would be perfect or (b) were paralyzed by internal criticism of their writing.

These perfectionistic traits seemed to assist the successful doctoral graduates; however, interestingly, these same tendencies hindered the progress of ABDs (Lenz, 1995). Lenz also found that completers may have had more emotional support that assisted in moving past the perfectionism.
Epistemological Development

“Epistemological development connotes a form of intellectual development that focuses specifically on the development of beliefs about the nature of knowledge” (Baxter Magolda, 1990, p. 555). Certainly, women’s views about learning and knowledge were instrumental in determining how they perceive the dissertation process.

Belenky et al. (1986), who conducted one of the most extensive studies on women’s intellectual development, *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, reported that women often felt isolated in academic settings because of information processing differences. According to Belenky et al, society’s conceptions about knowledge and truth has been largely shaped by a male-dominated majority culture, particularly in higher education. Such a paradigm values objectivity, rationale, and impersonal processing of information:

Another problem with traditional pedagogy so that it rewards learning that is associated with rational, objective approaches and as it happens with male students. Frequently, the mark of success becomes the grade that a student achieved rather than the student’s development of the ability to make meaning. (Maher & Tetreault, 1994, p. 228)

Because women typically operate from a more interpersonal, emotional perspective, they have often been viewed as less scholarly than men. “Feminist pedagogy, culturally constituted and ascribe to women in general, is defined as cooperative rather than competitive, attentive to student experiences, and concerned with the personal and relational aims and sources of knowledge” (Maher & Tetreault, 1994, p. 228). One major theme that has emerged from women’s studies of female student in higher education was that of being an “outsider” (Hayes & Flannery, 1996), regarding the differences in gender orientation to knowing and learning.
Women have experienced both overt and covert discriminatory practices in higher education. In the *Project on the Status and Education of Women*, Bernice Sandler (1982) acknowledged 35 categories of conditions that functioned to create a “chilly climate in the classroom” for female students in academia. This comprehensive study determined that both male and female faculty undermined female students’ self-confidence and career aspirations. Examples of discriminatory situations include: (a) overt discrimination (disparaging comments in class, questioning female career commitment, sexual harassment), (b) subtle discrimination (being more attentive to male students), and (c) rendering women invisible (interrupting them more, disregarding females who volunteered, calling on female students less frequently; Worrell & Remer, 2003).

In a study of learning styles and the dissertation, Lawler (1993) observed that the dissertation is a solitary, introversion activity. “For those students who had a strong preference towards extroversion, this may have been a difficult task. They would prefer to get their information by activity engaging others in discussion” (p. 7). What Lawler referred to as a “strong preference for extroversion” was echoed by Belenky et al.’s (1986) research, where they spoke of a connected knowing in women. According to Belenky et al., the most conducive learning environments for women tended to be those in which cognitive knowledge was integrated with life experiences.

Baxter Magolda (1993) conducted a longitudinal study of college students’ epistemological development and identified four ways of knowing: (a) absolute, (b) transitional, (c) independent, (d) contextual. Baxter Magolda’s discussion of *contextual knowing* in graduate and professional schools appeared to have significant relevance for female students at the
dissertation phase. “Contextual knowers believe that knowledge is uncertain and one decides what to believe by evaluating the evidence in the context of the question” (pp. 2–3). Her earlier work (1992) reflected three philosophies for promoting contextual knowing. First, “validating the students as knowers” (p. 3) entailed letting students know that they were co-constructors of knowledge whose opinions were valued. Second, “situating learning in students’ own experiences” (p. 3) affirmed that the students' own experiences and beliefs played a dominant role in knowledge construction. The final principle was “defining learning as mutually constructed meaning” (p. 3), which reframed knowing as co-constructing rather than acquiring knowledge. Baxter Magolda’s work (1993) on the promotion of the contextual knowledge related well with the dissertation process, as conducting original research and critically evaluating others’ opinions was a critical part of the dissertation process.

Having a deeper understanding of women’s development was critical when exploring the meanings and lived experiences of female doctoral students because of much of their perspective directly related to themes in women’s development (ex: centrality of relationships, mentoring, self-doubt, perfectionism, epistemological development). It is important to note that only one of these studies directly focused on the dissertation, therefore, further research needs to be done to understand whether these factors are significant issues for female students during the dissertation phase.

Summary

The experience of female doctoral students at the dissertation stage was a persistence issue since their failure to complete the final capstone resulted in devastating losses to the
student, their families, and the university (Lovitt, 2001; Holms et al, 2015). Several of the undergraduate models constructs, such as social and academic integration, were also critical issues at the doctoral level; however, doctoral candidate’s experiences were qualitatively different from those of undergraduate students. Undergraduate findings on persistence did, however, address that certain characteristics, such as personality, background, marital status, roles, and employment status, influenced choices and decisions that doctoral students made in regard to staying to school or dropping out.

There is still relatively meager research (e.g., Girves & Wimmerus, 1988; Tinto, 1993; Carter et al, 2013) on persistence issues at the doctoral level and proposed models for doctoral student persistence. Two limitations facing researchers who addressed doctoral student persistence were (a) challenges identifying and locating students who have dropped out (Mah, 1986) and (b) lack of longitudinal studies of doctoral students’ persistence (Peters & Peterson, 1999). This often resulted in doctoral students being lumped together with Master’s level students into the category of graduate students; however, the dissertation task and journey was unique to the doctorate student experience. Additionally, there was little research on female and culturally diverse doctoral students at the dissertation phase. This study intended to address this deficit by examining the lived experiences of female and minority doctoral candidates at the dissertation phase.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

“All great achievements require time.”

−Maya Angelou

This study built upon a previous dissertation study titled *The Dissertation Experience of Female Doctoral Students: Implications for Counselor Educators* (Williams, 1997) as a framework. However, this study’s focus was on lived experiences of a more inclusive sampling of female doctoral students, as the original study was done with only Caucasian female students, and research was lacking on the dissertation experience of minority women (Carter, Blumenstein, & Cook, 2013; Healy & Hays, 2011; Hagedorn & Doyle, 1993; Hite, 1985; Lenz, 1995 & Williams, 1997). This study also examined participant’s narratives through the social justice lens of the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts et al., 2016) adopted by the ACA and CACREP programs. The vast majority of research on doctoral student persistence, attrition, and retention has been quantitative, and has focused on male participants, Female studies (Chodrow, 1978, Gilligan, 1982; Worrell & Remer, 2003; Zeligman et al., 2015) spoke to the critical nature of interpersonal relationships in women’s lives. Qualitative research, such as phenomenological interviewing is well suited for women’s and multicultural issues as it gives a voice to those who have not been heard. The least heard voices in academia are those of female and minority doctoral student (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Carter et. al., 2013). A review of current literature revealed a lack of qualitative studies on the student voice. One
explanation for this may be that times, students often left in silence without expressing their reasons for leaving (Carter, Blumenstein, & Cook, 2013; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lovitts, 2001; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Nerad & Miller, 1996).

Research Design – Phenomenological Interviewing

I used phenomenological interviewing to explore the experiences of female CACREP doctoral students who have been mired in the dissertation process for at least three years since completing their comprehensive examinations and advancing to candidacy. Phenomenology is “the study of the lived experiences and the ways that we understand those experiences” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 122). It was based on the premise that there is a structure and essence to shared experiences that can be narrated. The purpose of this type of interviewing was to describe the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals shared. Phenomenologists sought to understand participants and the collective internal experience for some phenomena of interest (ABD and the dissertation experience) and how individuals intentionally and consciously felt and thought about their experience (Wertz, 2005), focusing on their subjective experience and interaction between self and their worlds (Hays & Singh, 2011). Phenomenological research answered the question: “What was the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of [a particular] phenomenon by an individual or by many individuals?” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 363). Thus, phenomenological studies focus on the exploration of everyday, lived human experiences (Sheperis et al., 2010). Phenomenological research spoke to the efficacy of employing this particular type of qualitative interview, as the researcher intended to understand the lived experience and shared meaning that the ABD
experience has for various individuals. Phenomenological researchers intended to enter the Lebenswelt, or *life-world* of their participants (Hays & Wood, 2001; Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Sheperis et al., 2010). Lebenswelt referred to any combination of feelings, thoughts, or self-awareness that participants experience. Phenomenologists sought to understand subjects’ Lebenswelts with a depth of empathic understanding and then described that life-world as applied to a particular experience. Phenomenologists empathically and nonjudgmentally entered participants’ subjective worlds and experiences very much the same way in which counselors enter clients’ worlds, to truly understand at a deep level clients’ subjective realities and experiences. Phenomenological interviewing was particularly well-suited for counselor education and training programs, as “both counselors and qualitative researchers must be aware of the cues given by the client or participant, and both seek to empower the individual offering the information” (Sheperis, Young, & Daniels, 2010, p. 136). Hays and Wood (2011) also spoke to synthesis of counseling and phenomenology, “because assessing detailed information about client experiences was a natural part of the professional practice. Additionally, it had strong philosophical underpinnings and was an ideal approach for understanding individuals’ common experiences of a phenomenon” (p. 291). Sheperis et al. (2010) and Merchant (2007) described several attributes that effective counselors and qualitative researchers shared: (a) awareness of one’s own worldview and biases; (b) ability to enter the clients/participants’ subjective worldview; (c) acknowledgment of the polydimensionality (the contextual and nonlinear nature of the human experience); (d) uses of narratives and stories; (e) tolerance for ambiguity; (f) focus on process and content; and (g) empowerment as a goal.
Population Selection

Participants are often called co-researchers from a phenomenological perspective. Typically, 8 to 10 participants are recommended for qualitative research (Creswell, 1998; Sheperis et al. 2010). In phenomenological research, criterion sampling is used because it is critical that all participants share the experience of being female and finding themselves stuck in the dissertation phase. In this study, I interviewed 9 female, culturally diverse (3 Caucasian and 6 African American) doctoral candidates from CACREP accredited counselor education programs to explore their lived experiences of the dissertation process. One of the participants had defended her proposed and graduated. Since she had agreed to be a participant before she graduated and still had a salient story to share, she was included in the study. Her perspective of the dissertation process from “being on the other side” (graduation) of the dissertation also added a new and different perspective. This participant met all criteria except for the fact that she had graduated. The criterion is that participants are female and have been stuck at the dissertation process (ABD) for a minimum of 3 years. Participants were also selected to represent cultural diversity. I contacted several universities and also posted on CESNET as a means to recruit participants who met this criteria.

Phenomenological research may often reveal intimate details of participants’ lived experiences; therefore, special measures were taken to ensure that participants have anonymity and are protected. Before the onset of data collection, participants were informed of their rights as voluntary participants, warned of potential risks and benefits, and familiarized with the research process. Confidentiality was of utmost importance in this study; therefore, participants were assigned a pseudonym as a means to protect their identities. Participants were also aware of
their right to leave the study at any time, without consequence. The researcher intended to use individual and group participant profiles, as a way to present the data in the context of the specific participant. These profiles were intended to help create narratives about the categories, themes, and patterns as they emerged.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the research was vetted by truth value (ensuring that confidence can be established in the truth of the findings); consistency (themes will be replicated, data collection and review will repeated to the point of redundancy, and application of within-case and cross-case analysis), and neutrality (bracketing and triangulation). Multiple sources of triangulation were used to further establish and ensure credibility. These included consultation with a peer debriefer (having an external check on the data collection process and researcher’s interpretations); referential adequacy (checking preliminary findings and interpretations against previous literature, and existing research to explore alternative findings as they emerge); and member checking (ongoing consultation and review with participants to validate that their true lived experience has been captured within the research) (Sheperis et al., 2010).

The Role of the Researcher

Phenomenological researchers play a significant role in the research as they are the research instrument and the primary mechanism for data collection and analysis (Merchant, 2007). It was therefore, critical for the researcher to “bracket” their experiences, biases, and perception as a primary step so that information gathered remains untainted. This bracketing, or
process of *epoche*, occurred before the phenomenologists enter the world of the participants (Appendix A). Researchers were encouraged to explain the specific process that they would take to refrain from allowing assumptions and experiences from influencing the data collection and analysis. It was also recommended for researchers to articulate how they fully processed and understood their participants’ experiences. This was done through the researcher journaling and having an additional coder.

The Researcher

According to Van Manen (1990), research was "always a project of someone: a real person, who in the context of particular individual, social, and historical life circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence" (p.31). Patton (1990) recommended that because of the critical role of the researcher in qualitative research, the researcher clearly outlined her qualifications, motivations for conducting the study, and relationship to the participants.

Many qualitative researchers examined research in areas foreign to them, but others conducted studies in areas with which they have familiarity (Ely, 1991). Ely suggested that familiarity with the subject at hand may have enabled researchers to delve deeply into the research without having to do a great deal of background research. Van Manen (1990) professed, “My own life experiences are immediately accessible to me in a way that no one else’s are” (p. 54). One potential problem with conducting research in an area where a researcher had familiarity is that the researcher may have presumed understanding (Ely, 1991). All researchers begin with biases and preconceived notions. Controlling those biases can serve to focus and limit
the research; however, unrestrained, they can have a negative impact on the research (Fetterm, 1989). As Fetterm noted, a researcher “enters the field with an open mind, not an empty head” (p.11). The process of the researcher making specific biases explicit mitigated the negative impact of the biases (Fetterm, 1989). Researcher journaling, bracketing of experiences, and having an additional coder for objectivity were means of offsetting this limitation.

Phenomenological interviewing and research took these factors into consideration. Prior to interviewing, phenomenological researchers wrote a full account of their own experiences, thereby bracketing their experiences from those of participants (Appendix B). This phase of the inquiry was known as *epoche* (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The premise of this self-examination and reflection was to assist researchers to gain clarity from their own preconceptions and was part of the “ongoing process rather than a single fixed event” (Patton, 1990, p. 408). The subsequent phase was called the *phenomenological reduction*; whereby researchers identified a phenomenon’s essence (Patton, 1990, p. 408).

Researchers then clustered the data around themes that emulated the “textures of the experience” (Creswell, 1998, p. 150). The final phase, *structural synthesis*, involved the creative exploration of “all possible meanings and divergent perspectives” (Creswell, 1998, p. 150) and concluded in a description of the essence of the phenomenon and its deep structure (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

The primary advantage of the phenomenological interview was that it allowed for an explicit focus on the researcher’s personal account combined with those of the participants. It focused on the deep lived meanings that particular events have had for individuals, assuming that these meanings guided actions and interactions. This particular methodology is quite laborious
and requires that researchers retain a reflective mindset. In the following section, I outlined my qualifications and motivations for conducting the study, in addition to biases and assumptions.

**Personal Biography**

I was a doctoral candidate in the process of writing my dissertation when I conducted this study. I had successfully completed all coursework as well as my general and specialty comps and had been ABD since fall of 2007. My interest in this topic was threefold: my (a) attempt to understand and make sense of my own lived experience of being ABD and my dissertation completion challenges, (b) desire to gain a deeper understanding of phenomenological inquiry, and (c) intention as a counselor educator to facilitate the dissertation process for other doctoral students. Thus, I was approaching this study as both a participant and an observer. As a participant in the dissertation process, I brought my own experiences, beliefs, and values into the research process.

Throughout my Master’s and Doctoral program, I managed to have two full time jobs, attended full time classes, and raised 6 children. For the most part, I encountered little difficulty and really enjoyed the experience of learning and progressing through the programs. I assumed that my dissertation experience would be an extension of what I had encountered on my academic journey to that date. Writing was something that came quite easily and naturally to me. I had been published seven times during my Master’s and Doctoral programs and did not feel intimidated by the writing or publishing process. I believed that the dissertation process would be an extension of my academic experience to date—something that I would embrace and succeed with. I never imagined finding myself stuck and lost in the abyss of ABD status.
As I prepared to embark on the voyage of discovery of women’s experiences with the dissertation process and ABD status, identifying and owning my own attitudes and experience is a way of encapsulating my journey. Reflecting upon my own experience as well as the life narratives of several colleagues who have completed (or not completed) the process allowed me to examine any assumptions and biases I had about the ABD experience and dissertation process. Some assumptions I had identified were (a) the dissertation process was a lonely and arduous journey; (b) life and its’ obligations often derailed a student’s dissertation progress; (c) prioritizing a dissertation was very challenging once done with classes and without regular ongoing contact and support with faculty members and peers; (d) multiple responsibilities and role strain often got in the way of students’ goal to complete their dissertations; (e) lack of experience with conducting research and meager knowledge and skills in research methods can add to the dissertation completion challenges; (f) the dissertation was a self-directed challenge in self-resolve and perseverance, and a rite of passage rather than something meaningful and rewarding; (g) even when a doctoral candidate was not working on her dissertation, it was always looming as a stressor and disappointment in her periphery; and (h) the arduous dissertation process provided all participants an opportunity for insight and self-reflection regardless of whether it was completed or not.

Data Collection Methods

As developed by Seidman (1998), an in-depth interview made up the phenomenological process and inquiry. The interview focused on participant past accounts, in regard to the ABD and doctorate experience; their present experience; and then joined these two narratives to detail
participants’ essential experience with the ABD process. Thus, semi-structured interviews and follow up interviews were conducted with all participants to ensure that the initial interview had captured their meanings and lived experiences. The use of open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview format provided an opportunity for these students to express their opinions in their own words. This research focused and presented the lived experience of nine female doctoral students who have been at the dissertation phase for at least 3 years after completing their comp and attend CACREP Counselor Education Programs.

In efforts to locate the most appropriate participants for this study, emails (Appendix C) were sent out to the Chairs of the departments of the 52 CACREP accredited Doctorate programs and to the CESNET listserv (A Counselor Educator’s listserv). In addition, flyers (Appendix D) and requests were sent out to the ACA Newsletter “Counseling Today.” These requests focused on female doctorate candidates who have remained at the ABD status/dissertation phase for a minimum of 3 years.

Recording and Managing Data

It was critical that the data was recorded in a manner that was appropriate for the setting and participants to ensure it did not interrupt the flow of the narratives and semi-structured interviews, and these recordings also facilitated the analysis of the collected data. Once appropriate participants were identified, they were emailed consent forms addressing the various measures of data collection and addressed the fact that the interviews would be recorded. Three interviews were in person, face-to-face, and the other interviews took place via Skype and the phone. Participants were asked verbally to consent to the process of the interview and to being
recorded. The research used a digital recording device and all data collected were transferred onto a secure computer for the intent of analysis. All practices taken were intended to keep the data intact, complete, organized, and accessible. All recorded material was then transcribed so that data could be coded. The researcher used a process developed by Marshall (1979) whereby data transcription, organization, and analysis were combined into a single operation.

Data Analysis Procedures

Moustakas (1994) identified four steps to phenomenological data analysis. Initially, researchers bracketed their own viewpoints and experiences so that these assumptions could be set aside when they entered the world of their participants. Subsequently, the researchers used a process called horizontalization whereby all nonrepetitive and nonoverlapping statements relevant to the experience under investigation (dissertation process) were identified in each interview transcript (i.e., invariant meaning units) and listed and extracted into meaningful and analyzable units (Atkinson & Coffey, 1996). These meaning units were significant statements (words or phrases that are relevant to the participants’ experience). Next, researchers identified and clustered into invariant meaning units to describe the various textures (meanings and depth) of the experience, in what is called textual description. Researchers then searched for themes among the meaning units and develop an overarching theme between these various lived-experiences which is called the essence of the phenomenon. The concluding phase occurred when researchers sought to find multiple meanings and tensions in the textual description. They developed a list or visual template to represent participants; experiences, creating a composite textual-structural description. Data displays were created to offer visual representations of the
themes and the results of the data systemically. This process, called imaginative variation, allowed the investigator to explore the data from different perspectives and varying frames of reference (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96). Within-case analysis and cross-case analysis were incorporated to deepen the researcher’s understanding and draw out the essence of participants’ experiences.

Phenomenological research, like all other qualitative methodology, employed a recursive pattern of data collection, interpretation, modification, and further data gathering as researchers and participants worked together to develop the full meaning and lived experience. Often these steps were repeated until redundancy and research saturation occurred.

Data analysis for this study was illustrated in Figure 1 and laid out as follows:

1. *Researcher reviewed transcripts.*
   
   Interview transcript was read by the researcher with the intention of identifying prospective codes to develop a code book.

2. *Researcher and second coder code the initial interview.*
   
   Researcher and volunteer coder separately hand-coded the first interview and created a set of codes.

   
   A discussion was held to agree and maintain consistency of the codes and corresponding definitions before moving forward.

   
   Initial interview was recoded by the researcher and volunteer coder using the updated code book. Coding was once again compared, and code book revised as necessary.
5. *Memos completed for the interview and discussed with the second coder.*

The researcher documented memos on the interviews and then shared the data with the volunteer coder. The second coder offered feedback about the findings of the interviews and both examine the consistency as far as patterns in the data.

6. *Coding for the interviews entered to NVIVO12.*

Coding for interviews was then entered and managed using NVIVO12 software, a program designed to support the management and analysis of qualitative data.

7. *Coding (and memos) completed for remaining interviews.*

The researcher completed coding and memos for the remaining interviews.

8. *Queries created and run.*

Queries were then created to assemble information reported for each code across the interviews.

The *Constant Comparison Method* was implemented to derive meaning from the data and in “grounding” categories in the data (Creswell, 2005). Statements and incidents within the interview were analyzed looking for similarities and differences, consistencies and inconsistencies. This comparison was also made *between* interviews.

In preparation of analysis, memos were also created to document thoughts, observations, and reactions of the researcher during the data collection. These memos were created to identify emerging patterns and themes, as well as analyzing the data and describing the findings and conclusion. Member check was used to ensure that the essence of the participants’ lived experiences had been captured and understood. Interviews continued with participants until there was data saturation.
Figure 1: Data Analysis Process.
Each step used in the data analysis process is shown. Test in an arrow represents the outcome of the step above it.
Ethical, Political, and Multicultural Considerations

Researchers enter the world of their participants, with clear intentionality and sensitivity of not imposing their assumptions or beliefs onto the data or the subjects. Bracketing, member checks, and consultation with peers were just some of the measures taken to ensure cultural sensitivity.

Phenomenological research is well suited for exploring diverse cultures, oppressed populations, and unique phenomenon since it takes into consideration the subjective realities, meanings and experiences of the participants and is known for being culturally sensitive. Wertz (2005) described phenomenology as “more hospitable, accepting, and receptive in its reflection on ‘the things themselves’ and in its care not to impose order on its subject matter” (p. 175); therefore, this method of inquiry honors the voices of the oppressed and minorities.

Research Ethics

Several research ethics precautions were taken. These largely focused on the confidentiality and beneficence of the participants (human subjects) in the study.

Pseudonyms

Participants’ names and the names of each academic institution were replaced with pseudonyms to protect the best interests and privacy of the subjects and institutions.

Data Collection and Storage

To protect the identities of research subjects, data collected did not include the
participants’ names. At the onset of the interview, I recorded the interviewee’s name and interview code on the Interview Code Cross Reference List, which was stored in a fireproof safe, separate from the recordings and transcripts. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, only I, as the researcher, had sole access the cross-reference document. Furthermore, any other identifying information that could have identified the participants was eradicated from all reports and presentations.

Interviews were digitally-recorded so that information could be transcribed at a later date. These recordings were encrypted and kept in a locked cabinet off campus in the home office of the researcher. These recordings were only accessible to me, the researcher, and will be destroyed after the 7-year record maintenance period.

Disclosure and Informed Consent

Prior to the interview, participants were fully informed of the nature of the research project and the interview process. Participants were also told that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the interview or study at any time, should they wish. This information was shared verbally as well as in the written informed consent forms (Appendix E). These forms were signed and returned to the researcher prior to participation in the study.

A proposal to conduct research with human subjects and all related forms and questionnaires were submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Northern Illinois University for review and approval prior to the onset of this study.
Summary

This research study focused on lived experiences of a culturally inclusive sampling of female doctoral students who are stuck at the dissertation process of their CACREP counselor education program. The purpose of this study was to gain understanding of the lived experience of female participants at the dissertation phase of their academic pursuits, and to address the critical issue of student attrition at the ABD phase of their studies. A conservative estimate of the attrition rate, across disciplines, suggests that approximately 50% of all entering doctoral students fail to obtain their degree. These statistics rank even higher for students within the social sciences, in particular for minorities and women. (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Carter, Blumenstein, & Cook, 2013; Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Marcus, 1997). Research also bore that primary focus of this select population has been with males, or Caucasian students, and studies are lacking with minority women. (Healy & Hays, 2011; Hagedorn & Doyle, 1993; Hite, 1985; Lenz, 1995; Williams, 1997). The vast majority of research on doctoral student persistence, attrition, and retention has been quantitative and a review of this literature reveals a lack of qualitative research and research on the student voice. (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lovitts, 2001; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Nerad & Miller, 1996). This study also examined the participant’s narratives through the social justice lens of the advocacy competencies (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2003) adopted by the ACA and CACREP programs.
CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”

– Maya Angelou

The above quotation speaks of the power of sharing one’s story. The purpose of this phenomenological interviewing research intended to do just that—share the untold stories of nine racially diverse, female doctoral candidates in CACREP accredited counselor education program who have found themselves in the dissertation process for at least three years. This chapter describes the unique and collective stories of nine such women. The goal was to examine their lived experiences as women sharing the dissertation journey through their stories. The research questions to be answered were:

1. What about the lived experience of female and/or culturally diverse doctoral students can help CES programs to better address their needs and ensure higher student graduation rates?
   a. What is the unique lived experience of this population while working on their dissertation?
   b. What were some of the unique challenges and obstacles that these students faced during the dissertation experience?
   c. How do social, cultural, political, and economic factors impact their dissertation experience?
d. What needs did they have that are going unmet?

e. What was/is needed for them to be successful?

