EXPLORING DOCTORAL STUDENT EXPERIENCES FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF MID-CAREER PROFESSIONALS IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP USING PHOTO-ELICITATION

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EXPLORING DOCTORAL STUDENT EXPERIENCES FROM THE PERSPECTIVES
OF MID-CAREER PROFESSIONALS IN EDUCATIONAL
LEADERSHIP USING PHOTO-ELICITATION

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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May 2013

Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

Recent literature cites a growing population of students who wait several years post-baccalaureate and into their careers before entering a PhD program. Such population includes doctoral students in education. Despite repeated calls from scholars of higher education, few empirical studies investigate mid-career students’ experiences in doctoral programs. Existing literature consists of anecdotal reports, demographic accounts in which mid-career is a data point among many variables, or empirical studies of international students. Theoretical models describing student experiences of mid-career professionals in doctoral programs are particularly absent. A handful of studies have explored doctoral student experiences of mid-career professionals through traditional interviewing techniques.

This study included an emergent methodology called photo-elicitation to explore doctoral student experiences from the perspectives of selected PhD-seeking mid-career professionals. Photo-elicitation can sharpen memory, promote self-reflection, and stimulate interview responses. Participants for this study took photographs of their experiences, developed captions, and then discussed a subset in a photo-elicitation interview. The data analysis focused on preserving participants’ voices and included two cycles: (a) in vivo and (b) theoretical coding. Transition theory served as the conceptual framework and provided the analytic underpinning for the theoretical coding cycle.

Findings from the study revealed three major themes about the emotional depth of doctoral experiences among mid-career professionals in EDL PhD programs. The Three Cs, included these themes, Conflicted, Commitment, and Community. These mid-career
professionals seeking the PhD reported feeling conflicted due to multiple, competing roles and issues with identity. These students expressed commitment to completing the PhD process amidst emotional upheavals brought on by personal, professional and scholarly challenges. Given their recall of work and life experiences, the participants revealed how they persisted toward degree completion. They also described how they built community in the doctoral program by using a variety of supports and strategies to navigate the doctoral process. Despite these descriptions of personal efforts to find support, these participants revealed that peer support was most lacking. Minimal differences existed across enrollment status and program concentration. These results suggest increased attention to providing graduate student services may be necessary for doctoral studies. The results also expand understanding of transition theory.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to future doctoral candidates. You will experience your own successes and challenges along the way, but rest assured that completing the dissertation while maintaining your sanity is doable! Create your own playlist of motivating music, be strong and of good courage, find balance, and remember that prayer is the greatest time saver!
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Jane Clark Lindle, Eugene T. Moore Professor of Educational Leadership for generously giving of her time and unselfishly imparting knowledge to elevate me to the status of practitioner-scholar. She is the epitome of a dissertation chair who is equally advisor, mentor, and coach. I would not be who I am today, nor accomplished what I have done throughout this PhD program and dissertation process without Dr. Lindle. Thank God for Tuesday and Thursday meetings!

Many thanks as well to my dissertation advising committee, Dr. Tony Cawthon, Dr. Hans Klar, and Dr. Robert Knoeppel (a.k.a. Santa). Collectively, you all have enhanced my experience and individually, I have learned a great deal from each of you. Furthermore, I am grateful to the entire LCH faculty and staff, especially Dr. Russ Marion for providing me with my first assistantship and Dr. James Satterfield for granting my first research study at the PhD level. Sincere thanks to Dr. Cassie Quigley, who introduced me to photo-elicitation in EDF 974. The method was a perfect fit for me.

I also extend acknowledgements to my doctoral student colleagues, particularly those on Grad Row who provided a sense of community and support. I cannot thank my friends, relatives, my roommate (soon-to-be-doctor) April Gillens, and immediate family members enough for their hearty prayers, well wishes, and love. Thanks Mom and Dad! To the co-collaborators of this research process, the participants, who made this study possible, I am grateful for your generosity and sharing so that others and I might learn.

Finally, I would like to thank my dear Heavenly Father, Jesus the Christ. We made it together—Proverbs 3:5-6.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The profile of doctoral students has dramatically changed across time. Whereas a once traditionally-aged, full-time student enrolled in graduate programs post-baccalaureate, today the population of students is largely non-traditional (Gardner, 2009; McCoy & Gardner, 2011; Offerman, 2011) with most students in doctoral programs in the field of Education entering at mid-career (Shulman, Golde, Conklin, Bueschel & Garabedian, 2006). Despite these characteristics, the line of inquiry delving into these students’ experiences remains scant (McCarthy, 1991; McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009; McCoy & Gardner, 2011; Murphy, 1992; Offerman, 2011). This study evolved from the researcher’s own experiences as a mid-career professional in a doctoral program, and the desire to understand how others’ navigated the process. The fact that little empirical research was available to provide answers about these experiences inspired this study as an investigation of perspectives among selected mid-career professionals in Educational Leadership doctoral programs.

The information provided in this chapter was organized into nine sections: (a) background of the study, (b) definition of terms, (c) statement of purpose, (d) purpose of study, (e) research question, (f) overview of design, procedures, and analysis, (g) significance of the study, (h) delimitations and assumptions, and (i) limitations of the study.
Background of the Study

Characteristics and enrollment patterns of graduate students have changed dramatically since Yale University awarded the first Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in 1861 (Pierson, 1983). Students in graduate programs have evolved from being primarily full-time, 22 year old, single, White males (Berelson, 1960) with little to no work experience, to a more diverse student body including women, multiple races and ethnicities, and many working professionals pursuing advanced degrees (McCoy & Gardner, 2011). Researchers have profiled today’s graduate students as largely non-traditional with 50% enrolled in programs part-time, averaging 33.3 years of age, and simultaneously engaged with family and or other roles and responsibilities (Gardner, 2009; Offerman, 2011; Syverson, 1999; Watts, 2008).

Among the graduate student population, education students tend to be the most distinct. On average, they wait 10-12 years post baccalaureate prior to entering a graduate program (Nettles & Millett, 2006). This situates them at approximately age 30 upon entry (Gardner, 2009; McCoy & Gardner, 2011; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Offerman, 2011) and over age 43 upon completion of their degree programs (Shulman et al., 2006). As a result, students in education-based doctoral programs are often married with children and largely responsible for paying their own way through graduate school (Offerman, 2011). They also are increasingly enrolled in graduate programs part-time (Gardner, 2009; Gardner & Gopaul, 2012; Nettles & Millett, 2006), but “differ from those in the arts and sciences or engineering in that most education students have had
careers before pursuing the doctorate…entering at mid-career” (Shulman et al., 2006, p. 26).

The mid-career stage can bring about particular challenges for working professionals as it is a time when multiple and competing roles can be most severe (Auster, 2001; Schneer & Reitman, 1995). Transitioning into a doctoral program at mid-career adds to this complexity because the needs and supports are often different for this population than they are for students who commence doctoral studies immediately following college (Jackson & Clearly, 2011). More importantly, while characteristics play an important role in describing the population of doctoral students, their experiences and perceptions may tell a richer story about these students’ ability to transition and persist through a doctoral program successfully. Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) argued that when adults in transition are “able to explore the issue more fully, understand the underlying meaning, and develop a plan, they are more likely to be able to cope effectively and resolve the problem” (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 31). Thus, this study intended to explore doctoral student experiences from the perspectives of mid-career professionals in a selected Educational Leadership (EDL) PhD program using a methodology, photo-elicitation, known to increase self-reflection. Transition theory (Goodman et al., 2006) served as a conceptual and analytic framework for the study.

Definition of Terms

As a means of avoiding confusion, the researcher provided definitions of several terms used throughout this study.
Data Generation

Data generated by participants is a feature of photo-elicitation methodology (Guillemin & Drew, 2010; Mitchell, 2011; Rose, 2012). The significance of using the term, *data generation*, in this study as opposed to data collection was intentional. Rather than engaging the researcher as the primary agent in collecting data, data generated by participants equalizes their role in the process (Catalina & Minkler, 2010; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Harper, 2002; Loeffler, 2004a; Packard, 2008; Smith, Gidlow, & Steel, 2012; Wang & Burris, 1997). In other words, by way of taking photographs and creating captions, as well as selecting photographs for the photo-elicitation interview, participants have an opportunity to craft their data before the researcher collects and analyzes these materials.

Educational Leadership

The researcher defined *educational leadership* (EDL) according to the Clemson University School of Education website as a doctoral degree program and discipline within education that prepares educators to assume leadership roles across the preschool through terminal degree education systems (P20) including: (a) schools, (b) agencies, (c) organizations, and (d) higher education institutions (Clemson University, n.d. c). The EDL PhD program includes two areas of concentrations, known as majors at other universities. For Clemson’s EDL PhD the two concentrations encompass: (a) preschool through twelfth grade (P-12) and (b) higher education (HE). The researcher’s choice of an EDL program as the discipline for investigation was predicated on the assumption that these programs often require professional experience as an admissions criterion in the
application process (Komives & Taub, 2003; Murphy, 1998). Another influencing choice for studying PhD students in an EDL program is that educational leadership (or educational administration) PhD programs confer over 4,000 degrees each year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

*Mid-Career or Non-Traditional Students*

Readers of this study will notice several terms used to describe mid-career professionals, including nontraditional and contemporary. Nontraditional is the most widely used term to describe the characteristics of current graduate students in contrast to graduate students of the past who were mostly full-time, White males, who entered immediately following completion of undergraduate degrees. Nevertheless, the field has yet to decide on a term to describe the variety of nontraditional students. For example, the term non-traditional has been used to describe graduate students who may enroll in graduate programs full- or part-time and at least 5 or more years post-baccalaureate (Offerman, 2011). Researchers have also defined nontraditional students as those who are married, single parents, financially emancipated, or first generation students (Ntiri, 2001; Offerman, 2011). Other literature simply described them as part-time students (Syverson, 1999; Watts, 2008). Even still, some refer to non-traditional students as contemporary—those who enter graduate school later in life confronting transitions involving full-time employment and either full- or part-time student status (Offerman, 2011; Watts, 2009). Still yet, some literature described nontraditional students as mid-career, that is, adults who enter graduate school with significant work experience (Auster,
2001; Jackson & Clearly, 2011; Schneer & Reitman, 1995) and around age 30 (Shulman, 2006).

In light of changing demographics, the need to identify these students properly “is real and is going to become more pronounced over time….even if the term nontraditional could be justified today, the concept of the traditional doctoral student is going to need to change to reflect contemporary reality” (Offerman, 2011, p. 29-30). With that in mind, the author of this text used the terms nontraditional or mid-career throughout this study. However, mid-career is the researcher’s preferred term to identify the population of doctoral students most relevant to this study who, above all, have acquired at least eight years of professional work experience prior to transitioning into doctoral work. In all cases for this study of students enrolled in the field of educational leadership, professional experience was at least one of the required criteria for admission to doctoral studies.

*PhD*

PhD is an abbreviation for Doctor of Philosophy. The Doctor of Philosophy is the hallmark of the academic community and scholars intended the degree for advancement within academe (Andrews & Grogan, 2005). For the field of education, the first doctoral degree was the Doctor of Education or EdD (Everson, 2006). Similar to the PhD, scholars intended the EdD for advanced scholarship. However, the EdD originated as a professional degree for applied research and to promote preparation for practice (Andrews & Grogan, 2005).
Despite the two doctoral degrees in education, scholars have praised the PhD for its ability to prepare doctoral students for both research and practice (Walker et al, 2008). Despite ongoing debates about the uses and intended outcomes between the PhD and EdD (Levine, 2005; Murphy & Vriesenga, 2005; Murphy, 2014; Perry, 2014; Richardson, 2006; Young, 2006), the focus of this study was a PhD program, given that it represents a substantial number of awarded doctorates among both practitioners and scholars in the field of educational leaders and administration.

**Photo-elicitation Interview**

Photo-elicitation interview is terminology germane to photo-elicitation methodology (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Baruchel, 2006; Loeffler, 2004a; Smith et al., 2012). Researchers based this type of interview on the idea of inserting a photograph into structured interviews (Harper, 2002; Rose, 2012) as a reflection and conversation stimulus (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). Harper (2002) explained that individuals respond differently to images versus text: “The parts of the brain that process visual information are evolutionarily older than the parts that process verbal information” (p. 13). Therefore, photo-elicitation researchers are able to elicit not just more information, but different and more reflective information from participants than could be rendered through traditional, verbal-only interviews.

**Statement of the Problem**

Despite the fact that doctoral students in education demographies monitored, little empirical research has been done to investigate their experiences—especially those of non-traditional students (Austin et al., 2009; Gardner & Gopaul, 2012; McCoy &
Gardner, 2011). Theoretical models describing these students’ experiences are particularly absent. Furthermore, in comparison to what is known about non-traditional *undergraduate* students, knowledge about non-traditional *graduate* students is nearly nonexistent (McCoy & Gardner, 2011). In decades of literature across the preschool through doctoral degree (P-20) spectrum in educational leadership, scholars have indicated these knowledge gaps, spawning repeated calls for studies exploring these students’ experiences (McCarthy, 1999; McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009; Murphy1992; Offerman, 2011). Of particular interest to researchers is how student characteristics such as mid-career accomplishments and expectations may affect doctoral student experiences (McCoy & Gardner, 2011).

Research exists on mid-career doctoral student experiences, but the literature is fragmented and sparse. Few studies have focused on multiple student characteristics, one of which is non-traditional status (see Barker, Felstehausen, Couch, & Henry, 1997; Bates & Goff, 2012; Choy & Catardi, 2006; Golde & Dore, 2001; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Other studies have reported on middle-aged, adult graduate students (Barker et al., 1997; Lenz, 1997), or those in EdD programs (see Smith, 2000) rather than students in PhD programs. The remainder of literature is anecdotal, and it does not focus on any specific academic discipline or field of study in regards to understanding mid-career doctoral student experiences (see Davis & McCuen, 1995; Hegarty, 2011; Jackson & Clearly, 2011; Offerman, 2011; Watts, 2008; Watts, 2009; Ntiri, 2001).

A handful of empirical studies conducted specifically to explore the non-traditional PhD student experience, include those by Austin and colleagues (2009),
Gardner and Gopaul (2012), and McCoy and Gardner (2011). These studies provided useful information about the mid-career experience. However, the data collection methods used in these studies by Austin and colleagues (2009), Gardner and Gopaul (2012), and McCoy and Gardner (2011) were largely traditional methods of structured interviews. Several researchers have argued that traditional data collection methods can impose rather than elicit descriptions from participants (Harper, 2002; Smith et al., 2012). Therefore, this study used an emergent methodology called photo-elicitation whereby data collection began with and was primarily *generated* by participants, rather than merely *collected* by the researcher (Guillemin & Drew, 2010; Harper, 1986; Harper, 2002; Mitchell, 2011; Pink, 2007; Prosser, 2011).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore PhD-seeking student experiences from the perspectives of mid-career professionals in a selected educational leadership program using photo-elicitation.

**Research Question**

To elicit responses from mid-career professionals about their student experiences in the PhD program, the following research question guided this study: *What are mid-career professionals’ descriptions of their experiences in seeking the PhD in an educational leadership program as generated from photo-elicitation methodology?*

**Overview of Design, Procedures, and Analysis**

In contrast to traditional methods, Keats (2009) argued that “Without a nonverbal means of expression, participants may be limited in how they articulate their
experiences” (p. 187). Therefore, in order to elicit responses from mid-career professionals about their doctoral student experiences, the researcher applied photo-elicitation methodology in this study. Photo-elicitation involved participants taking photographs of their experiences to be discussed in the photo-elicitation interview (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Harper, 2002; Rose, 2012). More specifically, participants in this study received 10 days to take 10 photographs, caption each, and then selected three pictures to be discussed in their photo-elicitation interview with the researcher. The 10 days and the process of creating captions gave participants time to reflect and gather their thoughts before engaging in the interview process (Prosser, 2011). Photo-elicitation offers deeper, more reflective narratives than would be possible using traditional means, given that participants drive the methodological process (Guillemin & Drew, 2010; Harper, 1986; Harper, 2002; Mitchell, 2011; Pink, 2007; Prosser, 2011). The methodology is rooted in the interpretivist epistemology because “both the photographer and the viewer of the photograph construct its meaning because both bring their social position, personality, and personal history to the interpretive act” (Loeffler, 2004b, para. 7).

Data was generated using photo-elicitation through three sources: (a) information elicited from participant-generated photographs and captions of those photographs, (b) information gathered from the photo-elicitation interview about the meanings behind the photographs and captions, and (c) a field instrument to generate post-interview notes. The field instrument was used to initiate the ongoing data analysis. The instrument was also used as a reflexivity tool to help the researcher highlight any subjectivities that may have interfered with the research process. As a means to keep the participants’ voices
germane, in vivo coding followed by theoretical coding was employed as the data analysis techniques.

**Conceptual Framework**

As a means to provide a clear, integrated, and justified understanding of how the findings were organized, the researcher used a conceptual framework. The conceptual framework chosen for this study was transition theory (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Schlossberg (1984) developed transition theory through counseling work with adults. The theory is not a stage theory; rather it incorporates multiple perspectives of how adults adjust to life experiences. Goodman and colleagues (2006) defined transitions as “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 33). The researchers explained transition theory through four factors commonly called the Four S System: (a) situation, (b) self, (c) support, and (d) strategies. The framework helped those working with adults in transition, but also assisted individuals understand and manage their own situations (Goodman et al., 2006). Applied in this study, Transition Theory offered a focal point to explore findings regarding mid-career students’ perspectives on understanding and managing their transitions in doctoral programs.

**Significance of the Study**

This study addressed repeated calls for deeper understanding of the mid-career professional’s graduate studies experiences. The findings in this study potentially countered the dearth of literature about a large population of students in educationally
based doctoral programs—mid-career professionals (Shulman et al., 2006). Previous studies (Austin et al., 2006; Gardner & Gopaul, 2012; McCoy & Gardner, 2011) only investigated full- or part-time student experiences. This study also represented the next logical step in a line of inquiry about mid-career doctoral student experiences, because it explored both full- and part-time experiences.

Moreover, the significance of using photo-elicitation methodology was to provide an opportunity for participants’ voices to be germane throughout the research process, rather than the researcher imposing descriptors upon them using traditional techniques. Photo-elicitation also promoted self-reflection on the part of participants by engaging them in critical thinking about their experiences in both visual and written form, as well as taking photographs and selecting certain ones to share in the photo-elicitation interview. The results of this study may be used to develop improved supports and strategies to alleviate concerns of mid-career professionals during their transition into doctoral programs. The results of this study may also help to alleviate challenges threatening to interfere with their degree completion.

**Delimitations and Assumptions**

Boundaries and qualifications are inherent in every study (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). The delimitations used by the researcher in this study were determined in order to seek an understanding of the experiences of mid-career professionals in EDL PhD programs. Therefore, the researcher only recruited participants who had at least eight years of professional work experience, as well as those enrolled in PhD programs rather than EdD programs. The paucity of literature about this population led the researcher to
employ these requirements, but limiting participation requirements did not allow the researcher to gain views of other individuals who may have also contributed to the study. A second delimitation was the researcher’s decision to limit the location to a single program within one state, as time and resource constraints prevented the researcher from broadening the scope.

**Limitations of the Study**

Limitations of the study design may have affected the interpretations of findings in the study. First, the findings of this study cannot be generalized beyond the sample of participants because the researcher delimited the study to include only four individuals at one university. Second, the researcher could not foresee events that might have disrupted or interfered with participants’ ability to take photographs or their responses in the photo-elicitation interview.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided an orientation to the study. The researcher began with a background of the study, defined key terms, and established a perspective to understand and address the problem. Then, the researcher stated the study’s purpose, the research question, and the significance of the study. The researcher followed this discussion with an overview of the particulars of the research design, procedures, and analysis techniques. The researcher then presented a synopsis of the conceptual framework undergirding the study. Finally, the researcher provided explanations of delimitations and assumptions along with limitations in order to be transparent about the entirety of the research process.
The next chapter, Chapter Two, provided a review of literature, the rationale for this research study. This included the history and current landscape of graduate programs, a synthesis of available literature on experiences of mid-career professionals in doctoral programs, perspectives on photo-elicitation, and the conceptual framework. Chapter Three presented details regarding the research design and listed data generation and analysis procedures for this study.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a synthesis of scholarship surrounding experiences of PhD students in educational leadership (EDL) as seen from the perspectives of mid-career professionals. Photo-elicitation served as the primary research design in order to elicit participant responses about their experiences. Transition theory was applied as an analytic tool to conceptualize and organize the data. The primary research question that guided this study was the following: What are mid-career professionals’ descriptions of their experiences in seeking the PhD in educational leadership programs as generated from photo-elicitation methodology?

Literature cited in this review was limited mostly to primary sources such as empirical studies in articles books, dissertations, and theses about the doctoral student experience during the years 2000-2013. This limitation was set to provide a current review of the topic (Galvan, 2009; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). This review also included older sources of scholarship on doctoral student experiences that represented seminal works (Galvan, 2009). Databases used for this review included Academic Search Complete, Google Scholar, and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Full Text. The researcher of this dissertation study culled the following organizations’ briefs and policy documents for any information on this topic: University Council for Educational Administration, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, American College Personnel Association, American Educational Research Association, Council of
Graduate Schools, Carnegie Foundation, Survey of Earned Doctorates, and the National Center for Education Statistics.

The researcher used many terms to identify literature on mid-career doctoral student experiences. For readability purposes, the researcher placed these terms in Table 2.1 in no particular order.