2. What are ways to advocate for this population to expedite the dissertation process using CES’s espoused position on social justice?

My intention was to explore the lived experience of these participants from the revised Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies of the American Counseling Association (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016, p. 30–31) which focus on:

1. understanding the complexities of diversity and multiculturalism on the counseling relationship,

2. recognizing the negative influence of oppression on mental health and well-being,

3. understanding individuals in the context of their social environment, and

4. integrating social justice advocacy into the various modalities of counseling (e.g., individual, family, partners, group).

The results of the research described above were unveiled by telling the unique and collective story of nine participants who shared the journey of a dissertation process in counselor education from various CACREP accredited institution located in the Midwest and Southern regions of the United States. This narrative begins by chronicling each individual student’s experiences and then aggregated and contrasted the stories of these women to understand their shared and unique lived experiences. The story itself is chronicled through eight emergent themes and is presented in chronological order. The discussion of these themes begins with a demographic description of the students themselves, their motivation for pursuing a doctorate in
counselor education and then moves their perceptions of the dissertation process (both positive and negative), their resources (intrinsic and extrinsic), the barriers (both internal and external) that they faced, the role of their Chair and committee in their journeys, topic selection, unmet needs, and the role of gender and discrimination in their academic pursuits. Additionally, quotations from individual participants were used to provide the reader with additional perspective and allow participants’ own voices to emerge. Specifically, eight themes were addressed: (a) Student Profiles/Demographics, (b) Motivation, (c) Perceptions of the Dissertation Experience, (d) Resources, (e) Barriers, (f) Program Experiences, (g) Unmet Needs, and finally, and (h) Social Justice Considerations (the role of gender and discrimination in their doctoral pursuits).

This chapter concludes with a synopsis of specific strategies shared by the candidates interviewed to aid in assisting future female students in a successful and supportive academic environment to complete their pursuit of a doctorate in counselor education. Here is their story.

Participant Profiles/Demographics

The story begins by looking at the background and characteristics of the female participants. Though starting dates varied, eight participants had completed coursework and candidacy exams and were actively at some phase of the dissertation process (from 2006–2019). One had completed her dissertation, although she met all other criteria for the study. As stated in Chapter 3, this participant was included because she originally agreed to participate before she graduated. Her interview provided a rich perspective and she also was able to provide a perspective of someone who also struggled, yet persevered and finished the process.
Three of the nine participants identified as single, four identified as married, one as remarried, and the last as divorced. Five shared that they had one or more children, three identified as childless, and one did not provide details. All but one participant worked full-time, the other said that she worked part-time. Of those who worked full time, six worked in academia, as professors or adjuncts in counselor education programs. Six participants identified as African American, and three as Caucasian. Distance from the university ranged from 15 miles to 438 miles. One participant has been in the dissertation phase since 2006, although most started the dissertation phase between 2013 and 2015. Two participants shared that they had a mentor, two shared that they had lost their mentor due to retirement and death, and five stated they did not have a mentor. Five participants were from two public universities in Illinois, two were from different universities (one private and one public) in Tennessee, one from a private university Mississippi, and the other from a public university in North Carolina. All universities were CACREP accredited. Table 1 (Appendix F) displays these demographics.

This Is Her Story

Participant 1, Marina

Marina is 42 years old and currently working part-time building her own business as a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor in the North Central region. She was conferred with her doctorate two years ago from a CACREP-accredited university in the North Central region. She took over four years to complete her dissertation. Marina is Caucasian, married, and has a four-year-old daughter who was born with special needs. Marina’s journey with the dissertation was on track until her daughter was born. That family crisis threw her academic journey off
course. She needed to take time off to care for her daughter and the multiple surgeries that her daughter needed to have.

Once her daughter’s health had stabilized, Marina resumed her studies, but still encountered some challenges. Her dissertation Chair was retiring, and Marina needed to reconfigure her committee. She attributes a large part of her success to a mentor who assumed the role of dissertation Chair and supported her through her journey. Marina did share that she encountered challenges from some female committee members instructing her to do much more than was originally anticipated as far as focus groups and participants. This was discouraging for Marina, but she stated that with the support of her mentor and her family, she was able to rise to the challenges and persevere. She looks back and sees this process as one that was very challenging but also very rewarding.

Participant 2, Shayla

Shayla is 38, Caucasian, and attends a public CACREP-accredited university in the Southern region. Through the course of starting her doctorate, she describes that she was “married, had a child, got divorced, remarried, and had another child.” Her children were 12, and 8 months of age at the time of interview. She works full time at an agency and does part-time work as an adjunct instructor at a local junior college. Shayla started her dissertation in the spring of 2012. She spoke to the challenge of having a family while in school,

Every time my kids are sick, it is assumed that I am the one to take care of them, and also for a while I was a single mom, so it was all on me. Once I was done with courses, I felt that I neglected everything so much and I owed it to my family to “catch up and make up
for lost time.” It seems like whatever I do, is never enough, and I feel so stretched.

Shayla did have a mentor in the early phase of her doctoral studies, but the mentor has since retired, and she does not remain in contact with her. Shayla also moved after her coursework was complete and currently lives 380 miles away from the university, which she shared “does impact my motivation and makes me feel even more disconnected from the faculty and dissertation process.”

**Participant 3, Kyla**

Kyla is a 31-year-old, African American, single female who started her dissertation in Spring 2014. She attends a private university in the Southern region and works full-time at a local agency. When asked about a mentor, she stated, “No, I don’t have one, but my committee Chair might think differently.” Kyla did speak quite verbosely about the strain that writing a dissertation has had on her personal life:

I’m lonely. I don’t have a counterpart that’s there to shoulder the burden with. So that makes it’s isolating or lonely. I would be nice to have someone to be like, I’ll cook dinner as you work on your paper. But I need to do all of that.

She would like to be in a relationship and explore getting married and having a family but feels that “life has been put on hold, until I am done with all of this.”

One of the challenges that Kyla has faced was being pressured by the committee Chair to change topics.

I wanted to study African American self-efficacy in youth, a topic that was relevant to my work at the agency, but my advisor wanted me to do a dissertation on veterans, so now I
am doing that. It’s okay, but I lost my passion . . . I wish I stuck to my original idea, I really cared a lot about that.

Kyla also has been facing a lot of challenges with her writing and does not feel supported by her committee or program.

Participant 4, Kaysha

Kaysha is a 55-year-old African American who is married with two adult children. She attends a doctoral program in a public CACREP-accredited university in the North Central region, although she moved to the South a year ago. Kaysha had not considered starting a doctorate program at her age (50+) but, she was encouraged by peers and supervisees, and therefore, did. She started her dissertation process in spring 2015 and now feels very stuck and unsupported. Her topic was selected because of the work she was doing for underprivileged youth. She believed in her program and wanted to make a difference. She has transitioned through a couple of dissertation Chairs and feels that there has been no guidance or support” “it’s the actually not having guidance and so it’s more of an independent study., you’re doing the work but if I have questions and request feedback, it’s like second to none, you don’t get it. I don’t get it.” This has resulted in Kaysha paying a coach to get some guidance and feedback. “It has cost me, but I couldn’t get guidance anywhere else, so I had to do I had to do to get, so that I can still matriculate, and I still have not been able to. Still always a holdup and that’s my discouragement . . . This experience has not been good for me.” As of the time of the interview, she had summited three chapters and was awaiting a response from her dissertation Chair.
Participant 5, Susan

Susan is a 57-year-old African American who is divorced and attends a private CACREP-accredited university in the Southern region. She works full-time and started the dissertation process in Summer 2014. Her challenge has been with the dissertation topic. She was encouraged to switch topics to one that her committee members chose and feels very alone during the dissertation phase. Her strength is that she is a good time manager when it comes to finding time to write; however, the financial toll of paying herself is challenging as she is single without supplemental income or support to help her through the process; “There’s no one supporting me financially so I have to maintain a full-time job and go to school and write a dissertation. I have to do all of that on my own versus if I had a spouse that could take some of the financial burden off me. That would be . . . that would free up my mind to be able to think.”

Susan’s passion is working with underserved populations, particularly people in recovery, and she expressed “because I am not in recovery at all, I feel that this degree may help garner some respect from that community because I’m not one of them, so to speak.” She feels that her biggest challenge is the faculty, in particular, her dissertation Chair because she does not feel guided or supported by her. “I literally do not know if she has my best interests at heart.”

She shared that it seems that all of the males have sailed through her program; however, she and the other (2) African American women in her cohort have struggled with writing issues that her Caucasian counterparts have not. “So, the school is mostly Caucasian. It is what it is. It’s just a world that I have to navigate. I don’t necessarily know . . . I don’t know if I deem it as a problem because this is just what happens when you are a minority living in the majority.”
**Participant 6, Harper**

Harper is a 41-year-old African American, married mother of one who has been at the dissertation phase since spring of 2014. She resides in the East Coast; however, she attends a CACREP accredited counselor education program in a public university in the Southern region. Harper shared that being an adjunct professor and wanting to be a presenter led to her interest in pursuing a doctorate program. Once she joined an agency, several of her peers had doctorates and further encouraged her to pursue the same program in counselor education. Harper selected her topic from teaching a class on military counseling and found a personal interest in the area. She also shared that, through teaching, she found there was scant research in that field of counseling and wanted to add to the research of military counseling.

Harper finds that her challenges with the dissertation process are the lack of structure, feeling ill-prepared regarding the research area, and the role strain of being married, a mother, teaching part-time and working at an agency.

**Participant 7, Ella**

Ella is a 45-year-old, Caucasian married mother of two who started her dissertation process at a public university in the North Central region in 2006. She works full time at a private university as a faculty member. Ella went right from her master’s-in-counseling into her doctorate. She has been through the transition of four dissertation Chairs during her dissertation. She felt extremely supported by her current dissertation Chair, however, did struggle with the other members of her committee. She described experiencing “kind of a hazing” from the female faculty on her committee which has left her feeling very disenfranchised, stuck, and discouraged.
Ella described her dissertation process the past few years as on-and-off. “When I’m actually working on it, I feel committed to it, but the moment I step away from it, I feel disengaged from it, and then it’s like . . . it turns into a hurdle, or that burden, and I just resent it.” She also speaks to the barriers of role strain, while working on her dissertation. “Working a full-time job, having young kids . . . just like the commitment to family, and just the responsibilities of being a mom are hard.” Currently she described that “I don’t have much motivation for it (dissertation), but there is an expectation where I work, that I will get my degree . . . I’m counting against what we need for CACREP ratios, so I feel some pressure from that.” Ella, spoke about wanting to find meaning and passion in her dissertation pursuits, but it has since faded, “I don’t want to look at my school or my work as hoops to jump through, I want it to be something that’s meaningful, and I feel passionate about, and like, I want to see it as worthwhile. And now I feel like I used to see the dissertation that way, but I no longer do. Now I just see it as, an academic exercise that I need to get through, that doesn’t bring me any joy or personal satisfaction.”

**Participant 8, Caitlin**

Caitlin is a 30-year-old single, African American student who lives with her father. She attends a CACREP accredited public university in the North Central region and works full-time. Caitlin has always known that she would get a PhD but was unsure of which discipline it would be in. She is very passionate with advocacy work and being a role model for other people of color. She started her dissertation process in 2014. Caitlin was a National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) fellow, which has allowed her some financial support as well as additional
needed resources (e.g., writing, research). Even though she had these additional resources, writing has still been a struggle during her dissertation process.

Her journey has been complicated by loss. Her mother, grandmother, and her advisor/mentor died:

It hasn’t been a joyous one for me, because my mother passed away while I was in my master’s program. So often I have dragged my feet, and now I have identified that it is because my mother won’t be here to see me graduate. So, although the doctorate process is a difficult one, that particular issue has been one I’ve had to contend with for a very long time.

Her academic journey was further complicated by another loss—that of her advisor and mentor:

It’s been an emotional rollercoaster for me. My advisor, my mentor, my friend passed away. After that, I almost gave up, like forget it, you know? But I was able to pull myself back because I know that if I do not finish, then I will disappoint both of him and my mother.

She does not feel connected to her current dissertation Chair, although her Chair was knowledgeable in the area of Caitlin’s dissertation topic. Role strain with being a caregiver to her father, working full time, grief and loss, and working on her dissertation has overwhelmed Caitlin.

**Participant 9, Cindy**

Cindy is a 53-year-old, single African American female who teaches in higher education at a University in the North Central region. She decided to go back and get her doctorate in
counselor education after becoming an empty nester given that education was always important to her. She started her program in 2011, but felt that she got derailed when her dissertation Chair advised her to change topics:

They [her Chair] advised me to do another topic that I wasn’t quite as familiar with and that I was not quite as passionate about, and so, that’s what caused me to take longer than I probably would have if I just stuck with the topic that I was familiar with.

She has been working on her dissertation since 2014 and attributes a lot of the anxiety and insecurity that she feels to the change of topic.

Cindy also has struggled with the writing piece. She felt that her program did not adequately prepare her for the writing expectations and standards required for the dissertation. Her writing process has been inconsistent and when she sits down to write, more time and energy is put into dealing with her anxieties than actual writing. Her external resources are described as her coworkers in higher education (many also have traversed the doctorate experience) and her spirituality, “a lot of prayer.” She has had 2 dissertation Chairs. The first never had time to read her dissertation or provide any feedback and current dissertation Chair is too busy with her academic responsibilities to really spend any time or guide her through the process:

I am not getting timely feedback and am being put off and telling me they [her Chairs] have other things, they have other students, and other jobs, but yet I’m having to pay tuition, stay enrolled, and nobody’s doing anything. I do not feel like I am a priority.

Motivation for Pursuing a Doctorate in Counselor Education

Multiple themes emerged from the participants’ narrative and some of them were fueled
by the participant interview guide (Appendix G). I have included some of the pertinent questions asked from which data emerged to provide some organizational structure.

What is your motivation for working on your dissertation?

This question evoked a lot of rich narratives from the participants and brought up both passion and pain. Because this theme brought up so much detail, it is was broken down into both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, and then broken down further into subtopics.

Intrinsic Motivations

There were various motivations shared for why each woman pursued a doctorate. These ranged from various intrinsic motivations such as, “my dream” (Marina, Shayla, Susan, & Caitlin), “goal set for self” (all respondents), “self-pride” (Kyla, Kaysha, Susan, Harper, Ella, & Caitlin), “love of learning” (Marina, Shayla, & Ella), “my purpose” (making a difference, social interest, social justice) (Kyla, Kaysha, Susan, Caitlin, & Cindy), “self-efficacy” (Shayla & Harper), “a milestone to conquer” (growth, commitment to self, self-satisfaction) (Shayla Kaysha, & Harper), and “being a role model for women of color” (Kyla, Susan, & Caitlin), “being a role model for her children” (Marina, Shayla, & Ella). These narratives fueled the passion to endeavor upon this journey. Marina shared,

First and foremost, I was really committed to wanting to do the best work that I could do for my clients . . . So really having a desire to just sort of operate in my field at the highest level that I could. And I also think I just always had a love of learning. I think I just wanted to pursue that learning in a way that was meaningful, both in terms of credential and in terms of the content and knowledge that I gave to the process.
Caitlin also spoke of a goal and dream set for herself:

I always knew that I was going to go for a doctorate degree. I never imagined that it would be in counseling. I thought I was going to go into a completely different field, but when I found counseling, I fell in love, and I knew that I would go as high as I could go with it. I’m very interested in research, and research with marginalized populations is important to me. I’ve always been interested in research, just as a layperson, but I never saw research being done with people of color. You don’t find a lot of studies across disciplines for people of color, and I knew that I could make some kind of change with that, being a person of color.

Cindy, also saw it as a goal she set for herself although it also coincides with timing—her phase of life as an empty-nester. She described it as,

I’ve always had a passion for education, I work in higher education, so I was on the fence about getting a doctorate, but I decided it was the best for me after I became an empty-nester. So, I just felt like it was the right time to start, so yeah, I would say, but the main part if that education has always been important to me. She also spoke about wanting to make an impact and mentoring others,

Joining the program more than specifically the dissertation, wanting to make an impact, wanting to complete what I started so that I can mentor other people that go down this path. They won’t have to feel so alone, but I have to finish in order for them not to feel so alone.

She and four other women shared altruistic reasons for embarking upon this academic journey. Their motivating factors were revealed by such stories as “social interest,” “making a
difference,” and the personal investment that it called for be following a path of higher calling. Kyla, encapsulated this with her statement, “To be a someone that people of color can look up to, particularly women of color, to make a difference in the lives of people of color, to help people coming behind me, regardless of their color.”

**Extrinsic Motivations**

Extrinsic motivators for getting a doctorate degree that were shared by eight participants included connection to career goal, professional growth, expectations from others (family and colleagues), faculty support, opportunities that this rigorous academic endeavor would provide, and being part of a learning community. Susan, expressed, “I believe that the degree that I’m pursuing is needed in order to open doors that I feel like I need opened in order to accomplish some of the goals that I want in life.” Kaysha shared a story of her supervisees encouraging her to pursue a doctorate:

> Actually, some of my supervisees, they encouraged me to apply to the program. I really had not thought about pursuing a doctorate, especially at my age (55) at that time, so that was significant for me as well. When they continued to encourage me, I decided to go ahead and apply.

Others spoke about happenstance playing a role in their decision, and it being a natural progression of a career in higher education. Ella, illustrated this process:

> I feel that pursuing the doctorate, like, was almost just happenstance. Like, I never really made a strong choice or commitment in thinking about my career goals to pursue a doctorate. Basically, I got my master’s in counseling, at a public university in Illinois,
and I was in the student development and higher ed track, and I very much wanted to be a counselor in a college setting. And I was just about through my program when I was getting the impression and hearing from others, like, “Oh, you can’t work as a college counselor with just a master’s degree. You need a doctorate to do that.” I’ve since learned that’s not the case, but I listened to everybody around me and didn’t really even investigate it that much myself, but basically, they were saying like, “You need a PsyD,” or, “You need like a higher degree than just a master’s degree.”

Family and community expectations were motivating factors for some of the participants (Marina, Kaysha, Kyla, Ella, and Harper) while others (Susan and Caitlin) found family and community obligations as hinderances. Some (Marina, Ella and Shayla) found being a role model to their children and families as a factor that pushed them to persevere through challenging odds. Shayla spoke to this motivating factor,

Although this has been one of the biggest challenges in my life, I wanted my kids to see that if I can get through this and accomplish this goal, they too can accomplish anything. I want to be a role model for them.

Others described mixed sentiments. Ella shared her experience by saying,

My parents have been very supportive. I know that my dad really wanted this for me, and he was sick, and he was dying when I initially was working on it, and I told him, “I’ll dedicate my dissertation to you.” . . . My mom is also supportive, but when I’ve been like, “I think I just want to quit. I don’t even know if I want to be a counselor educator anymore, I’d be happy to be an adjunct and really focus on clinical work” . . . and she would say things like, “you’ve come so far.” So I’ve felt this pressure to make that
decision for my parents, even though at times it has not felt like the right decision for me. And my husband has been the opposite, of like, “You don’t need to do this. Look at how much it is torturing you. Like these past 12 years, you have been miserable. Is it worth it?”

Others spoke of the surmounting financial debt that they had acquired, and how they were able to use the increasing debt as a motivating factor. Cindy shared, “My motivation is student loans. I have too many student loans at the doctorate level not to complete.” This sentiment was also echoed by Shayla when she stated, “I have over $100,000 dollars in student loans, and I have to finish because it cannot all be for naught. My heavy debt pushes me to make it all worthwhile.”

**Change in Motivation**

Others spoke to their motivation changing over time. This was captured by Marina:

I think my motivation changed over time. Initially it was, like I said, to inform my professional practice to become deeply knowledgeable about a topic that mattered to me, to make a contribution to the field. And I think as I continued on and toward the latter part of the process, I think finishing also was important to me. I wanted my daughter someday to be proud of me and my efforts and dedicating my dissertation to her. Kind of meant a lot to me too.

**Perceptions of the Dissertation Process**

Another rich area of data stemmed from the following interview question:
When I say the word “dissertation,” what is the first thought that you have?

This line of questioning/interviewing elicited some of the strongest reactions from all participants. When asked “What word do you associate with the dissertation process?” visceral and guttural responses, such as “Ugh!” (Ella), “Yuck!” (Caitlin) were shared, along with words that really spoke to the challenges that these women faced, “Annoyance” (Cindy), “Stressful, daunting. And irrelevant” (Kaysha), “Confusion” (Ella), “Burden” (Harper), “Challenge” (Shayla), “Overwhelming” (all), “Discouragement” (Shayla, Ella and Cindy), “Disconnected” (Shayla, Shayla, Kaysha, Harper, and Caitlin), even “Traumatic” (Harper, Ella and Caitlin). Kaysha, described it as “Discouragement at this point. Unsupported.” The participants were then probed further with the following interview question which elicited more detailed responses.

What feelings or emotions do you associate with the dissertation process?

Ella described her experience as “. . . mostly negative, feelings of overwhelmed. It just feels like a burden. I mean, I know that’s not an emotion, but like, I just feel stressed, exhausted, like depleted. Like, there are periods of time where I’ll feel some hope, but more often than not, it’s just like discouragement and being overwhelmed. Also, maybe like confusion and uncertainty, insecurity.”

Metaphors

Although there was no prompting from the interviewer about metaphors, most participants used metaphors that evolved and personalized their journeys and lived experiences. Metaphors used to describe their lived experiences, included, “a rite of passage,” “burdensome, a weight, heaviness,” “an emotional roller coaster,” “an albatross around my neck,” “obstacle,”
and “roadblocks.” Ella, shared her experience saying, “I didn’t want to look at my school or work as hoops to jump through, I wanted it to be more meaningful, and feel passionately about it . . . I wanted to see it as worthwhile. And now I feel like I used to see the dissertation that way, but I no longer do. Now I see it as, an academic exercise that I need to get through, that doesn’t bring me any joy or personal satisfaction.” This sentiment was echoed by Shayla who described her dissertation process as: “An albatross around my neck. No matter what I do or how successful I am in other areas of my life, it is always there . . . looming—reminding me of what I have not completed. There is disappointment and shame attached to it. It is the only thing in my life that I have tried and not succeeded at. I know it and so do others around me. At this point, I just want to get through. To get it done. Maybe I will feel some satisfaction once it is done, but not now . . . Right now, it is just an exercise in persistence.” The only positive response came from the lone participant (Marina) who had completed the process, she described it as, “I think it was a worthwhile learning experience and ultimately, I feel extremely proud of, but it was terribly overwhelming at the time.”

Help me to get an idea of what the dissertation process has been like for you?

Several themes emerged as the participants shared their stories. These included the dissertation being a solitary experience and a stressful and overwhelming process, as well as the ambiguity of the process, disconnection during the dissertation phase, and the personal sacrifice.

Solitary Experience

All nine participants viewed the dissertation process as a solitary experience with very little if any guidance as they navigated their way through the process. Caitlin, described it as:
A very tedious, very arduous, but not impossible journey. It’s a very lonely walk. It’s very isolating, almost like you feel like you’re walking through a desert maybe, by yourself, or a forest by yourself without a lot of direction, if you will. There are people along the way that can help you, but you have to be the one to do it.

Kyla recalled, “This has been a very difficult and lonely path to take. It’s a walk that, for the most part, you make alone. You don’t really have a map and guidance, and sometimes you don’t even know where you are going . . . You know your destination, but the roadmap to get there is uncharted and yours alone to figure out.”

**Ambiguity of the Process**

Eight participants spoke to the ambiguity of the process:

When you move to the dissertation there’s really no structure, whatsoever, unless you put it in place for yourselves. Dissertations are unclear. So the level of rigor that you’re expected to achieve is also unclear. It’s just much more ambiguous. And so for people who have a hard time tolerating ambiguity, which I think we all do to some extent, particularly when the stacks are so high, the process is certainly much more challenging than it is to complete coursework. (Ella)

Others also spoke to ambivalence. Marina described it as,

Challenging, tedious at times, confusing at times, overwhelming at times. I also do really believe that it was my greatest learning adventure. So, there’s some positives associated with it as well. As much as it was a challenge and as much it was something that I guess I found very overwhelming, I think the process itself can just be extraordinarily difficult
for people to navigate. It was extraordinarily difficult for me to navigate. I really did see it as my greatest learning adventure. I know that I’m different as a professional, because I had to become deeply knowledgeable about, not just my topic, but also the processes.

**Stressful and Overwhelming Process**

Seven participants described the dissertation process as overwhelming and all addressed stress as being an integral part of their dissertation experience. Kyla described it as,

> Whenever I was working on it, I felt stressed and overwhelmed. It is such a daunting task. Then as soon as you step away from it and life calls you in different directions, it is daunting to come back to. You have to get yourself back into the zone and that is a process. You can’t just sit down and write. You need to prepare yourself and change your energy and focus.

Marina also shared her experience, saying,

> Yeah, just the dissertation itself was extremely stressful, but also what I was experiencing personally, at the time was extremely stressful. So when I look back on that I just feel a weight on my back or sort of a heaviness that just was with me all the time.”

Susan described her stress and feeling overwhelmed when she described the transition from coursework to writing her dissertation:

> I’ve never written a dissertation before, so that comes with its own growing pains. I don’t know what the exact process is supposed to be but I’m not sure if I was given adequate preparation . . . They just kinda throw you into dissertation.
Harper described a similar experience,

I just felt like I had no idea what I was doing, and I wasn’t getting a lot of direction, or support. . . . I just wanted someone to tell me, “This is what you do at this stage, and I wasn’t getting that. It was kinda like, “This is all yours. You do it however you want to,” and I was like, “That’s too big, Like, I don’t even know where to start.”

**Disconnection During Dissertation Process**

One of the most distressing perceptions and themes of the dissertation process experienced by all participants was the disconnection they perceived during the dissertation phase of their academic journey.

This disconnection was from their classes, their routine and structure, their cohort/classmates, the faculty, and the university setting. This isolation and disconnection resulted in eight of the nine participants feeling like they were no longer a priority. Kaysha lamented,

I do not feel like I am a priority. Not getting timely feedback, being put off and telling me that they have other things, they have other students and other jobs, but yet I’m having to pay tuition, stay enrolled, and nobody’s doing anything.

Four of the participants personalized their perceived lack of interest in their progress this to the point of feeling “irrelevant” and becoming extremely discouraged. Harper shared her experience with this,

My academic experience was mostly can you write, can you produce research? That kind of thing so that’s why I say irrelevant . . . when other people were being solicited and that
kind of thing. Because I’m much older . . . sometimes that was discouraging. The faculty have in mind what they have to do to get tenure.

Others spoke to feeling that their academic studies were also irrelevant and that it wasn’t going to really make much difference in their lives whether they completed the dissertation or not. Ella shared,

In a way, it kind of felt like once my classes were done, I kind of had gotten all that I needed from my education, and I felt like the courses had served me, and then the dissertation felt like . . . like it didn’t feel that part was serving me. Like, it didn’t feel as relevant to the work that I was doing. I felt like I could do a good job as a counselor educator without having to have my dissertation. And there wasn’t a huge push at the university at that time for me to have it, so there was no real incentive or motivation to get it done.

This sentiment was also echoed by Harper, who shared,

I’m actually already teaching in a university, so it’s come to point where I’m taking the summer off just to focus on the dissertation ‘cause it was just impossible to be a full-time faculty member and take time to write a dissertation. Or even just focus on it.

Personal Sacrifices

Seven women spoke to the personal sacrifices made during this endeavor. Kyla shared how being in a doctorate program has affected her social/dating life as she is single and doesn’t have the time to date,

There is no one supporting me financially, so I have to maintain a full-time job and go to
school and write a dissertation. I have to do all of that on my own versus if I had a spouse that could take some of the financial burden off me. That would be . . . that would free up my mind to think.

Kaysha, who is an older, married empty nester, described her personal sacrifice:

Socially, we don’t have a lot of funds. We do have to make adjustments. We used to do date night every Friday night. We don’t do it every Friday; we just do something that doesn’t cost and don’t travel. We used to travel all the time. We have had to rearrange a whole lot of things, especially with having to keep continuing to pay $1,800 a semester with no movement in my dissertation.

Another question asked by participants that revealed rich information was,

What would you consider to be some of your greatest resources as you continue working on your dissertation?

The following themes and subthemes emerged. These included intrinsic resources, such as persistence, commitment, resourcefulness, and faith/spirituality, and extrinsic resources such as support from family, friends, colleagues, committee, and Chairs, and support from the program.

Resources

It takes tremendous intrinsic and extrinsic resources to embark and persist on such an arduous task as a doctorate degree, and even more is required when it comes to the solitary process of navigating through the dissertation process. This category was broken down into internal resources, and external resources. All nine participants spoke to the significance of
resources within themselves and around them. All the women spoke about a commitment to themselves and their own perseverance as contributing factors to the resilience within the program. Internal resources that were addressed included following a dream, a goal set for oneself, feelings of pride, part of her identity, passion for her topic, personal investment in herself, professional growth, self-growth, and being a role model.

Internal Resources

Participants shared multiple intrinsic resources which included persistence, courage, commitment to self, pursuing a dream, feelings of pride, a goal set for themselves, love of learning, passion, personal investment, professional growth, resilience, self-growth and satisfaction, and a sense of commitment.

Persistence/Perseverance

The dissertation is a journey of persistence and there is not one doctorate student who cannot identify with having to endure and push through the personal and academic challenges of her program. Cindy alluded to this “Even though I didn’t get everything that I wished I had, I still persevered, so yeah, I have perseverance. My level of perseverance is higher than I thought it would be.” Harper also shared similar sentiments, “I've learned that perseverance matters.” Kaysha spoke to her persistence but also, the continual challenges that she has faced:

No. I can’t imagine anything that will make me not complete, because you know, my husband has encouraged me, he said, “Look, you started this. You’re at the end, you gotta hang on. Tie a knot on that rope and hang on,” and that’s what I’m doing, because it’s
something that I started, and I don’t usually start and not finish it when things get hard. So it’s hard for me now, but I’m going to persevere, because I believe in myself, and I believe that it can be finished, but I just can’t do it by myself, and that’s the hardest part.

Marina shared similar sentiments:

I had a lot of really intensive personal challenges I experienced unexpectedly over the course of doing my dissertation. So I think when I think about the dissertation, some of that comes back for me. I think it was a goal that I was so committed to by that point in time, that really having to persevere through the personal stressors to the extent that I was able to kind of re-engage and re-focus myself on accomplishing this goal, that was just really challenging for me.

Resourcefulness

Each participant shared their narrative of how they were resourceful and able to overcome challenges within their lives and the program. Three participants exemplified this quality by having taken matters into their own hands. They each hired a dissertation coach to provide the guidance and support that they felt they were not getting from their committees or Chairs. Kaysha shared her experience with a coach:

It has cost me, but I couldn’t get the guidance from anywhere else, so I had to do what I had to do to get, so I can still matriculate and I have not been able to. My greatest resource is my coach who has been costing me, but she has been quite helpful. I live in Tennessee and a young lady who I met who attends another university in CES program recommended her to me.
Spirituality/Faith

Almost all of the women spoke to faith and prayer playing a role in their dissertation process. Cindy described it as, “A lot of my internal resources are spiritual, praying a lot. Yeah, a lot of it is prayer.” Harper shared how her identity as a Muslim helped her to persevere through. “My Muslim faith is very important to me, when all else failed, I would pray. It helped me.” Susan shared that she has learned “To pray every day. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

External Resources

External factors included support. All participants spoke about the significance of support from others. This included family, friends and colleagues, their coworkers, their cohort, their professors, committee members, and Chairs. Three participants also sought out a dissertation coach to provide them support.

Family Support

The most often cited source of support was family. Kaysha shared:

My husband has encouraged me, he said, “Look, you started this. You’re at the end, you gotta hang on. Tie a knot on that rope and hang on,” and that’s what I’m doing, because it’s something that I started, and I don’t usually start and not finish it when things get hard.

Marina recounted her familial support:

With my significant others, supportive. I think everybody wanted me to be done. My
family loved me and they supported me in pursuing this process, and they were all really ready for me to be done.

For Kaysha, the familial support of her kids was also intertwined with the sacrifices they had made:

Anytime I feel like I should just give up, my kids reminded me of how much they had sacrificed by not having me around. You have to finish mom, for all of our sakes. You owe it to yourself and us.

Support From Colleagues

Several participants shared how work colleagues in higher education had encouraged them to pursue a doctorate and supported them in their journey. Cindy shared:

The fact that I work in higher ed, I have a lot of people who have completed a dissertation that I can bounce questions off of . . . and then there’s people from other programs. I talk to them more so for emotional support.

Caitlin spoke to the significance of support from a cohort: “Having a cohort model definitely helped. They were supportive through the process, but we have since lost touch at the dissertation phase.”

Support From Chair and Committee

Outside of family, this appeared to be the most influential factor as far as support for the participants. Ella relayed,

I think (my dissertation Chair) is my very greatest resource at this point in time. He has
had faith and belief in me since starting this process, and he’s . . . you know, he’s done whatever he can to support me, and nurture me, and he knows what a rollercoaster it’s been for me, and I feel very much that he is there for me.

Caitlin had 2 Chairs. The first one was also African American, and unfortunately, he died during her dissertation process:

Dr. E and I were very close. We went through some difficult times. But I can say with absolute assurance that I know he had my back, and I had his. It was a very back and forth relationship, though, but one filled with love because I know that he wanted me to be my best. I know that he wanted me to move out into the world and do great and wonderful things. So, he put time and energy into me that he didn’t have to. He sat with me for five hours, he let me talk, he let me cry, he let me do whatever it is that I needed to do. And he told me to . . . when I was ready to throw in the towel, he told me, “Pick the towel up, wipe your face and keep moving. You’re going to finish this.”

Her subsequent dissertation Chair was very business-like:

My relationship with Dr. D is a different one. She’s invested in me, but it was a different relationship. Dr. D obviously is Caucasian. Dr. E was black. We connected in a different way that is acceptable among people of color. So he knew he could go to a certain place with me, and it would be considered acceptable. Dr. D just . . . she’s not that way. And that’s okay, it’s just different. It’s not a bad thing, it’s just different.

Some spoke about the myriad of support they had received. Marina responded,

My dissertation Chair was one of my greatest resources. Really my committee. My committee was a great resource for me. And then also other colleagues who had already
completed the process. I think that was helpful for me to be able to reach out and connect with people who were familiar with the process. And then certainly my family, just in terms of supporting me.

**Support From the Program**

One participant did share that she felt the school was invested in her completion. Caitlin shared,

I think that the school is invested in seeing me finish. I think that they are invested in seeing me finish. If I can be honest, I think they’re invested in seeing me finish because the school can then say that they have people of color who have graduated, not necessarily because it’s (me), but . . . I would say that it has impacted it.

This same participant was also a NBCC Fellow so that also provided her support: Well, I was an NBCC fellow, and I got a lot of help because I was an NBCC fellow that I may or may not have been able to get, had I not been a fellow. Now, the finances were there, from a personal perspective, so I could do things like pay somebody to teach me . . . you know, have an extended lesson on statistics or whatever the case may be. I know that I could reach out and say, “I need help with this,” and they were going to direct me to somebody that was actually going to help me and give me a good product at the end. If it was a lesson on statistics, if it was a lesson on writing, if it was a lesson on . . . they were going to make sure that I had a mentor, and they were going to make sure that I had people that I could connect with, and that impacted the dissertation process for me greatly.
What would you consider to be some of your greatest barriers as you continue to work on your dissertation?

Barriers

All participants spoke quite verbosely about barriers that they encountered during the dissertation phase of their doctorate program. Barriers and obstacles were discussed at length throughout their story sharing. Several themes emerged from their narratives. These have been broken down into internal barriers (those within the participants), and external barriers (those outside of the women that they had to contend with). Some of these were internal barriers that were self-imposed, while others were obstacles outside of themselves that they faced. It is also important to note that there is an overlap between the internal and external barriers.

Internal barriers that these women faced were physical and psychological. Several of the women spoke to physical illnesses or difficult pregnancies that further complicated their process and progress. Physical issues included health issues, surgeries, illnesses, and personal life challenges. Other challenges included psychological impediments, and time management and organizational challenges.

Physical Challenges

Some of the participants struggled with illnesses or surgeries themselves and well as having sick family members. It appeared unanimous that when there was any sort of family or personal crises, the dissertation was put on hold or no longer such a priority. Shayla spoke to her own health issues:
I had to have a total hip replacement. I was in extreme pain before the surgery so it was really hard to write when I couldn’t think straight and then after the surgery I had to go to physical therapy and learn how to walk again. While I was out of commission, my family and my job suffered so once I was okay, I needed to address all of the other demands and needs before I could even think of focusing on my writing again.

Ella shared her experiences with a difficult pregnancy:

And the fact that I was pregnant, and I had a really difficult pregnancy, and I was really, really sick, and that was a point in time when I was going to be working on my dissertation, and I couldn’t. So, you know, being biologically female, and carrying a child, and having a rough pregnancy impacted my dissertation, whereas if I was a man, I wouldn’t have experienced those types of physical hurdles. I mean, there could have been other things, you know? But I think just going through pregnancy, and having young kids, and nursing, and being up late at night, and you know, just being tired. Being a mom of infants and toddlers, and now school-aged kids, I think just has definitely impacted my ability to get my dissertation done, because I feel a lot of responsibility based on the fact that I’m a wife and mother, which I see as very gendered roles.

Ella also shared her plight with health issues,

I had major health issues arise. Like, I actually had some kind of scary health issues come up this summer, that fortunately have turned into nothing and I’m fine, but at that point, I was like, “I’m not working on my dissertation if I’m kind of more focusing on my health, and kind of . . .” And then also, just like focusing on my mental health and focusing on my family, and like, you know, this has been such an emotional drain, that like, is it worth it? So I think if I found that it were really, truly beginning to impact my physical
health in such a way that just my quality of life was so, so, so diminished, I think then I wouldn’t continue with it.

**Psychological Issues**

Psychological Issues included anxiety, discouragement, being overwhelmed, frustration, feeling disempowered, guilt, self-esteem issues (including imposter syndrome, inadequacy, incompetency, indecision, insecurities, feeling of failure, personalizing the lack of support), many fears (fear of asking for help, fear of rejection, fear of political repercussions), powerlessness, perfectionism, procrastination, shame (feeling held back by ABD, pressures from others on when you’ll be done, tired of saying, “I’m not finished”), role strain, prioritizing, and feeling stuck, and the trauma of hazing by committee members. For all respondents, it was a combination of many mixed feelings. This was aptly described by Shayla, “Internal self-doubt. That’s my biggest challenge, anxiety and not knowing what . . . and, the lack of guidance.” Some of the more prominent psychological issues are shared in the following sections:

**Anxiety**

All participants shared stories of anxiety and feeling overwhelmed at the thought of writing. Cindy, “There’s a long gap in between the break and me getting started again, and most of that is due to trying to overcome the anxiety every time that I have to restart again.” Ella illustrated her anxiety and her fear of rejection of defending her proposal through the following passage:

I need to have a willingness to just move forward in the face of my fears and be willing to
kind of be knocked down again. And I don’t know if I will be, but I have experienced it so many times that there’s a likelihood that it may happen again, and it’s like, I just can’t go through that again, you know? I have had to go back into counseling just to deal with all of this.

Marina described her anxiety by saying, “It was challenging, tedious at times, confusing, overwhelming and anxiety-provoking. It was a very difficult process for me to navigate.”

Shame

With the passage of time and discouragement creeping, many participants relayed narratives of shame and inadequacy. This appeared to have three origins:

1. people of emotional significance asking about the progress of the dissertation and if the participant was done yet,
2. traumatic experiences and mixed messages given to them by their committee, and
3. from within when participants do not live up to their own expectations.

This may often lead to isolation, as candidates tend to withdraw from experiences where they may have to face or talk about their dissertation. Cindy shared her experience of isolating from her cohort who graduated. “So, as my cohort graduated, I’ve slowly stopped talking to them as well just because I get tired of telling people I’m not finished yet.” Ella recounted her traumatic experience with her proposal defense and the impact it has on her self-worth:

I think maybe a little bit kind of emotionally as well. Like, just being so stuck, and being so invested in the opinions that my dissertation committee have of me and my work, and giving so much power to those other people, about kind of like, “Well, they can make or
break me.” And in fact, they can, and they have, so it has been a reality . . . So, I feel very
insecure and inadequate, and the distribution of power within my committee is very
apparent to me, and I don’t feel like a partner in this. I feel like a student, and these are
my teachers, and they’re like . . . They’re kind of, I guess, the gatekeepers, which is
ironic, because that’s what my dissertation’s about, but kind of like they’re preventing me
from moving forward, and that I have to prove my worth to them by meeting their needs
exactly how they’re identifying it. Like, I don’t feel like I have autonomy in my
dissertation, and I feel like I should.

Ambivalence

Several participants shared about having mixed feelings about whether to continue
pursuing their dissertation as life challenges occurred around them. Marina shared her struggles
surrounding the ambivalence:

I think there were times where our entire family’s life, sort of perspective on life was
different, when my daughter was in the hospital quite a bit. There were times when I
thought why does any of this matter. Certainly, nothing mattered to me other than her.
Even as she got better, then I think I still struggled a little about maybe some guilt
around, really kind of choosing to still pursue this school. Because although I saw it as
being something that really mattered deeply to me and I guess I say that I wanted for her
to be proud of me in the future. I also had some guilt around that I was studying this time,
pursuing this school. So that was challenging for me.

Ella shared her experience with ambivalence:
But like, at this point, I’m just stuck, and I’m stagnant, and I’m not moving forward. So, I think a lot of what I need has to come from within, because I don’t know . . . Like, I can’t control how my committee’s going to respond. And I think my Chair would give me whatever I need, whether it’s a pep talk, or, “Send me one sentence every day,” or you know? Like, I mean, he would be very willing to provide me with ideas and support, but I feel like I’m not even at a place yet where I can kind of ask him for that. Like, I have to get to that place. So it’s all kind of internal work that I have to do before I can kind of have my needs met from those external sources.

Organizational and Time Management Issues

Time was a theme that emerged through the date as critical for all women. All of the participants felt that they had sacrificed quality time from other areas of their lives (families, friends, work, personal time) in order to successfully complete their coursework, so now that time was much more unstructured, and the completion of the dissertation was on their own time frame, many women felt the need to make up for lost time in other neglected areas of their lives. Hence, the dissertation research and its writing often fell to the wayside as other priorities emerged. Taking blocks of time to work on the dissertation was often viewed as “neglecting” something or someone else. The anguish of how much time to commit to the dissertation process was experienced by all participants, and all participants placed relationships with family as a priority over writing and completing their dissertation.

Marina shared how she has to work her dissertation around her family needs:

I had collected all of my data before I gave birth to my daughter, and then my daughter
was born with really complex medical needs. So, our family sort of moved into a hospital, and I was not able to make progress for some time. I think that . . . I really had to take some time off. Then returning from all of that was sort of a slow process for me so I really integrated it, my working time, my writing time while she took naps, after she went to bed at night . . . I had to really prioritize my family above anything that I could offer to the dissertation process. I think that’s part of why it took me so long.

Shayla shared, I felt that my kids already felt resentful and neglected when I was in classes, now I have to make up time with them. I cannot ignore them to write and no one understands the structured space (both physically and mentally) I need to have in order to write academically. It is not conducive to the busy lifestyle of raising children and having to take care of their needs and a busy household. I am used to putting myself and my needs last, so unfortunately the dissertation falls into that category.

Ella described her work habits as, When I am working on it, I basically find that I feel I have a mindset that I can only work on it when I don’t have other commitments or distractions that are going to get in my way, which basically prevents me from working on it, because there’s always a commitment, or a distraction, or something else, but it’s like I feel like I need to have a full day on my calendar, where I have no meetings, I don’t teach, I have nothing else going on, and I can schedule that as a dissertation day, because I feel like I have to get into the mindset to be able to do it, and I don’t want to get started with it, because it’s so hard for me to get started with it. I don’t want to get started with it and then find that
something’s going to interrupt me. That strategy is not working whatsoever, but that’s kind of where I’m stuck with it, I think. When I’m actually working on it, I feel committed to it, but the moment I step away from it, I feel disengaged from it, and then it’s like . . . It turns into that hurdle, or that burden, and then it’s like I just resent it.

Caitlin shared that her work ethic with the dissertation is inconsistent to what she allots to other areas of her life.

Not as good as my work ethic in actual work. I work well with structure, and when there’s no structure and no instruction on it, then my work ethic is a little bit lower because I have to kind of try to figure out the intricacies of what’s going on. So I can’t say that I sit down and I’m going to write two pages every day, because when I write 10 pages, and they only accepted two of those 10 pages, then you kind of feel like you get kicked in the side, like, ugh, okay. Okay, fine. So not high. Not high.

**External Barriers**

There were countless external barriers that were relayed by the participants also. These included dealing with personal life crises, juggling work-life balance and responsibilities with the dissertation, dealing with committees, dealing with Chairs, topic selection, living at a distance from the university. For organizational purposes, the myriad of external barriers has been broken down into categories, which included academic issues, and relationships. Since there is so much overlap between relationships and academia, relationships within academia have been broken down as a subset of academic issues.
Academic Barriers

There were a multitude of academic barriers that these women faced. These included navigating through the academic arena, lack of structure of the dissertation process, challenges with comprehensive examinations, writing issues, challenges with topic selection, dealing with committee members, dissertation Chair issues, and distance between the university and their physical location.

Navigating Through the Academic Arena and Lack of Structure of the Dissertation Process

Several themes that emerged from the narratives were; the lack of structure of the dissertation process, feeling alone, a solitary process the ambiguity of the dissertation process, and feeling of drifting since entering dissertation, and lack of direction. All participants spoke in detail about the abrupt departure from structured classes and assignments with classmates and consistent feedback from professors to the ambiguous venture into independent research and writing of a dissertation. Most did not feel prepared as far as the abrupt transition and lack of structure and support and did not anticipate feeling so isolated and confused during the process. This is described by the following accounts. Harper shared her transition by saying,

I started in 2012 and I enrolled initially full-time in the program. It is a face-to-face program, so I did complete my face-to-face classes before dissertation within three years. I took my comprehensive exams and passed that, then I went into “dissertation.” I signed up for a class, but we did not have . . . we don’t have a class that actually meets. I did meet one time, maybe a year and a half ago. And so, I have been at dissertation for a while, so I just keep registering for the one credit hour that I need.
Kaysha described her transition from coursework to dissertation as:

Discouragement at this point. Unsupported. I am at a loss myself because of the lack of support, of guidance . . . It’s just the actual not having guidance and so having these people tell me it’s more of an independent study, you’re doing the work, but if I have questions and request feedback, you don’t get it. I don’t get it. I haven’t got it and I’ve been given excuses.

Caitlin conveyed,

Because typically, that’s one of the things I had found, is that the coursework is kind of structured and you’ve kind of gone through it with people, and suddenly it’s this, as you said, like walking through the desert.

Marina described her experience as,

I think when you’re participating in coursework, you have regular face-to-face contact with your faculty . . . You’re in a relationship with them so you are actively . . . it’s just a lot more structure. You have more contact and you have more structure. What is expected of you is well known. The syllabus guides you. When you move to the dissertation, there’s no structure whatsoever, unless you put it in place for yourself. Dissertations are unclear. So, the level of rigor that you’re expected to achieve is also unclear. It’s just so much more ambiguous. And so, for people who have a hard time tolerating ambiguity, which I think we all do to some extent, particularly when the stakes are so high, the process is certainly more challenging then it is to complete coursework.
Challenges With Comprehensive Examinations

Several participants revealed that they struggled with comprehensive exams and one had to try three times before she finally passed it. Cindy described the impact this had on her self-esteem,

Yeah, that did not help at all. I already had anxiety going in, but that just . . . yeah, and then it confirmed. That’s an internal feeling that . . . I came into the program feeling like an imposter and feeling like at any moment, I was gonna get that tap on the shoulder saying that, “We picked the wrong student,” so, failing comps and not being able to complete dissertation kind of feeds into that even though I know it’s not a legitimate feeling, but it feeds into that. I don’t know if that’s just me. I never really found that place to get it right, even after I failed comps, they put me in a remedial class. I had to go to an undergrad class, which to me, was insulting and further added, “I gotta pay for a class that makes no . . . and I also have dyslexia, so that was really like a double insult to me, yeah, so I just feel like they were trying to find their way, but they did a very poor job.