Table 2.1

**Search Terms Used to Identify Relevant Literature**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature Search Terms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Degrees</td>
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<td>Doctoral Student</td>
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<td>Experiences</td>
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<td>Doctoral Programs</td>
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<td>Characteristics</td>
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<td>Reform</td>
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<td>Professional Practice</td>
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<td>Credentialing and</td>
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<td>Licensing</td>
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<td>Cognitive Apprenticeship</td>
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<th>Literature Search Terms</th>
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<td>Part-time Students</td>
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<td>Mid-career Students</td>
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<td>Time-to-degree</td>
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<td>Peers</td>
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<td>Advisors</td>
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<td>Stop-out</td>
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<td>Non-traditional Students</td>
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<td>Identity</td>
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<td>Relationships</td>
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<td>Doctoral Advising</td>
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<td>Doctoral Students</td>
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<td>Relationships</td>
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<td>Doctoral Advising</td>
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<td>Mentoring</td>
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<td>Professional Identity</td>
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<td>Researchers Identity</td>
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<td>Professionals</td>
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<td>scholar practitioners</td>
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<td>Cohort Models</td>
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<td>Contemporary</td>
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<td>Doctoral Students</td>
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<td>Models of Doctoral</td>
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<td>Professional Identity</td>
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<td>Transition Theory</td>
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<td>Doctoral Student</td>
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<td>Development</td>
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<td>Work-life-school</td>
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<td>balance</td>
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<td>Professional Practice</td>
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<td>Educational Leadership</td>
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<td>Theory</td>
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<td>Environmental Theory</td>
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<td>Socialization</td>
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<td>Role Conflict</td>
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The researcher of this text organized the literature review in five main sections:

(a) a brief history of EDL graduate programs; (b) a description of current issues in
doctoral programming in the field of education; (c) research on the experiences of mid-career professionals; (d) an explanation of transition theory; and (e) a discussion of photo-elicitation as a methodology.

**Historical Perspectives of Educational Leadership Graduate Programs**

The history of educational leadership programs is rather brief in comparison to other disciplines such as the arts or sciences (McCarthy, 1999). Graduate degree programs in primary and secondary education began in the late 19th century (Everson, 2006). Graduate programs for the study of higher education, notably concentrations in student affairs, were established in the early 20th Century (Altbach, 1996; Nuss, 2003). Nevertheless, Bogotch (2011) reported that every contemporary issue has had a rich history of discussion and debate. Thus, this section explored the beginnings of graduate education in the United States. Following that discussion, the researcher provided a brief overview about the history of school leadership and student affairs graduate programs. The researcher narrowed the scope to the history of student affairs programs, rather than all disciplines within higher education because student affairs is a primary discipline within higher education that focuses on student development (Barr & Desler, 2000; Komives & Woodard, 2003), it was a likely choice to provide historic and current details on student experiences.

In comparison to undergraduate education in the U.S., graduate education is a relatively new tradition (Berelson, 1960). Pierson (1983) and Walker and colleagues (2008), reported that the first PhD was awarded at Yale University in 1861 according to the German university model. Johns Hopkins University, reportedly, established the first
graduate school in 1876 (Berelson, 1960). Seventeen years later, Teachers College at Columbia University awarded the first PhD in education in 1893 (Shulman et al., 2006). According to Everson (2006), Harvard University established the professional degree in education, the EdD, in 1921 to promote preparation for practice, rather than for research as scholars intended for its PhD counterpart.

Today, the PhD remains the cornerstone of academe (Walker et al., 2008). In contrast, mounting concerns regarding the quality and substance of the EdD (Levine, 2005; Murphy & Vriesenga, 2005; Richardson, 2006; Young, 2006) have sparked ongoing debates about the relevance and differences between the EdD and PhD. The most recent of debates stemmed from Levine (2005) who called for an elimination of the EdD in his work *Educating School Leaders*. Following Levine’s (2005) argument, national efforts took shape to investigate and resolve issues between the EdD and PhD, such as those by the Carnegie Institute on the Doctorate (CID). Led by Walker and others (2008), CID investigated PhD preparation across six disciplines: chemistry, education, English, history, mathematics, and neuroscience. Findings from Walker and colleagues (2008), revealed the need to make a distinction between the PhD and EdD in education, rather than eliminate as Levine (2005) proposed. Walker and others (2008) findings prompted the creation of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) that led the investigation and derived solutions for their 50 member institutions (Perry, 2014). These solutions included renaming EdD programs at some member institutions and, most often, aligning the EdD programs to practice rather than towards research (Shulman et al., 2006).
Despite these efforts, the debate ensues. Young (2014) argued that irrespective of degree name, programs should focus on the learner and “build toward a well-defined set of outcomes” (p. 20). Representing CPED, Perry (2014) offered similar thoughts to Young (2014) stating “What is the point of having two degrees if both can supposedly do the same thing?....one person cannot be adequately prepared by one degree program to be both a top-tier practitioner of educational leadership and an academic scholar” (p. 23). Murphy’s (2014) viewpoint turned the lens directly on the professoriate asking “In effect, the answer to the question of “why do students get what they do?” is this: “Because this is what people at the university know and can do” (p. 25). While scholars will likely continue to debate the best action towards distinguishing the EdD from the PhD, the solutions are beyond the scope of this study.

**Graduate Programs in Primary and Secondary Education**

The source of the EdD, PhD debate, as Powell (1976) claimed and Levine (2005) later asserted, arose from differences among several of the initial educational leadership programs about whom to educate. Teachers College preferred a practitioner-based program for experienced school leaders who would attend part-time and engage in practical instruction. University leaders at Harvard, on the other hand, favored a preparation model similar to law and medicine where young, inexperienced students would enroll full-time for two years. The University of Chicago sided with Harvard but agreed with Teachers College about the lack of rigor in university schools of education, and thus asserted the need to attract serious practitioners to be drawn into a quality program. Powell (1976) argued that education programs brought distinction to the
universities that housed them, due to the prestige in educating principals and superintendents. While Levine (2005) was not arguing for male-only school leaders, he supported Powell’s (1976) claim and argued that from a historical perspective, educating potential principals and superintendents seemed favorable to universities because these candidates were primarily male as opposed to the mostly and less respected female corps of teachers.

Despite disagreements about whom to educate as students, EDL programs continued to thrive. Murphy (2006) offered that following the Civil War, as enrollments grew in primary and secondary education, there was a greater need for administrators. Universities responded by adding specialized careers in education. By 1920, those specializations included vocational guidance, recreation and physical education, educational testing and measurement, and others (Powell, 1976). According to McCarthy and Forsyth (2009), educational leadership did not emerge as a separate specialty until the 19th century with the creation of the first school management program in 1881 at the University of Michigan. Formal preparation programs at the university level did not begin until “several decades later” (McCarthy, 1999, p. 119). Even so, school systems benefitted as EDL programs grew at the university level, because such programs served as outlets for recruiting new administrators to primary and secondary schools (Levine, 2005; McCarthy, 1999). Aspiring administrators also profited from participating in EDL programs because completion of both degrees and advanced studies provided a proven route to entering a higher-status and better paying career path than teaching (Levine, 2005).
When educator licensing or certification began after World War I, educational leadership programs provided an obvious and efficient way for educators to become certified (Levine, 2005). With licensure, came the understanding that master’s programs (and likely doctoral programs too) would prepare educators with some professional work experience given that licenses were to be renewed periodically. McCarthy (1999) reported that by the mid-1950s, 41 states required administrators of primary and secondary schools to have completed some graduate work to be licensed, and 26 states required school-level administrators to hold a master’s degree to be licensed (p. 120). However, the introduction of licensing also seemed to reprise the question of “who to educate?” Murphy (1998) argued that by the time of World War II, the traditional full-time, White-male student in education was quickly being replaced with school-based practitioners who worked full-time and entered school part-time.

**Graduate Programs in Student Affairs and Higher Education**

Whereas educational leadership programs in primary and secondary education were founded in the late 19th Century, concentrations on the study of higher education were established in the early 20th Century, around 1914 (Altbach, 1996). Although student personnel matters were beginning to transfer from college presidents and faculty to deans by the early 1900s, Nuss (2003) reported the earliest forms of professional degrees in student affairs concentrations of higher education programs were in vocational guidance. Nuss further mentioned that the first of its kind began at Columbia University’s Teachers College where student affairs practitioners were expected to act *in loco parentis* in their work with undergraduate students. Furthermore, unlike the first
students to enroll in elementary and secondary educational leadership programs, women were the first admits at Teachers College. Nuss (2003) reported that the first professional diploma for an “Advisor for Women” was awarded in 1914 along with the Master of Art degree.

The first doctorate in the field of student affairs was awarded 16 years later to a woman; men were not admitted in the program until two years later in 1932 (Nuss, 2003). Komives and Taub (2001) reported that entry into student affairs-based doctoral programs predicated on professionals’ accumulating years of professional work experience and earning a master’s degree in a related field. Enrollment patterns assumed full-time enrollment on the master’s level, with practice-based assistantships, and part-time studies on the doctoral level (Komives & Taub, 2000).

In recent decades, programs in higher education, particularly student affairs have soared. According to the American College Personnel Association (1999), over 80 institutions with at least a master’s program, and some with doctoral programs, were listed in the 1999 *Directory of Graduate Preparation Programs in College Student Personnel*. Eleven years later, the number of preparation programs listed in the 2010-2013 directory doubled, totaling 155 institutions offering at least one graduate program in student affairs (American College Personnel Association, 2013). Komives and Taub (2000) attributed this growth to the increased focus on student development theory. They also credited the growth to the profession of student affairs’ commitment to changing with student demographic shifts and enrollment patterns. However, Gardner (2009) argued that the focus of improvement and aim of developmental theory within programs
of higher education were limited to the traditional, undergraduate student population to the exclusion of understanding the development of master’s and especially doctoral student development. To that end, student affairs literature about doctoral students—graduate students even—in the foremost and latest handbooks of the field notably, Barr, Desler, and Associates, 2000 and Komives and Woodard, 2003, is nearly nonexistent and only produced a chapter by Komives and Taub (2000).

The gap in knowledge regarding what is known about doctoral students and their experiences in educational leadership programs has sparked repeated calls across the preschool through doctoral degree (P-20) spectrum for studies addressing such students’ issues. McCoy and Gardner (2011), researchers of graduate students in higher education programs, argued that in comparison to what is known about non-traditional undergraduate students, knowledge about non-traditional graduate students is nearly nonexistent. In particular, not enough is known about how student characteristics affect graduate school experiences. Of a similar mind, Offerman (2011) advocated for more research about the challenges facing nontraditional doctoral students, also noting the limited number of studies of this kind. McCarthy’s (1991) and Murphy’s (1992), studies of the preparation of school leaders, noted that research on graduate students in educational leadership has not been as frequent or systematically robust as research on faculty members.

Nearly 20 years later, calls to address that gap remained. McCarthy and Forsyth (2009) argued that “Empirical research on educational leadership students across programs is noticeably lacking” (p. 115). In particular, these researchers called for
studies on the personal and professional characteristics of students, chiefly, “What are their educational backgrounds and work experiences…? Do these student characteristics vary by type of institution where students are enrolled? Do students differ as to professional backgrounds and goals? Do graduates who plan to become faculty members rate their programs more favorably than do aspiring practitioners?” (p. 115). Therefore, this study aims to address gaps illuminated in several questions raised by McCarthy and Forsyth (2009) and others; notably, how mid-career students describe their experiences in EDL doctoral programs.

The Current Landscape of Doctoral Education

Despite continuing questions about the relationship between student demographics and experiences in educational leadership doctoral programs, as a whole, U.S. doctoral level education is thriving as compared to other countries (Wendler et al., 2010). The US has produced the majority of doctoral degrees conferred internationally, and the states’ graduate schools are consistently ranked among the world’s best (Wendler et al., 2010). Furthermore, in today’s society considers doctoral education as carrying significant public and private benefits. For example, doctoral students add to research productivity and grant awards that help boost institutional reputation (O’Meara, 2007). Doctoral degree production also enables the country to remain globally competitive, as an estimated 2.5 million jobs by 2018 will require individuals holding masters, doctorates, or other terminal/advanced degrees (Wendler et al., 2010). Additionally, those who have earned doctorates have the ability to reap social and financial rewards associated with their degrees (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010).
Doctorate degree rates conferred in education, particularly in educational leadership and among women remain robust. According to statistics from years 2010-2011 provided by the National Center for Education Statistics, education ranked as the third highest field of study in which individuals earned a doctorate representing 9,623 individuals. Additionally, more females in 2010-2011 earned degrees in education than men, amounting to 6,559 and 3,064 respectively. Among the disciplines within education, EDL conferred the most degrees. Table 2.2 displays educational facts by discipline and gender for year 2010-2011.

Table 2.2

*Top Five Doctoral Degrees Conferred in Education by Discipline and Sex of Student*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Number Degrees Conferred</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational leadership and administration, general</td>
<td>3,393</td>
<td>2,172</td>
<td>1,221</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bilingual and multilingual</td>
<td>1,884</td>
<td>1,363</td>
<td>521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education/higher education administration</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Administration and Supervision, other</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Degrees in Education</td>
<td>9,623</td>
<td>6559</td>
<td>3,064</td>
</tr>
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*Note:* Degrees include PhD and EdD. Adapted from National Center for Education Statistics. See Appendix A regarding permission to reprint.

**Mid-Career Doctoral Student Characteristics**

Despite prolific degree production from educational leadership programs, little is known about the experiences of students within them (McCarthy, 1999; McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009; McCoy & Gardner, 2011; Murphy, 1992). Demographics play a critical role in understanding how individuals manage transitions and view their identity.
(Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). Thus, it is critical to understand characteristics about mid-career doctoral students to develop supports and strategies to alleviate concerns during the transition, and mitigate challenges threatening to interfere with their degree completion.

Throughout the first century of graduate education, certain characteristics about doctoral students were rather homogenous. Berelson (1960) stated that the typical graduate student was a White, single, childless, male, aged 22 or 23, who enrolled full-time. Fifty years later, Gardner (2009) reported that today’s doctoral student averaged 33.3 years old, and the population has become largely nontraditional with around 50% enrolled part-time. Particularly in education, doctoral students are more diverse than the typical student was a century ago. Offerman (2011) reported that doctoral students in education are often married with children, pay their own way, or borrow money to fund their education.

Similar to patterns across doctoral studies, researchers have noted that education doctoral students are also increasingly enrolled part-time (Gardner, 2009; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Students in educationally based doctoral programs also wait 10-12 years after college before entering graduate school (Nettles & Millett, 2006). As a result, doctoral students in education disciplines are older than their student peers-- averaging around age 30 upon entry (Gardner, 2009; McCoy & Gardner, 2011; Nettles & Millett, 2006; Offerman, 2011) and over 43 years of age upon completion (Shulman, et al., 2006). Students in education also transition into doctoral programs with significant professional
work experience “at a mid-career stage…rather than at the beginning” (Shulman et al, 2006, p. 26).

**Research on Experiences of Mid-Career Professionals in Doctoral Programs**

Although characteristics about mid-career doctoral students are becoming more apparent, relatively little empirical research has been conducted to examine their experiences. In the few studies conducted, most used nontraditional status as one variable to consider among many (see Barker, Felstehausen, Couch, & Henry, 1997; Choy & Catardi, 2006; Golde & Dore, 2001; Nettles & Millett, 2006), rather than a sole focus on these students’ experiences. Other research about nontraditional students reported on doctoral students in other countries (see Bates & Goff, 2012; Neumann & Rodwell, 2009), or on the experiences of students in EdD programs (see Smith, 2000). Some research about middle-aged adult graduate students exists (Barker, Felstehausen, Couch, & Henry, 1997; Lenz, 1997). However, age is not always a predictor of experience (Goodman et al., 2006), and in this dissertation study, professional work experience is a criterion for mid-career participants.

A bibliographic database search for empirical studies specifically about the experiences of nontraditional students in doctoral programs in the US turned up a few studies, including Austin and colleagues (2009), McCoy, and Gardner (2011) who included investigations about full-time doctoral students. Gardner and Gopaul (2012) provided some useful findings about nontraditional part-time doctoral students. Since doctoral students in education tend be enrolled part-time (Nettles & Millett, 2006), literature about part-time experiences of students may shed further light on what is
known and unknown about mid-career professionals in these programs. The remainder of literature specifically directed towards understanding the mid-career doctoral student experience is anecdotal, and does not focus on any specific academic discipline or field of study (see Davis & McCuen, 1995; Hegarty, 2011; Jackson & Clearly, 2011; Offerman, 2011; Watts, 2008; Watts, 2009; Ntiri, 2001), thereby leaving unanswered questions about the experiences of this population. The next few pages provide findings from the few known empirical studies on nontraditional students.

Gardner and Gopaul (2012) explored experiences of doctoral students enrolled part-time across different disciplines. Researchers conducted an exploratory case study at one institution with 10 doctoral students. Four of the 10 students were enrolled in what the researchers called soft applied programs that included educational leadership, counselor education, higher education, and literacy education. Three of the 10 students were enrolled in hard-applied programs that included several disciplines in engineering, food and nutrition science, forest resources, special information science, and wildlife ecology. One student was hard pure that is, from a discipline among the hard sciences such as biochemistry, oceanography, zoology, or physics. Two of the 10 students were enrolled in soft pure programs such as English, history, psychology, and communication. The researchers used Glaser’s (1978) constant comparative method to analyze transcribed data from face-to-face interviews with participants. Gardner and Gopaul (2012) found that their part-time student- participants reported a struggle to fit into their programs. Essentially, students felt as though they were missing opportunities to conduct research and participate in projects because of their part-time status. Additionally, the researchers
reported that part-time students felt more support from their families and places of employment than faculty.

Austin and colleagues (2009) conducted a phenomenological study with seven full-time doctoral students in education to gain an understanding of first semester experiences of nontraditional doctoral students. The students were considered non-traditional because their ages ranged from 25-48 years of age, and participants had worked between 3-25 years prior to enrolling in their doctoral programs. The site for their study was a research university in the southeastern part of the United States. Data included open-ended, face-to-face interviews and field notes taken by researchers. Austin and colleagues (2009) found that students primarily enrolled in their doctoral programs for career advancement. Other findings indicated that intellectual mastery and perseverance were important aspects of surviving the first semester of doctoral study. Additional findings indicated that support systems and time management skills helped students to balance competing identities and roles such as parent, spouse, and friend.

A study by Austin and others (2009) revealed some of the successes and challenges faced by mid-career professionals. Nevertheless, these contributions lead to new questions. Austin and colleagues (2009) did not report the discipline within education for which the participants studied. The discipline matters as doctoral student experiences differ across fields and departments (Golde & Dore, 2001). Thus, whether the researchers’ findings are representative and applicable to mid-career doctoral students in EDL remains unknown. Furthermore, the authors gave some contradictory information in justifying their attention to only the first semester, rather than the first
year. Austin and colleagues (2009) pointed to a study by Ying (2002) to defend their decision to explore only first-semester experiences, but later used Ying (2002) to argue that “transition affects all students especially the first year as it is stressful, socially isolating and sometimes disappointing” (p. 197). Therefore, it is unclear why the authors would limit their scope to exploring just the first semester since transitioning into a doctoral program was found by at least one study to be more challenging during the first full year of study.

McCoy and Gardner (2011) also explored the experiences of nontraditional doctoral students. They argued that high attrition rates among doctoral students led them to conduct the study, namely because individual student characteristics have been found to affect attrition (Council of Graduate Schools, 2004). Their study differed from the scope of Austin et al. (2009) because McCoy and Gardner (2011) included seven master’s students as participants in addition to seven doctoral students. More specifically, participants were enrolled full-time in programs of study focused on higher education and made the transition from work to school within one or two years from the start of the study, rather than the first semester as seen in Austin et al. (2009). The average age of master’s students was 25 years. Doctoral students averaged 32 years. The settings for their study took place at four institutions: (a) on the East coast, (b) West coast, (c) in the North, and (d) in the South. The researchers conducted phone interviews. They probed students about their experiences, supports, and challenges faced during their transition from work to school. Goodman et al.’s (2006) transition theory served as
McCoy and Gardner’s conceptual framework. They (2011) reported findings differentiating between masters and doctoral students.

McCoy and Gardner’s (2011) findings about doctoral students indicated that participants looked to their families for support during the decision-making process, but once enrolled leaned more on peers and faculty. McCoy and Gardner (2011) work also confirmed some of Austin et al.’s (2009) findings. That is, in both studies, participants revealed that they enrolled full-time for career advancement and the opportunity to assume other roles in the organization. In McCoy and Gardner’s (2011), study participants also indicated that they enrolled full-time to avoid struggles they perceived as likely for part-time student enrollment. Moreover, some participants reported a lack of confidence in their jobs and reasoned that graduate studies provided a relief and an identity that they could feel good about because school was something in which they always excelled. McCoy and Gardner’s (2011) study provided another perspective into the experiences of mid-career students. Nonetheless, their study leaves remaining questions about the other population of students in higher education programs—part-time students—and their experiences entering a doctoral program with work experience.

**Photo-Elicitation Methodology**

The aforementioned studies (Austin et al., 2009; Gardner & Gopaul, 2012; McCoy & Gardner, 2011) provided some useful information about the mid-career experience in doctoral programs. The researchers used traditional methods, (e.g. phone interviews and phenomenological methods) to collect and analyze data. Some methodologists (Harper, 2002; Packard, 2008; Smith, 2012) argued that traditional
methods, even among qualitative approaches, may have prevented participants from openly sharing their experiences, because of the restrictions associated with the research design. As argued by Harper (2002) and later echoed by Smith and colleagues (2012), traditional methods can impose rather than elicit responses from participants. They argued these points because researchers collected data as opposed to empowering participants to generate data and co-create the analysis approach. As an example of the advantages of participant generated data, Packard (2008) offered a similar perspective about generative-emergent strategies in visual studies methods:

> As they so aptly point out, nobody knows the situation of the research participants better than the research participants themselves. Rather than asking direct, narrow, predefined questions geared toward examining an existing academic question, the points of research inquiry were generated by the issues brought up in the photographs and the open-ended interviews that followed. (p. 65)

As an alternative to traditional data collection methodologies, according to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2008), emergent methods, such as photo-elicitation arose as a “means of accessing answers to complex research questions and revealing subjugated knowledge” (p. v). They further argued that new questions and new insights about phenomena required new ways of exploration. In alignment with these thoughts, Pounder (2006) argued that researchers in educational leadership “are increasingly using sophisticated designs and analyses intended to capture the complexities and realities of organizational life…” (p. 88). Emergent methodologies are often applied to situations in
which there is little understanding of social phenomena (Hess-Biber & Leavy, 2008). Methods, which enlist participants in data generation, such as photo-elicitation, may offer a useful medium to explore complex realities surrounding the experiences of mid-career professionals in educational leadership doctoral programs.

Photo-elicitation is the process of introducing photographs into a research interview to elicit deeper, more authentic responses and memories from participants than can be rendered from traditional, word-only techniques (Harper, 2002). Although photo-elicitation can involve researcher- or participant-generated photographs (Rose, 2012), participant-generated photo-elicitation was the approach used in this study to provide a platform for participants to generate their own stories about their experiences. Guillemin and Drew (2010) reported that participant-generated photo-elicitation is also known as autodriven photo-elicitation because of the primary role participants play in the research process.

Prosser (2011) offered that photo-elicitation originated in anthropology by John Collier (Collier, 1967; Collier & Collier, 1986) as a way to stimulate participants’ thinking during interviews. Packard (2008) argued that it was not until the mid-1980s that the methodology became popular as a result of Collier and Collier’s (1986) book on the subject titled Visual Anthropology, and Douglas Harper’s (1986) article Meaning and Work: A study in Photo-Elicitation. Harper (1986) used photographs as a way to help participants express hard to explain details about their jobs that were very technical in nature.
**Why Photographs?**

Photographs serve as the focal point for conversation, during the photo-elicitation interview, but their use in the methodology is concerned with the perceptions, meanings, and representations attributed to the images (Guillemin & Drew, 2010; Pink, 2007). Guillemin and Drew (2010) further claimed that the use of visual stimuli in an interview also provided the opportunity for participants to express what may be otherwise hard to articulate. Collier and Collier (1986) found that using photographs in an interview “sharpen the memory and give the interview an immediate character of realistic reconstruction” (p. 106). Pink (2007) substantiated the vitality of photographs in studies used to understand people’s experiences. Pink argued that photographs are visual objects through which people reference and understand aspects of their experiences. A photograph preserves a moment in time. Put another way, Harper (2005) argued that “photographs [are] both empirical and constructed” (p. 748). The constructivist nature of photo-elicitation explains its roots in the interpretivist paradigm because “interpretivists attempt to understand situations from the point of view of those experiencing the situations” (Sipe & Constable, 1996, p. 158). Consequently, the use of photographs in the photo-elicitation process provides a platform for participants to tell their authentic stories (Mitchell, 2011) and can change the quality of discussion among those who advocate their well-being.

**Advantages of Photo-Elicitation**

Rose (2012) encapsulated four advantages of photo-elicitation. First, Rose argued that using photographs as the primary method allows researchers to gain not just more but
different insights into the phenomena. Second, photo-elicitation interviews served as an opportunity for participants to express insights and knowledge in their own words. Third, the process of taking and selecting photographs in the research likely causes participants to be more aware of the daily nuances that otherwise may go ignored or overlooked, particularly by the researcher (Rose, 2012). Photographs also help researchers visualize events for which they were not present (Smith et al., 2012). Fourth, the photo-elicitation process has the ability to bring out more emotional and affective responses than other types of methodologies (Harper, 2002). Such a process may reveal aspects of the doctoral student experience as unexpected cycles of security followed by episodes of extreme doubt (Youngs, 2007).

Other researchers have noted advantages of photo-elicitation by way of the collaboration needed between researcher and participant. Loeffler (2004a) found in his study conducted with 14 college-based outdoor recreation participants that photo-elicitation had the ability to reduce the asymmetry of power between the participant and researcher because photographs, not participants, were the focal point of study. Guillemin and Drew (2010) stressed the value of the technique for “bridging the culturally distinct worlds of the researcher and the researched” (p. 176). Prosser (2011) argued that the time involved in taking photographs and preparing for the photographic interview gave participants time to reflect and gather their thoughts before engaging with the researcher in the interview process. Thus, photographs have been found to elicit more personal, self-reflective narratives from participants (Clark-Ibáñez, 2007). Given research on doctoral student development supports the idea of self-reflection as a means
of actualizing learning and avoiding pitfalls (Hall & Burns, 2009; Youngs, 2007), the process of eliciting doctoral student experiences can be enhanced by the use of photo-elicitation.

**Challenges to Visual Methodologies**

Photo-elicitation is not without its challenges or critiques. Harper (2002) and others argued that despite the fact that we live in an increasingly digital age, the standard form of dissemination of knowledge in academe is largely dependent upon written words (Prosser, 2011; Rose, 2012). These arguments have led to discussions about the vitality and appropriateness of visual methods in research (Goldstein, 2007). While the methodology is regarded as emergent, it has not had the same amount of time or opportunity to be interrogated by the research community. Researchers that apply visual methodologies in studies have to contend with this fact and be transparent about why the methodology was most appropriate to studying the given phenomena (Rose, 2012).

The emergent nature of using photographs in research has led to disagreements among scholars in the field of visual methodologies. Scholars disagree on whether photographs are most promising because of the change that is achieved through their use (Wang & Burris, 1997), the emotion they incite (Harper, 2002), or for what they are (Rose, 2012). Therefore, “there remains no clear established methodological framework to discuss the uses of photography in social science research (Rose, 2012, p. 300). Without a clear process, issues of validity and reliability may be more apparent.

One of the appropriate and beneficial ways that photo-elicitation is applied to studies is the way in which researchers and participants co-create knowledge (Loeffler,
However, the participatory nature of some visual research presented a third challenge to its use in research. Although referencing another visual method, photovoice, Wang and Burris (1997), Catalina, and Minkler (2010) described the long hours and lengthy studies that come with introducing photographs into the research—notably working with and training participants on how to use digital cameras and the follow-up and accountability required throughout the research process.

**Ethical Considerations of Photo-Elicitation**

In addition to challenges associated with the methodology, researchers who apply the photo-elicitation design in studies have to be attuned to possible ethical concerns. There is an expectation that some pictures may be taken in public places, given that participants take pictures depicting their lived experiences. However, the issue of what constitutes as public domain is an ethical dilemma faced by photo-elicitation researchers, and they have not reached any clear answers. Clark (2010) argued, “anyone may take photographs in public places or places where they have permission to take photographs” (p. 84). Clark then contradicted himself saying that what constitutes as public space is unclear, particularly in the international realm. Harper’s (2005) interpretation seemed to be that harm to participants was unlikely if the photographs depicted “normal people doing normal things” (p. 759). Harper (2005) further stated that it was the clearly portrayed face of someone that presented the ethical dilemma, but participant anonymity cannot always be guaranteed because of the visual images (Smith et al., 2012).

Consequently, certain researchers believe that images from visual studies should only appear in publications if the participants were made aware upfront, or if one or more
individuals could be identified as the author of the photograph (Smith et al., 2012). Nevertheless, other researchers uphold the use of visual images in publications and public displays. Catalina and Minkler (2010) and Wang and Burris (1997) contended that it was in part the visual image that promoted change in communities, particularly for individuals in marginalized communities. They went on to say that the fact that policymakers and community members could read and visualize the inequalities made them that much more real.

Clark-Ibáñez (2004) argued that researchers should balance between being empathetic and showing genuine interest in the participants’ story while remembering that they are engaged in research that requires a level of separation and professionalism (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Along the same lines, researchers need to expect that asking participants to take pictures, particularly of sensitive issues, may produce emotionally filled photographs (Guillemin & Drew, 2010). Therefore, researchers need to be preemptive about the emotional harm that participants may endure.

On the other hand, Guillemin and Drew (2010) reported that photo-elicitation brought healing to participants of studies in certain health science research. Many of the participants felt as though the research project was the first time that they were able to tell their story and be heard about the pain and agony they suffered. Even still, Mitchell (2011) suggested that researchers should be equipped with ways to help if participants become distressed.

Researchers using photo-elicitation methodology should also be prepared in instances where participants may provide pictures portraying some form of unlawful or
morally questionable behavior (Clark, 2010). To circumvent this, Mitchel (2011) reported that researchers should explain to participants in the consent form that these types of photographs are unacceptable and appropriate legal actions may need to be taken.

Legal and property rights present another ethical dilemma. Clark (2010) argued that pictures are protected under copyright laws, but not the court of law. Pictures may be subject to subpoenas by the court system. Wiles et al. (2008) argued that usually the producer of photographs was the owner of the photographs. They stated that researchers desiring to keep the photographs for later publication should be up front with participants. In this study, participants signed a consent (see Appendix G) releasing ownership of all photographs to the researcher.

Loss of confidentiality presents yet another ethical challenge that researchers of photo-elicited studies must contend. Gold (1989) argued that the biomedical model did not fit the type of research most appropriate for visual research. Instead, Gold (1989) argued for a research outlook that was rooted in ethics, a level of sensitivity that requires the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of subjects so that he or she may determine which individuals and activities may be photographed, in what ways it is appropriate to do so, and how the resulting images should be used. If situations were deemed inappropriate, would violate the norms of the setting, or feeling of participants, then the researcher would not photograph. (p. 103)

In support of Gold (1989), Harper (2005) argued that in order for the profession to advance, “rules and norms concerning ethics must acknowledge the rights of
photographers/researchers to photograph in public and to present identifiable subjects, but in the context of ethical considerations that consider photographers/researchers as connected by webs of obligation and moral regard” (p.760). Taking another stance, Pink (2001) argued that the participant-driven nature of visual methods may shift ethical issues, because of the collaboration and negotiation endured by participants and researchers. As co-collaborators, participants and researchers must come to a mutual agreement about ethical principles and practices prior to the start of study. Rose (2012) argued that having a debriefing prior to the start of study, particularly before the photo-elicitation interview, was imperative to establishing trust and rapport. The debriefing was also a way to work out potential ethical challenges (Rose, 2012).

Finally, although technical issues may not present ethical dilemmas, they do exist in visual studies. If people want their faces blurred for publication, researchers need to be aware of that technology and able to get it done without defacing the photograph (Clark, 2010). Furthermore, Harper (2002) reported that researchers should be prepared in the incident that participants are unsure of how to use a camera, lose cameras, or there are issues with picture quality (Harper, 2002).

The Vitality of Photo-Elicitation

Despite these challenges, photo-elicitation has been used in research across a variety of disciplines including sociology, health, history, arts, psychology, and education (Harper, 2002). Researchers use this methodology to examine social identity through raising questions about what parts of identity are visible and invisible in the pictures (Harper, 2002). Several studies have used photo-elicitation to explore perspectives of
children (Epstein et al., 2006; Gabhainn & Sixsmith, 2006; Punch, 2002; Rasmussen, 2004). Other researchers conducted studies with adults (Packard, 2008; Radley & Taylor, 2003). In fact, Harper (2002) found photo-elicitation to be the primary methodology in 40 studies, including doctoral theses, books, articles, and reports and concentrated in four areas: (a) social organization/social class, (b) community, (c) identity, and (d) culture (p. 16). Nevertheless, researchers including Harper (1998), Mitchell (2011), and Rose (2012) have argued that photo-elicitation is an underutilized method despite its nearly limitless potential to elicit meaningful descriptions of social realities. Moreover, no known studies on the doctoral student experience have used photo-elicitation. Yet, it is the opportunity to gain authentic descriptions of the experiences of mid-career professionals in PhD programs that this study seeks to address through photo-elicitation.

As described among the literature on doctoral students’ experiences, McCoy and Gardner (2011) used transition theory to conceptualize and organize their findings. Therefore, the theory may be an analysis strategy for understanding experiences of mid-career doctoral students in educational leadership programs, because we do have an indication that it was a useful approach. Details regarding transition theory are presented in the next section.

The Conceptual Framework: Schlossberg’s Four S System of Transition Theory

Mid-career professionals who return to graduate school after several years of professional employment face multiple transitions in their lives (Austin et al., 2009; McCoy & Gardner, 2011). The process of earning a doctorate degree is complex,
nuanced and often requires students to undergo a change in occupational roles and professional priorities (Hall & Burns, 2009). Similarly, Dobrow and Higgins (2005) suggested that doctoral students might experience shifts in identity as they navigate through and between their professional and academic identities during their transition into and matriculation out of doctoral work. Experiences serve as a central component to identity and often determine how a person handles a current transition (Goodman et al., 2006).

The idea that identity formation is limited to children and young adults is a misnomer as “midlife adults often recapitulate this issue” (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 99). Adults continuously review their lives analyzing their past as a way of assessing the future (Goodman et al., 2006). More importantly, adults returning to a university setting often need new supports and encounter new identities (Schlossberg, 1981). The significance of professional identity to transition theory is that most students modify their sense of self during a transition (Colbeck, 2008).

Transition theory was originally developed by Schlossberg (1984) through counseling work with adults. Goodman and colleagues (2006) defined a transition as any event that is expected such as being admitted to graduate school or an unplanned event such as a death in the family that resulted in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. Even with incorporation of adult development perspectives, Schlossberg’s (1984) model is individualized including elements of how and why adults experience life (Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). In
other words, the framework explains that the way adults experience life and their
identities is not linear.

Goodman and others (2006) argued that transitions are explained by four factors,
commonly called the Four S System. The first of the Four Ss focuses on situation.
Situation is defined as the event that caused the transition including the subsequent role
change, previous experience with similar events, timing and one’s control of the event,
the amount of stress due to the event and otherwise, and the individual’s assessment of
the event as being positive or negative. The next S, Self, encompasses demographic
factors such as age in the form of developmental functioning and social age rather than
chronological order. Other demographics associated with self-include gender,
socioeconomic factors, race-ethnicity, value orientation, and spiritual outlook. The third
S stands for Support, including the type of support and functions of support ranging from
family and friends to coworkers and institutions. Strategies, the fourth S, are comprised
of the adult’s coping mechanisms or active support systems. Although presented in four
parts, transition theory is not a stage theory (Goodman et al., 2006). Therefore,
individuals may move through the Four S continuum in a linear or nonlinear fashion.
The researcher created a visual representation of transition theory, the conceptual
framework used to analyze findings in this study. The visualization is depicted in Figure
2.1.
According to Goodman et al. (2006), across the lifespan, transitions stimulate individuals to look at themselves and assess their lives in new ways. Loss of identity and perceptions of control are at the forefront of managing transitions. Individuals view permanent transitions differently than temporary changes, and it is the uncertainty of the duration of the transition that causes the most stress and negative effect (Goodman et al., 2006). Since doctoral degrees are open-ended degrees, without time limits for completion (Nettles & Millett, 2006), the undertaking is often uncertain and described by certain researchers as a “perilous passage” (Hadjioannou, Shelton, Fu, & Dhanarattigannon, 2007).

Researchers of transition theory (Goodman et al., 2006) argued that self-reflection provided opportunities for individuals to cope with transitions. Similarly, photo-elicitation required participants to engage in extended reflection in order to take, select,
and explain photographs in an interview (Guillemin & Drew, 2010). Therefore, the photo-elicitation approach may serve as a great reflection tool to remind or help participants identify the many areas in life in which they experienced success. The process may also assist participants in identifying lessons learned from those prior experiences that could be applied to the current challenge.

**Chapter Summary**

As noted throughout this chapter, images of doctoral students have changed dramatically from the onset of doctoral education in the nineteenth century through current times. McCoy and Gardner (2011), Shulman et al. (2006) and others, reported that the current demographic of doctoral students in education are largely nontraditional, increasingly enrolled part-time, and substantially older than their full-time peers and those in other disciplines. These students are individuals who are coming into the process in the midst of careers—making the conscious choice to transition from one status to another in educational leadership.

Given the dearth of literature surrounding their experiences, how can we better understand this transition? Literature on transitions from Goodman and colleagues (2006) explained that the more individuals going through the transition understand the underlying meanings and challenges associated with their transition, the better able they are to cope. Missing from the literature, as evident in this phenomenon, is research describing the doctoral student experiences of mid-career professionals, who are generally well established in a career before embarking on a doctoral degree. Theoretical models describing these students’ doctoral experiences in educational leadership are
particularly absent. An emergent, visual methodology, called photo-elicitation provides an opportunity to gain knowledge about these experiences through participant-generated photographs of these experiences. Chapter Three provides the specific procedures of this investigation.
CHAPTER THREE
STUDY METHODS

Introduction

This chapter includes steps in the data generation and analysis process systematically implemented to interrogate the following research question: *What are mid-career professionals’ descriptions of their experiences in seeking the PhD in an educational leadership program as generated from photo-elicitation methodology?* The chapter comprises seven parts: (a) site selection (b) participant recruitment, (c) description of participants, (d) instruments used to generate data, (e) data analysis techniques, and (f) a discussion about the limitations and delimitations of the study.

The research design for this study was photo-elicitation. Photo-elicitation is an emergent, participant-generated methodology that introduces photographs into the research process based on the “assumptions about the role and utility of photographs in promoting reflections that words alone cannot” (Clark-Ibáñez, 2007, p. 171). Keats (2009) argued that “The photographs were an important means of recording experiences, as well as a means of persuading the viewer of particular aspects of the experience and a focus on the immediacy or reality depicted in the photographs” (p. 187). Loeffer (2004a), explained a benefit to photo-elicitation as the collaborative nature by which participants and researchers must work together to co-create knowledge. On a similar note, Harper (2002) argued that researchers become listeners while participants interpret the meaning of photographs for the researcher. Consequently, photo-elicitation is
grounded in the interpretivist paradigm because of the centrality of interpreting reality through subjective means (Crotty, 1998; Sipe & Constable, 1996).

In this study, the researcher used photo-elicitation to generate participants’ selected visual images and reflections about their experiences as nontraditional mid-career doctoral students. Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix B), the researcher enlisted four doctoral students who at mid-career, enrolled as full- or part-time students in the same university’s educational leadership PhD program.

The researcher used multiple sources of data to probe meanings generated by both participants and the researcher. The multiple sources included information elicited from participants (photographs, captions, and interviews), field notes, the researcher’s journal, member-checks, and insights from a critical friend during the analysis process. The participants took 10 photographs and wrote captions of their experiences. After 10 days, participants selected three photos to discuss in a particular type of interview called the photo-elicitation interview (Rose, 2012). The photo-elicitation interview occurred after participants took photographs (Harper, 2002; Rose, 2012). The photo elicitation interview not only prompted more information, but also evoked different and more personal narratives (Harper, 2002).

The researcher used a field instrument to generate post-interview notes. From the questions posed on the protocol, the field instrument served as a means for the researcher to express and address any subjectivities that may have emerged in the interviews. Data
analysis for the captioned photographs, interview transcripts and field notes consisted of two cycles of coding: (a) in vivo and (b) theoretical.

**Site Selection**

The site for this study was Clemson University in Clemson, South Carolina. Clemson University began as Clemson Agricultural College of South Carolina in 1886. Thomas Green Clemson founded the institution in the final years of his life. He willed the bulk of his estate for the creation of an agricultural college for males (Mercer, 1998). The name of the college was changed to Clemson University in 1964 to account for increased academic offerings and research endeavors (Clemson University, n.d. a).

Despite the agricultural focus, since its inception, Clemson University has been known for its strong military heritage (Clemson University, n.d. b). The commitment to preparing young men for the military was evident in the first student regulations that were drawn up in the early 1890s and required young men “to be under military discipline and required to purchase dress and fatigue uniforms” (Mercer, 1998, p. 29).

Nevertheless, following World War II, the desire to stay relevant in a shifting world from one of agriculture to industry, put distance between Clemson and its military heritage (Reel, 2006). This turn in the institution’s mission led the way for Clemson to become coeducational in 1955 (Clemson University, n.d. a). Women undergraduates majoring in teaching were especially encouraged to apply to the university, because they increased the enrollment and “helped meet the state’s need to upgrade the educational level and experience of public school teachers” (Reel, 2006, p. 21).
While it took the inclusion of women to support the development and growth of undergraduate programs in education, graduate programs in education had been offered at Clemson since 1928 (Mercer, 1998). Nonetheless, it was decades later in 1992 when the PhD in Educational Leadership at Clemson University would emerge as an academic offering. In comparison to the U.S.’s first educationally based doctoral program that began in the 1920s, the EDL PhD program at Clemson is relatively new. The recent development of the program makes for a dynamic 21st Century design that offers connections to practice, and encompasses multiple delivery modes (from face-to-face to on site to online) for full-time and working professionals. These factors also make it a dynamic context for the study of mid-career professionals who often desire flexible programmatic offerings in graduate school due to work and other obligations (Maher, 2005; Offerman, 2011; Saltiel & Russo, 2001).

Furthermore, the fact that Clemson University holds an institutional membership to the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) also provided reasons for selecting it as the context for this study. As the leading organization for professors of educational leadership (UCEA, n.d. a), UCEA has established institutional and program quality measures to ensure that member institutions are adhering to standards and the knowledge base on quality leadership preparation (UCEA, n.d. b). Investigating students’ experiences within such programs may offer insights into the outcomes of these quality measures at Clemson University. Finally, Clemson provided the ideal context for this study because of its close proximity to the researcher, and thus a convenient source from which to collect data.
Participant Recruitment

Following IRB approval (see Appendix B), the researcher recruited participants from the Educational Leadership (EDL) PhD program’s preschool through twelfth grade (P-12) and higher education (HE) concentrations at Clemson University. The researcher sent emails to students inviting them to participate in the study (See Appendix C). The first four participants who volunteered and who also met the selection criteria were selected for the study.

Participants had to meet three requirements for selection. First, participants had to be enrolled at Clemson University in either the P-12 or HE areas of concentration, or minors, as known in some universities. Second, participants had to consist of those enrolled full- and part-time in doctoral study. Third, in keeping with literature about mid-career professionals, participants were to have at least eight years of professional work experience prior to enrolling in their respective doctoral programs (Gardner, 2009; McCoy & Gardner, 2011; Nettles & Millett, 2006). Table 3.1 shows the selection criteria for soliciting participant involvement.