Topic Selection/Change of Topic/Passion for Topic

Four participants felt pressure from their Chair and/or committee to change their dissertation topic. Caitlin spoke to the pressure she felt to change topics,

So it’s difficult, especially when you don’t agree, because when I first started on the dissertation process, my advisor looked at me out the side of his eye and was like, “Why do you keep wanting to talk about sex?” I’m like, I just want to pick something that I think I’ll be interested in, because a dissertation is just one piece of billions of other
pieces, so it’s just one thing, it’s just one project. That’s what you told me, right? It’s just one project. Why do you keep giving me hell about this one project? Just let me do it. So, he did. He finally got on board and was like, okay.

The three that did change their topic later regretted it, stating that they no longer felt the passion for the second topic that they had felt for the initial topic. There was also a sense of discouragement because all of the work and research that they had acquired on that topic in their previous coursework could not necessarily be applied towards their revised topic, so they felt that they had to start over and were at a disadvantage to those students who stuck with their original topic.

Cindy shared her challenges with feeling pressured to change topics:

The advice that people gave me was always stay with the same topic throughout your courses, so that way you are at least getting the literature review part of your work, dissertation, done. However, when I got with my Chairperson, my dissertation Chair, they advised me to do another topic that I wasn’t quite as familiar with and that I wasn’t quite as passionate about, and so, that what caused me to kinda take longer than I probably would have had I just stuck with the topic that I was familiar with . . . My original topic was on relationship styles. It was African Americans and relationship styles. I can’t even remember now. I think that I was traumatized. Now it’s coping and self-efficacy among African American college students, because that’s what my Chair studied . . . and it want something I was even interested in in the first place. It was like, “Ugh.”
Committee

Several themes emerged from the data as women recounted their experiences with committees. These were: change of committee members, configuration of committee, roles committee members play, lack of support from faculty, gender of committee, lack of direction and guidance from committee, subjectivity of committee, unclear communication, hazing, women in academia, investment from committee, feeling irrelevant, lack of power, preferential treatment given to others (Caucasian, male, young, polished), need to seek outside support, and hiring a dissertation coach.

Changing of Committee Members

There were countless stories of these women rotating through multiple committee members. Some of this was due to the length of time that some of these candidates have taken to complete their dissertation, but also the fluid nature of academia. Kaysha revealed,

I asked people to be on my committee. Since then two of the individuals have moved to other universities and so I am now still short one person because I’m not physically there, I don’t know who else to choose. I’m not getting much guidance in trying to find somebody else.

Cindy spoke to her experience with committee members:

I had to change quite a few times because people left and retired or took on another position, so I’m constantly . . . not constantly but when I feel like I’m ready, then it’s time for me to find another committee. So yeah, my committee, I haven’t really relied on too much.
Several of the participants spoke about the committee not really playing a significant part in their progress to date because they were still working with their Chair on the first three chapters and proposing. Others spoke about the committee being stretched thin and overloaded with other responsibilities, and therefore not available to provide feedback. Many personalized this experience and felt irrelevant and that their committee was not invested in their success or progress. Kaysha revealed her discouragement,

It has cost me, but I couldn’t get guidance from anywhere else, so I had to do what I had to do to get, so that I can still matriculate and I have not been able to. Still always a holdup and that’s my discouragement. That’s why I wouldn’t even encourage anybody to do it.

Lack of Guidance and Support From Committee

Most spoke about lack of guidance and support from committee. Kaysha reiterated,

Getting timely feedback and not being put off and telling me that they have other things, they have other students and other jobs, but yet I’m having to pay tuition, stay enrolled, and nobody’s doing anything. Again, the challenge is for me timely feedback, my Chair going on sabbatical, did not tell me until a couple weeks before the semester began and then having to find another Chair, somebody to step in temporarily. I asked one of the people on my committee to help me, if they would step in, and I got nothing. No feedback whatsoever for a semester. I wasted money and time. That’s the biggest challenge I have is the timeliness of them getting back to me.

Others spoke about subjectivity of the committee where initially they would get feedback
that things were fine, and then next meeting it would change, and it was no longer acceptable. These mixed messages and inconsistent feedback left candidates feeling even more overwhelmed and confused. Ella shared,

I thought everybody was on board with my proposal, and I thought we were moving forward, and I thought it was basically just kind of like a whatever, like just an exercise to get through, and Dr. P refused to sign off on my proposal. So, I basically left that meeting . . . Again, it’s another situation of like having the wind taken out of my sails . . . And I feel like that’s been this pattern, of like I feel like everybody’s on board. I go and I do that, and then I come back and it’s like, “Oh no. This isn’t what we agreed to.” So, it’s like . . . traumatizing, and I basically haven’t worked on it since then, and that was last, like, April.

Many of the African American candidates shared stories of preferential treatment given to students who were younger, more polished, male and Caucasian. From their experiences, it appeared that other students were invited to do research or co-present with professors. This will be discussed further in the Social Justice section of this chapter.

**Hazing by Committee Members**

A couple of students (Caucasians) also discussed hazing incidents at their proposal defense where they experienced female faculty attacking them and holding them to a higher standard than others. It is unclear if for some female faculty this is seen as a rite of passage—preparing other female faculty for what they may experience in academia (upon further literature review, nothing could be found to address this matter from counselor education research). These
were extremely traumatic experiences for at least two of the students (both Caucasian) and left them feeling traumatized, discouraged, and questioning whether or not it was worth continuing. Ella shared her encounter by saying,

I feel that the women on my committee, and I’ve had predominantly women on my committee over the years, have been the ones who have held me to a very, very high, rigorous standard, almost as though, as women in academia, we really need to prove ourselves worthy of this . . . like they put me in my place, and they put up all these barriers, and I . . . You know, even as I talk about it now, it’s like, “Why can’t I see the fact that, like, I did eventually get what I want?” But just that whole process of that hazing process feels like I haven’t quite made it to where I need to be yet. and then two others knocking you down, it’s just pretty discouraging and defeating. I don’t think either one of them really realizes how devastating their feedback and their . . . how devastating that hazing meeting was for me, you know?

Marina shared her experience,

I think it’s challenging because as much as we want counselor educators to be really highly supportive, we also want them to maintain standards and have high rigor. And so there’s kind of a balancing out of those two things. I think my committee held me to a high standard. In fact, I actually had a really hard time with it the very beginning some of the additional components that were requested of me to add on to my study. I think as I looked around to other students whose studies were being approved at that time, it seemed like I was being required to do quite a bit more than what some others were being asked to do. At the time, I thought that was very frustrating. Of course, in hindsight, now
that I have gotten through it all, I look back and I think I really did create high quality work that I’m proud of. It was a real study and there was rigor and there were high expectations of me so I do appreciate that.

These academic persecutions have left students feeling traumatized, overwhelmed and discouraged. This was revealed in the account from Ella:

So, that’s kind of like where I am right now in the process, of just like it’s not worth it. Like, I’m just afraid of that happening, where I invest so much, and I’m so ready, and excited, and proud of myself for making the effort, and taking the steps, and like overcoming the hurdles, only to just have it squashed down again. And just, like, I don’t know if I can go through that again. And I don’t know that it will happen, but it has happened so many times that I’m like afraid to try anymore, because I just don’t want that devastation, and that disappointment, and that feeling like, once again, I’m meeting these roadblocks that are preventing me from moving forward . . . it feels punitive as opposed to supportive.

One participant chose to change her committee members because she no longer felt emotionally safe to continue with them. Both of the participants who had encountered this experience fortunately had a very supportive and understanding Chair who assisted them with processing the experience and encouraged them to continue to go forward.

The Significance of the Chair

All participants spoke to the importance of the Chair in their progress, and how the Chair could make or break their dissertation progress. Cindy responded that not having a supportive
Chair was her greatest barrier:

Not having a supportive Chair . . . My first Chair . . . They were not invested at all. I almost feel like I was a burden more than anything. My first Chairperson wouldn’t read my dissertation, kept giving me feedback, but wouldn’t read it, and then after a while, just completely ignored my phone calls and texts, and then, my second Chair has been mentally busy, so again, not able to really talk and sit down and kind of have somebody to really walk me through this process.

Others spoke to how their Chair was their biggest ally and support. Shayla validated this by saying, “If I did not have the continuous support of my Chair, I don’t know if I would still be here. It seems no one else in the program is invested in my academic progress but my Chair.”

These sentiments were also shared by Ella:

I think (my Chair) is my very greatest resource at this point in time. He has had faith and belief in me since starting this process, and he’s . . . you know, he’s done whatever he can to support me, and nurture me, and he knows what a rollercoaster it’s been for me, and I feel very much that he is there for me.

Lack of Mentoring for Minority Students

Only two Caucasian respondents shared that they had a mentor and, in both cases, it was their Chair. One African American candidate did have a mentor who was also her Chair, but he died during her dissertation which was very traumatic for her. Most of the African American respondents spoke of a lack of mentors and how it would have made a huge impact for them to have a mentor. Kaysha shared,
From a Black standpoint, the amount of strife, the amount of ridiculousness, and the amount of frustration for people not being in my corner is greater. They were no mentors for us . . . but if I call out professors for some of the foolishness they are doing, it will only hurt me. The institution is Caucasian and I am not. I have to learn to just be a minority in a majority world once again.

Caitlin shared her views on this matter:

I wish Dr. E (her deceased mentor) was still here. I wish that he and I would have done some things differently so that we would have things in the world to remember our relationship. I think it should be mandatory that you, as an advisor, publish with your advisees, because I think that, as an advisor, it’s your responsibility to help them through that process and how do you get through that process. A lot of people, when they leave school . . . A lot of people, when they leave school, they don’t have the kinds of people that I have had, and I know that.

**Inconsistency Within the Program**

Several respondents relayed stories of misperceptions and inconsistencies within programs. Cindy shared how the dissertation was initially explained to her and then shared her reality of how it was:

My program said that we would meet once a month to talk about our progress and to talk about our limitations and to see as a group how we can overcome it, but then when I get into this process, they said that . . . they changed and said, no, they weren’t doing that, so,
I feel like if they had stated that, that would be very helpful to be accountable, to have some type of accountability group.

Most respondents did talk about how their program appeared to have changed since they first started and appeared to be supportive to future students and candidates, although they personally did not receive the benefits themselves. Ella spoke to this, “I think they have changed things now, where there’s an actual course or courses that students enroll in to work on the different stages of the dissertation, so I think that would have been helpful.” Cindy also shared this sentiment:

I feel like if they had stated that, that would be very helpful to be accountable, to have some type of accountability group. That would be helpful, and then to have more . . . even though I believe they’re doing it now, but to have more writing-specific classes, to have more writing assignments and writing-specific classes. What I’m saying: writing-specific writings, classes that would help towards comps and dissertation, ‘cause that’s very specialized and technical writing, and I think you need more classes to cover that so that when you get to that point, you know what the expectation is.

Challenges With Writing

The majority of women of color shared challenges that they encountered with writing their dissertation, this left them even further discouraged. Some attributed this to the inequity within the educational systems they were taught in. Cindy reported,

I feel that the level of education that I received in elementary and high school and maybe even college ‘cause I attended predominantly African American schools, I feel like they
were substandard to some of the experiences that my Caucasian friends talk about in terms of school resources, yeah mostly school resources, and just even some of the material that was covered . . . so I went to the teacher, explained to her what was happening and I was like, “Well, can you give me additional assignments or can you look at my writing? How can I make this work for me?” And, she wasn’t . . . and, I understand. They didn’t know what to do with me so that was just kind of their resolution. That was stupid to me, but . . . and, in all that, no one even asked me, like, “What do you feel like we need to do? What do you feel like you should do to succeed?” No one even asked me. They just kind of came up with a solution.

Caitlin shared her experience: “Writing has been an issue, but it wasn’t one that I could not overcome, but it has definitely been an issue.” Kaysha shared,

Everybody’s learning style is different, so just because student A was a good writer, and a good presenter, and a good whatever, “Oh, we can hurry up and do this one real quick, and we can have this one propose, defend then graduate” Whereas, another one may need a little more time, whereas, initially I agreed with them that my writing was jacked up, I mean, that it wasn’t good, I followed their lead in recommending that I take additional writing courses, and this, that and the other. But now the problem is I don’t feel that I get enough guidance and feedback so that I can finish. So what am I doing wrong or what am I doing right? What do I need to do? I need to finish. About three weeks ago, I was told, “Stop trying to rush,” and that, for lack of a better word, pissed me off.
Writing Routine

Most participants shared that they struggle with a consistent writing schedule. Sometimes this is due to the role strain and other responsibilities that these women have in their lives, and sometimes it has to do with their own time management and priorities. Others described that anxiety and self-doubt get in the way of their writing schedule. Cindy describes,

Just try to fit it in whenever I can . . . I work on it bit by bit when I find free time at work or on the weekends. I just kinda pick it up and go, so the problem with me is I have these long gaps where I don’t look at it, and then when I get started, then it becomes easier to write, but then, if I take a break again, then it’s a long gap in between the break and me getting started again, and most of that is due to trying to overcome anxiety every time I have to restart it again.

Challenges With Candidacy Exams

Cindy spoke about failing her comprehensive examinations twice before finally passing. This heightened her anxiety and contributed to her “imposter syndrome.” In her own words,

I already had anxiety going in, but that just . . . yeah, it confirmed it. That’s an internal feeling that…I came into this program feeling like an imposter and feeling like at any moment, I was gonna get that tap on the shoulder, saying we picked the wrong student, so failing comps and not being able to complete a dissertation kind of feeds into that even though I know that it’s not a legitimate feeling, but it feeds into that.
As mentioned earlier, the centrality of relationships in women’s lives, it was understandable that women struggled more with the multiple roles and responsibilities because of the significance and identification of relationships. Relationships was a prominent theme for all women. Some of the themes that emerged from the data were, role-strain (juggling the dissertation with other life responsibilities such as work and family, dealing with personal crises [health issues and death of loved ones], lifespan issues); marriages, divorce, births of children, deaths, empty nesting, retirement, aging, etc.; and family obligations, personal sacrifices, and pressure from others. This was captured by Caitlin in her account about relationships and role strain while in the doctorate program:

Life issues. Up until recently . . . so I’ll speak within the last six months to a year . . . life issues, family issues, just the drama of taking care of my . . . being a caretaker for someone and dealing with family that are not participatory, don’t help. And then after my grandmother passed away, there’s fighting about money and properties . . . It’s just a lot.

Ella shared her experiences:

I think as a wife and mother, I view my role at home to be very much kind of the primary caretaker of the family and household. I feel support from my family, but my husband’s kind of like, “If it drives you so crazy, why even do it?” You know? Like, “Just why put yourself through this?” So he will say, like, “I know you can do it,” but kind of the message I get from him is like, “Is it even worth it?” And I wish he would just be like, “You got this. You can do this,” you know? Like, as opposed to almost giving me an out, and kind of the same with my colleagues. I either feel pressure from them to do it or I feel like I don’t really need to do it.
Friends

One of the most challenging issues with friendship for these participants was the lack of support as far as understanding the level of commitment entailed for a dissertation. These women often felt a pressure to be done, by friends and family and also the constant nagging questioning of, “When you will be done?” Kaysha shared her account:

Everything is pretty much, I wouldn’t say on hold, it’s more of they are very supportive, and I can tell that folks are like, “Okay it’s been all these years. Where are you? When are you going to graduate? When are you going to finish?” Those are the questions I really don’t want to answer because I don’t want to seem like I’m complaining. It’s not no fault of mine. I can only go through the process with the help of the committee and my Chair.

Ella shared her experience with friendships when she said,

And I think my friends have been supportive. Like, they’ll say, “Oh, how’s your dissertation going?” And I’ll be like, “Oh, it’s not,” and you know, like they’re curious, but none of my friends have gone through this process, so they don’t really know. They know enough to ask and to check in with me, but usually, I’m like, “I don’t want to talk about it.” Unless there’s a situation like where I went to defend it, and then there’s this huge event where I’m like, “I’m giving up. I’m not working on it. I want nothing to do with it.” Otherwise, like, I really steer the conversation away from it, because I do feel a lot of shame over the fact that I haven’t done it, and it’s been at least 10 years, probably like 12 years.
Lack of Support and Understanding

Quite a few respondents touched upon how most of the significant people in their lives don’t comprehend the academic rigor that is required to write a dissertation. This tends to lead to many doctoral candidates isolating and not sharing a lot about the process with others who wouldn’t understand it. Cindy speaks to this when she said:

I feel like I’m in a bubble ‘cause most people don’t understand, so I don’t really talk about it with them a lot.” She went on to further describe her experience. “I’m the first of my family to go to college, to get a masters, to go for a doctorate. So, I’m first generation for all of those stages. So, not being able to have family members, the support of family members who have gone through this to mentor you make the difference, and then, not having people who understand the process is also very different.

Disconnection and Distance From Campus

Another prominent theme that emerged through these women’s story was the disconnection that they felt. For some this disconnection was physical (moving to another state) while for others the disconnection was emotional. Marina shared,

I got pretty disconnected from other students, which was hard, because I did feel like I was just sort of out there on my own. Then I think having that dissertation course as much as it was sometimes challenging to be spending time, participating on online discussions or a what have you with other students. I do think that that did bring a level of connection. I appreciated having that, but I did feel pretty disconnected from other students. I can’t say that there was any great kind of network there. I think other people
found that, but I didn’t really find that. And I think that’s because I had been in the program for so long that there were a number of different cohorts so I was never really a part of one particular cohort. I felt like I was sort of a part of a part of several cohorts.

Kaysha shared some of the challenges of physical disconnection:

I moved from (the North Central region) to Tennessee. . . . Now I just feel . . . the relationship since I’ve been passed on, it’s like, “you’re secondary.” . . . It’s just the not getting back to me. I used to think it’s because I’m not living in Illinois, but it’s not that. I didn’t have a response for two and a half months, then at the end of July, he tells me he’s going on sabbatical, which really flipped me out. It’s like “really?

Describe your experience in your doctorate program? How can your institutional policies and practices be improved? How can faculty be more attuned and supportive to your needs?

Program Experiences

Several respondents spoke about being neglected or hindered by their program because the lack of guidance, accountability, and direction. Kaysha spoke about accountability for programs:

I think it should come from CACREP, since they are the accrediting body, to more oversight on what these programs are doing, and how they are helping students, and not hindering them, because right now I feel hindered. And, I’m just going to tell you I remember when CACREP came to do the accreditation, when they came to do their visit, that’s how . . . With the profession, it was very, “Oh, so y’all trying to make good on . . . ‘Cause you being evaluated, so, you want us to make sure we say X, Y and Z,
encourage us to do this, that and the other while they’re here and interviewing us.” I’m like, “Mm-hmm (affirmative), okay.” Then the minute they leave, you got your accreditation, you go back to the same old, same old.

Others spoke to the insensitivity of the program and faculty in addressing cultural issues. Caitlin shared her experience:

So in my cohort, there were seven people of color, women, and nine people all together. And of the seven women of color, six of them had fibroids, and this professor basically was like, “It don’t matter. You just deal with it, and you have to come to class.” But I’ve been hospitalized twice, to include this year, I was in the hospital for seven days, and I had to have a blood transfusion, two of them, because of this. And this professor said, “No, it doesn’t matter who . . . A lot of people have heavy periods.” No, this is a bit more than heavy periods, and it’s something that is rampant in the African American community, number one. Number two, there are lots of things that people of color have to deal with that people of non-color don’t, and if you’re not reading on these things, if you’re not listening to the students when they are saying it, you’re not going to understand to be able to sympathize and empathize. So, if you don’t believe . . . This is an institution of people who do research. Look for yourself. Go look for yourself. And even if you’re not believing the doctor statements that are coming in, this is what I’m saying to you. You may not believe that that’s the case. I really am trying here. This professor didn’t get it, and this professor and I had some conversation later, and they’re better at it now, but it was a real issue for me then.

What needs do you have that are going unmet?
Unmet Needs

All participants shared openly and readily about their unmet needs. Themes that emerged from the data included; better structure of the dissertation, clear communication from committee members, faculty support and accountability, timeliness of feedback from committee members, fear of political and institutional ramifications if people spoke out, investment from committee members, mentoring, and need for faculty to reach out if someone disconnects.

Support

The need for support was emphasized by Cindy:
I would need someone to literally be with me at each step reading the paper, providing me feedback, holding me accountable, giving me support when I need it, giving me a kick in the butt when I need it . . . having someone walk alongside me as opposed to meeting me at the finish line, I need someone to walk alongside me and let me know that it’s okay. I guess that’s the definition of support, but feeling like it’s okay to ask questions . . . but just be able to be authentically me and ask questions that . . . and feel supported, yeah, and not feel dumb or burdensome to the people I ask.

This desire for continuous support was also shared by Kaysha:
Their guidance . . . walking with me through this process, and not having me try to figure out things on my own, and then when I figure out how it should be, then they tell me, “No, that’s not . . . No.” Then all this time has passed, and then I’m not closer to finishing than when I first started.
Timely Feedback

Marina shared her experience about needing timely feedback and poor timing between her and her committee members:

Time was really the biggest . . . Finding a balance of all of that, finding the time . . . I think, obviously, just as I had a life and my own priorities, my committee had lives and their own priorities. So certainly, there were times where our schedules didn’t line up, where I was looking for maybe feedback sooner than I got it. Or maybe there were times where my Chair was ready and able to meet, monthly or every other week, and I wasn’t ready and able. Then there were times where I was ready and able, and she wasn’t ready and able.

Kyla shared her frustrations about having to wait an entire semester to get any feedback:

I kept asking, and resending emails, and making phone calls. I felt like I was really in a precarious position because I didn’t want to be forgotten and passed over, but I didn’t want to create more problems for myself also by having the committee resent me for pestering them. I just felt very insignificant.

Social Justice in Pedagogy

The Role of Gender and Discrimination in Their Dissertation Pursuits

This study explored the lived experience of female culturally diverse ABD counselor education candidates from a social justice perspective utilizing Ratts et al. (2016) Social Justice Model as a template to examine participants’ individual or personal narrative as well as the
professional, the organizational (or systemic), and the societal/political levels of their stories. Counselor education, academia, and society at large suffer when critical voices are not heard and contributions to social, educational, and political arenas are lost (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lovitts, 2001). These ABD students shared their social and political voices in an effort to be heard and not silenced. Some of the emergent themes from interviews were; racial discrimination (African Americans fearing asking for help and feeling the need to be polite so that they are not succumbing to any stereotypes, feeling that preferential treatment was given to men and Caucasian students, challenges with writing due to substandard educational experiences, power and oppression, and the hidden secret of ABD students.

These narratives echoed the current research suppositions that women are not completing their dissertations at the rate of their male counterparts, and the academic journey is even more challenging for women of color. Story after story was told of the male students being the first to finish their program and graduate. And women feeling “silenced” or needing to be polite. Cindy shared her perspective on this matter:

I feel, sometimes, that I have to be polite . . . and that’s kind of a gender norm for women that I have to be polite and maybe wait my turn. I think the way that I internalize my frustrations are according to societal norms for women, so to not get angry not to get upset.

Her experience also illustrated some of the murkiness experienced as a woman and also a woman of color:

In terms of me being polite, you know, the way that society tells you to be polite, don’t be pushy, but yeah, some of that is race too. Gender, race, it’s hard to know how to
differentiate. Being a minority in a doctoral program, there were . . . surprisingly, there were minority women in my program but the most of faculty were not, and so, just always feeling very aware of my race in the program, not wanting to fit a negative stereotype. Yeah, being polite and not being angry. Even sometimes I even [don’t] wanna ask specific questions ‘cause you don’t wanna appear unknowledgeable. And then there are visible differences with the way Caucasians were treated in my program versus the African American students. . . . I wanna say that it was not conscious, but Caucasian students get a lot more opportunities to sit in offices, to get help. When I felt like I did the same thing, I don’t feel like I received the same amount of help, and then they were able to take advantage of opportunities that were available that wasn’t available to me.

Cindy shared her experience of needing faculty who are not minorities to be more sensitive to students of color:

If the faculty is of a different race, they really should be more sensitive to the need and maybe go to the student a little bit more and reach out, because race really does play a significant role . . . for some students of color, race plays a significant role in feeling welcomed.

Need for More Faculty Diversity

There were also discussions about the need for more diversity within the faculty so that students of color could have more opportunities for mentors that they could identify with and also to be able to more sensitive to the plight of women of color. Kyla shared,

I really think that, particularly if faculty is a different race, that they really should be
more sensitive to the need and maybe go to the student a little bit more frequently than they would go to maybe a student of the same race, maybe realize that race does play a significant . . . for some students of color, race may play a significant role in feeling welcomed or feeling that it’s okay to use another resource.

Caitlin also shared a perspective of the program being invested in her completion because of their own agenda rather than it being personal:

I think that the school is invested in seeing me finish. I think that they are invested in seeing me finish. If I can be honest, I think they’re invested in seeing me finish because the school can then say that they have people of color who have graduated, not necessarily because it’s me, but . . .