Table 3.1

Criteria for Selecting Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Concentration</th>
<th>Full-Time Enrollment</th>
<th>Part-Time Enrollment</th>
<th>Total Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>P-12</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Participants</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
In the event that participants could not be recruited by contacting students through the respective listservs or program-based email lists, then the researcher had planned to email Clemson faculty members of the respective doctoral program to solicit nominations from among their advisees and PhD students enrolled in their courses. An attached volunteer form, as approved by IRB, was intended to accompany the email for which interested students would complete and return to the researcher by fax or scanned as an attachment to email (See Appendix D).

**Participants**

Following recruitment and selection, the researcher sent the selected volunteers individual emails with an attached informed consent form and two release forms (Appendices E, F, and G, respectively). The informed consent form provided information about the study and participants’ rights and activities for the study. The first release form required participants to get consent from other individuals prior to taking photographs of those individuals. Participants were instructed to make copies of the release form as needed. The second release form asked participants to release ownership of the photographs and captions to the researcher for future research and publication purposes. After signing the documents, participants were asked to return the signed consent form and release forms to the researcher by fax or scanned as an attachment to email. They were also asked to schedule a day, time, and location to participate in a photo-elicitation interview that would follow the 10-day period in which they were taking photographs.
Instruments for Data Generation

Three sources of data were generated in this study: (a) participant-generated photographs and captions of those photographs, (b) information elicited in the photo-elicitation interview about the meanings of the photographs and captions, (c) a field instrument to generate post-interview notes, (d) the researcher’s personal journal, and (e) the researcher’s subjectivity statement. The term data generation was chosen over data collection to indicate the significant role of participants in this study. Participants’ generated data by taking and selecting photographs and writing captions long before the researcher began collection and analysis of these materials.

Photographs and Captions

Participants used their own digital cameras or phones equipped with photographing capabilities. They took 10 pictures within an allotted 10 days. The photos represented participants’ experiences in a selected educational leadership doctoral program. The research instructed participants to caption their photos. After 10 days, participants gave all photographs and captions to the researcher as artifacts of their doctoral student experiences. Participants received only these basic instructions in keeping with photo-elicitation methodology. Researchers using photo-elicitation provide few guidelines on what types of photographs the participants could take (Rose, 2012).

The next steps included preparation for the photo-elicitation interview. In an effort to promote reflection and stimulate conversation, participants were asked to chose three of the 10 photos that most represented their experiences to discuss with the researcher in the photo-elicitation interview.
Photo-elicitation Interview

The photo-elicitation interview is a term used in photo-elicitation research to describe the event whereby participants explain the meanings behind their photographs and captions to the researcher (Harper, 2002). To do this, the researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol and probes (Patton, 2002) to provide participants with the opportunity to share their thoughts with minimal interference from the researcher. Participants were asked a series of questions about the photographs they took, how the photos related to their experiences as doctoral students, and their experiences using photographs to describe their doctoral student experiences. The photo-elicitation interview protocol can be found in Appendix H.

Additionally, the interviews were conducted on the university campus or in locations that were accessible to both on- and off-campus students. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour and a half. The flexibility of this period enabled participants’ discussion and reflection time. All interviews were recorded using an audio recorder with the participants’ consent.

Field Instrument

Following each photo-elicitation interview, the researcher used a structured field instrument to “maximize opportunities to extend patterns, discover new elements, and multiply connections among elements” (Nespor, 2006, p. 300). The researcher completed the field instrument within 30 minutes of each interview in order to capture particularities of the interview and moments or body language that the researcher wanted to remember for contextualizing the analysis of transcripts. These notes included
participants’ body language, responses, emotions recalled and or experienced by participants, voice influxes, etc. (See Appendix I). The field instrument also provided a structured reflexivity by which the researcher could identify and address any subjectivities that may have interfered with the interviews.

**The Researcher’s Journal**

The journal primarily served as a means to capture decisions made throughout the research process, such as what to present in the chapter and how to organize information in the chapters. The researcher also used the journal to draw illustrations of theories and concepts eventually placed in the dissertation. The researcher also kept a to-do-list regarding what items the researcher needed to complete for the dissertation.

The researcher also kept the journal that on occasion, served as an extension of the field notes instrument. The researcher kept the completed field notes forms inside the journal as a way to keep all of the forms in one place. Occasionally, hours or days after an interview, the researcher would reflect on something that she wrote in the field notes, such as a difficulty that a participant experienced, and wanted to elaborate on those thoughts. The journal provided an outlet for such occasions. The researcher also found the journal convenient due to the ability to write in the journal at moment’s notice rather than waiting until a computer was available to access the original typed field notes forms.

**Researcher as Instrument**

In addition to formalized tools used to generate data, qualitative studies require researchers to acknowledge their role as instruments in the research process (Patton, 2002). Given the participatory nature of photo-elicitation, the methodology requires
researchers to enter the field with as few preconceived ideas, assumptions, and biases as possible (Pink, 2001) in order to be open to the collaborative research process. Therefore, this statement of subjectivity provided an opportunity for me, the researcher, to acknowledge my role in the research process (Peshkin, 1988).

For me, the investigation of self in regards to this study was rooted in my experiences as a working professional that intertwined with my status as a doctoral student. After serving as a marketing and sales professional, I entered the public school system as a high school counselor. I chose school counseling as a profession because the occupation was considered to be a helping profession (Egan, 2013), and I desired to serve in a professional role that aided and empowered students to reach their potential in life. School counseling was also a collaborative venture because of the way in which counselors, students, parents, and others have to work together to resolve issues (American School Counseling Association, 2012). In fact, my background as a school counselor drew me to photo-elicitation because researchers of the method adhered to the same values of collaboration that I experienced and appreciated as a professional school counselor.

Nevertheless, conducting research in my own context required me to acknowledge what collaboration might look like in this context, given that I was a student in the same PhD program and had relationships with three of the participants. Although I did not know the fourth participant personally now or in the past, we both worked for the same employer at one time so there was a familiarity about the challenge of going from that particular workplace as a professional to a learning environment as a student. The
other three participants were in my same social group or in one case, I interacted via
email with the participant through Paw Pals, the doctoral program’s peer mentoring
program that I helped establish. Moreover, because I knew the majority of the
participants, I had sensitivity towards ensuring that their voices were paramount in the
study. I also did not want to take up too much of their time, given their lives as busy
professionals and doctoral students with deadlines. Further, I wanted to avoid
misinterpreting something that they said for fear they would be upset, disappointed with
me about the findings from the study, or feel as though I hindered their relationships with
faculty because of something they shared during the research process.

Yet, I also knew that in order to honor one of my identities as a helper by
describing doctoral students’ successes and challenges, I had to acknowledge how my
status as a PhD student may have interfered with the research process. In fact, my own
struggles with questions of identity as a mid-career professional in the PhD program
prompted me to want to explore whether other students were experiencing challenges in
route to degree completion, and if so, what could be done to resolve or improve these
issues.

Personally, my struggles were not due to lack of support or being unaware of the
PhD process. Thankfully, I had a number of individuals who served as my support
network ranging from faculty, peers on campus, and friends. I am also the fifth member
of my extended family to earn a doctorate so I was not oblivious to some of the
opportunities and challenges that I would face. Rather, my struggles stemmed from
entering the doctoral program and feeling as though I had lost some of the prestige I had
earned and experienced as a working professional. Differences in writing styles and the pressures of synthesizing and analyzing to conduct scholarly research in the PhD program, replaced my confidence as a professional. Although I was not the 22-year-old who was still forming my identity, I was the 36-year-old who was trying to answer the question of *who am I—now?* Was I currently a student, or was I a professional who happened to be a student? Was I still going to be respected in the field when or if I returned after being away so long? If I was grappling with those questions despite my support network, what was going on with other doctoral students who were in the mid-career stage? How were they navigating the doctoral student experience? What were some of their identity negotiations? Equally important, what were the implications for programs in educational leadership, given that the majority of students in educational doctoral programs enter at mid-career?

Therefore, since I was a student in the same PhD program who had relationships with the majority of participants—and like them—was coming from a professional background, I exercised several forms of reflexivity. These forms of reflexivity promoted the participants’ voices while decreasing my own. To do this, I began with the interview protocol. I deliberately structured the protocol to be open ended with a limited number of questions to provide participants with the majority of talking time with minimal interference from me. I also took critical steps in the data generation and analysis process to ensure that the participants’ stories were paramount, beginning with the field instrument. For example, questions on the field notes protocol compelled me to be honest about and address sensitive topics or emotions felt by participants or myself.
during the photo-elicitation interview. I also used a personal reflection journal that, among other things, helped me to identify my assumptions and biases that resonated during interviews with participants (Hsuing, 2008). I also enlisted the support of a critical friend who helped verify the accuracy of how I moved from transcriptions to coding to themes. Finally and more importantly, all participants participated in member checks where they verified the accuracy of their transcriptions, descriptions of the emerging themes, and where their photographs fit within these themes. The next section details these steps, and others taken to ensure the credibility of results.

Data Analysis Procedures

Following data generation, the researcher analyzed information gathered from photographs, captions, and the field instrument. Data analysis is the process of making sense of large amounts of data, and requires a great deal of interpretation, judgment and creativity (Patton, 2002).

To analyze generated data, Keats (2009) argued that researchers should transcribe the data and then do an initial read of all the data collected to get a general impression of the data. As a second step, Keats (2009) recommended that researchers move beyond general impressions by analyzing the transcribed data separately as a form of triangulation. Creswell (2009) reported that triangulation assisted with trustworthiness of the study and is the process of synthesizing and converging lines of evidence to make sense of the data. Harper (2005) also advocated for triangulating visual data arguing that “visual documentation becomes part of research triangulation, confirming theories using different forms of data” (p. 748). Therefore, captions of the photographs created by the
participants, field notes taken by the researcher, and data elicited from interviews that included what participants said about the meaning of the visual data were all transcribed and analyzed according to the Creswell’s (2009), Keat’s (2009), and Harper’s (2005) recommendations. Furthermore, to keep within traditions of ethnographic methods, the data generation and analysis phases were co-occurring and reiterative (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Wolcott, 1999).

**Coding Cycles**

Following data transcription, the researcher employed two cycles of coding (in vivo and theoretical) in the data analysis process. Coding is the process of “naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). The researcher used spreadsheets in Microsoft Excel to analyze data in both coding cycles. For the first cycle of coding, the researcher created a column for each participant’s transcript, photographic captions, and field notes so that the researcher could list codes by data source. Then, the researcher assigned each data item a color to trace back datum to the original source if necessary.

To analyze data in the second cycle of coding, the researcher created another worksheet in Excel and grouped like data from the first coding cycle into separate columns by using the copy and paste functions. From there, the researcher identified themes by grouping common terms and identifying relationships among the categories by collapsing or merging codes from the first cycle. The researcher found Microsoft Excel to be particularly useful because the program is available on most computers, including
personal and work computers, and Excel is a free resource provided by Clemson University.

The spreadsheet features that were particularly useful were the copy-and-paste functions because these functions allowed movement of text sections from the initial coding list into worksheets designated for development and refinement of categories and themes. The shading/fill-cell function was another useful feature in Excel, because the researcher was able to assign a color to each datum that would allow the researcher to trace back codes to their original source even after collapsing. The insert additional rows and columns features allowed the researcher to add as many codes as necessary to the Excel worksheet.

Irrespective of the system used for coding, the goal of both cycles of coding in this study was to remain open to exploring concepts and themes directly in the data, rather than to assign preexisting categories to the data (Saldaña, 2013). Another goal was to ensure that the codes represented the complexities of the photographs as well as the sentiments of participants from the interviews (Rose, 2012). As Saldaña (2013) further argued, certain categories of coding, such as in vivo coding, can be employed to allow the participants’ voices to remain dominant in the coding process. Therefore, in vivo coding served as the first cycle of coding in this study.

**In vivo coding.** According to Charmaz (2006), *in vivo* coding refers to forming categories based on terms used verbatim by the participants, rather than terms assigned to text by the researcher. This category of coding allowed for thick descriptions of the data, and researchers have found in *vivo coding* to be particularly useful in studies that
prioritize and honor the participant’s voice (Charmaz, 2006). Therefore, in vivo codes were identified from terms used by participants in the photo-elicitation interview and titles assigned to photographic captions. During this cycle of coding, the researcher also paid attention to the seen and unseen in the pictures as some photographs were intended to “signal what is no longer in place” (Rose, 2012, p. 315).

**Theoretical coding.** The second cycle of coding employed in the study was theoretical coding. According to Charmaz (2006), theoretical codes identified relationships among the categories previously determined in earlier coding cycles. Therefore, some in vivo codes were collapsed during the second cycle. Other in vivo codes remained and developed organically into categories and or themes.

An important point in theoretical coding, as argued by Saldaña (2013) was that theoretical codes were not the theory itself, rather “an abstraction that models the integration of all codes and categories” (p. 268). Theoretical coding, then, is the culminating step towards reaching a theory (Saldaña, 2013), and was used to identify common themes that could be integrated into the development of propositions about mid-career doctoral student experiences as an extension of transition theory.

The role of transition theory was significant to the analysis process because transition theory was used in two of the three studies about the experiences of nontraditional doctoral students described in Chapter Two, notably McCoy and Gardner (2011) and Austin and colleagues (2009). Furthermore, the utilization of a preexisting theory in a qualitative study is not unusual. Many qualitative studies are informed by a theoretical or conceptual framework (Lunenburg & Irby, 2011) and have been found to
be just as substantive to the contributions of grounded approaches as studies that do not include a priori theories (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). Furthering that notion, Corbin and Strauss (2008) argued that using an existing theory in a grounded study might provide insight and direction for how an individual might build upon or dispel findings from previous studies. The researchers further justified the use of a priori approaches in grounded research given that “New categories would most likely be discovered…. [and an] “awareness” would be raised to an even greater abstraction because it is now being applied across situations” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 41).

**Establishing Trustworthiness and Validity of Findings**

Several methods aided the researcher in the data analysis process to prevent misapplication and to establish trustworthiness of interpretations. First, the researcher provided a statement of subjectivity as an additional strategy to aim for fidelity in the research process (Eisenhart, 2006). The field notes instrument provided a means for the researcher to systematically call out and address any subjectivities that may have appeared throughout the research process (Nespor, 2006).

The researcher also demonstrated evaluative validity in the study. According to Eisenhart (2006), evaluative validity is the “justification for representing participants’ actions, beliefs, or values as good or bad, positive or negative” (p. 575). By employing in vivo coding in the study, the researcher limited the imposition of assumptions by using participants’ own words—rather than assigning claims. Thus, the participants’ experiences were thematically grouped. These thematic groupings were verified during
member checking—a third strategy used by the researcher to establish trustworthiness in the study (Patton, 2002), and enlisting the feedback of a critical friend.

**Member Validation**

Member checks, sometimes known as member validation, were the process of enlisting study participants to verify the accuracy of the researcher’s interpretations of participants’ responses from the interviews (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Patton, 2002). To engage participants in the member-check process, the researcher sent participants individual emails to confirm accuracy of the data analysis process and eventual findings. Participants were asked to verify the accuracy of and provide feedback on three items that were attached to the email: (a) the participants own professionally prepared transcription, (b) the titles, and descriptions of the themes and subthemes, and (c) the placement of their pictures within the themes and subthemes. Appendix J includes a copy of the email sent to participants about the member-check verification process, along with the conceptual map of the themes, corresponding definitions of themes, and a chart of the participants’ photographs that they received to engage in the member-check process.

**Critical Friend**

As an additional step, the researcher enlisted the support of a doctoral student colleague as a *critical friend* in an effort to “reduce or even remove blind spots” (Gordon, 2006, p. 5). The critical friend was selected due to her relative expertise on roles, identity, and adult learners as evidenced by the theory and literature included in her dissertation and related scholarship. The critical friend did not receive or have access to information that would have revealed the identity of participants; rather, the critical
friend read the coding schema and raised important questions about how certain themes emerged and how the researcher defined subthemes. The critical friend also provided literature that helped to discern between definitions of themes and subthemes. For example, the critical friend shared literature about role theory and role conflict (see the work of Merton, 1957; Tubre & Collins, 2000), adult socialization (see Tierney, 1997; Gaff & Lambert, 1996), and identity (see Ibarra, 1999).

While member checks and a critical friend helped to establish trustworthiness of the study, and despite being thoughtful and systematic in approach, all designs are susceptible to limitations (Shadish & Luellen, 2006). Limitations and delimitations are the focus of the next section.

**Limitations and Delimitations of the Design**

Threats to validity are inherent in designs as limitations are not under the control of the researcher. Hence, the researcher listed several limitations of this study. First, because this study explored phenomena and experiences unique to a particular group of people in a specific context, the researcher could not claim generalizability (Patton, 2002). Therefore, the experiences of participants in this study may or may not apply to other doctoral students in the same program, nor at the selected university, nor among other doctoral students in other similar programs at other universities.

In addition, historical experiences endured by participants also problematize validity (Shadish & Luellen, 2006). The researcher could not foreshadow events or experiences that may have influenced how participants viewed their experiences or responded to questions about their experiences in a doctoral program. There was also the
chance that participants may not be genuine in their responses about their experiences. They perhaps chose to disclose information that they thought the researcher preferred to hear, rather than disclosing their true thoughts and feelings. Moreover, participants may have chosen to leave the study, presenting another threat to validity called attrition (Huck, 2008).

Besides limitations, delimitations provided additional threats to validity by way of sample selection. This study elicited responses from four participants at one university, which at the nascent stage in a line of promising research is a credible approach (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Limited resources, gatekeeping and access issues, as well as time demands prevented the researcher from studying a larger number of students at additional universities. Large numbers could have led to extremely lengthy interviews, especially if the number of photographs had not been limited. Given these limitations and delimitations, this study offered an initial step in exploring mid-career doctoral student experiences in one university’s educational leadership program.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the study’s design and systematic steps in the data generation and analysis process. The use of photo-elicitation was selected based on the epistemological perspective of the researcher and the method’s relevance to the study’s research question as stated as the following: What are mid-career professionals’ descriptions of their experiences in seeking the PhD in educational leadership programs as generated from photo-elicitation methodology? The chapter
began with the researcher’s subjectivity statement that disclosed potential biases and assumptions that may have affected the research process. Then, the researcher described steps involved in securing participants as well as the three instruments used to generate data. Two levels of coding were employed in the data analysis phase and several measures were taken to establish trustworthiness in the study. Limitations and delimitations were also discussed in an effort to be transparent about threats to validity. The next chapter, Chapter Four, describes findings from the study.
CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter includes findings from the data analysis process and contains 10 sections. The first section provides a brief summary of the study including methodological procedures and information about the critical friend and member check process. The second section offers details about the research context, while the third section provides an introduction to study participants. The fourth section presents the findings from the study, arranged by overarching themes and subthemes. As appropriate, the participants’ photographs illustrate the themes. The fifth section of the chapter provides a summary of participants’ narratives and photographs by theme. The sixth section provides participants’ reflections on taking photographs to describe their doctoral student experiences, while the seventh section lends a post-analysis subjectivity reflection. The eighth section discusses relationships between the themes from the study and the Four S System of transition theory. Finally, the ninth and tenth sections answer the research question followed by a summary of the chapter, respectively.

Study Overview

This study explored PhD-seeking student experiences from the perspectives of four mid-career professionals in the educational leadership (EDL) doctoral program at Clemson University using photo-elicitation. The research question for this study asked: *What are mid-career professionals’ descriptions of their experiences in seeking the PhD*
in educational leadership at Clemson University as generated from photo-elicitation methodology?

The purpose of the study was achieved through an emergent, participant-generated methodology called *photo-elicitation*. The methodological procedures engaged four participants in documenting their doctoral student experiences by taking 10 photographs, writing captions about the photographs, and participating in a 30-minute to one-hour photo-elicitation interview focused on three of the 10 photos. The interview provided participants an opportunity to reflect and explain meanings of three photographs and their captions. A third source of data was the researcher’s field note instrument used to generate post-interview notes, including information about the researcher’s subjectivity.

Data analysis involved analyzing the interview data, photographic captions, and the field notes. Photographic images were considered in light of captions, but while photographs served as the focal point for conversation during the photo-elicitation interview, their use in photo-elicitation was concerned with the perceptions, meanings, and representations attributed to the images (Guillemin & Drew, 2010; Pink, 2007).

Data were analyzed through two cycles of coding: *in vivo* and theoretical. *In vivo* coding literally translates from Latin as *in life*. The point of *in vivo* coding is to allow the participants’ voices to dominate and live throughout the research process (Saldaña, 2009). Theoretical coding is the process of recoding data from first cycle coding in an attempt to condense the information to a few words that explain what “this research is all about” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 146). During the theoretical coding cycle, the
researcher paid special attention to see if categories emerged along tenets of the conceptual framework, the Four S System of transition theory in a dynamic and interactive grounding of an existing theory (Saldaña, 2009; Wolcott, 1999).

The data analysis process also involved enlisting the help of a critical friend to verify accuracy of findings, and engaging participants in member checking. Both processes took place after the researcher established themes, subthemes, and determined placement of the photographs within the themes and subthemes. A critical friend whose scholarship includes role theory, identity theory, conducted in a qualitative paradigm. The critical friend reviewed the list of codes, and definitions of themes. As a result, the researcher separated subthemes Roles and Identity into two subthemes because the critical friend clarified how research and theory differentiate the two concepts. Specifically, roles describe a position or task-based contribution someone may serve whereas identity describes individuals’ perspectives about themselves and with whom they affiliate.

Member checking occurred after the critical friend process. To conduct member checking, the researcher sent the four participants an email with related attachments (See Appendix J). The member check process requested participants’ perceptions about (a) the accuracy of their own professionally prepared transcriptions, (b) the researcher’s definitions of themes and subthemes, and (c) a list of their photographs displayed by theme and subtheme to verify the accuracy of where the photos should be placed in the study. The request emphasized the importance of the participants’ feedback concerning the degree of validity of the researchers’ categories and themes in representing their
voices. As an aid to this request, participants received a conceptual map of themes. At this point, the researcher provided a chance for participants to consider the study’s use of all ten of their photographs, and the researcher reminded participants of their right, per IRB provisions, to remove any of the photos from use in the study. Additionally, the researcher also verified during this time that participants’ photographs did not create ethical dilemmas as described in Chapter Two because of the photographic content.

In response to the invitation to engage in member checks, three participants provided written feedback, and one participant followed-up with a phone call to the researcher. They each indicated their preferences.

In regards to the transcriptions, only one participant provided feedback. The participant communicated that the name and spelling of the school for which he was the principal was inaccurate. This participant’s correction did not affect the themes or analysis process; however, as the researcher did not mention the school name in the study per the confidentiality statement found in all of the IRB materials.

In regards to the titles and descriptions of the themes, the participants provided no feedback. However, three participants raised questions about the placement of some of their photographs, and proceeded to expand their explanations of the meanings of those photographs—particularly the photos not discussed in the photo-elicitation interview. For example, the researcher made decisions about where to place photographs based on both captions and images in light of the transcribed interviews. Participants, as the originator of the photos and captions, were able to provide additional insights about the meanings and placement of each of the photographs.
As a result of the member check process, photographs were moved from one theme category to another, included in the study, or excluded from the study based on participants’ feedback. More specifically, based on the analysis process, the researcher concluded that 36 of the 40 photographs were related to the themes and thus should be included in the findings.

During the member check process, participants clarified the meaning behind the four photographs that were not originally included in the findings, and in some cases, the researcher asked them to elaborate on the meanings of other photographs that were not discussed in the photo-elicitation interview. The discussion led to all four photographs being added back for inclusion in the study for a total of 40 pictures. However, after the researcher reminded participants that all 10 of their pictures could potentially be used if the photos fit within themes, two participants asked that pictures revealing their identities be removed from the study. Therefore, three of the 40 photographs were excluded from the findings. The researcher digitally modified two other pictures to protect the participant’s identity. Consequently, 37 of the 40 photographs taken by participants were included in the study and presented throughout the chapter.

The researcher would also like to note that participants moved eight of the 37 photographs to other theme categories than were originally placed by the researcher. Additionally, one participant commented that while she did not take a picture of her family due to distance constraints, she wanted to include the commentary about her family discussed in the photo-elicitation interview within the appropriate theme category.
Given the researcher’s allegiance to the fundamental premise that the participants’ perceptions underlie the salience of this study (Saldaña, 2009), the researcher accommodated all of their requests. The final themes and examples represent the participants’ stated recommendations and validations from the member-check process.

**Research Context**

The Eugene T. Moore School of Education at Clemson University is located in the historic landmark campus building, Tillman Hall. According to the School’s website, the School of Education is home to over 600 undergraduate and 600 graduate students, and currently hosts 11 master’s degree programs, two education specialist (EdS) degrees, and two doctoral programs. The Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctor of Philosophy offers two concentrations: one in preschool through secondary education (P-12) and the other in higher education (HE).

Furthermore, not all of the School of Education’s programs, faculty, or classes are housed in Tillman Hall. These factors make for a contemporary doctoral program with multiple delivery modes for students to engage in the learning process. For example, the EDL doctoral program in both concentrations, primarily offers courses in the evenings when practicing professionals are available. In addition to face-to-face courses, classes are offered online, at satellite campuses of Clemson University such as the University Center in Greenville, and off campus in elementary and secondary schools. It is also not uncommon for courses to be held on weekends, although football season makes it difficult to park on campus and thus most fall weekend courses are moved to the Greenville University Center. Doctoral student orientation is also held on a weekend.
once a year, and historically in Greenville, but for different reasons—to avoid conflicts with Clemson’s undergraduate students’ move-in to their campus housing in the fall.

Full-time EDL graduate research assistants (GAs), currently share office spaces in the basement or on a hallway (dubbed by some as the GA Hallway or Grad Row) on the third floor of Tillman. While part-time students do not have offices on the hallway nor even a common gathering place, these EDL students frequent Grad Row to drop in on their GA colleagues and work on common research assignments and projects.

**Introduction to Study Participants**

As indicated in Table 4.1, the four participants in the study were at various stages in the EDL PhD program at Clemson University. The range of credit hours earned was used to get an understanding of students’ experiences at various stages in the doctoral process, given that an academic year is comprised of three semesters (fall, spring, and summer), and a minimum load is nine hours for full-time students and six hours for part-time enrollees. Participants’ age ranges provided additional context about their non-traditional status and these ranges confirm the national demographics showing that Education graduate students are generally 10 to 20 years older than other disciplines’ doctoral students (Nettles & Millett, 2006). To preserve confidentiality, participants selected their own pseudonyms or in one case, based on the participant’s request, the researcher assigned one.
Beyond these general characteristics, the participating PhD students offered personal background details. These details were elicited in the interview protocol (See Appendix H).

**Jacob.** During the study, Jacob was a full-time student in the EDL PhD program, Higher Education concentration. He also was a graduate assistant (GA) with an office on the third floor hallway provided for EDL’s GAs. Jacob knew from the time he was an undergraduate student that he wanted to attend graduate school at the masters and PhD level. “It’s always been on my bucket list, and in my family there’s a legacy of university/college administrators on the executive level—VP, president, whatever the case may be,” he explained. Despite his family’s history of university leadership, Jacob was not interested in working on the collegiate level until undergraduate college. While a bachelor’s degree student at Tuskegee University, Jacob worked for the Vice President of Student Affairs and based on that experience Jacob proclaimed, “This is what I want to do one day.” Nevertheless, Jacob pursued a career in business following his

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>HE or P-12</th>
<th>FT or PT</th>
<th>Years of Professional Experience Prior to PhD</th>
<th>Years in EDL PhD Program</th>
<th>Credit Hours Earned in PhD</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>HE</td>
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<td>PT</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Erin</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>PT</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>41-45</td>
</tr>
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undergraduate studies but always planned to pursue his interest in student affairs in graduate school (masters or PhD level).

After 25 years of a successful career, Jacob decided it was time to switch careers. He resided in a large city, with plenty of universities from which to choose. However, Jacob explained that “Clemson felt more at home than any of the other institutions, and then at the same time, the financial support that the university gave, along with the reputation, and closeness to home—knowing that I would be within a certain distance from family and friends—played a part in coming as well.”

**Marie.** Marie participated in this study while she was a part-time student in the EDL PhD, Higher Education concentration. Unlike Jacob, Marie was already working in the field of education when she decided to return to graduate school. Marie was a practicing teacher, and at the time, planned to get a master’s degree to become a professional school counselor. However, she read that many graduate schools required prospective counselors to have at least three to five years of classroom experience before consideration for application to graduate work. During that waiting period, Marie switched her interest from aspirations of counseling high school students to working with undergraduate baccalaureate students—primarily because of her involvement as a national board member for her undergraduate sorority.

Marie discovered Clemson while taking her middle school students on a tour of mostly large universities in the southeast. She was already in the process of considering graduate schools when the tour began, but based on her experiences as an undergraduate at a small liberal arts college, Marie was skeptical about whether she would enjoy a large,
research university. Nevertheless, walking around Clemson’s campus she felt a connection. “Clemson is a large school, with a small school feel. When I started doing research about Clemson’s programs, I fell in love with it. I resigned from my position and entered the master’s program in student affairs full-time with an assistantship,” Marie commented. About a year into the program, the faculty encouraged her to apply to the doctoral program. Marie decided to enter the PhD as a part-time student with the rationale that she “did not want to miss too many more years of professional work experience.” Upon completing her degree, Marie plans to lead a division of student affairs and pursue an adjunct position at Clemson University or another university. Marie is also contemplating the professoriate as a full-time career option.

**Erin.** Erin is a full-time student in the EDL PhD program, P-12 concentration. Erin does not hold a graduate assistantship; instead, she finances her education through personal resources. Similar to Marie’s background, Erin’s path to the PhD was routed within the field of education with professional experience as a school psychologist. She planned to earn a PhD immediately following her master’s degree but decided that family responsibilities came first. Erin explained this decision: “I had three children in elementary school and even though my husband and I have a really good shared parenting approach, I couldn’t do that to them. And, my advisor didn’t think it was necessary at that point in my career based on my career goals of being a professor or a consultant to school systems. So, I just felt like I had plenty of time.”

Erin also shared that she was not sure of which degree program to enroll given her varied interests. However, when Erin made the decision to return to school to get a PhD
she chose EDL and Clemson for similar reasons as Jacob. She stated, “when I read the mission statement and came across the [program’s] five domains [of leadership, ethics, diversity, research and policy], I felt like my values and the things I wanted do were aligned to research, diversity and the other domains…Plus, Clemson is a reputable school and is close to my family.’’

**Derrick.** Derrick’s situation is different from Jacob’s, Marie’s, and Erin’s, because Derrick is from South Carolina, and grew up fully aware of Clemson's reputation and academic offerings. Nevertheless, Derrick described how he nearly missed the opportunity to attend Clemson University for his bachelor’s degree. He stated, “I was educated in South Carolina during a time when Black boys were considered disruptive or were put in special education for anything that the system decided was out of the ordinary. So, I’m thankful that I had parents who advocated for me and steered me towards a college, and [master’s and PhD] degrees especially at Clemson…There was never a question whether I would get a PhD.”

In addition to the encouragement by his parents, Derrick added that the choice of getting a PhD from Clemson was rather straightforward. “Clemson is a top university, but it’s the relationships I developed when I was here as an undergraduate and graduate student that resonated with me and called me to come back [for a PhD].” At the time of the study, Derrick was a school principal in a nearby large metropolitan city. He would like to become a superintendent of a school system following degree completion. To serve that aspiration, Derrick enrolled part-time in the Educational Leadership, P-12 concentration.
**Presentation of Findings**

The use of photographs in the research process served as a point of self-reflection and memory recall for participants (Guillemin & Drew, 2010; Harper, 2002), as well as a power equalizer and conversation stimulus between participant and researcher (Collier & Collier, 1986; Harper, 2002; Loeffler, 2004). Photographs also provide a means to elicit deep, emotional narratives through which individuals can understand and make sense of their experiences (Pink, 2007). Participants in this study discussed their experiences through photographic images that led to three central themes and two corresponding subthemes within each theme. The three themes were (a) Conflicted, (b) Commitment, and (c) Community, otherwise termed by the researcher as the Three Cs.

The theme Conflicted described the conflicts and challenges that Jacob, Marie, Erin, and Derrick endured as a result of adding PhD studies to their existing identities, established roles and responsibilities, and current pressures on their time. From the theme Conflicted, two subthemes surfaced: (a) Roles and (b) Identity. The subtheme Roles described the types of roles in which participants engaged, how those roles fit within the context of being doctoral students, and tools participants used to balance multiple and or competing roles. The second subtheme Identity examined participants’ feelings of legitimacy and explored how the four participants’ perceptions of identity were in conflict with or changed as a result of matriculating through the PhD program.

The second theme Commitment described the participants’ ability to persist and persevere in finishing the doctoral program despite challenges faced in route to degree completion. Commitment is supported by two subthemes: (a) Emotions and (b) Life
Experiences. Emotions described the ups-and-downs in the participants’ experiences as professionals in a PhD program. Emotions also explored the participants’ awareness of how the PhD connected to their future career trajectory, and thus their endurance of difficulties they experienced in route to degree attainment. Life Experiences is the second subtheme within Commitment. Certain life and work experiences of participants, along with age, and maturity—not necessarily stage in career—helped them cope with the emotional dynamics experienced in the doctoral program. While Life Experiences may seem like a strategy participants used to help them cope, participants reflected that life experiences made them more aware of the need to cope and deal with the challenges of the program in order to finish the degree successfully.

The third and final theme that emerged from the analysis process was Community. The theme Community described participants’ support systems that helped them cope with challenges in the PhD program, or supports that the participants recommended that if in place would help them feel a sense of belonging or community. Community was represented by two subthemes: Support and Strategies. The first subtheme, Support, explored the types of support systems that served as participants’ strategies for coping with difficulties incurred in the doctoral program. Strategies, the second subtheme, included strategies that participants used to advance in the program. Strategies also included a compilation of recommendations and suggestions made by the participants for their particular PhD program’s improvement. These suggestions were either explicitly recommended by participants as ways to help them transition and cope with challenges in
the PhD program, or through the participants’ narratives on support systems that presented a consistent pattern.

Narratives and photographs related to each theme are discussed below, followed by a summary of the participants’ collective experiences.

**Conflicted**

The first theme that emerged from the collective voice of the participants Jacob, Marie, Erin, and Derrick was Conflicted. Conflicted described the role conflicts and identity struggles in which participants found themselves as a result of adding the role of student to their existing role responsibilities and their own identities. Conflicted is supported by two subthemes: Roles and Identity.

**Roles.** The subtheme, Roles described the variety of roles participants assumed upon entering the PhD program, and the mix of experiences participants encountered as a result of those roles. Some participants discussed strategies for balancing multiple—and at times—competing roles.

**Jacob.** Jacob, a full-time student in the EDL higher education concentration took a photograph displaying his roles and he captioned it, “Organized chaos” (Figure 4.1).
The photograph outlines assignments for classes, dates for service such as Jacob’s involvement on the Clemson University Judicial Board, as well as dates and tasks related to conferences. Jacob commented that the picture “represents the many hats and the many roles I’m actually playing in addition to the class work—as far as being conscious of what I need to do to at this stage like presenting, publishing, getting more involved in student affairs service stuff, because I’m coming from a corporate not educational background, Jacob commented. He sounded perplexed as he went on. “It’s a constant reminder of that whole juggling act that goes along with being a PhD student,” Jacob concluded. What are noticeably missing from the photograph are roles and responsibilities related to Jacob’s personal life and or ways to balance the many roles.

The missing lists gain saliency in light of Jacob’s description of health issues that propelled him into a yet another role. Jacob learned of his failing health at the onset of
the PhD program. He took a picture of the Clemson University health center named Redfern to illustrate this role. He captioned it “My weekly reality” (Figure 4.2).

![Redfern Health Center](image)

**Figure 4.2. My Weekly Reality**

“Redfern,” Jacob commented, “is my home away from home because I go through those doors either 2 or 3 times a week, so it’s home away from home. The picture symbolizes my reality of juggling my academic responsibilities, juggling the things I’m doing in class, in the student affairs arena, and juggling the whole health aspect.”

Interestingly, while Jacob mentioned Redfern as a “very supportive place,” he noted that the facility also interfered with his role as a student because it took time away from school. He sounded a bit defeated when he stated, “It’s like, ‘wow!’ The burden of the balancing act is just reality. It’s a little scary because I know there’s a lot of loose ends I need to tie up regarding my actual research agenda—upcoming pilot study, preparing for comps, and even getting in a place where I’m ready to even undertake those tasks given my health.”
Marie. In contrast to Jacob, adding the role of a PhD student was business as usual for Marie. She enrolled in the PhD program immediately following her Master’s degree and expressed that she was “already used to juggling…,” Marie commented. She did not want to take time off for fear of getting “used to what it’s like to just have a job and not have to balance class,” she concluded. Marie illustrated these feelings in the photograph of her calendar captioned “Typical week…” (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3. Typical Week of Balancing a Full-Time Job, Teaching for the Master’s Program, and Taking 6 Doctoral Credits per Semester.

A closer look at the events on the calendar shows a professional busy at work during the day and personifying an additional role in the evening due to night courses.

Nevertheless, Marie assumed many roles for several reasons, one being her career aspirations to lead a division of student affairs at Clemson or another university maybe
even outside of her current division. Marie felt that building connections across divisions was critical to her career success despite the time and effort it took to engage in these activities. She seemed reassured when she expressed that “It’s nice when you get an email from the Office of Community and Ethical Standards to assist when they have an emergency discipline, and they have an “all hands on deck”—I’m in career services—so for them to be able to email me at 5 and say, ‘Can you be here by 6?’ that’s a good thing.” In essence, Marie felt that assuming multiple roles even as a PhD student added to her marketability for future jobs, rather than serving as a point of distraction as Jacob indicated.

As a further contrast to Jacob, Marie illustrated and discussed the importance of finding balance. She took a picture of a football game as an example of an enjoyable pastime (Figure 4.4). Marie also expressed the usefulness of caffeine in order to fulfill roles despite being tired in a picture she captioned “Caffeine – need we say more?” (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.4. All Work and No Play, Does Not Make a Successful Doc Student. Need to Appreciate the Place You Work and Study.
Erin. For Erin, in the P-12 concentration, the decision to enter a PhD program full-time was intentional. Erin wanted to avoid having multiple, competing roles that Marie spoke of, and that Erin reportedly experienced on her job. Erin felt as though she would have to balance more responsibilities had she enrolled as a part-time student. The picture, which Erin captioned “Fluid” (Figure 4.6), represented her definitive decision to enter the PhD program as a full-time student, and how in many ways her former career role helped with time management that ultimately made the PhD process more fluid.
Erin explained in the following comment: “I had a dual role on my job as a leader [running a special program] for the school system. I did three schools as a school psychologist, and then I was in charge of planning, implementing all the training, running this website. I had been talking about going back to school. I would have made it work part-time but I was getting tired of doing everything and it would have been a lot. I looked around and my kids were in college and my husband was okay,” Erin shared. As she went on, Erin sounded confident about the role her professional career played in her adjusting to the PhD program. “I do think that my career helped me to manage my time better in the [PhD] program because I was already used to juggling a lot of things at once,” Erin expounded.

Erin also mentioned the possibility of becoming a professor, so the need to juggle her job while in school in order to stay marketable for another school district job seemed unnecessary. Erin’s thoughts are reminiscent of Jacob’s experience given that he also
stepped out of his professional role to assume full-time study. However, Jacob left his job to become relevant in a new field while Erin appeared to indicate that her marketability to a school setting was not at risk because her program concentration was within her same area—the P-12 domain—and she was moving to a new sector of the same career.

Erin may not have had to juggle the role of student with that of a professional in practice, but she did find that the PhD program brought constraints on her personal life because of the demands of coursework. Even so, similar to Marie, Erin found ways to balance life by not foregoing hobbies. Erin looked determined as she remarked “You start saying, ‘Oh, I don’t have time,’ but if you don’t find those outlets, it’s just not going to work…. You end up being frustrated, but you have to be okay saying that ‘I’m going to be stuck some days.’ So finding a groove and balance is important and that worked for me, saying that I’m not giving up on things like yoga.”

**Derrick.** Jacob, Marie, and Erin’s decision to transition to a PhD program often presented role conflicts and the need to balance. For Derrick, managing multiple, competing roles was both his professional and personal role given his life as father, school principal, and student. “I play many roles as a principal alone,” Derrick said. “I’m the counselor, mother, father, friend, and confidant.” Derrick took a photograph of a staff meeting to depict his role as a principal—his responsibility to students and staff captioned “Responsibility and Service” (Figure 4.7). He also took a picture of students in the cafeteria scattered about as a representation of the complexity of his job (see Figure 4.8).
Even though Derrick enjoyed his job and decided to enroll part-time in the PhD program in order to keep his job in route to the superintendency, Derrick discussed several occasions where he had to make trade-offs between roles and responsibilities. He sounded disappointed when he said, “[My son] had a program where he was master of
ceremonies and I missed that, and it just ate me up…I feel like a bad parent if I’m not there…I don’t want my son to be like ‘Dad, you suck as a dad.’”

Derrick also explained that balancing all of the roles while a doctoral student affected his marriage. He recounted the first two years of the doctoral program: “I am fully accountable for my actions, but I was taking 12 hours a semester, and I was a teacher, and then I became math department chair,” Derrick remarked. He threw up his hands and said, “I know, it was crazy! And with two kids. I had a lot of credits, but I was burned out, and my marriage failed.” Although Derrick experienced role conflict due to the many roles he played, like Jacob, he did not discuss particular activities or take pictures that helped him stay balanced the way in which Erin and Marie described. Rather, Derrick commented that his “faith helped to sustain him and keep him going in challenging times.” He also described the importance of continuing to manage roles. Derrick captioned a photograph “No more chains…He will create his own world to lead” (Figure 4.9) to illustrate his commitment to provide a secure future for his children that would come with obtaining a PhD. “I am many things to many people,” Derrick said with purpose, “but it will all be worth it in the end. I can only imagine where my son will go based on what his dad is trying to do right now.”
Identity. The subtheme Identity explored participants’ feelings of legitimacy and how the participants’ perceptions of identity changed, differed, or were in conflict with other identities as a result of entering a PhD program.

Jacob. Jacob captioned one picture with the title, “Ongoing travel back and forth” (Figure 4.10). Jacob’s stated that this picture showed his struggle with the question of “who am I now?” On one hand, the picture illustrated the ongoing back and forth travel from Clemson to Atlanta for medical treatment and the need for camaraderie. On the other hand, the photograph represented the struggle in identities and roles between Jacob’s past as a professional to his current identity as a doctoral student. He was constantly shifting between both worlds, Jacob explained, “I just feel being in school is
different because you come from being a professional where you dress differently, act
differently, you’re treated differently, you have more money to being back in a collegiate
environment,” he remarked. As if realizing that he may sound like he was complaining,
Jacob’s voice became stronger and he said, “I’m not complaining, because I want this
career change but it’s sometimes difficult to remember who you are when so much has
changed—especially when you leave a big city for a small town like Clemson.”

Figure 4.10. Ongoing Travel Back and Forth

Despite the identity conflicts, Jacob was appreciative of his professional identity
because he believed that his prior work experiences would help him be more marketable
upon degree completion. Jacob commented: “I definitely think it’s a plus that I come
[into the PhD program] with years of experience. I believe many of those skills are
transferable. From the standpoint of leadership skills, from the standpoint of knowing
how businesses work, from the standpoint of budgetary related information, organization,
and even soft skills. I know that work and the skills are the same even though I’ll be in a
different field.” Nevertheless, Jacob has doubts whether his years of professional experience in business will be valued in student affairs even with a PhD. Jacob remarked, “I’m at the point in the program where I’m having to think about “Where the heck am I going to go with all this? Where am I going to land? Will I be marketable enough for a university to hire me? Even though I have the skills, will they value my previous years in business?”