Power and Privilege in Academia

The power and privilege of the institution and its faculty was also addressed by some participants. Ella shared the power imbalance from her perspective:

Being so stuck, and being so invested in the opinions that my dissertation committee have of me and my work, and giving so much power to those other people, about kind of like, “Well, they can make or break me.” And, in fact, they can, and they have, so it has been a reality. And with the dissertation, I will feel competent, and then I feel like my committee puts me in my place. So, I feel very insecure and inadequate, and the distribution of power within my committee is very apparent to me, and I don’t feel like a partner in this.

Susan shared her frustrations with her experience: “My Chair got a promotion. So before she was just like a professor, but now she’s head of my department. When I have issues, who do I go to?”
Cindy reflected on her experience with power and privilege by saying,

    My passion and dissertation topic was love and relationships. I did all this research, and then he wanted me to switch to what he did his dissertation on ‘cause I think it was just easier for him to talk about. He didn’t want to invest in reading about something else, so yeah, it was like, “Wow!”

**Differences in Completion Based on Gender**

These narratives echoed current research suppositions that women are not completing dissertations at the same rate as their male counterparts, and that the academic journey is even more challenging for women of color. Story after story was told of the male students being the first to finish their program and graduate. Susan shared her views, “I think it [gender] plays a role because legitimately, all the guys in my cohort are finished. And they finished probably like back to back to back, for sure. But the women in my cohort probably three of us maybe, to my knowledge, have completed, maybe . . .” Kyla shared her experience,

    I think if we all had wives to support us in our endeavors, all of us would be successful. Someone to take care of the household responsibilities and support me in my journey, but alas, women have to step up and be all to everybody, and then whatever crumbs of our time and energy are left after we have taken care of everyone else’s needs, can be spent on our dream, and finishing our dissertation.

Marina echoed this sentiment and female experience, “I had to really prioritize my family above anything I could offer to the dissertation process. That is why it took me so long.” Harper shared her wish that faculty would be more sensitive:
I think committee members need to be more sensitive or understanding to the additional roles that women face regarding their role as a wife and a mother. . . . It’s been my experience that in talking to other women that women tend to experience the role of mother and wife in a different, more all-consuming way than how men experience the role of husband and father.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

“One of the most revolutionary things you can do sometimes is just tell the story. Tell it and be honest with it.”

− Viola Davis, 2012

This phenomenological study explored the lived experience of nine culturally diverse female doctoral candidates who shared their experience with the dissertation process. All participants were from CACREP-accredited counselor education programs and had been at the dissertation phase of doctoral studies for a minimum of three years. The goal was to examine their lived experiences as women sharing the dissertation journey through their stories. The research questions to be answered were:

1. What about the lived experience of female and/or culturally diverse doctoral students can help CES programs to better address their needs and ensure higher student graduation rates?
   a. What is the unique lived experience of this population while working on their dissertation?
   b. What were some of the unique challenges and obstacles that these students faced during the dissertation experience?
   c. How did social, cultural, political, and economic factors impact their dissertation experience?
d. What needs did they have that were going unmet?

e. What was/is needed for them to be successful?

2. What are ways to advocate for this population to expedite the dissertation process using CES’s espoused position on social justice?

My intention was to explore the lived experience of these participants from the revised Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies of the American Counseling Association (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016, pp. 30–31), which focus on:

1. understanding the complexities of diversity and multiculturalism on the counseling relationship,

2. recognizing the negative influence of oppression on mental health and well-being,

3. understanding individuals in the context of their social environment, and

4. integrating social justice advocacy into the various modalities of counseling (e.g., individual, family, partners, group).

The previous chapter presented these women’s stories of navigating through and the meaning they attributed to the dissertation process. This chapter begins by exploring common themes that emerged through the interviews and data analysis, and then compares these themes and experiences to the existing literature. Through semi-structured interviews, 9 participants shared their lived experiences as they traversed the journey of their counselor education dissertation. Several prominent themes emerged through their stories and the data. Some themes echoed the existing research, such as navigating the dissertation process, barriers to the dissertation process, motivations for pursuing a doctorate (intrinsic and extrinsic), resources
(internal and external), and perceptions of the dissertation process. These overarching themes were then broken down into subthemes. Other themes that emerged from the narratives brought new ideas and contributions to the field of counselor education and the dissertation process as experienced by women: shame and its role in the dissertation process, and faculty hazing experiences during the dissertation process. Chapter 5 discusses these themes, in addition to the limitations of this study, implications for counselor education programs and female candidates, and recommendations for future research. This chapter culminates with a personal reflection and conclusion.

Discussion of Common Themes

This section examined and analyzed the relevant findings discussed in Chapter 4 from this study. This section is organized by the major themes that emerged from the participants’ stories, followed by what has been learned from previous research, what these findings add to the existing knowledge about the female experience surrounding the dissertation process, and what questions remain unanswered. The information presented supports the foundation for the following two sections: implications and suggestions for further research.

Themes

I Have No Road Map – Perceptions Navigating the Dissertation Process

Common perceptions that these racially diverse female candidates shared about the dissertation process described it as being a very overwhelming, solitary experience immersed with ambiguity and confusion, which appears to be consistent with previous research. Many
doctoral and graduate students described their dissertation process as a painful rite of passage that one needs to navigate and persist through on their own, without much guidance or support. Many doctoral students felt unprepared for the solitary and unstructured act of doing a dissertation and it does play a significant role in attrition rates for doctorate candidates (Gardner, 2009; Nerad & Miller, 1997). There seemed to be a universal consensus that other doctoral students have had to struggle and persevere through this similar feat; therefore, the next generation should have to suffer as much as they did. This is characteristic of the oppressor/oppressed phenomenon where one generation experiences trauma and oppressive conditions and inadvertently becomes the oppressor to the next generation (Torres, 2015; Scarritt, 2019). William’s (1997) dissertation colorfully described a participant’s view of the dissertation process:

It [the dissertation process] is both a game and “rite of initiation into the profession”, a part of me thinks that they’re all up there on the balcony watching us struggle to climb the wall, you know, there’s this unspoken rule that says, “Do not reach down and give them a hand. They have to get here on their own. . . . Part of the game is “No.” It’s survival of the fittest, we don’t help them, and whoever makes it to the top deserves the damn letters that go behind their name . . . There are brilliant people who don’t make it. So, I really think I’m gonna get there one day and they’re gonna say, “Ok, now, here’s the manual.” (p. 156)

The dissertation process has been viewed like this throughout time, as evidenced by Casuto (2013) who shared how attrition among doctorate students has been an issue through the past century. Moore (1985) echoed this with the following comment:
Of all sacred cows of academia, the Ph.D. dissertation is the most holy! The idea that to attain academia’s crown jewel you must make an original contribution to knowledge in your field is an unquestionable item of faith. That the dissertation should be a long, ego-threatening, gut wrenching experience goes without saying. That a dissertation is not acceptable until a committee of professors who could not agree on the time of day, all agree to accept your complex work is academia’s most unshakable rubric. (p. 127)

Although this shared experience of dissertation process challenges was shared and experienced by all participants, there was unanimous consensus among the participants that the process did not have to be this painful and there was a desire among the participants for the process and faculty to be kinder and gentler.

Why am I Doing This? Motivations for Pursuing a Doctorate in Counselor Education

The motivating factors that participants shared were organized into the subthemes of intrinsic motivating factors, extrinsic motivating factors, and failure avoidant factors. As cited in Chapter 2, Deemer et al. (2010) proposed a tripartite model of research motivation in graduate students, suggesting that students could be driven by intrinsic, extrinsic, or failure avoidance motivation. Whereas intrinsic motivation is based on engagement in tasks that individuals may find interesting (Deci & Ryan, 2000), extrinsic motivation is based on external incentives and rewards that individuals may receive by completing tasks (Smith, Deemer, Thoman, & Zazworsky, 2014). Failure avoidance motivation is based on a desire to minimize negative consequences (Deemer et al., 2010).
Intrinsic Motivating Factors

Participants shared stories of a myriad of intrinsic motivating factors of why they had chosen to pursue a doctorate in counselor education. Intrinsic factors included, “it was always my dream,” (Marina, Shayla, Susan, & Caitlin), “it is a goal I set for myself” (all respondents), “self-pride” (Kyla, Kaysha, Susan, Harper, Ella, & Caitlin), “my love of learning” (Marina, Shayla, & Ella), “it is my purpose” (making a difference, social interest, social justice; Kyla, Kaysha, Susan, Caitlin, & Cindy), “self-efficacy” (Shayla & Harper), “a milestone to conquer” (growth, commitment to self, self-satisfaction; Shayla, Kaysha, & Harper), “being a role model for women of color” (Kyla, Susan, & Caitlin), and “being a role model for her children” (Marina, Shayla, & Ella). These narratives fueled the passion for participants to endeavor upon their journey. Research stated that intrinsic motivation is the most compelling and durable of motivating factors for students and helps with completion rates in doctorate programs (Deemer et al., 2010). A prominent theme was being a role model for others. Almost all participants of color shared wanting to empower and advocate for other students of color who are coming up behind them. Participants who were mothers often pursued this goal as a role model to their children and families.

Extrinsic Motivating Factors

Eight participants shared extrinsic motivators for getting a doctorate degree that included connection to career goal, professional growth, expectations from others (family and colleagues), faculty support, opportunities that this rigorous academic endeavor would provide, and being part of a learning community. Research illustrated that extrinsic motivation was not as
great an influence of research productivity and sustainability in dissertation processes. Although incentives such as job marketability and opportunities (Espino, 2014; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Zhou, 2014) may motivate CE students to complete their dissertation and conduct research (Deemer et al., 2010), these rewards may not motivate participants to publish more beyond the dissertation.

**Failure-Avoidant Factors**

Six participants also shared motivators for completion of their dissertation that would fall under the failure-avoidant factors. The failure-avoidant factors participants shared included:

1. The participant feeling pressure to complete her dissertation because of a promise made to a dying parent (even though the participant felt it was not necessarily the right decision for her anymore)
2. Participants feeling like they had to finish because of all of the time and financial costs that they had invested
3. Participants did not want to be perceived as a failure by others or themselves.

Deemer’s (2010) findings suggested that failure-avoidance motivation had an inverse effect on research and writing productivity. Students motivated by failure avoidance may concentrate on fulfilling program research requirements (e.g., dissertations) that have severe consequences if uncompleted (Espino, 2014; Zhou, 2014), but may not necessarily seek future research projects. These students/professionals may engage in fewer research activities, and thus have fewer publications in the future.

These findings led to a prominent theme of barriers.
Barriers

Living in a White Man’s World – The Patriarchal Structure of Academia

The perception that academia makes the dissertation process harder than this experience needed to be fits with hierarchical and patriarchal views often found in academe. Research spoke to how much academic process in doctorate programs is hierarchical and patriarchal, and not inclusive in its nature (Shin, 2008). Graduate students need to be aggressive and competitive in their nature and push through the pain (all male ideals), rather than embrace the feminine ideals of cooperation, support, nurturance, and collaboration, as referenced in Chapter 2. All participants were female and shared how challenging it was to accommodate to these masculine principles of independence, “pushing through” and dedicating their energy to their goals, when they had been socialized to care and tend to the needs of others. Regardless of racial background, all participants shared a common acculturated belief and responsibility that they were the primary caregivers and relationships were significant for them—within academe and in other areas of their lives. All participants spoke to the significant role that relationships played for them, family, friends, cohorts, professors, their committee, and especially their Chair.

As stated in Chapter 2, Chodorow’s (1978) study of separation-individuation has provided the groundwork for much research on women’s development. Most developmental theories have used male subjects as the focus of their research; developmental tasks, such as attaining autonomy and independence have been culturally accepted as necessary for healthy human development in Western cultures. These ideals were easily identifiable within academic constructs. According to Chodorow’s research as well as that of many others (Chodorow, 1978;
relationships have always played a significant role in women’s development due to socialization. A participant in another study even went as far to call it “rape.” This participant had a very raw and poignant way of describing what she saw as the dissertation was America’s or our culture’s way of separation:

I think that [the dissertation process] is a blending, a marriage of the masculine and feminine, and I think that the way we attend to the masculine way of life, and I think that we are raped by it. And I feel tremendous rage as a woman. And no, I have not been physically raped, but our institutions themselves are masculine in nature and our life is masculine. And it’s all focused on the product and performance and you lose your soul. (Williams, 1997, p.165).

These findings are consistent with the universal need all the participants shared for more connection and support from their advisors, Chairs, and the program. These findings about the need for support and relationships also were supported with the next popular theme, that of mentoring.

Help, I Need Somebody – The Need for Mentoring

Garofolo and Hansman-Ferguson (1995) examined the barriers that prevent women from successful mentoring relationships in their doctoral programs. “Establishing mentoring relationships is important in the academic environment, but, unfortunately for women, initiating and keeping a relationship with a faculty mentor in the academic environment can be problematic” (p. 94). Mentoring programs have also been seen to be especially effective for
women and diverse populations, who are often less likely to have some of the same opportunities within the professional world or academia (Holm et al., 2014; Williams-Nickelson, 2009). Despite research stating the importance of mentoring programs, often students of color did not have the opportunities to become involved in mentoring relationships (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Smith & Davidson, 1992; Zeligman et al., 2015). The research cited some barriers included the “good old boys’ network,” multiple role responsibilities, lack of female mentors, and issues with men mentoring women (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Smith & Davidson, 1992; Zeligman et al., 2015). This study also found lack of time as a major barrier for women in establishing mentoring relationships. This lack of time was attributed to the multiple roles and responsibilities that these women have outside academic settings.

The literature was consistent with the findings of this study. There was clearly a need for mentoring that many participants shared; however, only a few (4 of 9 participants) shared that they did have a mentor. Three Caucasian participants and one African American participant shared that she had experienced the support of a mentor. Therefore, all of the Caucasian participants had experienced a mentoring relationship of some sort during their program, however only one of the six African American participants shared the same experience. The African American participant who did tell her experiences with a mentor had an African American male mentor and commented on how the racial understanding meaningfully added to the comfort and understanding that they shared. Caitlin recalled and contrasted her relationships with two different dissertation Chairs, of which one was her mentor. “Dr. X obviously is Caucasian. Dr. Y was black. We connected in a different way that is acceptable among people of color. So, he knew he could go to a certain place with me, and it would be considered acceptable.
Dr. X just is not that way. And that’s okay, it’s just different. It’s not a bad thing, it was just business.” All African American women in the study cited that mentoring is critical and would have been a huge support for them and all people of color. This was consistent with the research cited in Chapter 2. Participants also shared that there were not a lot of faculty of color within their programs, which made it hard to find a mentor they could identify with. This was congruent with the research, which finds in CACREP-accredited programs that there continues to be underrepresentation of ethnic minority faculty, in particular, African American faculty, especially among tenured and senior-level counselor educators (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2002; Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Pittman, 2012; Shin, 2008).

Although all participants acknowledged the importance of mentoring, it appeared to take on different meaning to African American participants who did not have mentors. Caucasian candidates spoke about having a mentor but did not necessarily realize just how critical that mentoring relationship was in her success. African American participants knew how important it was because they saw Caucasian peers being afforded opportunities because of privilege that the African American candidates did not receive. None of the African American participants acknowledged that they or their peers of color were chosen by their faculty to do research projects, presenting, or academic writing. From their perspective, the Caucasian students were chosen more often than African American students. Their views were consistent with the current research on this matter. In one study, one third of African American graduate students surveyed reported that they had received no mentoring support or guidance in their programs (Haizlip, 2012) and women also cited a lack of mentors as a difficulty in academia (Bruce, 1995; Catalyst, 2000; Hill, 2004; Holm et al., 2014; Williams-Nickelson, 2009; Zeligman et al., 2015). The
Caucasian participants did acknowledge their privilege but I do not believe that they were fully aware of their privileges and how it much it impacted their academic experience with mentoring and support, nor the ease at which they were able to write due to their educational privileges that were afforded them.

More of the Same – Racial Discrimination and Inequity in Education

Minority students are rarely afforded the same academic opportunities as their Caucasian counterparts. Often students of color are not invited and do not have the opportunities to become involved in academic endeavors (co-presenting, co-publishing, and coteaching; Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004). Racial discrimination and inequity is reflected in the research (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Smith & Davidson, 1992; Zeligman et al., 2015) and was reaffirmed by the participants of color in this study. The common experience of substandard educational opportunities afforded students of color was another variable which impacts minority students not being offered opportunities with their professors. All the Caucasian participants in the study felt that they were strong writers and were confident in their abilities to write, yet the African American participants shared that they struggled during their doctoral program. Many African American candidates recalled shaming experiences of failing classes, failing comprehensive exams, and being required to take a remedial writing class (or an undergraduate class in writing) to strengthen their skills. Rather than this intervention being perceived as supportive, it felt shaming and punitive to several participants. This also contributed to some experiencing the “imposter syndrome.” Ewing, Richardson, James-Meyers, and Russell (1996) examined the imposter phenomenon in African American graduate students. They revealed that academic self-
concept and being in the immersion-emersion stage of racial identity were significant negative predictors of feeling like an imposter. Haizlip (2012) asserted that the internalized effects of both racism and sexism contribute to the imposter phenomenon in African American women.

Cindy shared,

No one knew what to do with me, they were just trying to feel their way, they just came up with a solution to put me in an undergraduate writing class. No one asked me what I need or how I could be successful. They just put me in a class that was totally inappropriate and shaming.

Academia and counselor education programs can be more sensitive with identifying doctorate students needing help with writing, finding out from the students what their needs are, and tailoring accommodations and interventions which are better suited for the students. Counselor education speaks a lofty game about the significance of mentoring and empowering individuals, yet CE programs seem to fall short of actually applying that empowerment in a way that can help students.

Social Justice and Implications Within Counselor Education Programs

Race and Gender Matter – An Honest Look at How We, as Counselor Educators, Talk a Good Game

Social justice has been a huge movement in the American Counseling Association’s mission statement and paradigm over the last 20 years. Although CACREP extolls social justice, the ACA, and its divisions, there still appears to be a gap in the implementation within CACREP-accredited programs (Shin, 2008). We talk a good game, but the bottom line is that we
have not come as far as we would like to think we have. Every CACREP program teaches the importance of social justice and practicing with the clients’ best interest at heart, yet many students do not identify with this experience. All the African American participants spoke about racial inequities and violations to their personhood. Many spoke about being accustomed to racial inequities in other areas in their lives and, also experiencing this within their academic journeys. Several participants shared how they felt that if they spoke up against the dominant culture of patriarchy and race, they would be perceived as “problem students,” therefore, their anger and their voices continue to be silenced. This has been a perpetual problem that is still occurring.

Many participants also spoke to physical ailments due to their stress and silence, with an African American participant sharing how almost every African American female in her cohort had fibroid tumors or cysts. These students were chastised by a male faculty member as making this up or the condition not being as serious as the students shared it was. Students were penalized for missing classes due to their painful medical condition. Incidentally, fibroid tumors and cysts are often associated with feeling disempowered and victimized, and forced into things one does not want to do (Segal, 2010).

If We All Could Have a Wife – The Allocation of Time and Other Responsibilities

All nine participants shared stories of conflict and guilt as far as where to allocate their time and energy when it came to their other responsibilities, relationships, and the academic writing of their dissertations. Many relationships and projects were perceived to have been neglected during the class work phase. Several studies (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010;
Flynn, Chasek, Harper, Murphy, & Jorgensen, 2012; Holm, Prosek & Godwin Weisberger, 2014; Yeager, 2008) state that 50% of doctoral students are over age 35, 65% are married, 80% are employed full time, and 85% are studying part time. Thus, typical doctoral students from the 2000s and beyond have much more complex lives and roles. They tend to have multiple commitments, such as a full-time job and family responsibilities, in addition to the role and responsibility of being a doctoral student.

The challenge of balancing these responsibilities is especially challenging for female students who often have family and work obligations (Holm, Prosek, & Godwin Weisberger, 2014). The open-ended nature of the dissertation places it in the very susceptible role of being placed upon the back burner once life gets too challenging and crises arise. Females are often socialized to place everyone else’s needs above their own; family responsibilities are primary reasons why female students persist less frequently than their male counterparts. (Holm, Prosek, & Godwin Weisberger, 2014). According to Hite (1985), “Women pursuing doctoral study in any field experience more conflict in integrating the student role into their lifestyle than males at the same educational level” (p. 62). As mentioned earlier, the centrality of relationships in women’s lives makes it understandable that women would struggle more with the multiple roles and responsibilities because of the significance and identification of relationships. From the male perspective, it is easier to be objective and to compartmentalize the different aspects of one’s life. However, from the female perspective, this proves to be much more difficult.

Female doctoral students may be juggling multiple roles; however, the roles surrounding family issues appear to be the most challenging (Carter et al., 2013; Hinojosa & Carney, 2016; Hagedorn & Doyle, 1993; Hanson, 1995; Holm et al., 2015; Kaplan, 1982; Zeligman et al.,
Findings from this study paralleled the existing research. Participants shared how they felt that so much of life had been put on hold or sacrificed during the coursework part of their doctorate studies. Now that things were much more nebulous and unstructured, other things and relationships competed for their attention. They unanimously shared such factors as family responsibilities, care giving, needing a break (or catching up on life) after the coursework and proposal, the lack of structure dissertation process, lack of feedback and guidance, feeling disconnected, isolated and overwhelmed, financial pressures, lack of motivation, lack of self-esteem, as struggles that they encountered during their dissertation phase.

Outta Sight, Outta Mind – The Role of Geographic Distancing vs. Emotional Distancing

I had asked participants about how far they lived from campus because I was curious to see what role, if any, physical connection/distance played as a barrier for these women in completing their dissertation. Three participants moved out of state or lived more than 100 miles from their programs while in the dissertation phase (Appendix F). What I learned is that physical proximity does play a role, but emotional distance or disconnection appears to be a more significant contributing factor in candidates’ success or attrition than does physical connection. Those participants who still felt a connection to peers, cohorts, or their committee members fared better than those participants who felt disconnected and isolated. According to Katz (1995), few experiences isolate people from each other for such an extended time period as the dissertation. For many students, making the “transition from collaborative scholar to isolated writer is a difficult one” (Miller, 1995, p. 45). Many students also feel the need for a break once they complete their coursework (Holm, Prosek, & Godwin Weisberger, 2014), and if they are isolated
from academia and their peers, they can struggle with remaining persistent in their dissertation work (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005).

**Do I Need This? Job Stability Not Contingent on Terminal Degree Conferment**

Four participants shared that knowing that their job as a faculty/adjunct (whether part-time or full-time) was not affected by the conferment of a degree in counselor education also played a role in lessening their motivation to complete their program. Ella did share that she felt a little guilty that she could not count as core faculty for CACREP faculty ratios; however, her guilt was not a motivating factor for her to push forward. Ella had initially pursued a doctorate in counselor education because she wanted to teach in a college setting and did not feel that it was possible without a doctorate, but then she learned that this was not the case. Ella felt comfortable within the job she had as a faculty member and wasn’t planning on doing anything differently after she got her degree (if she got her degree). Shayla also spoke about being comfortable in her role as a senior lecturer and not really needing the degree for academic or career advancement. She saw it more as a personal goal she set for herself rather than a career goal. This is consistent with research (Brunning, Schraw, Norby, & Ronning, 2004; Harsch, 2008) that speaks to higher graduation rates for those candidates whose career pursuits depend on finishing their dissertation.

**New Findings About Barriers From This Study**

**Shame – Something is Wrong With Me**

I was surprised to see how prevalent shame was among female candidates in counselor education programs. Seven participants spoke about shame. For some, it appeared internal from
unmet self-expectations (perfectionism, low self-esteem, being too hard on themselves), and for some, it seemed that their perceptions of how others viewed them brought shame. Friends and family asking them if they were done yet, or why is it talking so long was a common theme among these participants. Others experienced shame from faculty, committee members, and the program in thwarted efforts to “help” them that seemed very judgmental, attacking, and made them feel small. Examples shared included remediation programs for writing, candidates feeling that they didn’t have the necessary knowledge, background and confidence to launch into the dissertation phase, and the “shaming/hazing of several candidates by female committee members at the proposal phase. All these incidences left the participants feeling the same way—that they were “not good enough” and left an indelible impression on their psyche and self-esteem.

There seemed to be another layer of this for the African American participants as they felt that they were looked over and not offered the same opportunities as their Caucasian peers. Once again, life (now academia) was repeating that age-old adage that race does matter. And once again, these participants’ lived experiences were that they were “less than” their Caucasian counterparts and not given the same academic opportunities (research assistants, co-authoring chapters, presenting with faculty, and co-teaching) or selected as protégés by the faculty (Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004).