Professional identity was not Jacob’s only concern as it related to the question of “who am I now?” Jacob was also concerned about perceptions related to his student identity. While Jacob mentioned that he has always served in mentoring roles, he never served in a capacity where he was still learning and rather uncertain about his own abilities. He was always in a situation where his mentees were younger and he was imparting skills that he himself already had. Given that he was still learning to balance multiple roles and competing identities as a doctoral student, Jacob wondered whether he would be a role model next year as one of the advanced students on the graduate assistantship hallway. Jacob started laughing, but then looked serious when he reflected on the matter. “Ok, you started out on the hall, and now you’re about to become the senior that other people might look up to just like I look up to [current advanced doctoral students] on the hall, so that’s an uneasy, scary thought because I’m still learning too.”

**Marie.** Consistent with Jacob’s experience, Marie reported struggles with identity conflicts and feelings of legitimacy. However, Marie also talked about her identity as it related to being a part-time student, and at times, how she viewed some of the differences in experiences between those enrolled in part-time versus full-time study.
Marie recapped her decision to enroll part-time in the doctoral program while holding up the number of fingers that would represent her time away from professional practice if she enrolled full-time. “It was truly the taking off another three years of professional experience for a total of five [years] in one chunk: two years of a master’s program, three years in a doctoral program—that’s half a decade,” Marie nearly shouted. She gave a look as if to say “not me” as she continued. “I didn’t want to be one of those people where you’ve got the credentials and you don’t have the experience, even being a research assistant. If I wanted to go to a practitioner job, I was going to have to do a lot of outreach to the division and a lot of committee experience and things like that. So, that was how I made that decision.”

Marie was also sensitive to the fact that as a part-time student, she may have missed opportunities experienced by full-time students that would help prepare her for the professoriate. In regards to those sentiments, she sounded satisfied while commenting, “So I know there’s two different experiences occurring, and while everybody would love to have both at the same time—because the full-time students are getting more research experience and collaborating with faculty more and part-time folks are getting more work experience—you can’t have it all.”

Marie elaborated on work experience and perks later in the conversation. “I’m able to participate in decision making on another level as a full-time employee unlike when I served as a graduate assistant.” Moreover, some of the perks from her professional life overflowed into her student life as displayed in the picture of her employee-parking pass (Figure 4.11).
Despite Marie’s confidence in choosing part-time enrollment, Marie did not want others to perceive her to be less serious about or committed to the doctoral program because she did not chose to enroll full time. Marie captured that sentiment in the photograph about her taking five days off in between earning her masters and the start of the doctoral program. She wanted to be seen as legitimate, namely because of the amount of time and effort she put into creating a practitioner-scholar identity,—teaching courses, maintaining excellent grades, researching, and presenting at conferences even while working full-time. Marie took a picture of a scrapbook she made following her master’s graduation and prior to the start of the PhD programs—a total of five days (see Figure 4.12).
Marie further illustrated her concern about her legitimacy as a PhD student when she said, “I don’t want to ever be reflected as that, ‘Ah, you just went part-time. You were just doing it for the letters [PhD, behind your name].’ I would want the full-time students on [Grad Row] to look at me and at least go, ‘She’s not one of those part-time students. She is legitimate. She is in it for the right reasons.’ It’s not just, ‘How can I take all the online courses and just progress through this and get it done?’” Marie concluded. Marie further illustrated her dedication to the PhD program and acceptance of her newly defined scholarly identity as represented by photographs that illustrated her commitment to reading outside of class and knowledge of the American Psychological Association Publication Manual (APA, 2010)—the professional style manual used in the behavioral and social sciences (See Figures 4.13 and 4.14). Interestingly, while Marie
shared that balancing roles was important as evidenced by the picture of the football stadium in the previous subtheme, Roles, the lack of pictures depicting scenes outside of work and school in the Identity subtheme were glaringly absent from her photographs.

Figure 4.13. Reading Outside of the Assigned Reading Helps Bring New Perspectives.

Figure 4.14. The Doctoral “Bible.”
Erin. Complementary to Marie’s and Jacob’s descriptions, Erin experienced identity changes as she transitioned to the PhD program. While Jacob described challenges in professional identity and Marie talked about identity in the realm of part-time versus full-time, Erin commented on adjusting to academic demands particularly the writing. “As a professional, I had to write quite a bit, so I was used to writing, but they were from templates, and it was all about individual students, and so it became habitual, and it was easy….so I had to shift back into writing as a student and writing papers in a different manner.” Even though it had been some time, Erin felt as though her master’s program—in some ways—had prepared her for doctoral level courses. “In terms of things like APA—all of that, my master’s program had high expectations for my writing and for using APA and writing in a certain way, so eventually I remembered. It’s like riding a bike, you slip back into it.”

In other ways, however, Erin felt that the leap from professional to student was more difficult, because like Jacob, her perceptions of what doctoral student experience would be like were in many ways misinformed. Recalling her preliminary exams, Erin took a picture of her feelings of being trapped in volatile water that she captioned “Stuck and volatile” (Figure 4.15)—a clear contrast from her picture titled “Fluid” discussed in the Role subtheme section. Erin slumped in her seat and explained further. “Prelims, that’s where that turbulent water—that volatile water was—it was a great learning experience, but I’ll just say I was cocky because of my experience with my master’s, because of my background, because I had a pretty good track record professionally and as a student. I felt good about it. I felt like I had prepared really well, but what was funny
was—the very first question I went, ‘I don’t know how to answer this.’ Then during the prelim meeting with my committee it got worse. In talking with other students, it sounded like it was going to be more laid back… I was preparing for and planning that we would talk about my goals and aligning with my GS2… I really underestimated—I should have gone back and read my answers. I was way too cocky.”

Figure 4.15. Stuck and Volatile

Despite misunderstandings between the rules of engagement for academia versus a professional work setting, Erin assumed an attitude towards academics that was similar to Marie. Both individuals wanted to feel a sense of validation, but Erin’s need for legitimacy appeared intrinsic when compared to Marie who often talked about wanting to appear serious about the PhD program and legitimate to other doctoral students, particularly the full-time doctoral students. In contrast, Erin realized that she was responsible for her own learning and noted that the realization was a big transition
between her expectations coming into the PhD program and reality of the PhD process. Erin explained that she took a doctoral level course from a professor that did not always provide meaningful feedback, if feedback was given at all. Rather than succumb to low expectations, instead, Erin found herself saying decisively, “Ok, you still need to be rigorous.” I want to learn. I’m not here to meet a low standard. I need to have a high standard for myself, so I need to apply that no matter what the expectation is because really, I’m a PhD student, and [the professor] should not be holding my hand. You know?”

However, in other ways, Erin’s expectations were met. Erin expressed her excitement over the diversity of racial/ethnic groups, experiences, and variety of professions that were represented in the program. Erin took a photograph of colorful markers as a representation of the various types of diversity in the program that she simply captioned “Diversity” (Figure 4.16). For Erin, the diversity recalled an important part of her identity that had long been suppressed but emerged when she enrolled in the doctoral program. Erin smiled and explained further, “I remember going home and just being so happy to be with people of different races, the variety of professions and [careers] people want to have when they get out, and even the perspectives that come from being in class with P-12 and Higher Ed people….I missed it because [my high school] in [another state was so integrated…but I had gotten away from that, because some of the schools in [local areas] are bad with diversity, and I missed it until I got into the PhD program…..so just the influence of those different viewpoints and perspectives, and different backgrounds in terms of our education has been really interesting,” she said.
Erin put her hand on her chest as if holding something dear to her and said, “It’s brought back a part of myself that was missing—a part that’s important to me now and for my future career,” Erin concluded.

Figure 4.16. Diversity

Derrick. Similar to his P-12 counterpart, Erin, and HE participant, Marie, Derrick’s identity struggles were in many ways related to academics. To illustrate this point, Derrick took a picture of his office at work and captioned it “Late night debate about purpose” (Figure 4.17). Looking at the photograph seemingly through tired eyes, Derrick communicated that the conference table in his office is not filled with work related items, rather schoolwork. Despite the caption, Derrick referred to the picture during the photo-elicitation interview “as the work looking back at me” to explain just how much time and energy being a PhD student added to his many roles and identities.
In a similar fashion, Derrick talked about the challenges shifting through and between a professional work identity and that of a practitioner-scholar, especially because of his leadership position. The picture captioned “Multitasking on multiple levels” (Figure 4.18) is his symbol of the dichotomy of being a leader who is also in a PhD program, despite his awareness of the necessity of leaders continuing to engage in learning. “Even leaders need to continue to learn, but I think that there’s a clear contrast coming from being the leader of 500 people every day,” Derrick said “to where I’m trying to get my feet wet again and get into this godly mindset of getting the work done at a higher level. So this was a transitional semester for me because when I got my grade on one of my papers, I said, “Wow, this sucks,” but it’s a humbling experience and only compels me to work harder, do better, to learn, to ask for help, so it’s an interesting contrast.”
Summary of Conflicted

The four participants in this study: Jacob, Marie, Erin, and Derrick, assumed multiple roles for a variety of reasons. Differences emerged between the two higher education concentration participants. These differences were not due to full-time or part-time status, rather between the way Jacob and Marie perceived how to manage the role and identity of becoming a PhD student. For example, while Jacob felt that the roles he assumed were in competition with one another, Marie indicated that the multiple roles she was engaged in were welcomed additions that would help advance her career. Marie also took photographs and described a few ways that she was able to balance competing roles. Jacob’s depiction of him driving back and forth from Clemson to Atlanta offered one way in which he coped.

In contrast to Jacob and Marie, as well as her P-12 counterpart Derrick, Erin took on full-time study in-part to avoid multiple, competing roles that she was experiencing on
her job prior to entering the PhD program and would likely continue to endure as a part-time student. Nevertheless, similar to Marie, she found ways to balance her personal life and academic demands. Derrick’s conversation about multiple, competing roles was perhaps the most complex because unlike Marie he was a parent, and in contrast to Erin and Jacob, he had young children still at home. Derrick also had the added responsibility of being a school principal—responsible for the learning, development, and safety of hundreds of students, faculty, and staff. Despite these role conflicts and the time it took away from his children, similar to Marie, he chose often to view the roles as positives relying on his faith to counterbalance the challenges.

Furthermore, the participants expressed the various ways that their identities were affected matriculating into and through the PhD program. Jacob talked mostly of transitioning from a big city to a small town and his successes and challenges in trying to assume a new identity as a student affairs professional in addition to his background in business. Interestingly, the hurdles that Jacob spoke of in building a new professional identity where the same issues that Marie feared and ultimately led to her decision to enroll in the EDL program part-time. However, even though Marie was confident in her decision to enroll part-time, she worried that full-time students and others would view her decision as her being less committed to the doctoral program. Meanwhile, Derrick—the other part-time student—tried to manage shifts, sometimes simultaneously, between his professional identity and evolving practitioner-scholar identity. Erin, on the other hand, did not experience competing identities, rather like Jacob; found that her perceptions and
expectations of what the PhD was all about were in many ways misinformed due to prior career success.

**Commitment**

The second theme Commitment described the participants’ commitment to the program as evidenced by their ability to persevere in light of ups-and-downs experienced in route to the PhD. Commitment also described the participants’ awareness of how life experiences and maturity, rather than stage in career, helped them to overcome challenges and gain perspective about resilience and persistence in the doctoral program. Two subthemes emerged within the theme: Emotions and Life Experiences.

**Emotions.** This subtheme captured the emotions that participants’ experienced because of their involvement in the PhD program. These emotions were often associated with differences between, and the transition from, work to the PhD program—often in relation to personal adjustments or coursework.

**Jacob.** The emotions that Jacob expressed were a result of the isolation he felt in the program and on campus, in addition to his health issues. Both issues suggested that while Jacob had been in the program for a year and a half, he was still dealing with emotions associated with the transition—being away from friends and family, and transitioning from professional to student. Jacob’s photograph captioned “Isolated and alone” (Figure 4.19) illustrated his feelings of loneliness. He looked downtrodden as he spoke and his voice was softer. “This picture pretty much describes the way I feel most of the time, because even though I might be surrounded technically by hundreds of students, I pretty much for the most part feel like I’m walking alone…being away from
friends and family, and the fact that no one’s around places further emphasis on the alone piece,” Jacob remarked.

Jacob commented further that other feelings of isolation had to do with the fact that after having worked for some many years and being accustomed to a working lifestyle, it was difficult transitioning to the role of student, especially enrolling as a nontraditional, full-time student in a traditionally aged college environment. Jacob looked down before he started talking and then said, “it’s just a little rough probably because I’m a nontraditional student and feeling the isolation in the absence of being in touch with the real world, so to speak—or at least the world that I’m accustomed to prior to coming to Clemson.”

*Figure 4.19. Isolated and Alone*
Simultaneously while Jacob was trying to adjust to a lifestyle absent of a professional career, he was dealing with a serious medical issue that drained the financial resources that at one time afforded him the ability to leave his job and enter the PhD program as a full-time student. “It was like being hit by a truck, especially in my case when I quit a job in corporate America to pursue my PhD full-time because I had the resources to, and then as soon as I arrived on campus, I’m being confronted with a major medical issue,” Jacob disclosed. Despite challenges, Jacob remained committed to persevering in the program. Jacob expressed emotions of thanksgiving concluding that “while I could never imagine getting seriously ill, I feel blessed to have had done well in my classes despite my health challenges.”

**Marie.** While Jacob was dealing with emotions caused by unforeseen health issues when he enrolled full-time, and coping with the transition from leaving work and family to pursue a PhD, for Marie, emotions experienced during the PhD program revolved around frustrations caused by a particular course (statistics). Emotions surfaced because of the difficulty of the course and the amount of time it took Marie out of the office, away from her work responsibilities. Marie captioned the following photograph in accordance with these feelings about the statistics course titling it “Bane of my existence” (Figure 4.20). Marie’s voice got louder as she reflected on the photograph in the following statement: “In the master’s program—I didn’t struggle through anything. I did very well, invested the time. This was a new “ah ha!” epiphany moment. It was the first time in my life that I have ever had to calculate what does one need to get on the final exam to not have to take the course again,” Marie declared.
Marie went on to comment on how the course interrupted her workday and caused her to miss significant time in the office. “This is why I also took a picture of this coursework versus anything else—all the other courses are in the evenings, online, or hybrid. This was a normal college class—three days a week; it took me out of my office every afternoon, and on the fourth day, it was a two-hour lab that took me out of my office. So to handle my counseling responsibilities of two rotations a week, I couldn’t do anything any afternoon, so my two counseling rotations had to get factored into the morning, not to mention the days I’m on committees.” Marie also felt guilty because she was asking for time off to attend class. “I felt very guilty because while it didn’t put a crunch on the office, I felt like it was,” Marie disclosed.

Similar to Jacob, Marie also experienced strains on her finances due to the PhD program. She commented that the statistics course—in addition to being the “bane of her
existence”—also served as a financial liability. To that affect, Marie stated, “I had to pay an extra credit because as an employee you get six free credits and that semester; I had seven because I took a 3-credit class and the stats class was 4 credits, so I had to do well. I invested in it. And, when Blackboard notifications went out that the grade had been posted, I was so relieved because I was like, “Ok, that was not 15 weeks of my life wasted. That was not money wasted. I can move on,” Marie explained.

In addition to financial strains, Marie’s emotional upheavals affected her relationship with her significant other. In the photo-elicitation interview, Marie described remarks made by her boyfriend when the statistics course was over. “Even my boyfriend at the time was like, “You’re back. Your face just changed,” Marie added with resolve, “And I knew then how stressful it was on a lot of different parts of my life.”

Nevertheless, akin to sentiments made by Jacob about being thankful, Marie also expressed emotions of thanks towards the student affairs faculty who encouraged her throughout the course and especially towards her work supervisor who allowed her to miss some hours in order to attend class. “I’m very blessed that our executive director went through this doctoral program, he gets it…and I could leave the office, and I didn’t get this evil eye look every time,” Marie concluded with joy in her voice.

**Erin.** Getting a foothold on academics presented similar feelings of frustration for Erin as they did for Marie, but for different reasons. While Marie was frustrated because some courses interfered with her full-time job, Erin struggled to adjust to the type of thinking and understanding required in a PhD course. Both Erin and Marie’s situations seemed opposite of Jacob who shared that he was performing well in
class despite health challenges. Nevertheless, Erin’s photograph captioned “Stuck and volatile” discussed earlier in this text led to a sensitive conversation about adjusting to coursework. Erin seemed to capture the stresses of coursework and the PhD process in the photograph captioned “Linear but not” (Figure 4.21). She took the picture to symbolize the fact that the PhD process was linear in many ways, due to the combined School of Education’s orientation for both PhD program, EDL and Curriculum and Instruction. Also the EDL PhD Handbook provided to students from the faculty set up a more-or-less sequential set of stages through the program.

Figure 4.21. Linear But Not

However, in many other ways, such as going from a professional setting to doing the type of scholarly thinking required in a PhD program, the path was not clear. This tension led to fear and doubt. Erin expressed these sentiments in the following comment. “I said this the first semester, and it continues to happen, that one day a week, I feel that resistance. I don’t want to work. Because part of being stuck and not knowing the path out is you start judging yourself, and you start feeling like, ‘I’m inadequate. I can’t do this.’”
remember one time this semester submitting a paper—it’s so funny. I got it back, and instead of getting 10 out of 10, I got an 8.5 and being so critical of myself, and going, ‘This is over my head. I don’t get it’ because we have nine books for that class, and I’m reading going, ‘I have no idea what [the author] is talking about.’” Erin further commented that while she is generally conversational in class, there were times in class when she hesitated to ask questions. “I’ve been so in my own world of school psych and [the program I run in the district] that I’m unsure if the question is only unknown to me or to everyone else,” Erin shared seemingly still pondering the answer.

Besides academic adjustments, and reminiscent of Marie’s experiences, Erin realized that her relationships were being affected by the adjustment to the PhD process. “I was so busy and so stressed out, that one day my husband was like, ‘What the heck is going on with you?’”, Erin nearly shouted. Erin did not comment whether her husband’s remark made her more sensitive to whether the challenges she faced in the PhD program were visible to others, as Marie alluded too. However, Erin went on to say that while she could easily explain the difficulty in adjusting to returning to school after being away for so long, she couldn’t yet understand the emotions of why it was so difficult matriculating through a PhD program—especially after earning a Master’s degree as a non-traditional student. Irrespective of these challenges, like Jacob and Marie, Erin found a way to view her circumstances positively. She shared that talking with other students and hearing their experiences were similar, helped her to feel less fearful about her ability to remain committed to finishing the doctorate program.
Derrick. Complementary to Erin’s dialogue on the difficulties of being a PhD student, Derrick captured similar emotions in his photographs. One of his photographs and captions was similar to Erin’s photograph titled “Linear but not” that showed a contrast between her expectations and the reality of the PhD process. Derrick’s photograph captioned “Clemson…the path is never straight” (Figure 4.22) seemed expectant of challenges and offered a more confirmatory notion of the struggles in the PhD process. The picture signaled Derrick’s belief that if he remained committed, he would reach degree completion. Derrick expressed these feelings in the following quote “I took that picture because it’s a winding and crooked path, but it’s going to lead me to the destination of the day, which is going to class. And that’s part of my journey. Taking it one day at a time. One class at a time, and then pretty soon, I’ll have my PhD.”

Figure 4.22. Clemson…The Path Is Never Straight
Derrick also shared thoughts that were similar to his part-time counterpart, Marie, whose earlier conversation about wanting to appear legitimate and amass the same level of scholarship complementary to some full-time students, was echoed in the following narrative by Derrick. “I also took that picture because I’m interested in the end result, but I want to get to the end result with integrity, if that makes any sense. There are no shortcuts to success, and I believe that, but the path is never straight. You never know what’s around the corner, but you’ve got to take that step,” Derrick said with confidence.

Even with his positive attitude, Derrick experienced other emotions in route to the PhD that were reminiscent of Erin’s conversation on adjusting to being back in a learning environment. Derrick said, “My colleagues, friends, or the people I lead at my school could tell you that I’m very humble and I’m always trying to learn as much as I can. I know principals have tremendous power, but I don’t flaunt it….but when I come here, being human, you have those self-doubts when things don’t go your way or you may be depressed—you’re just human, so you go through those emotions, and that’s what I experienced this particular semester because I’m coming back into the fold [after not taking courses for a few years],” Derrick commented.

Even still, identical to the other three participants, Derrick chose to view the complications of the PhD process as a learning experience. He closed with a tinge of excitement and hope and said, “It’s still an exciting time, and at the end of the night after I get through looking at my work, staring and it’s staring back at me, I say, ‘I’m going to get this done. Take it one-step at a time. I’ll get it done.’”
**Life Experiences.** The subtheme within Conflicted, Life Experiences, described how participants’ recalled prior life and work experiences and used those occurrences to build their resilience and commitment to persist in the PhD program. While many of the experiences illustrated various struggles and emotions, the focus is on the learning rather than the problem at-hand.

**Jacob.** Jacob has the longest professional work experience of any of the study’s participants and also, he was the oldest among the four of them. During the conversation about why he entered graduate school, Jacob reflected on what entering a PhD program would have looked like had he entered at an earlier stage in his life and career. Jacob paused and then commented: “I’m glad I actually put off getting the PhD and got some real life experience. Because I don’t think I would have been mature enough to enter into a PhD program straight from a master’s program, or straight from an undergrad program, without having years to experience life, and work for different organizations, and be exposed to different types of people, organizational cultures or mentalities—whatever the case might be.”

His narrative seemed to fit with the picture he took of a major metropolis that symbolized his outlook on the past, present, and future (see Figure 4.23).
Jacob speculated about his potential for PhD studies had he entered the program with less experience. “I think from that standpoint of being committed and being focused—especially with all the hurdles I’ve had to overcome, it wouldn’t have happened at a younger age. I probably would have quit and it’s probably something I would have come back to at the age that I am now. I don’t think I would have had the discipline had I done it earlier,” Jacob recalled.

The narrative about Jacob’s past experiences in light of entering the PhD, led to a conversation about the differences between work experiences and life experiences. Jacob shrugged his shoulders and shared his insights: “Well, I think it’s a combination of both. Work experience plays a role because you get accustomed to structure; doing things that are premeditated, and doing things where you have a strategy. It definitely plays a role—adding to being able to persist in our actual [doctoral] program. Life experiences as well, because through life experiences, you gain maturity. You fine tune your skills, learn
right from wrong, and you learn how to interact with different types of people in the real world and on the job,” Jacob concluded.

Jacob also felt that including mid-career in the title of the study was misleading and the title itself in some ways inaccurately labeled nontraditional doctoral students’ experiences. Jacob shared that when he first received the initial invitation to participate in the study he did not think the term midcareer described him. Although he had 25 years of work experience, he was just entering the education profession and thought participants had to be educators at mid-career. Jacob also shared that mid-career was an awkward word when evaluating and analyzing oneself in isolation from a career. Jacob explained that for him the doctoral student experience is “more about ‘What am I experiencing right now?’ [rather than] ‘How does my background as a working professional influence this?’”

In addition to life and work experiences and the title mid-career, the connection between age and an individual’s ability to persevere through a PhD program also came out during Jacob’s photo-elicitation interview. Jacob sounded appreciative when he commented that “having the ability to actually go back to school when so many other individuals may not have that opportunity makes you grateful. So you look at it from the standpoint of regardless of the hurdles, ‘I’ve got to take advantage of this because this is an opportunity that I’m not going to allow myself to not take advantage of’….you remind yourself to take advantage of the opportunity that’s being presented to you,” Jacob explained.
Marie. Seemingly channeling Jacob, during the conversation about her photograph captioned “Bane of My Existence…” (Figure 4.20), Marie referenced how her age coupled with life and work experiences signaled definitive choices about entering a PhD program. While Jacob was appreciative of the opportunity and felt that his years of work experience had prepared him for the decision to enroll, Marie took a more critical eye to her decision to enroll in the PhD program because she planned to do so immediately post-Masters. She said, “I was trying to figure out would this be the best program and the answer to myself was ‘Yes, I would be comfortable.’ What I didn’t need was to go somewhere where faculty were like — ‘We’re going to break you down and build you back up.’ I’m sorry, I’m too old for that. I don’t respond well to that,” Marie concluded by waiving her hands and shaking her head.

Once Marie was enrolled in the doctoral program, she realized how her experiences as a teacher helped her to be resilient in her quest to earn a doctorate. “I do know that I am getting more out of my education because I taught first,” Marie explained with pride. “I don’t know about younger people in the PhD program. But when I hear 22-year-olds talking about certain things in [the master’s program] class, I’m like, ‘you don’t even really know how to get through the challenges of graduate school until you’ve had a parent scream in your face that you are an incompetent teacher who can’t even calculate a grade correctly, and in actuality they’re the ones not calculating the grade correctly’….but having a woman tell you that when you’re 22 years old, ‘Ouch!’ You learn quick how to handle adversity, but [the master’s students are] still in that protected bubble when they first come in,” Marie expounded.
Marie’s previous work experience also helped her understand and make connections between courses and real-life experiences. She shared an example of how she grasped a theory by applying it to situations in practice, particularly with leaders from her sorority of which Marie served as a national board member. Marie said, “When I heard a theory, I could attach it to this one chapter president I worked with up at New York University, or I could attach it to this one alumnus out in Oklahoma that did things according to the theory. I had a framework. I know I benefited more from [these experiences]….I don’t want to speak to [younger, less experienced students in the program], but I know that I was attaching things to what happened in life, and there was a higher level of appreciation.”

Furthermore, Marie attributed her life and work experiences to her ability to relate to faculty, but like Jacob, Marie was not willing to credit age or work experiences independent of one another. Marie explained further. “That was a funky thing too—having to go from grading the papers to actually writing the papers. A little scary, but when you first turn in your first 20-page one, you’re like; ‘I’ll just turn this one in instead of having to grade all of these.’ I get that, and I don’t know if it’s just age. I’ve always been around people that were older than I was….So I don’t know if it’s [age]. I don’t know if it’s being a teacher” Marie remarked.

Even though Marie could not attribute her success to a particular experience or her years of life, she benefitted nonetheless. “I’ve been able to have candid conversations with faculty….I don’t know what it is with that. But I do know I am appreciative that I did see a middle school and high school. So I get that. And I know that’s helpful, but it
is been so beneficial to benefit from everybody else’s rich and diverse experiences
because I think there was a lot more of that in the doctoral program versus in the master’s
program. So I know I’ve gotten more out of [the doctoral] program,” Marie concluded
and leaned back in her chair.

**Erin.** Complementary to, Marie and Jacob, in the higher education
concentration, Erin attributed her growth and her commitment to persist in the PhD
program to life and work experiences. Erin’s picture captioned “Growth,” (Figure 4.24)
illustrated her progress through the doctoral program. Erin looked agitated as she
clarified the perspectives she has gained because of her first statistics test: “It was my
first test coming back [to school after having worked for many years], and I left there,
and I was so frustrated. Little things had been happening all morning, like my alarm
didn’t go off. Just stupid things. Then I came out and had a flipping parking ticket, and I
just started laughing, and I left and went, ‘You’re in your 40s. This doesn’t matter - how
you did on a test.’ It gave me perspective. I know that there are much, much bigger—I
mean, my mother is seriously ill. You know? I got an A in the class, but it puts it in
perspective.” Erin’s ability to put the PhD process in perspective, particularly in light of
her mother’s illness, are reminiscent of Jacob’s perspective on his ability to persist
through the program despite health challenges he personally faced.
Following the discussion on growth and perspectives, Erin shared that—like Jacob and Marie—she too was better off having gained work experience and waiting until she was more mature before enrolling in the PhD program. Recounting the story, Erin shared, “I think I would have been a lot more frustrated had I done the [PhD program] earlier. I think I would not have been able to step back and say, “Ok, let’s come up with some strategies.” I’m so much more self-aware. I have no idea who I was back then. I am so much more self-aware. I’m in tune with my body—I have more energy at certain times of the day, certain days of the week. Yeah. Knowing that helps. And just working through that in my career. School psychology requires a lot of time management, a lot of organization, and that’s not natural to me, but I was able to develop that and it’s been helpful to me at Clemson.” Erin expressed.
Then, in a manner similar to Maria’s self-reflective narrative, Erin went on to share ways in which she has benefited from the PhD program that were also connected to experiences with faculty. Erin did so by elaborating on experiences from preliminary exams. Erin conveyed that “in addition to having different expectations about what prelims were about, my lack of preparation had to do with my success career wise, and as a student—my previous experiences as a successful student…However, I realized after a couple of days, the whole point wasn’t for [the faculty to] say, ‘You’re wrong. It’s this way.’ It was to challenge me to go deeper, to rethink, instead of the old approach of right or wrong,” Erin remarked. Erin disclosed further that she has grown since being in the PhD program, “and at some point in the program it clicked that ‘learning isn’t about reading something and getting it; it’s such a process,’ and just exposing yourself to different ways of looking at something—and being ok with it,” Erin concluded smiling.

**Derrick.** Derrick chose to view life experiences as symbols of his determination to persevere in the PhD program. However, in contrast to narratives offered by his counterparts in the study, Derrick felt a responsibility to give back and make a difference in society realizing that he did not get to his present circumstances by himself. Through the picture he captioned “I see the world through a window,” (Figure 4.25) Derrick showed his desire to give back to others as others had given to him. Derrick sat up in his chair as he remarked, “I want to be an asset to someone—be part of something bigger than me. I am so blessed to have a job I love and be doing this PhD program at Clemson. It’s my time of trying to help people, you know?”
Derrick’s thoughts on the need to remain determined to finish the PhD. In conjunction with the photograph, Derrick retold a story from his childhood that helped him gain perspective on the need to continue in the PhD program and life’s challenges. Derrick sounded inspired as he told the story. “Toys-for-Tots came [to our school] because the word got out of all the wonderful things we were doing for children at our school. And they said, ‘Let us help you. Let us donate some toys.’ But, you don’t get that blessing unless you put some action behind it. You have to hustle and work, and [then] somebody’s going to help you. I always tell this story to my leadership team and my staff. I say, ‘You know, when I was in middle school, I was 4 [foot] 6 [inches]. I went to a dance, and nobody would dance with me. I kept asking girls to dance and they said, ‘No. Go on ugly boy.’ They’d say all kinds of things but I kept asking.’ And my point is somebody’s going to dance with you if you keep asking. And I was dancing at the end
of night. You don’t know unless you continue to keep hustling, keep asking,” Derrick declared with confidence.

![Image](image.jpg)

**Figure 4.26.** Giving and Hustle

As with the narratives from Jacob, Marie, and Erin’s life experiences that they drew upon to overcome challenges in their PhD journey, Derrick recollected how his story illustrated the need to remain steadfast in route to the PhD. “I use that story to share that you shouldn’t be defeated when you hear ‘No.’ You have to put the work in. You can’t be disappointed when things don’t go your way. Just try a different way and keep moving forward,” Derrick concluded.

**Summary of Commitment**

Commitment explored the emotions and life experiences that participants endured in route to the PhD, as well as their commitment to completing the program. Within the Emotions subtheme, participants’ descriptions of their photographs captured moments of uncertainty but also their reflections also offered resilience as they continued to persist despite challenges. Jacob’s narrative showed him adjusting to the social and
environmental differences of being a nontraditional student in a small, college town away from his professional career, family and friends in a large metropolis. Health challenges threatened his persistence in the program and presented financial obstacles to his decision to enroll full-time. Courses also presented concerns about finances for Marie who explained that despite the employee discount, she personally paid for a required course and thus had to perform well. Marie further explained that the course brought additional constraints on her time, because the course was offered during the day. Erin and Derrick also felt emotions associated with adjusting to being back in classes after years on the job, but Erin did not anticipate challenges along the way. In contrast, Derrick’s photo captions suggested that he expected—and perhaps had already experienced—some difficulties in the PhD program. Nevertheless, all participants chose to remain positive about their ability to overcome challenging emotions in route to the PhD.

The patterns of responses among all four participants supported the subtheme of Life Experiences. They cited incidents where their life and or work experiences coupled with maturity, helped them persevere in the PhD program. Jacob and Marie offered additional commentary on whether life, age, or work experiences were the main motivators behind their endurance throughout the doctoral process. Jacob shared further thoughts on his interpretation of the term mid-career.

Furthermore, Jacob, Marie and Erin expressed thoughts about their readiness to enter the PhD program prior to gaining substantial work experience, citing personal immaturity as reasons why they did not enroll earlier in life. Nevertheless, Marie and Erin cited incidents where they learned and grew upon entering the doctoral program. In
contrast, rather than reflect on experiences within the degree program that helped them persist, Jacob and Derrick focused on work and life experiences external to the PhD program.

Community

The third theme, Community, described participants’ support systems or lack thereof, and strategies used to navigate their doctoral student experiences. Responses within this theme divided into two subthemes: Support and Strategies.

Support. The first subtheme, Support, explored participants’ support systems including the types and functions of those supports.

Jacob. Jacob mentioned a variety of supports on which he has relied throughout his doctoral student experience; however, peer supports were the most lacking. Jacob commented, “Although I have associated some friends in the program, there isn’t really anyone at the university that I’ve formed a close bond with.” Jacob remarked that his lack of friends at the University was due primarily to a lack of camaraderie and willingness to form friendships on the part of African American males. Jacob took a picture of paraphernalia from his fraternity that he captioned “Missing my frat bros” (Figure 4.27) to represent the type of brotherhood he once experienced living and working in a large metropolitan area, and to represent what he feels is “completely lacking in the campus environment,” Jacob explained.
Jacob sounded somewhat dispirited as he elaborated on the meaning behind the photograph. “From the standpoint of coming from the city, which is a major metropolitan area, and having connections in that area—be it fraternity, be it social organization, sitting on boards of different nonprofits, volunteer work, or the connections I have with individual friends or family members—all those people, to be placed in an environment where there isn’t much brotherhood from the standpoint of being an African American male. And guys placing emphasis on, ‘Let’s look out for each other’. There isn’t even an interest in a simple ‘hello’”, Jacob explained as he threw up his hands seemingly in disgust. Nevertheless, Jacob reported that he found camaraderie and a sense of brotherhood with a most unexpected individual, as the following photograph captioned, “Ironically” (Figure 4.28) indicated. With this peer, Jacob felt as though he
could have honest conversations about race and its effects on society, more so than he could with some of the African American males on campus.

Figure 4.28. Ironically—Where I Go 4 Brotherhood

Despite Jacob’s feelings about the lack of brotherly support at Clemson, he has made some acquaintances, both male and female. Jacob expounded on why those relationships have worked, “The acquaintances that I’ve met on campus are greater with older, more mature students who have been out in the work world, been a part of a work force. There’s a whole different level of relate-ability that comes along with those relationships versus more traditional students.” Jacob also expressed that he “connect[s] more with individuals who are in their careers at Clemson.”
Jacob’s other form of support came from the doctors and nurses at Redfern, the Clemson University health center. While Jacob emphasized that Redfern was a symbol of yet another role he plays given that he is battling a serious illness, he reported that the doctors and nurses at Redfern have been a great support to him and in many ways enabled him to remain committed to continuing in the PhD program. Jacob recalled, “I still have a ways to go, but they’ve been there to give me tools that I need to help accept everything that I’ve experienced…combat feelings of depression and stress when it comes to issues with my life and school—even getting through losing a brother once I arrived at Clemson as well. So that little hospital on campus, it’s a Godsend,” Jacob said with a tone of thanksgiving.

In addition to Redfern, Jacob mentioned the support of EDL faculty, particularly in light of his illness. Jacob commented, “I do think that there’s a big disconnect between some professors and the students they actually mentor because of faculty time commitments. But I will say from the standpoint of being at a school and in a program where everybody is very supportive and empathetic of personal issues and the plight that students may actually encounter during their journey or experience—thumbs up.” The support from faculty meant so much to Jacob that it has influenced the type of institution he plans to work following degree completion. Looking reassured, Jacob commented, “Very supportive staff, very supportive professors and administrators, and I think it’s made me do some soul searching from a standpoint of the type of university where I hope to land once I graduate,” Jacob concluded.
Marie. Coinciding with some of Jacob’s experiences with EDL faculty, Marie’s primary support systems in the PhD program included the HE faculty and her family. Marie took a picture with her advisor who she calls “my South Carolina mom” (See Figure 4.29). The researcher, to protect Marie’s identity altered the picture. Marie explained why she took the picture. “I took this picture for several reasons because she pushes me without micromanaging me, but also because it includes the research piece and her support in getting me to the point of actually having that poster—even though it started in [another HE professor’s class]. That was such an accomplishment because two days prior, I took my prelims and I wanted to push them back, but [she and another student affairs faculty member] we’re like ‘Nope. You can do it. Get it over with’” Marie remarked.

Figure 4.29. Disseminating Findings from a Study Takes a Long Road with a Lot of Support, Especially from Faculty.
Marie went on to provide additional examples of ways in which her faculty advisor provides support, but still challenges Marie to grow. “So, I really appreciate the fact that she pushes me to new opportunities, allows me to do things, allows me to say, ‘No’ if I think it’s too much because she knows I don’t say, ‘No’ very often. But allowing me that out, but giving me first right of refusal on certain things which I appreciate…because she puts her neck out on the line. I watch her with what she does as a faculty member, but I know how hard she advocates for both [the Higher Education EDL program and the Master’s degree program in Student Affairs]….she goes to the ends of the earth—as well as [the other faculty student affairs faculty member]—to make sure our program has what it needs to be successful, increases its reputation, all that good stuff,” Marie explained with affection.

Marie also attributed her commitment to persevering through the PhD program to the HE faculty, not just her advisor. “Between her and [another student affairs professor], they’re the reason I’m in a doc program. They’re the reason why I’m still here in South Carolina. Because the plan was to punch in, punch out, get out of here, do my two years, and go back up north and be closer to family and friends. But having their support down here pushing me to do things, inviting me in to teach a course…they’re amazing,” Marie disclosed.

In addition to faculty support, Marie felt as though the support she received from her family was just as important. Due to distance, however, Marie expressed that she was not able to take a picture of her family for inclusion in the study. Although Jacob’s family lived two hours away, and he often mentioned the hardship of being away from
his family, like Marie, he too did not take a picture. Marie offered some commentary about her family with a somber tone to her voice. “It’s sad not having my family here, especially with the holidays coming up, but at the same time, I know that I would want to do things and go places with them so in a way I don’t have that to worry about. But it makes me a little sad. Because there’s no way I’d be able to do [the PhD program] without them, without their moral support, without their financial support, especially during the master’s program when you deplete your savings because of no paycheck. And they always said ‘We will always support you in your educational endeavors whatever that looks like. We don’t want you to have to say no.’ But it kind of makes me sad that I didn’t take a picture, but it also represents the fact that that’s not part of what I have to manage down here with the doctoral program,” Marie concluded.

Erin. In a similar manner as Marie, Erin felt that her strongest support was her family. In fact, Erin reflected that it was her husband who encouraged her to apply to the PhD program. “For Christmas two years ago, my husband bought me a laptop and said, ‘It’s time.’ I think he knew that I needed that. He just kept saying ‘You have full support. It’s time,’” Erin divulged while smiling. Erin took a picture of a growing tree held by reinforcements to illustrate the support that her family, particularly her husband, has shown throughout her matriculation in the PhD program. She captioned the picture “Support” (Figure 4.30).
Besides family support, Erin and Marie’s narratives connected on another level as well—in response to faculty. Although Marie appeared to have stronger, personal connections to faculty based on her commentary, more nuanced were Erin’s experiences with faculty. Erin took an in-class incident and internalized it as a form of personal support, volunteering that a faculty member of the P-12 concentration was especially helpful to her in one of her first semester courses. “The professor took time out of a class—and she was the only one to do that—and said, ‘Ok, we’re going to check in. How are people feeling?’ I was glad that was in my first semester. Of course, that was probably the class I needed it most for,” Erin clarified while laughing.

Erin’s narrative also brings to mind Jacob’s story, in regards to the lack of peer networks in the PhD program. Erin commented that peer relationships were part of her experiences in the master’s program, but she has yet to develop strong relationships at the
PhD level. “Well, I haven’t really talked to newer people,” Erin said. “…part of the reason I went full-time was to have those relationships, and I’m not taking advantage of it because I had such a great experience with my master’s, but it was a cohort group. So, it was as much a social group. I’ve had conversations with [another PhD student] down the [grad assistant] hall because we teach an [undergrad course together] and we’ve talked about ideas and about education and things like that, but not about, ‘How are you experiencing all of this?’” Erin commented.

Although Erin was pleased with her decision to enroll full-time, she expressed that her relationships with peers in the PhD might have been different had she secured a graduate assistantship. In her reflection, Erin’s doubts appeared when she said, “I probably should have done a GA. And that might have helped because there are times when [I’m visiting the GA hallway and] I’ll ask somebody about something, or if I’m confused about part of the program, somebody else who’s on the [GA hallway] will answer and say, ‘Duh, duh, duh.’ I only know that because I hear people in the [GA] hall talking.”

Erin explained further that during those occasions she feels alone—much like Jacob expressed earlier. “I prefer to use the term ‘individualized’ [to represent how I feel sometimes],” Erin said, “because I feel like it’s an individualized process because it’s not a skill set, it’s figuring out what I need to develop and fashioning the classes and everything towards my goals, but I often feel very isolated. If I’m sitting at home hours on end writing papers, it’s very isolating,” Erin concluded.
Derrick. In contrast to his three counterparts in the study, Derrick rarely leaned on others for support throughout his doctoral student experience. In the following comment, Derrick explained why: “You go through those phases and transitions. Sometimes, you have the courage to share them with someone you know who is interested in hearing it…. [for the most part]. I guess I don’t. And, unless someone asks me, I keep it positive. I have to be so strong all the time. This is the first time I’ve had a chance to say these things about my [PhD] program because I just don’t bring it up,” Derrick remarked. He hesitated and then commented further. “I guess part of me knows that sometimes [my friends, colleagues, and teachers in the school] don’t want to hear it. They want to hear about their issues and issues with their graduate programs and, ‘What can I do to help them?’ I don’t have an outlet. It’s by choice, I guess,” Derrick confessed.

Derrick also volunteered that he preferred not to speak with his parents about difficulties he may have faced in the PhD program. “My mother, my father, they’re 86 [years old]. I’m only going to bring good tidings to them, and that’s very deliberate. I don’t want them to even have to worry about me,” Derrick proclaimed. However, when pressed further, Derrick confided that he could reach out to friends and colleagues, but his role as a school leader made him hesitant to do so. To that end, Derrick remarked, “I feel that I can reach out to people if I need to. I feel that I can have a conversation with people who have reached out and say, ‘Hey, you can have a conversation with me.’ Yeah. I don’t know how else I can word that. In my professional realm, my field, people
don’t want to hear it…So I’m very careful about what I share of my personal life. I’m very deliberate about staying private for many reasons, ok?”

While Derrick remained skeptical of sharing his trials in the PhD program with individuals, he relied heavily on his relationship with God. Derrick also preferred to focus on helping others, rather than himself. He illustrated these feelings through the picture he captioned as “Heaven is coming…be an asset to others” (Figure 4.31). Derrick explained his thoughts behind the photograph, “I don’t like to burden people. I think getting through the PhD program is something that I can carry with the Lord. I would rather spend my time helping others. This is just me—doesn’t make it right.” Derrick confessed.