The Firing Line – Hazing/Rite of Passage

I would like to give special attention to the hazing incidences. This was a theme that I was not expecting, nor have I encountered personally, but it was evident on just how damaging this process was to at least four participants (two Caucasian and two African American) from
three different CACREP accredited institutions. According to the lived experiences of these four participants, it was something that none was expecting. Ella shared how she had received positive feedback from committee members about her first three chapters before her proposal, and then when she was in her proposal defense, the rules changed, and she felt chastised and attacked by two female committee members who she thought she had good relationships with. She recalled leaving feeling shamed and demoralized. It took months before she could bring herself to even look at the first three chapters again. Even though she knew that she just had revisions to do that could have taken her several hours. The pain and hurt associated with the hazing left her feeling traumatized and considering dropping out the program, rather than subject herself to anything that painful again. Another candidate, Marina, shared how it was her Chair that changed the rules during her proposal defense and required her to do another round of focus groups and research before she could defend. Again, she was blindsided, and felt attacked. Marina recalled that she felt that she was being required to do additional work that other candidates do not have to do and left feeling very frustrated and hurt. No participant was aware of male students who had similar experiences.

It is unclear whether these actions are remnant and colored by the committee members’ own journeys or dissertation process and then seen as a “rite of passage” that other females had to go through. It would certainly be an area that could warrant further research. When I tried to conduct a literature review on this topic, nothing came up. My sense is that this is another area of academia (like the ABD crisis addressed earlier) where it almost becomes a “dirty secret” that no one wants to admit happens. Committee members are probably not eager to discuss their behaviors and students are too traumatized to share their story with others. These hazing
experiences described above may also be an area to explore as far the perfectionistic tendencies and traits of female committee members and Chairs.

There is some scant research on maladaptive perfectionism among female counselor educators (Moate, Gnìlka, West, & Bruns, 2016), but no research addresses perfection in faculty and how such can affect relationships with students. Some female committee members and Chairs appear to require much more perfection from candidates in the dissertations they’re chairing before giving permission for candidates to move on the next chapter, defend their proposal, or schedule their dissertation defense. Moreover, they may hold female candidates to a more perfect standard than male candidates.

All participants asked for reassurance that their comments were confidential, and pseudonyms would be used so that there would be no repercussions (politically or otherwise) from their own faculty and institutions. Although all participants who shared these similar experiences were still deeply affected by the harsh treatment, all had chosen to take this traumatic experience and try to be different for their future students—to use this negative experience to be kinder and more supportive to others coming after them. Not one participant shared that this was a helpful experience for them (even though some acknowledged that maybe the committee members thought that this “tough approach” might help them. This could also lead to another layer of research—to look at the meaning that traumatized students attribute to the hazing experience and dissertation process, and perceptions of committee members and Chairs about the dissertation process.
The Reality – More of the Same

This study highlighted that there is still much work for us to do as counselor educators. We like to talk about how far we have come, but we have not come far enough. The system is rigged against women and minorities so therefore, no wonder we are finding attrition among culturally diverse women in staggering numbers. We are set up to fail. We are invited into a system that is still designed for the privileged and expected to “suck it up” and act like the privileged do, with no direction or guidance. No one is handing candidates a manual or a supporting them in successfully getting through the system. Instead, we see culturally diverse candidates walking in the minefield and faculty are watching from afar in our protective ivory towers. This serves no one, not the candidates, our programs, our profession, or academia. When one of us falls, we all fall.

Academia is a microcosm of what we currently experiencing in our larger society. I am writing this passage on Juneteenth as the country is experiencing some of largest demonstrations about racial inequity that we have seen since the civil rights movement. The outrage about police brutality and Black Lives Matter has expanded to a global level even in the middle of a pandemic. Things need to change, and it is not just with the police, but also with counselor education.

So, What Do We Do About It?

It is easy for us to point fingers or blame the female candidates for their struggles, but it serves no one and just adds to the frustration. What we need are solutions.

How can we, as counselor educators, become the advocates and espouse the social justice
principles that we teach about? Let’s start by revisiting the research questions that I attempted to address in this study.

Revisiting the Research Questions

1. What about the lived experience of female and/or culturally diverse doctoral students can help CES programs to better address their needs and ensure higher student graduation rates?
   a. What is the unique lived experience of this population while working on their dissertation?
   b. What were some of the unique challenges and obstacles that these students faced during the dissertation experience?
   c. How did social, cultural, political, and economic factors impact their dissertation experience?
   d. What needs did they have that were going unmet?
   e. What was/is needed for them to be successful?

2. What are ways to advocate for this population to expedite the dissertation process using CES’s espoused position on social justice?

Because I have always been a person-centered counselor at heart, I have to go back to the roots of my theory to examine the issues and lived experiences of the female participants
Person-Centered Principles

Listen, Don’t Assume — Empathic Understanding

All of the participants echoed narratives of feeling unheard and unsupported. The first step is for us as counselor educators and committee members to really listen, and understand the subjective reality of our candidates and students. What are they saying? What are they not saying? Can we truly put ourselves in their experiences and understand the world from their viewpoint? Can we put our experiences aside to truly hear them? What is it that students need from us? Are we asking the right questions?

Ella, one of the participants shared how she struggled with writing, but rather than anyone sitting down with her and asking her what she needed to be successful, decisions were made without including her to put her into a remedial English class for undergraduates. Ella found the process to be unhelpful, irrelevant to her needs, and demoralizing. This process added to feelings of shame and inadequacy.

The Struggle is Real — Genuineness

As counselor educators, we need to be genuine and real. Most counselor educators can relate to our own narratives of isolation and challenges when we were candidates, yet how many of us share our challenges with our candidates. When candidates feel that it is only them that have struggled, it makes that chasm seem even greater. Counselor educators need to share about our struggles as a student. Be real and authentic with our students and candidates rather than hiding behind the cloaks of academia. Be available and be open.
See Me, Value Me – Unconditional Positive Regard

We need to see the inherent worth and value in ALL students. Not just those who remind us of us. Who are we mentoring? Just those that look like us or those we can identify with? Or can we push ourselves to see the gifts of ALL students and provide them with the same opportunities as the privileged students.

Check In or We Will Check Out – Accountability Matters!

It is critical that professors take an active role in staying connected with candidates, especially when they transition to the dissertation process. Time and time again, candidates and participants have described feeling isolated, not supported and feeling like they are floundering with no one noticing or caring. We need to stay connected and check in with candidates. Committee members or Chairs also need to sit down with candidates and develop a structured schedule with accountability. This was a predominant theme and wish for all of the participants—to have someone to hold them accountable and to reach out and grab them if they drift too far away from academia. This takes little effort on the behalf of faculty, yet can be monumental in the perceptions and experience of candidates.

Breaking the Chains That Bind Us – Hand Up, Not Hand Out

Mentoring is a critical part of a novice’s success, and this particularly true for students, especially those students who may be the first generation of college students and have no role models or template to follow. We can be the guide that we never had and make the difference between a student successfully defending and graduating or becoming lost in the abyss of the
dissertation process. It is also critical that the struggling students get the mentoring and support they need.

I had a Master’s level student who was one of my most passionate and enthusiastic learners. She was African American and worked within the prison system with inmates as a corrections officer. She loved her work and really saw the difference that she was making as a role model for her inmates. Although she was a very eager student, Monica (pseudonym) really lacked writing skills. Her grammar and writing skills were a sad reality of her inadequate and inferior educational background. I knew that Monica was going to touch many people as an amazing counselor that I could only hope to touch, but I also she did not have the writing skills level to be successful in our Master’s program. I brought Monica in my office and told her that I would have to fail her based upon her writing and testing ability, but I encouraged her to sign up for my classes again and that I would mentor her in writing academic papers. Monica did fail, but she also did sign up for classes again. A year ago, I had the honor of sitting on her Master’s defense committee where she successfully defended her Master’s in Counseling. There are many Monica’s out there who are waiting for us to invest in them. WE really CAN make a difference—not only to the Monicas of the program, but also all of the clients whose lives they will touch.

The Sins of Our Fathers – Stopping the Cycle and Mentoring for ALL

This cycle of lack of mentoring is often a cycle that has been repeated over the generations. It is hard for counselor educators to provide to others what we have never experienced ourselves. Educational programs at conferences, online seminars on the benefits of
mentoring, journal articles, and step by step processes of how to be a good mentor can help to fill in those gaps in our pedagogy.

Privilege Matters – Breaking the Oppressor/Oppressed Pattern

How can we use our privilege as professors and counselor educators to open the doors for students who are coming behind us? We give great lectures on privilege and oppression, but how are we at integrating this into our academic practices? Can we practice what we preach/teach? This may mean developing a mentoring group for underprivileged students to work on writing, research, or presentation skills, perhaps present with minority students at local conferences and workshops. Candidates with some experience are more inclined to then present at larger conferences.

Kinder, Gentler Experience – Be the Model We Teach About

Typically, when we think of counseling, we think of a profession where the counselors are kind, patient and considerate to others. Is this also mirrored in our teaching? The dissertation process does not need to be a bootcamp experience, where participants are broken down and are competing against each other for our attention where only a few make it. If we employ more collaborative and cooperative experiences within our program, we are being more culturally sensitive to ALL cultures and females. Counselor educators need to make sure that we are staying away from strictly male principles of competition and individualism and see learning more inclusively and collectively. Hazing incidences should never be a part of the dissertation process. No one flourishes when we use archaic principles of punishment and fear to teach. This
is not the time to defeat candidates, but rather, to empower and transform lives. We can make the difference in breaking the cycle of power and oppression and build a more sensitive and collaborative educational process.

Limitations

Limitations of this study are described below and include researcher bias, convenience sampling, geographic limitations, need for more cultural diversity, fear of retribution (power differential), and social desirability.

Researcher Bias

As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 3, I was a researcher-participant. Although I was not an active participant in the study, I have lived this experience and identified with many of the lived experiences and stories that these participants shared. My interest in this topic was threefold: my (a) attempt to understand and make sense of my own lived experience of being ABD and my dissertation completion challenges, (b) desire to gain a deeper understanding of phenomenological inquiry, and (c) intention as a counselor educator to facilitate the dissertation process for other doctoral students. Thus, I approached this study as both a participant and an observer. As a participant in the dissertation process, I brought my own experiences, beliefs, and values into the research process.

My personal biases and assumptions that I discussed in my journaling and bracketing were (a) the dissertation process is a lonely and arduous journey; (b) life and its obligations can often derail a student’s dissertation progress; (c) prioritizing a dissertation is very challenging
once done with classes and without regular ongoing contact and support with faculty members and peers; (d) multiple responsibilities and role strain can often get in the way of students’ goal to complete their dissertations; (e) lack of experience with conducting research and meager knowledge and skills in research methods can add to the dissertation completion challenges; (f) the dissertation is a self-directed challenge in self-resolve and perseverance, and a rite of passage rather than something meaningful and rewarding; (g) even when a doctoral candidate is not working on her dissertation, it is always looming as a stressor and disappointment in her periphery; and (h) the arduous dissertation process provides all participants an opportunity for insight and self-reflection regardless of whether it is completed or not.

Phenomenological researchers play a significant role in the research as they are the research instrument and the primary mechanism for data collection and analysis (Merchant, 2007). Therefore, I, as the researcher, “bracketed” my experiences, biases, and perceptions as a primary step so that information gathered remains untainted. This bracketing, or process of epoche, occurred before I entered the world of the participants (Appendix A). Researchers are encouraged to explain the specific process that they will take to refrain from allowing assumptions and experiences from influencing the data collection and analysis. It is also recommended for researchers to articulate how they will fully process and understand of their participants’ experiences.

Patton (1990) recommended that because of the critical role of the researcher in qualitative research, the researcher clearly outline her qualifications, motivations for conducting the study, and relationship to the participants. Many qualitative researchers examine research in areas foreign to them, but others conduct studies in areas with which they have familiarity (Ely,
One potential problem with conducting research in an area where a researcher has familiarity is that the researcher may presume understanding (Ely, 1991). All researchers begin with biases and preconceived notions. Controlling those biases can serve to focus and limit the research; however, unrestrained, they can have a negative impact on the research (Fetterman, 1989). As Fetterman noted, a researcher “enters the field with an open mind, not an empty head” (p. 11). The process of the researcher making specific biases explicit mitigates the negative impact of the biases (Fetterman, 1989). Researcher journaling, and the bracketing of my experiences were means of offsetting this limitation.

Phenomenological interviewing and research take these factors into consideration. Prior to interviewing, phenomenological researchers write a full account of their own experience, thereby bracketing their experiences from those of participants (Appendix B). This phase of the inquiry is known as *epoche* (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The premise of this self-examination and reflection is to assist researchers to gain clarity from their own preconceptions and is part of the “ongoing process rather than a single fixed event” (Patton, 1990, p. 408).

The primary advantage of the phenomenological interview is that it allows for an explicit focus on the researcher’s personal account combined with those of the participants. It focuses on the deep lived meanings that particular events have for individuals, assuming that these meanings guide actions and interactions. This particular methodology is quite laborious and requires researchers retain a reflective mindset.

Member checks on the themes and their perceptions were another way that I accounted for researcher bias and made sure that I had captured the essence of participants narratives (Appendix H).
Convenience and Snowball Sampling

I recruited the initial round of participants from convenience sampling. These were female candidates that I was aware of who fit the criteria (three participants). Those participants then referred their colleagues and friends (three participants) who also fit the criteria (Snowball sampling). I also wrote invitations to the CESNET community for willing participants. Ten individuals contacted me. There were two rounds of soliciting participants from CESNET; however, three of the individuals who responded through CESNET either did not follow through with the interviews, did not meet the criteria of being in the dissertation phase of their studies, or did not meet the criteria of having been at the dissertation phase for a minimum of three years. Six potential participants responded through CACREP and did meet the criteria. This included an Asian American participant, an international participant, a Caucasian, and three African American participants. All met the criteria and expressed interest, five filled out the consent forms; however, only three followed through as far as the interview process.

Two participants did interview face-to-face. The remaining seven participants were interviewed using a HIPAA compliant and secure digital platform. Although there were two different modes of interviewing, it did not appear to affect the comfortability of participants to respond. I believe that those who did not see me, shared an extra layer of anonymity because it was not face-to-face.

Geographic Limitations

Five of the participants (two Caucasian and three African American females) came from 2 CACREP counselor education programs in the Northern region where the researcher had
personal connections. These five participants all share the experience of living in the same state in the Northern region and therefore, may have experienced living in the unique meso-system in the same regional and attending common universities. Race and economic factors, however, did affect and alter their lived experience both in and out of academia. The other four participants volunteered from different CACREP programs throughout the Southern region of the United States. This is important to note given that such may not be representative to other CACREP affiliated institutions or geographical areas. It was unique to these participants’ unique experiences.

**Need for More Cultural Diversity**

This study provided a voice to three Caucasian participants and six African American participants. Although an international candidate from Thailand and an Asian American candidate from the Northeast agreed to participate, both failed to meet for their scheduled interview. Thus, the narratives only reflected the perceptions of these African Americans and Caucasian doctoral candidates which cannot generalize to all cultural groups. The participants were also all female, so the study only reflects the female perspective of their dissertation experience.

Sexual orientation was not asked about although two participants did reveal that they are gay. Several (five) participants identified as heterosexual and were in committed heterosexual marriages. Three participants shared their relationship status as single, and one identified as divorced.

One participant did report she was Muslim, three self-identified as Christian, and the
remaining five did not disclose any religious affiliation. Participants’ ages varied from 31 to 57 although it was evenly distributed among these decades. Three participants were in their 30s, three were in their 40s, and three were in their 50s. Eight participants worked full-time (six in academia as a faculty or adjunct) and one worked part-time. A more multicultural population with diverse ethnicities (rather than just two), sexual orientation, and different geographic locations may have provided a richer sampling of lived experiences of female candidates going through the dissertation process.

**Fear of Retribution (Power Differential)**

This interview process of examining the lived experience of participants while they were still engrossed in the dissertation process presented a clear power differential between the respondents and the committees and institutions that they were sharing their experiences about. I addressed the fear of retribution by assuring confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used and other identifying information (names of schools and states) was omitted. Although these protective measures were in place, four of the participants still queried about whether their faculty would have access to this information and how safe/honest could they be? I addressed their concerns and all participants did appear to become more comfortable and share openly.

**Social Desirability**

Social desirability needs to be taken into consideration when examining the trustworthiness of this study. Some participants tend to alter their “truth” in a conscious or unconscious desire to appeal to the researcher. Others may omit information to protect
themselves, especially due to the power deferential of their positions in their various programs. All participants were assured that their confidentiality would be protected. Yet, five needed additional reassurance before they divulged deeper and more personal information about their experiences with their programs and committee members. Participants may have provided answers that they felt I was looking for or omit information that painted them in an unfavorable light. It did appear that all participants were forthcoming and volunteered willingly; however, social desirability is a construct that needs to be examined in research.

Implications From This Study

There were several emergent themes that echoed the current research. These included: navigating the dissertation process, barriers to the dissertation process, motivations (intrinsic and extrinsic) for pursuing a doctorate in counselor education, resources (both internal and external) that played a prominent role in participants’ academic endeavors, and participants’ perceptions of the dissertation process.

Implications for Counselor Education Programs and Female Candidates

This study examined the lived experience of culturally diverse female doctoral students at the ABD stage of CACREP-accredited doctoral programs in counselor education and supervision. This study identified the perspectives of these participants as they navigated their way through their lived experiences as a doctorate candidate (ABD). It also examined the motivating factors, resources within the participants, in addition to barriers and issues that obstruct female culturally diverse doctoral students from completing their dissertation. This
study also explored these factors through a social justice lens as far as how discrimination and oppressive factors in academia and society at large may play a role in demise of attaining the doctorate degree. Little research has been conducted on female counselor educators and their dissertation process (Hinojosa & Carney, 2015; Holm, Prosek, & Godwin Weisberger, 2014; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). Similarly, few studies have examined social justice issues in academia (Chang, Crethar, & Ratts, 2010; Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007; Kiselica & Robinson, 2001; McWhirter, 1991; Ratts et al., 2004; Ratts et al, 2016). My intention was to share the stories of these participants who have been at the dissertation process for at least three years in an objective manner that would supplement current knowledge and research in the domains of counselor education, women’s issues in doctoral education, social justice in academia, and multicultural education. Understanding and sharing these women’s academic journeys and stories allows for counselor educators to gain a glimpse into the female experience of the dissertation process. As Aspy and Sandhu (1999, p. 11) stated,

   Knowledge is power, and never before in history have women had the access to knowledge that is available today. They can restructure society not to become equals in a man’s world, but to change society to value more highly those dimensions that are associated with the feminine.

   By gaining a richer understanding of these educated women’s endeavors and experiences, counselor educators can better address these students’ specific needs within doctoral programs and empower them to complete their educational pursuits and further their contribution to counselor education and supervision.
Recommendations for Further Research

Recommendations for further research include explorations of (a) the meaning that participants attribute to their lived experience of the dissertation process and how that experience and meaning changes or is reconstructed post-graduation, (b) the role of gender in the dissertation process and the comparing and contrasting the meaning and experiences that each gender attributes to their dissertation process, (c) an examination of faculty and students’ perceptions of gender and completion dissertation process, (d) an examination of the mentoring experience of doctoral students through the lenses of culture and gender, (e) exploring the variable of perfectionism with doctoral candidates and counselor educators, (f) shame and its role in the dissertation process, (g) hazing incidences in doctorate counselor education programs, (h) more research into the multicultural aspects of female doctorate candidates during the dissertation phase of their experience.

All participants shared a united experience of the struggle and costs (emotional, time, and financial), yet it seemed that the participant who had completed her dissertation was also able to derive new meaning from the process. My hunch is that participants’ shared meaning attributed to the dissertation process may change once they have completed their academic journey and found a new satisfaction in the struggle, rarely present in mid struggle. Previous literature reviews did result in some studies that compared and contrasted attributes of completers and ABD students (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010; Yeager, 2008), but none explored participant meaning attributed to their experiences (pre- and post-completion).

An additional area to explore could be the difference between face-to-face interviews versus online anonymity. Research often talked about participants being more comfortable
revealing personal material in confidential and anonymous settings. In my own bracketing and journaling, I did not see much difference in the disclosure of participants regardless of communication methods; however, it is a factor to consider. I also did not teach at the doctorate level so, therefore, I may not have been perceived to be as much of a threat since I was their peer rather than a professor in a doctorate program.

Many participants (6) spoke about men completing their dissertations, whether in cohorts or separately, at much faster rates than female candidates. This phenomenon was also cited in the research (Yeager, 2008). Role strain and responsibilities for families also seemed to be barriers that women carried at a heavier level than males (Holm, Prosek, & Godwin Weisberger, 2014). Gender differences and perspectives of the dissertation process could be an area for further research. Comparing and contrasting the dissertation experience along gender lines and exploring the barriers for each gender could bring added information into counselor education and the dissertation experience.

**Perfectionism**

There is a common perception from research (shared in the literature review of Chapter 2) that perfectionism is an internal barrier that often gets in the way of women completing their dissertation (Carter et al., 2013; Bell, 1990; Germeroth 1991; Katz, 1995; Lynch, 2005). Eight participants in this study were self-identified perfectionists. However, perfectionism did not seem to be a defining a barrier for them. Research states that often perfectionists tend to procrastinate because there is an overwhelming desire to do the dissertation perfectly, often resulting in stagnation and avoidance (Carter et al., 2013; Bell, 1990; Germeroth 1991; Katz,
1995; Lynch, 2005). Although participants acknowledged the pressure of perfectionism and wanting to do the dissertation “right,” the ambiguity and confusion surrounding this isolating experience of researching and writing a dissertation was far greater than any perfectionistic tendencies students had. Rather than wanting to do something perfectly, participants were trying to navigate and understand the process itself. If anything, this process seemed to help participants overcome their perfectionistic tendencies as they felt immersed in a process of “not knowing, with little guidance.” Many spoke of a level of exhaustion, where they had come to see to “a completed project was better than an unfinished perfect project.”

Personal Reflection

My own dissertation experience paralleled with several themes that various participants shared. My entry into the dissertation phase was rife with loss and trauma. The love of my life broke up with me the day before my specialty comps. I remember going into that defense feeling totally numb. I was so lost and heartbroken that passing a defense seemed inconsequential. I ended up passing and doing very well but then realized there was no one to call to share the good news with. My best friend and partner was no longer in my life, my parents never valued education, and my children resented me for being in school. I knew in my heart that this should be a significant moment in my life, yet I felt empty and alone. There was no one to share this milestone with—no one who could appreciate the journey or understand the sacrifices and hard work to get to this accomplishment. The next week my mother was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer, so my education went on hold to be her primary caregiver. The next eight months were spent flying to Florida to be there for my mother and supporting my bewildered and
overwhelmed father through this earth-shattering process, while still balancing two jobs and a household of teenagers. The emotional trauma of cancer took a toll on my mother where she finally allowed herself to feel a rage that she had been containing her entire life. This petrified my father who did not understand why she was so angry, so I supported each parent through this process in their own way. The week after my mother was cleared from her treatment, my best friend Laura was diagnosed with 30 tumors throughout her body. The following eight months was spent witnessing one of the most remarkable women I had ever had the honor of knowing, deteriorate and die with an integrity and honor that few people possess. Laura was also a single mother and we were each other’s “go to” person. I took her five-year-old to kindergarten every morning while Laura got weaker and weaker. I then had the privilege of preparing her four children, a six-year-old and three adolescents for the impending death of their only parent. After Laura died, I started working on my dissertation. There have been many highs and lows, and many times where life has pulled me away from my studies and writing to be there for my family. I had the gut-wrenching experience of witnessing my middle son struggle with drugs, and almost die. It was terrifying and I was determined not to bury another child (my second daughter died at six months from a terminal chromosome disorder). Fortunately, I did not have to. I sent my son to Florida to live with my brother, and David was able to recover and thrive. Later, Marina, my oldest daughter gave birth to twins 3 months prematurely so, again, the dissertation was put on hold to help my daughter in Boston deal with two fragile, premature infants, weighing 2 lb 14 oz Miraculously, they are both fine and I have two beautiful and talented, six year old, identical twin granddaughters. I have also experienced my own health issues. This included two back surgeries, a hip replacement, renal failure, and now aplastic anemia and
pancytopenia. Life and family have pulled my attention and energy in many different directions, yet I have always come back to the dissertation process and endured. I have proceeded on my academic journey as a single mother of 7 children, with 2 full-time jobs, so time, persistence, and priorities have always been essential to my continued progress in the dissertation phase. Role strain and time taken away from other priorities and relationships have probably been some of my greatest obstacles. I always felt like I was robbing someone or something else in order to chisel time and energy away for the research and writing. Family emergencies (health issues with loved ones) and personal health issues have plagued my journey. Even as I wrote this reflection, I was awaiting test results from a bone marrow biopsy to determine whether I have an autoimmune disorder, cancer, or leukemia. This journey has also been uplifted by all of life’s celebrations. Ironically, as I learned about my recent health issues, I also learned that my youngest son is expecting his first child who is scheduled to arrive on my birthday, and there will be four weddings with my children within the year. So, life continues, both the riches and goodness of life and its complications and opportunities for self-reflection and growth. And there is still the looming, heavy call from an unfinished dissertation, just begging for its share of my time and energy.

My latest challenge has been managing very serious health conditions during uncertain times. Aplastic Anemia and Pancytopenia are blood and bone marrow conditions which have resulted in barely having any platelets, red or white blood cells. My bone marrow was operating at five percent and I have no autoimmune system. After two weeks at Rush hospital, getting blasted with chemotherapy and autoimmune suppressants, my treatment was having blood and platelet transfusions for 3 days a week. The treatment should hopefully take six months. Two
months later, society found itself dealing with the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Not exactly the best time to have compromised autoimmune conditions! Yet, I have endured. As soon as I was released from the hospital and gained enough strength to write, I started back on my dissertation. The “at home shelter” which has been imposed on a state and federal level has afforded me the opportunity to stay home, rest, and write. I am determined to complete this journey within a month.

As I reflect upon this journey, I can also see how much I have grown. I have always been a strong person, but this dissertation experience has been a constant for a significant period of my life, and it has grown alongside me. Part of the dissertation’s growth was for me to change my topic from mentoring and leadership within ACA to examining the lived experiences of other women during the dissertation process. This reflected my own journey and growth—from being heavily involved in ACA and leadership to a more solitary and reflective journey. This is a topic that I have lived and feel passionate about. It is my story. My passion has always been empowering others, but especially women. This is my soul’s calling and the progression to giving voice to other women’s stories (feminine) rather than examining mentoring and leadership roles in ACA (more patriarchal) aligns with my own focus and lived experience.

One of my most significant journeys has been to “come into my own and accept my own power.” I was raised in Europe by British parents where I inadvertently picked up the messages to “be quiet, nice,” to “be smaller than I was, and to make other people comfortable.” Cultural and familial innuendos I had picked up included, my physical looks were what mattered (my father), don’t be too smart or multi-faceted (insecure men in my life), and accommodate to other people’s needs (my mother and society). I went through life, knowing as a young child that there
was so much more to me than people saw, but most people weren’t comfortable with my multidimensional gifts. I learned to accommodate—attend to others’ need and make people comfortable. A perfect making for a counselor and counselor educator. Adulthood (and life) has been a journey back to “me”—to the truth that I always knew as a child but now can fully embrace.

My writing for this dissertation, however, was an area where this was still a struggle for me. Mixed messages and power differential as a student still entailed that I should compromise and accommodate. Messages such as, Chapter 5 is about you. Bring more of yourself to your writing. Yet, don’t write in your natural style. Change the words or do it this way. Whether the rules are from the latest version of APA writing format, academia and its expectations, or professors’ preferences, there are still implicit, patriarchal, and academic expectations of not being fully yourself and accommodating and meeting others’ needs. My hope and wish were that once the academic writing feat of this dissertation was complete, I would take the opportunity to write naturally from my heart and soul rather than pigeon-hole my creativity, thoughts and ideas into academic constructs and confines.

Nothing in my life has been such an effort in persistence. This has been a 14-year journey for me and one that I am determined to finish. Like other participants, the money and time that I have already invested become motivating actions to complete this, and the fact that this is the only thing that I have attempted and not succeeded, which ties into my incongruence and, like most of this study’s participants, a sense of shame and failure of something left undone. I easily identified with rotating dissertation Chairs and committee members, as faculty came and went. This has also been an extraordinary practice in patience as the volleying back and forth of
feedback is often not on the candidate’s timetable, nor is it always clearly understood. Faculty members are often stretched in their commitments (both professionally and personally), and once I was not meeting regularly, it is easy to dismiss/get distracted from the needs of the isolated dissertation candidate. Then there is the internal political debate, do I advocate for myself and become the squeaky wheel trying to remind committee members about stated deadlines, or am I then perceived as a problematic student and will there be political ramifications? This academic journey was one rife with rigor and mine fields as I continued navigating the uncharted terrain called the dissertation – not wanting to push too hard, but fearful of not pushing at all, and then the dissertation becomes as much of a distant memory to me as it appeared to the committee.

Conclusion

This study intended to capture the lived experiences of nine culturally diverse female counselor education candidates as they traversed the dissertation process. The voices of many female culturally diverse ABD status candidates in counselor education programs remain unheard, and their experiences and stories remain untold (Hinojosa & Carney, 2015; Holm et al., 2014; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). Research on female doctoral student attrition, retention, and persistence indicated a lack of qualitative research and research on the student voice (Holm et al., 2014; Lovitts, 2001). One justification for this is students oftentimes leave in silence without expressing their reasons for leaving (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lovitts, 2001; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). Thus, some scholars have recommended more research be conducted to obtain the voice of these departing students (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Holm et al., 2014). This study was my attempt to assist counselor educators in understanding this “at risk” population’s plights
and journeys as well as gain deeper insight into my own story and journey. This is a social justice issue. As Shin (2008) stated, “Counseling and counseling psychology faculty are situated in unique and influential positions to identify the policies in higher education that perpetuate the oppression of certain individuals and groups and, concurrently, to provide students with strategies for empowerment and social transformation” (p. 181). By gaining a richer understanding of these educated women’s endeavors and experiences, counselor educators can better address these students’ specific needs within doctoral programs and empower them to complete their educational pursuits and further their contribution to counselor education and supervision.

This research study reflects an effort to share their stories and bear witness to many of their silent suffering so that those women who come after them may have a more supportive and positive academic journey. May these women’s narrative blaze the trail for those who come after us . . .

The following poem eloquently captures my experience and the experience of some many of my participants. For me, this poem speaks to the experience of blazing a trial for the generations of women to come, and how we all have a responsibility and accountability to our daughters and women to come. This poem also speaks to the dissertation experience as far as no one to guide us and forging ahead with no direction but our passion. Finally, this poem from *Burning Woman* by Lucy H. Pearce also addresses social advocacy and mentoring and how necessary it is for us with privilege or who have made it to blaze a trail for those behind us so they don’t have to struggle as hard as we did:

> Often we can get caught in our own struggles, our own small stories, that we forget our
place in the larger story arc – the way that our actions, our choices, our achievements can and will blaze trails for that who come after us, so that they do not have to spend their time and energy re-fighting the same battles.

For sure we walk a spiral path, but for generations of women the spirals were so tightly packed that it seemed they were going round in circles – let us blaze trails so that the path we walk takes in wider and wider sweeps of human experience.

Trail blazing is what we do when we find ourselves in the wilderness, with no path to guide us but our own intuitive understanding of nature and our destination. At times we must walk through the night, guided only by the stars. We know when to sit and rest, to shelter from storms, when to gather water, and what on the trail will sustain us and what will do us harm. We are courageous and cautious in equal measure, but we are driven forward, not only by our own desire to reach our destination, but also by the desire to leave a viable way for others who follow.

Trail blazing is an art-form. It is how we find paths through what before was wilderness. We push aside branches, or cut them back, we tramp down nettles and long grasses, ford rivers and streams, through the inner and outer landscapes.


Aspy, & Sandhu (1999).


Khadjooi, K., Scott, P., & Jones, L. (2012). What is the impact of pregnancy and parenthood on


http://www.oecd.org/publishing


Yeager, B. J. (2008). *PHD or ABD: To be or not to be?* Dissertation, UMI Microform 3310970.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION
Participant Background Information

Personal Background

Name________________________________________________________

Age_________ Gender_______ Ethnic Background___________________________

Marital Status_________________ Number of Children (if any)_________________________

Are you currently working?_________ If yes, full or part-time________________________

Approximately how far do you live from the university? ________________ miles

Does anyone in your family have an advanced degree?__________

If yes, please list their relationship to you and the type of degree________________________

________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

Please list your previous degrees:

Degree Earned Year Institution

__________________________________________ ____________________________

__________________________________________ ____________________________

Institutional and Program Information

Name of your university______________________________________

Is your university private/public?__________ Is your program CACREP approved?______

What were the primary reason(s) for selecting this particular institution/program (check all that apply):

_____ reputation of institution

_____ reputation of program

_____ close to home/work

_____ cost

_____ ability to receive financial aid

_____ only available option
____ other (please explain)

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Dissertation Related Information:

What the semester and year of your last course?______________________________

What was the semester and year of your comprehensive exams?________________

Does your university have a time limit on completing dissertations?______________

If yes, what is the limit?____________________________________________________

Does your program include a course devoted to dissertation research?____________

Have you passed your proposal defense?______________________________________

If not, where are you currently in the dissertation process?_____________________

What is the topic of your dissertation?________________________________________

What is your anticipated date of graduation?_________________________________

How often do you meet with your major professor/dissertation Chair?____________

Who determines how often and when you meet (you, the Chair, or both)?___________

Did/do you have a faculty mentor____________________________________________
APPENDIX B

STRATEGIES FOR BRACKETING
Strategies for Bracketing

Start with a reflective journal to be used throughout the research study. Reflect on the following questions:

1. Why are you doing this research? What is your motivation and potential personal and professional gain?
2. How might your cultural identity (e.g., race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender) affect the process of gaining access, investigating research questions, and collecting data?
3. What are your values and biases related to the research questions?
4. What results do you expect to find?
5. Are there potential role conflicts that you expect (e.g., difficult interactions with the participants or situations related to the study, gatekeepers who have self-interests that are potentially detrimental to the participants)?
6. How might co-researchers and consultants help you maximize your ability to attend to participants’ perspectives?
7. What situations and with which participants do you experience negative feelings? Positive feelings? How might these feelings affect researcher neutrality?
8. As you analyze data, are you “looking” for certain codes and themes? How can you be sure to avoid this?
9. Are you more involved in the study than you intended? (Have you “gone native”?) How might that be helpful? Harmful?
10. How might other ways of gaining access or collecting data be achieved if you experience roadblocks?

11. When you write the research report, how much of the findings are your voice rather than the participants’ voices? Are you quoting certain participants more?

12. Does the literature review support the findings? Are you leaving literature out that contradicts your findings?

13. Are you overlooking data that do not “agree” with your assumptions? (Erford, 2015, p. 116)
APPENDIX C

LETTER TO THE DEPARTMENT CHAIRS
Letter to the Department Chairs

Dear Department Chair,

I am conducting a phenomenal research inquiry on the lived experiences of female doctoral students who have found themselves stuck in the dissertation process and the ABD experience for at least 2 years after completing their comprehensive exams. These participants should be from CACREP-accredited counselor education programs. As you are aware, at least 50% of doctoral candidates remain at ABD status and never complete their dissertations. My intention is to gain understanding in how counselor educators can empower and advocate for these students so that a larger number can complete their dissertation. This research study is the culmination of my own dissertation project. I would appreciate your assistance in identifying any eligible participants who may be interested in volunteering for this project.

If you know of any ABD students who may be interested in this study, please have them contact me directly at Snow13728@aol.com or (708) 837-3722. My dissertation Chair is Dr. Scott A. Wickman, who can be contacted at swickman@niu.edu or (815) 753-9324. I greatly appreciate your assistance in this matter.

Regards,

Tracey Kim Snow, MA, LCPC

Doctorate Candidate at Northern Illinois University
APPENDIX D

FLYER
Flyer

I am looking for volunteers to participate in a phenomenological dissertation study on the lived ABD Experience of CACREP Counselor Education female and minority doctoral Candidates. Participants should have completed their comprehensive examinations and have at least two years of experience at the ABD level. My goal is to capture these stories and give voice and understanding to this unique experience so that the field of counselor education can better understand how to empower and advocate for professionals in this position.

If you are interested in participating and meet the criteria, please contact me, Tracey Kim Snow at Snow13728@aol.com, or (708) 837-3722. Thank you, and I look forward to hearing from you.
APPENDIX E

CONSENT FORM
CONSENT FORM

For Participants in a Dissertation Research Study

Conducted by Tracey Kim Snow, MA, LCPC

I, ____________________________, agree to participate in a qualitative research study conducted by Tracey Kim Snow. The focus of this research is examining the lived experiences of female students who have been at the ABD status for a minimum of 2 years since completing their comprehensive examinations. I give permission to Tracey Kim Snow to use the information obtained through digitally recorded interviews as well as information gathered from the “background information form” in the text of her dissertation. I understand that if I am quoted or referred to directly or indirectly, a pseudonym will be used in place of my name to protect my anonymity.

I recognize that participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw my participation at any time. I also acknowledge that I may request the results of the dissertation by contacting Tracey Kim Snow at the below address:

Tracey Kim Snow  
13728 W. Carefree Dr.  
Homer Glen IL 60491  
Phone (708) 837-3722

My signature below indicates that I understand, have read and agree to the conditions listed above.

_________________________________________  ________________________
Participant’s signature                  Date
APPENDIX F

TABLE 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Relationship status</th>
<th>University regions</th>
<th>Miles from university</th>
<th>Public/Private CACREP accredited institution</th>
<th>Occupation status</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Year started dissertation</th>
<th>Had a mentor</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Married with a young child with special needs</td>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Works part-time</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>In the beginning but she retired years ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Marina)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Married, divorced, &amp; remarried w/ 2 children (12, 8 mo)</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Works full-time</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Spring 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Shayla)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Works full-time</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Spring 2014</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Kyla)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Married w/ 2 adult children</td>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Works full-time</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Spring 2015</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Kaysha)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Works full-time</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Susan)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Married w/ 1 child</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Works full-time</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Spring 2014</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Harper)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Married w/ 2 children</td>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Works full-time</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Spring 2006</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Ella)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Works full-time</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Fall 2014</td>
<td>no (died)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Caitlin)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Works full-time</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Fall 2014</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Cindy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

Participant Demographics
APPENDIX G

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW GUIDE
Participant Interview Guide

When I say the word “dissertation,” what is the first thought that you have?

For everyone who decides to work on an advanced degree, there is a sequence of experiences and choices that lead to that decision. What have been some of the significant experiences and choices that lead to you pursuing a doctorate?

To help me to get an idea of what the process has been like for you, I’d like for you to outline for me the various stages that you have undertaken up until this point (i.e., when did you get started, how did you choose your topic, select your committee, etc.).

What feelings or emotions do you associate with the dissertation process?

Based upon your own experiences, how would you describe the dissertation process to someone who is unfamiliar with it?

What has the transition from coursework to dissertation stage been like for you?

How do you accommodate the writing of the dissertation into your life? (balance responsibilities, etc.)

How would you describe your work ethic while working on your dissertation (i.e., when do you usually work, how long do you work for, do you have a set schedule, etc.)?

What would you consider to be some of your greatest resources as you continue working on your dissertation?

What would you consider to be some of your greatest barriers as you continue to work on your dissertation?

What is your motivation for working on your dissertation?

What has challenged your motivation for working on/completing your dissertation?

Describe your relationship with your committee Chair and other members of your committee?

What have your relationships with significant others, family, friends, and other students been like during the dissertation experience?

What role do you think gender has played in the dissertation process for you? Yours? The gender of your committee?
If applicable, what role do you feel being an ethnic minority has played in your dissertation process?

How has that impacted your relationships with your committee?

How do social, cultural, political, and economic factors impact their dissertation experience? How has the dissertation writing experience affected or interacted with issues related to lifespan development? Or vice versa?

What needs do you have that are going unmet?

What was/is needed for you to be successful?

What are ways to advocate for you and other female students to expedite the dissertation process?

How can your institutional policies and practices be improved?

How can faculty be more attuned and supportive to your needs?

What do you think that they are unaware of?

What can the profession be more supportive?

What do you wish would have been different for you?

What would have really helped you?

What have you learned from this dissertation process?

What have you learned about yourself from this process?

From what you have experienced and what you have heard of others’ experiences, do you think that your experience of the dissertation process is typical of most students?

Research states that a large percentage (40%-60%) of doctoral students remain ABD. Can you imagine anything that would prevent you from completing the dissertation? What do you think prevents many students from finishing the dissertation?

What advice would you give other students who are considering a doctorate?

What advice would you give students who are entering the dissertation phase of their doctorate?

Let’s assume that you’ve now completed the dissertation, and you are the committee Chair of a dissertation. Share how you would approach the situation.
APPENDIX H

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS INCLUDED WITH MEMBER CHECKS
Dear

As I near the analysis phase of my dissertation study, I want to ensure that I have represented you accurately and respectfully, therefore, I am enclosing a couple of documents for you to review and return to me. The first document consists of two parts: (a) the section on your introductory background; and (b) a list of extracted statements and summaries which I considered to be significant to the study. The second is a verbatim copy of the transcript of our interview session.

After you have reviewed the two documents, I would appreciate any written feedback that you wish to return to me. Do you feel that I have accurately represented your statements? Do I emphasize the correct aspects, or do you feel that I misinterpreted your meaning? If you find any statements that need to be clarified or further explained, please provide me with the corrected feedback.

Your corrections and clarifications can be written on a separate piece of paper. Feel free to add any other comments regarding the topics or suggest corrections in either document. The
two documents are yours to keep; however, I am requesting that you return the enclosed envelope to me, whether or not, you submit any changes or additions.

I am truly grateful for your participation in my study, and the opportunity to spend time with you discussing your dissertation “journey”. Your contribution to my study has provided rich data on the experiences of female minority doctoral students in CACREP accredited programs during the dissertation phase. If you are interested in the results of my study, please feel free to contact me.

Please return your corrections and comments as soon as possible, but no later than ____________. Your prompt response is greatly appreciated.

Respectfully,

Tracey Kim Snow

enclosures
APPENDIX I

CURRICULUM VITAE
CURRICULUM VITAE 2020

Tracey Kim Snow

Senior Lecturer, Department of Psychology and Counseling
Governors State University
University Park, IL 60466

Business Address: Beyond Healing, 13728 Carefree Dr., Homer Glen, IL 60491 (708) 837-3722
tsnow@govst.edu or kim.beyondhealing@gmail.com

EDUCATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(2020)</th>
<th>Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL</th>
<th>ABD - PhD. Candidate Counselor Ed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Governors State University, University Park, IL</td>
<td>MA Counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>University of St. Francis, Joliet, IL</td>
<td>BA - Psychology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LICENSES AND CERTIFICATIONS: Illinois

- National Certified Counselor 60718
- Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor 180-006920
- Certified Family Therapist - NCA 605
- Reiki Master & Teacher

PROFESSIONAL AWARDS

- 2007 ICA Research Award from Illinois Counseling Association, Tinley Park, IL
- 2003 “Outstanding Mentor Award” from Chi Sigma Iota, Governors State University
- 2000 Student Leadership Award from Governors State University
- 2000 “Who’s Who Amongst Graduate Students” Award, Governors State University
- 2000 Outstanding Chapter of Chi Sigma Iota Award, ACA Conference, Washington, D.C. awarded under my leadership
- 1994 Pinnacle, the Non-Traditional Honor Society for Adults, Joliet Junior College

WORK EXPERIENCE

- 2003-present  **Governors State University**, University Park, IL 60466
**Full time Senior Lecturer in Counseling Program**
Teach and supervise Masters level counseling students from all 3 tracks: School, Community, and Marriage and Family Counseling.

2009-present **Beyond Healing – A Wellness, Counseling, and Personal Growth Center**, Homer Glen, IL  
**Owner, Clinical Director, and Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor.**  
Responsibilities include: running a private practice, creating and running professional development, holistic, and personal transformation workshops, and counseling adults, children, adolescents, couples, families, groups, and supervising counselors and counselors-in-training. 2 locations – Homer Glen, & Frankfort, IL

2020-present **The Crystal Healing Studio LLC**, Retail Store, Homer Glen IL 60491  
**Owner**

2020-present **Awakening – Mind*Body*Soul, LLC.** A Personal Growth Center, Homer Glen, IL, 60491  
**Owner**

2015 **Advanced Counseling, Consultant**  
Responsibilities include setting up two counseling clinics and an internship program

2014-2015 **Family Therapist and Intern Coordinator, Timberline Knolls Residential Treatment Center**, Lemont IL 60439

2008-9 **Southside Christian Counseling Center**, Tinley Park, IL 60477  
**Clinical Director/Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor**  
Responsibilities include: supervision of therapists and interns, coordination of staff development, developing programs, presentations, consulting with director and assistant director, creating community programs and counseling adults, children, adolescents, couples, and families.

2001-3 **Adjunct Professor – Governors State University**, University Park, IL  
Supervisor - School Practica Classes – Coun 844 & 852  
Co-teaching Multicultural and Social Foundations  
CACREP Accreditation Preparation Assistant  
Division Workshop Planning, Design, Coordination, Participation, and Evaluation

2003 **Cancer Support Center**, Homewood, IL 60430
**Family and Children Program Coordinator**
Develop and run cancer, transition, and bereavement groups for children, teens, and parents. Counsel individuals, couples, and families counseling with cancer related issues. Provide outreach related to services and programs. Facilitate bereavement and caregivers’ group.

**Coordinator of Participant Services**
Conduct intakes and assessment for newcomers to the Cancer Support Center. Counsel individuals and family members dealing with cancer and bereavement issues. Phone contact person, introduce and designate participants into various programs and groups. Provide outreach and resource information.

1999-2003  **Oak Lawn Family Services**, Oak Lawn, IL
**Licensed professional counselor.**
Clinical counseling experience with individuals, couples, families, groups (both adult & children), and vocational clients

2001-2002  **Nolan and Snow Counseling**, Orland Park, IL
**Co-director and counselor**
Private practice focusing in clinical counseling experience with individuals, couples, families, groups (both adult & children)

1998-2008  **Governors State University**, University Park, IL
**Productions Research Coordinator for Dr. Jon Carlson**
*Video Coordinator for 17 national video series*

1989-1995  **Happy Home Daycare**, Joliet IL
**Director/coordinator of home day care**

1981-1986  **Sports World International GmbH**, Heidelberg, Germany
**Office Manager/Sales coordinator**

**TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

Couns 845 (Advanced Individual Practicum), Couns 847 “Group Theories and Dynamics”, Couns 856 “Group Practicum” Supervisor, Couns 842 “Vocational Counseling Practicum”, Couns 609 “NCE Preparatory Course”, PSYCH 502 (Health Psychology), PSYCH 508 (Creating a Healthy Lifestyle), PSYCH 524 (Principles of Learning and Motivation), PSYCH 546 (Psychological Issues in Psychology) and PSYCH 720 (Cultural and Social Foundations). CACREP Assistant, School Counseling Advisor

2003-4 Adjunct professor at Governors State University (GSU), Co-teaching Couns 600 “Professional Orientation and Ethics” with Dr. Julia Yang, Co-teaching Couns 720 “Social and Cultural Foundations” with Dr. Cyrus Ellis, Couns 844 & 852 “School Counseling Practicum”

2004 Intern/Assistant Instructor at Northern Illinois University (NIU). Co-taught CAHC 530 “Counseling Theories” with Dr. James Sells.

2000-2004 Adjunct professor at Governors State University (GSU). Taught Couns 630 - “Counseling Theories and Ethics” to Masters Level Students every trimester Help students to examine their own lives and be more aware of their own issues and deal with these before they become counselors themselves. Teach students the fundamental theories and techniques necessary to develop their own style of counseling and work effectively with clients. Teach students how to write APA Style Papers Screen students for counseling program Assistant teacher for Couns 851 - “Consultation”

2003-2004 Adjunct professor and supervisor for Couns 844 & 852 School Practicum - Graduate level – Practicum for school counseling at GSU. Teach students clinical aspects of school counseling and supervise school counseling students with running groups and individual sessions.

1993 Taught Child Development classes for undergraduate students at Prairie State University

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2010-2020 “To Be or Not to Be – The Challenges and Barriers of ABD Female Counselor Educators and Their Lived Experiences– Dissertation – Northern Illinois University

2006 Involved in research project with Dr. Fran Giordano on “Transformative Anger”, Northern Illinois University.
2003-4 Involved in a research team “Academic Women and Career Choices” at Northern Illinois University (2003) with Dr. Carol Minor

2003-4 Involved in a research team with Dr. Hugh Crethar at Governors State University on Mentoring and the Implications for the Counseling Field

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

2007-12 ICA GSU Chapter, Faculty Sponsor
2007-12 GSU Chi Sigma Iota, Counseling Honor Society Faculty Sponsor
2007-8 Kappa Delta Pi - International Honor Society in Education - Member
2003-4 The Family Journal (IAMFC) - Advisory Board Member
2002 American Psychological Association - Student affiliate
2002-present Illinois Counseling Association – Governing Council Member

Graduate Student Committee – Chair
Illinois Association for Spirituality, Ethics and Religious Values in Counseling (ISERVIC) – Board and Founding Member, President 2008-9
Illinois Association for Adult Development and Aging (IAADA) - Member
Illinois Association for Couples and Family Counselors (IACFC) - Member
Illinois Association for Multicultural Counseling (IAMC) - Member
Illinois Association for Counselor Educators and Supervisors (ICES) - Member
Illinois Counselors for Social Justice (ICSJ) - Member and Communications Officer
Illinois Mental Health Counseling Association (IMHCA) - Member

2002-Present Northern Illinois University Counseling Association - Member
1999-Present American Counseling Association - Member
1999-2005 International Association for Marriage and Family Counselors – Division Chair & Member

2002-present ICES student member
2002-present CSJ member, student representative & Mentoring Chair
2003-2004 ACCA – Research Committee Member
1999-Present Chi Sigma Iota – Member, former President, and Faculty Sponsor of GSU Chapter

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

2019 Building Healthy Boundaries, Homer Glen, IL
2019 Rebuilding Shattered Hearts and Lives, Parents for Peace & Justice, Chicago, IL
2019 Vision Maps – Lockport Highschool, Lockport, IL
2019 Self Care and Self Love, Homer Glen IL
2019 Women of Wisdom – Empowering Women, Homer Glen, IL
2018 Creating the Life of Your Dreams, Homer Glen, IL
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event Title</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Self Care and Boundaries, Homer Glen, IL</td>
<td>Homer Glen, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Overcoming Adversities, Homer Glen, IL</td>
<td>Homer Glen, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Overcoming the Loss of Loved Ones, Weekend Retreat for Parents for Peace and Justice, Douglas, Michigan</td>
<td>Homer Glen, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Self Care and Healing from Trauma - Weekend Retreat for Parents for Peace and Justice, Homer Glen, IL</td>
<td>Homer Glen, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Coping with the Death of a Loved One – Royal Academy of Family Physicians, Bangkok, Thailand</td>
<td>Bangkok, Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Stress Management for Students – Argosy University, Chicago, IL</td>
<td>Argosy University, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Stress Management for Students – Argosy University, Chicago, IL</td>
<td>Argosy University, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Stress Management for Students – Argosy University, Chicago, IL</td>
<td>Argosy University, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Creating the Life of Your Dreams – Palos Heights, IL</td>
<td>Palos Heights, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Workshop on the Chakras, Palos Heights, IL</td>
<td>Palos Heights, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Loving from the Inside Out, Palos Heights, IL</td>
<td>Palos Heights, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Cord Cutting, Palos Heights, IL</td>
<td>Palos Heights, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Finding Your Dream Job – Living Your Purpose, Orland Park, IL</td>
<td>Orland Park, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Women and Work – Finding Balance with Work, Family &amp; Life, Palos Heights, IL</td>
<td>Palos Heights, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Energy Healing, Palos Heights, IL</td>
<td>Palos Heights, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Self Care and Wellness – Palos Heights, IL</td>
<td>Palos Heights, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Creating Wellness, Palos Heights, IL</td>
<td>Palos Heights, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Developing Healthy Boundaries, Palos Heights, IL</td>
<td>Palos Heights, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Women in Transition, Palos Heights, IL</td>
<td>Palos Heights, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Women of Wisdom – Empowering Women, Palos Heights, IL</td>
<td>Palos Heights, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Intuition and Counseling, Palos Heights, IL</td>
<td>Palos Heights, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Counselor Health and Wellness, Argosy University, Chicago</td>
<td>Argosy University, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Bridging the Gap – One Family at a Time, New Day Ministries Chicago, IL</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Intuition and Counseling, Governors State University, University Park, IL</td>
<td>University Park, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Manifesting Your Dreams, Palos Heights, IL</td>
<td>Palos Heights, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Self Care and Wellness – Palos Heights, IL</td>
<td>Palos Heights, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Intuition Workshop, Palos Heights, IL</td>
<td>Palos Heights, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Energy Healing, Palos Heights, IL</td>
<td>Palos Heights, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Nurturing and Self Care for the Caregiver, Palos Heights, IL</td>
<td>Palos Heights, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Developing and Maintaining Healthy Boundaries, Palos Heights, IL</td>
<td>Palos Heights, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Developing Your Niche in Private Practice, Tinley Park, IL</td>
<td>Tinley Park, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Crisis Counseling, Tinley Park, IL</td>
<td>Tinley Park, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Boundaries and Self Care, Chicago Counseling Association, Chicago, IL</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Integrating Theory into Therapeutic Practice, University Park, IL</td>
<td>University Park, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Working with Parents of At-Risk Youth, Kankakee, IL</td>
<td>Kankakee, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Incorporating Spirituality and Alternative Forms of Healing into the Counseling Process – University Park, IL</td>
<td>University Park, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Creating Healthy Families, Orland Park, IL</td>
<td>Orland Park, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Exploring Spirituality and Religion in Counseling from a Multicultural Perspective – Tinley Park, IL</td>
<td>Tinley Park, IL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2007  Thriving as a Graduate Student. Half day workshop at Illinois Counseling Association State Conference in Tinley Park, IL
2007  Dangerous Avenues – Exploring Adolescent Identity and Substance Abuse with Pamela Harrison at ICA State Conference in Tinley Park, IL
2007  Good Intentions Gone Bad – Health Implications of Female Self Sacrifice with Tina Musselman and Brandi Kirk at ICA State Conference in Tinley Park, IL
2007  Counselor Health and Body Work, Chicago Counseling Association, Chicago, IL
2007  Graduate Student Summit, Graduate Students of ACA, ACA National Conference, Detroit, MI
2006  Building the Leaders of Tomorrow – Mentoring and Involving Students in ICA, with Dr. Scott Wickman, ICA State Conference
2005  Mentoring the Leaders of Tomorrow – A Student Forum with Rebecca Farrell, Jeff Hughes, Jim Marquez, and Dr. Robert Conyne, ACA Conference, Atlanta, GA
2005  Four Points of a Circle – Bringing Race to the Table with Dr. Cyrus M. Ellis, ACA Conference, Learning Institute, Atlanta, GA.
2005  Indigenous Healing and Wellness in Counseling, Chicago Counseling Association, Chicago, IL
2004  Rebuilding Shattered Hearts – Working with Grief, ICA Conference, Lisle, IL
2004  Critical Components of Good Supervision Strategies in Counseling: Effective Planning, Process, and Evaluation, with Dr. Toni Tollerud & Jim Klein, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL
2004  "Do You Hear What We Need? - Advocating for the special needs of the deaf community" with Patricia Spano & Katrina Maddox, Louis National University, Wheaton, IL
2003  Cancer in the Classroom, Ridge Middle School, Orland Hills
2003  “Mentoring Multicultural Populations” with 5 of my students at Illinois Association for Multicultural Counseling Conference, Chicago State University, IL
2002  “7 Skills of Addiction Free Living” with Dr. Jon Carlson & Dr. Judith Lewis at ACA Conference, New Orleans, LA.
2002  “Being a Doctoral Student” to Taiwanese students at Governors State University, University Park, IL
2001  “7 Skills of Addiction Free Living” with Dr. Jon Carlson at Smart Marriages International Conference, Orlando, FL

WORKSHOPS, & SPECIAL TRAINING

2019  Building and Maintaining a Private Practice, Skokie, IL
2019  Ethics Training, Tinley Park, IL
2019  Trauma and Mind Body Work, Chicago, IL
2019  Trauma & Couples with EFT, Palos Heights, IL
2018  Building and Maintaining a Private Practice, Lisle, IL
2018  Developmental Trauma Training, University Park, IL
2018  Gottman Couples Therapy Training, Level 1 & 2, University Park, IL
2017  EFT Eutaptics Level I & II, Oklahoma City, OK
2016  Wealth and Life Mastery, Tony Robbins Institute, Marco Island, FL
2016  Date with Destiny, Tony Robbins Institute, Boca Raton, FL
2011  Cord Cutting, Plainfield, IL
2010  Clinical Hypnosis Training, Chicago IL
2009  WAIT/ART Training, Washington Aggression Interruption Training/Aggression Replacement Training, Normal, IL
2005  Child Custody Training, PACES, Tampa, FL
2005  Supervision and Counselor Training with Dr. Toni Tollerud, Governors State University, University Park, IL
2004  Supervision workshop, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL
2004  Issues in Spirituality & Counseling, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL
2004  Emerging Leaders Training, American Counseling Association, Kansas City, KS
2004  Governing Council Meeting for Illinois Counseling Association, Naperville, IL
2004  Adlerian Brief Counseling with Dr. Alan Milliren, GSU, University Park, IL
2004  Brief Lifestyle Assessment with Dr. Alan Milliren, GSU, University Park, IL
2004  Career Counseling Across the Lifespan with Dr. Byron Waller, GSU, University Park, IL
2004  Individual Child and Family Play Therapy Techniques with Dr. Kate Sori, GSU, University Park, IL
2004  Rebuilding Shattered Hearts and Lives with Kim Snow, GSU, University Park, IL
2004  Intuitive Healing with Caroline Myss & Dr. Judith Orloff, Chicago, IL
2003  Ethics training, Santa Fe, New Mexico
2003  Governing Council Leadership Training Conference, Illinois Counseling Association (ICA), Lisle, IL
2003  Reiki Training & Certification, Levels I, II, III, & IV, Insight & Awareness Institute, Homewood, IL
2003  Spiritual Dimensions of Healing, Wellness House, Northbrook, IL
2003  Profiles in Healing: An Ethnographic Study of Global Wisdom Traditions” with Dr. Brad Keeney, Governors State University, IL
2002  Multicultural Training with Dr. Paul Pedersen (2-day workshop), Governors State University, IL
2002  PREP Certification (3-day training) at Smart Marriages Conference, Washington, D.C.
2002  PIC (Precouples Inventory Counseling) 1-day training at Smart Marriages Conference, Washington, D.C
2001  ACA Public Policy and Legislative Training, Alexandria, VA
2001  CompassionPower Certification (anger and emotions regulation training) 5-day workshop, Washington, D.C.
2001  Ethics Training, Personal Growth Workshop, Santa Fe, NM
2001  Crisis Intervention Conference, Oak Lawn, IL
2001  Psychopharmacology and Counseling Issues Conference, Oak Lawn, IL
2000  Conference on Senior Issues, Oak Lawn, IL
2000  STEP (Systematic Training for Effective Parenting) certification with Don Dinkmeyer Jr., Schaumburg, IL
2000  Ethnic Training, Personal Growth Workshop, Santa Fe, NM
1999  40 hours of domestic violence training, Tinley Park, IL
1999  Rainbows Certification (dealing with death and divorce in children), Romeoville, IL
1987  Crisis Counselor Training, Joliet IL

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

2017-present, Founding Member of Parents for Peace & Justice
2009-10  Board Member, Kankakee Courts & Social Services, IL
2009-10  Working with adult probation department in Kankakee to develop collaborative group counseling with GSU students and interns.
2009-10  Running anger management and behavior modification groups for at-risk adolescents on probation, Kankakee Probation Dept, Kankakee, IL
2007-present, Faculty Sponsor for the 2 student groups at GSU: Chi Sigma Iota and ICA.
2007-8  Taskforce Co-Chair, Position Statement Taskforce, Counselors for Social Justice
2005-6  ACA Graduate Student Association, Co-Chair, Bylaws Committee
2004-5  ACA Graduate & New Professional Task Force, Member
2004  Founding member and secretary of ISERVIC (Illinois Association for Spirituality, Ethics, and Religious Values in Counseling)
2004-8  Student Representative & Mentoring Chair, Counselors for Social Justice (CSJ).
2004  Advisory Committee for ICA Conference in 2005
2004-7  Governing Council Member of Illinois Counseling Association (ICA)
2003-8  Graduate Student Chair, Illinois Counseling Association
2003  Coordinated “Profiles in Healing” Presentation with Dr. Brad Keeney at Governors State University.
2003  Coordinated “Mummy at the Dining Room Table” Discussion and Book Signing with Dr. Jon Carlson, Governors State University
2002  Chair of the "International Program Development" Committee of IAMFC
2002  Task force member of CCIN - Counseling Children Interest Network of the ACA.
2002  Associate editor of the “Insight and Hindsight: Psychology Discussion Papers” Student Journal at Governors State University
2002  Coordinated workshop and presentation on Multicultural Triad Model and Synthetic Culture Lab for Dr. Paul Pedersen at Governors State University
2002  Represented Graduate Completers for NCATE/ISBE Visit to Governors State University
2002  Met and hosted a group of Taiwanese Doctoral students at Governors State University and Oak Lawn Family Services
2001-Present, Mentoring graduate students and offering them opportunities to join in writing projects
2001  Coordinated, trained, and supervised over 200 graduate student volunteers to work the learning institutes and over 600 content sessions for the International ACA Conference in San Antonio, TX
2001  Assisted Dr. Pat Love and Dr. Susan Schmidt in the coordination of Personal Growth Workshop in Santa Fe, NM
2001  Assisted Dr. Steven Stosny during the CompassionPower training in Washington, D.C,
2000  Served as co-president of Chi Sigma Iota, Gamma Sigma Upsilon Chapter (Counseling and Academic Honors Society) awarded “Outstanding Chapter Award”.
2000-2003 Coordinated and assisted with the plenary sessions and key note speakers for the past three Smart Marriages Conferences in addition to being executive assistant to the director, Diane Sollee.
2000  Coordinated a Brown Bag Speakers Series at Governors State University for graduate students and professionals.
2000  Created a mentoring directory and program for the counseling students at Governors State University
1999-2002 IAMFC graduate student volunteer
1999-2002 IAMFC graduate student task force member

PROFESSIONAL PUBLICATIONS


Snow, K., Melton, K., (2002) Student video and questions to accompany the manual and textbook for theories and strategies in family therapy Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon


PROFESSIONAL PRODUCTIONS/VIDEOS

Productions Coordinator - Recruit, screen, and coordinate clients for each specialized video. Publicize and screen for audience participation, publicize the videos and workshops throughout the local area with local universities, agencies, clubs, organizations, and public forums. Assist the therapists for the duration of the project. Gather all of the written materials necessary for each series (from articles, and bibliographies, to consent forms, and bios on clients and presenters), coordinate and distribute the CEUs for each workshop presentation. Assist in the creation of video inserts. Gather and collect information for web site maintenance. Video series include:

“Living Love” - Couples Education, a video-based couples workshop hosted by Drs. Jon Carlson and Pat Love. Published by Zeig, Tucker, & Theisen, Inc., these 7 videos teach couples communication skills and techniques to improve their relationships. Each video is broken down into four sub skills that are taught in group format. Topics and guests include:
  A Great Relationship: A Matter of Choice, Not Fate with William and Carleen Glasser;
  Co-Creating a Positive Relationship with Richard Stuart;
  Keeping Passion Alive with John Gray;
Conscious Communication with Harville Hendrix;
Loving Sexuality with Pat Love;
Getting Unstuck with Michelle Weiner-Davis;
Creating Connection with Kathlyn and Gay Hendricks

“Parenting with the Experts”, a video-based parent education program hosted by Drs. Pat Love and Jon Carlson. Published by Allyn & Bacon, these thirteen videos include such topics and experts as:
Take back your kids with Dr. Bill Doherty;
Organizing your family with Dr. John Covey;
Mindful Parenting with Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn;
Self Esteem with Dr. Hanoch McCarty;
Creating Cooperation with Dr. John Gray;
Compassionate Parenting with Dr. Steven Stosny;
Getting Through to Your Kids with Dr. Ron Taffel;
Raising Boys with Dr. Mark Kiselica;
See Jan Win: Raising Healthy Girls with Dr. Sylvia Rimm;
Talking About Difficult Things with Dr. John Friel;
Discipline That Counts with Dr. Thomas Phelan;
Positive Discipline with Dr. Jane Nelsen; and,
Parenting in the Stepfamily with Dr. James Bray.

“Imago Master Trainers” video series, hosted by Dr. Jon Carlson and produced by Harville Hendrix (couples therapy). A series of five master trainers who discuss their approach, how they use IMAGO, and work with real couples. It is then followed up with a discussion among graduate students and marriage and family therapists. Master trainers include:
Pat Love, Sunny Shulkin, Bruce Crapuchettes, Maya Kollman, and Joyce Buckner

“Psychotherapy with the Experts” video series. Hosted by Drs. Jon Carlson, and Diane Kjos. Published by Allyn & Bacon. This series of videos is broken down into an interview about the theoretical application, an individual session, and a question and answer format. Topics and therapists include:
“Integrative Therapy” with Dr. Jeffrey Kottler,

“Family Therapy with the Experts” video series Hosted by Drs. Jon Carlson, & Diane Kjos. Published by Allyn & Bacon. This video series demonstrates how expert therapists work with families with various issues. It is broken down into an interview about the theoretical application, an individual session, and a question and answer format. Topics and therapists include:
“Imago Therapy” with Dr. Pat Love;
“Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy” with Dr. Susan Johnson;
“Sex Therapy” with Dr. Domeena Renshaw,
“Child Therapy with the Experts” video series. Hosted by Drs. Jon Carlson & Don Keat and produced by Zeig & Tucker. These series of twelve videos demonstrates how to work with children from a variety of approaches. It is broken down into an interview, a session with the child, and then a discussion with professional and students. Topics and presenters include:

- Person-Centered Approach with Anin Utigaard;
- Multi-Modal Child Therapy with Don Keat;
- Eclectic/Integrative Approach with Gerald Koocher;
- Narrative Approach with Steven Madigan;
- Cognitive Behavioral with Bruce Masek;
- Solution-Focused Approach with John Murphy;
- Adlerian Play Therapy with Terry Kottman;
- Family Therapy with Teens with Janet Sasson Edgette;
- Reality Therapy with Robert Wubbolding;
- Gestalt Approach with Violet Oaklander;
- Object Relations with David Scharff;

**Parent Consultation** with Drs. Don Dinkmeyer and Jon Carlson. This video demonstrates how to consult with parents individually and in groups. It also focuses on how to consult with parents from a school counseling background.

**Teacher Consultation** with Drs. William Glasser and Jon Carlson, The Glasser Institute

“APA Psychological Theories Video Series I” hosted by Dr. Jon Carlson and produced by the American Psychological Association. This video illustrates each of the various theories, and how to work with clients using these specific theories. This series includes a theoretical interview with the presenter, a counseling session, and then a discussion after the session where particular parts of the sessions are highlighted and discussed. Topics and presenters include:

- Brief Dynamic Therapy with Stanley Messer;
- Adlerian Therapy with Jon Carlson;
- Emotion Focused Therapy with Leslie Greenberg;
- Constructivist Therapy with Robert Niemeyer;
- Gestalt Therapy with Gordon Wheeler;
- Research-Based Psychotherapy with Scott Miller
- Brief Affective Psychotherapy with Leigh McCullough
- Cognitive Therapy with Dr. Judith Beck
- Focusing with Diana Fosha

“APA Specific Treatments for Specific Populations Video Series II” hosted by Dr. Jon Carlson and produced by the American Psychological Association. These videos demonstrate how to work with specific populations of clients and how these issues impact the counseling session. This series includes a theoretical interview with the presenter, a counseling session, and then a discussion after the session where particular parts of the sessions are highlighted and discussed. Topics and presenters include:
“Culture-Centered Counseling - The Triad Model” video with Dr. Paul Pedersen;
Attention Deficit Disorder with Robert Resnick;
Perfectionism with Paul Hewitt;
Spirituality with William Miller
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder with Reid Wilson
Depression with Michael Yapko
Treating Victims of Abuse with Laura Brown
ADHD with Vince Monastra
Gambling with Nancy Petry
Career Counseling with Mark Savickas
Shyness and Social Phobias with Anne Marie Albano
Working with Trauma - Laura Brown
Adolescent Suicide with Alan Berman
Anger with Ray DiGuiseppe
Self Injury with Wendy Lader

“APA Behavioral Health Issues in Therapy Video Series III” hosted by Dr. Jon Carlson and produced by the American Psychological Association. This videos series focuses on various behavioral health issues can impact counseling and how to deal with clients who have these particular issues. This series includes a theoretical interview with the presenter, a counseling session, and then a discussion after the session where particular parts of the sessions are highlighted and discussed. Topics and presenters include:

- Exercise with Kate Hayes;
- Substance Abuse with William Miller;
- Sexual health with Lisa Firestone;
- Sleep with Ed Stepanski;
- Chronic Illness with Len Sperry;
- Pain Management with Robert Gatchel;
- Smoking Cessation with Bonnie Spring;
- Weight Management with Ann-Kearney-Cooke;
- Childhood Asthma with Bruce Bender;
- Cardiac Rehabilitation with Robert Allan;
- Breast Cancer with Suzanne Miller;
- Genetic Counseling with Andrea Patenaude.
- Diabetes with Alan Delamater
- Headaches with Don Penzien
- Alzheimer’s Disease with Sara Qualls
- Fertility with Annette Stanton

“APA Therapeutic Relationships Video Series IV” hosted by Dr. Jon Carlson and produced by the American Psychological Association. This videos series focuses on various relationships and how to counsel clients with these dynamics. This series includes a theoretical interview with the
presenter, a counseling session, and then a discussion after the session where particular parts of the sessions are highlighted and discussed. Topics and presenters include:

- Cognitive Behavioral Couples Therapy with Art Freeman;
- Teenage Girls with Karen Zager;
- Counseling Men with Mark Stevens;
- Older Couples with Paula Hartman-Stein;
- Parenting Parents with Pat Pitta,
- Parenting Young Children with Edward Christophersen;
- Couples and Illness with Tamara Sher;
- Functional Family Therapy with James Alexander;
- Gay, Lesbian, and Bi-Sexual Couples with Ruperto Perez;
- Forgiveness with Robert Enright & Rick Fitzgibbons;
- Families in Transition with James Bray;
- Depression in Couples with Mark Whisman;
- Victims of Abuse with Laura Brown
- Sex Therapy with Barry McCarthy
- Couples Therapy with Doug Schneider
- Adoption with Marc Nemiroff
- Caregiving with Tim Elliot
- EFT with Couples with Leslie Greenberg
- Divorce with William Doherty
- Child Custody with G. Andrew Benjamin

“APA Therapeutic Relationships Video Series V” hosted by Dr. Jon Carlson and produced by the American Psychological Association. This videos series focuses on multicultural counseling and how to counsel clients from various multicultural perspectives. This series includes a theoretical interview with the presenter, a counseling session, and then a discussion after the session where particular parts of the sessions are highlighted and discussed. Topics and presenters include:

- Working with Latino/Latina Clients with Patricia Arrendondo
- Working with African America Clients with Thomas Parham
- Working with Native Americans with Winona Sims
- Working with Asian Americans with Jean Lau Chin,
- Mixed Race Identities with Maria Root

“APA Therapeutic Relationships Video Series VI” hosted by Dr. Jon Carlson and produced by the American Psychological Association. This videos series focuses on spirituality and how to counsel clients from various spiritual perspectives. This series includes a theoretical interview with the presenter, a counseling session, and then a discussion after the session where particular parts of the sessions are highlighted and discussed. Topics and presenters include:

- Spirituality with Scott Richards
- Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy with Zindel Segal
- Spirituality with Lisa Miller
- Mindfulness Therapy with Alcohol Issues with Alan Marlatt
Christian Counseling with Mark McMinn
Religion with Edward Shafranske

“APA Therapeutic Relationships Video Series VII” hosted by Dr. Jon Carlson and produced by the American Psychological Association. This video series focuses on psychology in the schools and how to counsel clients within the school environment. This series includes a theoretical interview with the presenter, a counseling session, and then a discussion after the session where particular parts of the sessions are highlighted and discussed. Topics and presenters include:

- Working with Families with Abuse and Neglect with Wes Crenshaw
- Harm Reduction with High School Students with Mary Larimer
- Bullies with Arthur M. (Andy) Horne
- Teenage Eating Disorders with Stephen Wonderlich
- Autism and Asperger’s Syndrome with James Mulick

“APA Stimulus Video on Ethical Issues” hosted by Dr. Jon Carlson and produced by the American Psychological Association. This video focuses on ethical issues that may arise in the therapeutic relationship. Expert psychologists demonstrate how to handle various very sticky boundary and ethical situations such as being offered gifts, sexual boundaries, invitations to dinner and funerals, anger, and touch.

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

2017-present Running grief groups and retreats for families who have lost children to gang violence in the following communities; Humboldt park, Austin, Chicago, and Indiana
2003-present Probono individual and couples counseling
2002-present Mentored graduate level counseling students
1999 Facilitated process group for Masters level counseling students, Governors State University, IL
1999 Facilitated support group for stay-at-home moms, Homer Glen, IL
1999 Rainbows counselor for Reed and Walsh Elementary Schools working with children dealing with divorce or loss
1999 Facilitated school programs “Beary Unique” for children with low self-esteem in Walsh & Reed Elementary Schools, Lockport, IL
1987 Crisis line counselor, counseled clients in crisis and helped the elderly with “sunshine calls”, Crisis Center, Joliet, IL

1989-1993 Organized and facilitated Support Organization for Trisomy 18/13 (SOFT) support group for terminally ill children & families, Joliet, IL
1992-1993 Raised $14,000 for Support Organization for Trisomy 18/13 (SOFT) Support Group
1989-1993 Created, published and distributed care packages for hospitals and families
1989-1994 Counseled families with terminally ill children, IL
Skilled in foreign languages (Italian, German, Spanish, some French)

REFERENCES

Available upon request