![Figure 4.31. Heaven is Coming…Be an Asset to Others](image)

**Strategies.** Within the strategies subtheme, participants provided a number of methods they used to cope and navigate through the PhD program, as well a few recommendations that might strengthen programmatic offerings.
**Jacob.** Jacob reported that the third floor hallway where the graduate assistants share space is “[His] only feeling of connectedness” (Figure 4.32) as the photograph below was captioned.

![Image](image_url)

*Figure 4.32. My Only Feeling of Connectedness*

While the individuals on the hallway served as a form of support for Jacob, he used opportunities to go to the hall as a strategy for dealing with personal challenges due to his illness and to ask other students questions about the PhD process. Jacob smiled as he looked at the picture and then explained in the following quote, “The infamous hallway. Alright, I chose that picture because although I do feel a disconnect being at Clemson from the undergraduate population, and even from some of my own peers and individuals in my cohort, so to speak—I do view the hall as sort of a safe haven where individuals
come together. I use the hall as a tactic for escaping from personal problems because of my illness, or as a way to just ask [other doctoral students] questions about how to get through this program. And, we might laugh, we might joke, we might offer support, we might cheer each other own regarding dissertation proposals, prelims, defenses, whatever the case might be—getting advice. Those little relationships that we form in the process of being in our program are important. It’s ironic that I call it the HBCU [historically Black college or university] hall,” Jacob said laughing, “because it’s the hall where the majority of people in the hall are students of color, but it’s just a place I can go to get away from it all, to laugh and talk, and joke, and support each other,” Jacob confided.

Jacob shared much of the same feelings about his office space located on the third floor graduate assistant hallway that he simply captioned “My office” (Figure 4.33). “It’s so amazing to have this office,” Jacob remarked. “It’s similar to the [graduate assistant] hallway in that I can come here and escape my problems, but my office is more than that. It helps me stay focused on my work, because it’s easier for me to study here than at home, and I’ve got the white board that I can write down all the stuff I have to do and it just stays there until I decide to erase it,” Jacob remarked.
Jacob further elaborated on why office spaces may benefit students, especially former working professionals. Jacob said, “So, my office is definitely a space that has helped me stay together, and I hope that students in the future will be able to have offices. It’s really important to have a common space, especially for nontraditional students, because at least in my case, [the office] reminds me that I’m not just a student, I’m a doctoral student which has more of a professional sound to it than just graduate student…that’s important because I’m a professional who’s just in school right now,” Jacob clarified.

Similar to Derrick’s statements in the Support subtheme, Jacob explained that his faith served as a strategy for dealing with the ordeals of the PhD process. “My faith in
God is a constant reminder that no matter what the hurdles are that you’re dealing with—the financial obstacles or [health] issues—you remind yourself, ‘You’re blessed’—not to make this a whole spiritual journey, but that’s a part of it,” Jacob said assuredly. Jacob continued by saying that a large part of making it through the PhD program was keeping focused on others. He remarked, “Then you just hope throughout that journey that you can bring somebody along with you—be it through mentoring, or through community service, or through being able to give back. For me, that’s a big part of it as well,” Jacob concluded.

**Marie.** The strategies Marie used for advancing through the doctoral program were very different from Jacob. Marie mentioned relying on faculty and her family for support and as means for coping. However, for Marie, understanding how to navigate successfully through the PhD meant understanding some of the hidden rules. For example, Marie photographed a picture of the student database system, called iROAR, to demonstrate a strategy she used to monitor her time-to-degree in the PhD program—understanding the registration system (See Figure 4.34). The caption in Figure 4.34 also indicated a possible difference between the lifestyles and experiences between undergraduate and graduate students illustrated by Marie’s partial caption that reads “As an undergrad, registration means avoiding the 8am classes.” The caption also epitomized a skill needed to be strategic in an undergraduate program versus the finesse required to navigate a doctorate program.
Figure 4.34. As an Undergrad, Registration Means Avoiding the 8AM Classes. As a Doctoral Student, It Means Knowing What Classes Are Offered in What Semester to Remain Set to Finish the Program on the Timeline You Have Set for Yourself

**Erin.** Erin volunteered that one of her strategies for advancing through the program was to identify and use additional resources that could assist her in completing course assignments and further develop into a scholar-practitioner. A few of those resources, in the form of books and articles, appeared in the photograph Erin captioned “Utilizing resources” (Figure 4.35).
Erin also used reflection techniques to maneuver through her doctoral student experiences. The photograph of the George Washington monument’s reflections in the pool, symbolized Erin’s desire to make reflection a regular part of her experience in the PhD program. She titled the photograph “Reflection” (Figure 4.36). Erin explained further, “the use of reflection has been a primary tool during this program and one that I really didn’t use before. I also teach yoga. When I went through becoming a yoga instructor, I had to journal and use reflection to integrate my readings there, and it really stimulated a lot of growth, but I never used it professionally or for educational purposes. Well, in my master’s program, they talked about it, but it’s just something I didn’t really get into and use,” Erin said as if regretting not having used reflection tools during her master’s program.
Erin illustrated further, how the Reflection photograph documented her doctoral student experiences. “[The picture] reflected something that I felt like was a great depiction of the program, and I went, ‘Of course, reflection,’” she said with raised hands. “And it’s so funny. It’s just something that maybe some people take for granted, but it’s so important, and it’s something that we’ve used in creative inquiry consistently, and so I’m hoping that now it has become a habit…It helps me to go so much deeper with the information. It helps me to integrate what the professors are saying with my experiences, and to process it at a deeper level,” Erin reported.

Akin to Jacob’s thoughts regarding doctoral student office spaces, Erin also volunteered that an additional orientation or workshop would have helped her better navigate the doctoral process. “I just think making it explicit—talking about some of the
ups-and-downs as a group. I think the Paw Pals [peer mentoring program] thing really is a great way of helping students. But also during the orientation, having that time with other students, but you know, at that point, you don’t know what you don’t know. If you haven’t experienced it, it doesn’t mean anything to you. Maybe having some planned time [during orientation] where you meet in mentor groups with the advisor, but also some time for just the group….I also think having an orientation or some kind of workshop at the end of each semester or year would be helpful in giving people strategies to know how to navigate the process,” Erin explained.

Derrick. In a similar way as the other three participants, Derrick too found ways to maneuver strategically through the PhD process. Derrick’s photograph captioned, “Faithful highlighter,” (Figure 4.37) illustrated his thoughts regarding a strategy he used to stay motivated and committed to the PhD program. “So the yellow highlighter helps me process the material that I think is relevant to the paper that I’m writing. I don’t know how I can describe it to you, but once I read the paper once or twice, I take the highlighter, then I make connections, and that’s how I write my papers. I think it’s different for everyone, but it works for me. And sometimes, you make connections that people don’t even realize are there….what helps me is going to the text and marking where you think the author is making a point so that helps me. Again, this is a transitional semester, so I’m getting better. I’m getting better,” Derrick proclaimed while tapping his hand on the table.
Derrick explained further that the picture of the highlighter had another meaning that coincided with yet another strategy he has used to keep advancing through the program. “I also took the picture because it represents the need to have a positive attitude about everything. That night that I took the picture, I didn’t want to do it. I didn’t want to do the work. You have that conversation in your head, but you must do it. You know? You must. It’s not a should, it’s a must. The more you change your ‘should’s’ to ‘must’s,’ the more successful you can be. That was that conversation, and I decided to take a picture of it. I wanted to go home and get in the bed, but I had to get the work done,” Derrick declared with a tired expression on his face.

Derrick’s positive outlook on life seemed to align with Jacob’s, in that Derrick used his faith as another strategy to navigate through his doctoral student experiences. Derrick explained, “…what’s effective is anytime I’m going through a difficult time in
my life—if I’m at the bottom or whatever, if I’ve got [this phrase in my mine] ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me’ and I can say that over and over again, no matter what’s going on, and that works, it just works. You get some type of inner strength. I cannot portray someone who’s godly in the religious text, but I am who I am,” Derrick concluded.

Summary of Community

All four participants identified a support system, albeit not always preferable to their needs. Jacob longed for brotherhood with other African American males in the program or on campus, but instead used his office on Grad Row for support and to cope with difficulties he experienced. Jacob was the only participant who took a picture of an individual who represented a friend and a peer in the PhD program. Otherwise, participants did not take photographs of friends, peers, or coworkers who acted as their support systems.

Marie included her family and faculty members as her support system, and identified resources to help her better understand the unwritten rules of advancing through a PhD program. Marie was also the only participant who took a picture of a faculty member, although Erin mentioned feeling supported by one professor who had taken time to ask students in a class how the students were doing. Jacob also expressed that faculty had been supportive of him in light of his illness.

Marie and Erin relied on additional resources outside of class as strategies, and Erin used reflection as a technique to circumvent challenges presented in the doctoral degree program. As Jacob described in his narrative, Derrick relied on his faith to guide
him and remain committed to the PhD process until degree completion. Moreover, everyone other than Derrick mentioned something about Grad Row—whether it was visiting the hall for some sense of camaraderie or for support in navigating the doctoral student experience. He was also the only participant who did not identify at least one person who acted on behalf of a support to him, citing that his role as a school leader interfered with his ability to be candid and open with others. Instead, Derrick chose to rely on his spiritual beliefs for support and strategies.

**Summary of Themes: The Three Cs**

Three themes and two corresponding subthemes, labeled by the researcher as the Three Cs, emerged from the doctoral student experiences of the four mid-career professionals participating in this study. As illustrated in Figure 4.38, participants cycled in and through the Three Cs in indirect ways, rather than through a linear process. They also experienced a series of emotions as they cycled through the Three Cs as represented by the letter “e” in Figure 4.38. The researcher presents a summary of the Three Cs as represented by the participants’ experiences next.

**Conflicted**

Descriptions of doctoral student experiences from mid-career professionals in this study showed participants experiencing successes and challenges in route to degree completion, primarily along the lines of managing perceptions about the process of earning a PhD and adjusting to a learning environment after years of being in a professional work setting. In concert with the typical adult life, these adjustments often had to do with the emotions that came with balancing multiple, and often, competing
roles (Gardner, 2009; Goodman et al, 2006; Offerman, 2011; Syverson, 1999; Watts, 2008) and shifting through and between identities (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005).

**Commitment**

Participants discussed emotional occurrences in route to degree completion, but drew heavily on prior life and work experiences to recall the importance of remaining committed to finishing the program. Interestingly, while participants talked about their challenges going from work to the PhD program, they talked about these experiences in general terms rather than within the confines of a career stage. To that end, only one participant used the term midcareer and nontraditional in relation to himself.

**Community**

Additionally, there were very few differences between program concentrations and full- and part-time enrollment, except that the two participants enrolled part-time struggled to adjust and balance work responsibilities with academic courses. Full-time participants in the study struggled the most with belonging and fitting in as evidenced by their photographs and accompanying conversation on feeling isolated and alone. However, all participants experienced emotions and were challenged by the new role and new identity presented by the PhD program. Nevertheless, participants had varying ways of dealing with the challenges and issues of community, and no two were the same. Two of the participants mentioned family as a source of support, and to some degree faculty was named. Yet, in other ways, spiritual supports served as the underpinnings participants used to persevere through the PhD program. Other strategies consisted of reading outside of class to further the development of a practitioner-scholar identity, and
using personal reflection tools to help provide balance. Irrespective of supports and strategies, peer support and solidarity was most lacking from participants’ narratives.

A visual representation created by the researcher of the Three Cs with an “e” in the center for emotions is depicted in Figure 4.38.

![Three Cs Diagram](image)

*Figure 4.38. A visual representation of the Three Cs*

**Emotions**

Emotions surfaced as a common thread throughout the Three Cs. Throughout the participants’ narratives, photographic captions, and body language, they expressed a range of emotions such as doubt, frustration, fear, confidence, reassurance, and a positive outlook. Thus, emotions served as an underpinning for their collective experiences and are represented by the letter “e” in Figure 4.38. For example, Jacob appeared sad and fearful as he described how his health challenges interfered with his PhD experiences. His photographic caption titled “Isolated and alone” illustrated additional ways that Jacob
was dealing with emotional upheavals associated with matriculating through a terminal
degree program. Marie’s emotions ranged from confidence to guilt as she tried to
maneuver the perils of balancing a full-time job with appearing legitimate and serious
about earning a PhD. Her picture captioned “The bane of my existence…” illustrated
Marie’s frustrations with some of the aforementioned issues. Other pictures by Marie
illustrated happy emotions such as her photographic caption describing how she stays
balanced by attending football games, among other pastimes. Erin’s narratives and
photographs also portrayed a range of emotions. There were times when she indicated
being too cocky about her ability to master content and checkpoints in the PhD process,
because of the success she experienced on her job and in previous graduate programs.
Her picture captioned “Stuck and volatile” is an example of such. Yet, Erin also
described feelings of reassurance as she started to grow as a practitioner scholar in the
program and using reflection tools to find balance. While Derrick described challenges
similar to the others, he continued to express emotions associated with being optimistic
and having a positive outlook. His photograph captioned “I see the world through a
window” and “Heaven is coming…be an asset to others” are representative of these
feelings.

In addition to the participants’ narratives and photographic captions, participants’
body language throughout the photo-elicitation interviews revealed emotions. Questions
on the Field Instrument (See Appendix I) provided an opportunity for the researcher to
record body language and affective responses from the participants. Each participants’
body language reflected how they were feeling and mirrored their words. For example,
when Jacob described his perceptions about the lack of brotherhood on campus he sounded dispirited and frustrated. At one point during the conversation, he threw up his hands as if physically displaying these emotions. Often times, Marie leaned back in her chair when she was describing a decision that she felt confident about, particularly when she talked about her decision to enroll part-time and enter the PhD program after years of working. Erin had the tendency to slump in her seat when she described a challenging experience. Her conversation about preparing for and taking preliminary exams provides a relevant example. Derrick’s eyes revealed the most emotions from him, especially when he was describing his tendency to stay at school late to complete class assignments despite being tired.

In summary, the participants experienced a range of emotions as they cycled in linear and nonlinear ways through each juncture of the Three C model in Figure 4.38. Body language, participants’ narratives, and photographic captions revealed emotions that were associated with them being conflicted due to role and identity conflicts experienced throughout the PhD program. Emotions also surfaced as they tried to persevere through the PhD process and emotions that resonated as the participants identified strategies and systems of support at various stages in the advanced degree program.

Having provided a summary of the Three Cs, in the next section, the researcher provides a summary of participants’ experiences taking photographs to describe their doctoral student experiences.
Participants’ Reflections on Taking Photographs

In addition to their experiences matriculating through the doctoral program, participants’ also reflected on the process of taking photographs to illustrate their happenings in the PhD program. Their commentaries about the photographs fit within the Three Cs, but were primarily limited to concepts within Conflicted and Commitment.

Conflicted

Jacob expressed that the opportunity to take photographs about his doctoral student experiences “really made [him] do a lot of self-reflecting. That’s why I kept saying, ‘oh yeah, I’ll do the interview,’ then I realized I needed time to self-reflect and think about the task that [the researcher] has given me and think about what pictures I could take that symbolized my experiences,” Jacob remarked. However, Jacob’s experiences taking photographs also revealed conflicting moments. He said, “So, it wasn’t as easy as I thought it would be. Then, once you get the pictures, you’re still pondering, ‘What caption or name do I give them? How do I qualify this particular picture? What do I say to make it transparent the feelings I’m trying to convey….It was definitely a good opportunity to self-reflect,” Jacob concluded.

Marie’s explanations about the process of taking photographs was similar to Jacob in that she had to put a lot of thought into which pictures to take, but Marie also thought about the visual aesthetics of the photographs, and how the pictures captured certain support systems. Marie summarized her thoughts,

I just kept thinking about what seems to consume my life or what do I think about often. The picture of the caffeine and employee decal
were obvious pictures because they were things that keep me going and help me get to and from work with ease while staying alert. I also tried to visualize something about my evenings or fun things that keep you sane, but I’m a Type A person so I was also trying to think about what would be visually presentable that [the researcher] could put on a research poster and it still look good.

Committed

Erin’s remarks about the process of taking photographs was closely aligned to Jacob and Marie in that the experience caused her to be reflective of her journey in the PhD process. However, Erin’s reflections about taking photographs were similar to participants’ descriptions within the Life Experiences subtheme. The reflections caused her to be more aware of the connections between experiences in the PhD program and future implications for success. She further remarked that using pictures as descriptions of her PhD experiences, “gave [her] time to pause, reflect, and think critically about [her] experience in terms of how she was getting through the program, where she wanted to be afterwards, and remembering to keep [the program] in perspective relative to other [facets] of her life.” Taking Erin’s remarks further, Derrick commented about the experience of taking photographs, but also included thoughts regarding his participation in the photo-elicitation interview. He said, “I think this experience has shown me some things that maybe I subconsciously was not looking at, so it’s been very reflective.”
Community

Marie was the only person to connect her experiences taking photographs to ways in which she found support to persevere through the program. More specifically, Marie talked about how her decision to take certain pictures over another failed to convey certain supports. Marie shared, “I also realized that I have no pictures of my family because my family’s not [local], so reflecting back on the pictures, and noticing what’s not in the pictures was really sad for me,” she concluded.

Collectively, the opportunity to take photographs caused the participants to be reflective of their experiences in the terminal degree program. Marie also focused on how her pictures would look on paper or in a presentation, while Erin reflected that the photographs helped her make stronger connections between experiences in the PhD program and future career goals.

In addition to the participants’ reflections, the researcher also provided reflections on the research process. The researcher discusses those reflections next.

Post-Analysis Subjectivity Reflection

In addition to participants’ narratives and photographs, questions raised on the field note protocol and notes from the researcher’s journal provided transparency about the researcher’s subjectivity throughout the research process and along the Three Cs.

Conflicted

The photo-elicitation interviews revealed my, the researcher’s, tendency to be conflicted about identifying the proper balance between respecting participants’ voice and their time while generating the data necessary to conduct the study. A quote in my
field notes illustrated this point, “I’m not sure I did [the interview] right because we didn’t get to the second photo until 30 minutes into the interview. Yikes, maybe probe less?!.” While I limited probes from the start in order to bring participants’ words to the forefront, as a result of running out of time, in later interviews I tended to probe even less because each interview question led the participants into revealing many stories. While the participants did not complain about the time, nor was I on a schedule, I felt compelled to adhere to the 30-minute to one-hour schedule because that is what I had originally communicated to them. I was afraid of going beyond the one-hour time limit and not getting through all of the pictures, and thereby having to cut the interviews short to be respectful of participants’ time.

Yet, I was conflicted because I did not want participants to feel as though I ignored or did not care about their experiences. A statement in my field note revealed this struggle. I said, “It’s good that I’m doing the study because it seems like he hasn’t talked about this stuff before or with anyone, but I still feel like I’m running out of time [in the interviews], because there’s so much he wanted to say, but how can I cut him off? I want to show concern while maintaining a professional environment.” Cutting the interviews short of an hour in the midst of a participant’s story was especially troublesome. It was troublesome because I knew that the photo-elicitation interview was in many cases, the first time they had an opportunity to discuss their experiences and the emotions and struggles that went along with the PhD process. At any case, despite my concerns, ultimately we were able to get through the interviews in a manner that was
acceptable to the participants and myself. Further, I reminded participants to contact me at any point if they wanted to elaborate or share something further.

**Commitment**

Participants’ confessions of emotions and struggles in the PhD program also brought challenges to the research process, particularly with researching a context that I was also in the midst of experiencing. When participants mentioned a challenge they had encountered, it was difficult to hear because I had a personal relationship with three of the participants. I made a comment in my field note to that effect. I remarked, “I didn’t realize she was really struggling with the academics….She never mentioned this before, even in Paw Pals.” I also felt guilty about their struggles, thinking that I had neither done enough to communicate the perils of the PhD process nor provided enough support as a friend and advanced PhD student to help them avoid difficulties, especially because I was one of the co-founders of Paw Pals.

Alternatively, in other cases, emotions flared because I resonated with a participants’ experience and the remembrance of a similar situation or experience led me down an emotional path. For example, two of the participants talked about how lonely they felt at times because of differences in age and experiences from students they encountered in the EDL PhD program. Despite my involvement on campus, and the graduate students I know on campus, I often felt the same way. I wrote a comment on the field notes form. “It’s interesting that even with the grad offices and involvement with GSG [Graduate Student Government], he felt alone too. I guess being involved on campus doesn’t make up for lack of friends,” I concluded. The protocols and steps in the
research process protected the participants from me interfering with the research process. Nevertheless, to maintain my own emotional health, I found myself needing time alone to reflect and write notes or talk these issues out with a friend. These approaches were helpful as a way to capture my emotions by working through my own feelings in order to separate my experiences from that of the participants.

Community

As mentioned previously, I am a student in the EDL PhD program at Clemson University, and had relationships with three of the participants and knew of the fourth participant. Due to this familiarity, I felt comfortable engaging participants in the member check process and I was looking forward to us being collaborators in the process. However, because some of the responses to the member check document were vague or I did not understand what the participant was trying to convey, the participants and I engaged in multiple follow-up emails or phone calls. I also wanted to be respectful of their time constraints, but I knew I could contact them multiple times if I needed to because of our relationships outside of the study. I believe I would have been more hesitant to engage in repeated contact of participants with whom I did not share past experiences or common program awareness.

Thus, I was concerned that I may have over engaged or relied on them too much during member checks. A line in my personal journal illustrated my concerns about the member check process. “I think I relied on them too much to check the accuracy of where I put the photos because I knew I could because I know them,” I wrote. The multiple contacts primarily had to do with placement of the photographs, especially when
the photographs and their narratives revealed sensitive topics. I also had to follow-up with two of the participants several times after the member check process ended about the number of credit hours earned. Nevertheless, I noted that in addition to the collaborative effort between researcher and participants this study aimed to establish, “I was fearful that the participants would grow weary because they weren’t expecting this much work on their end at this point in the process,” I concluded.

Overall, the reflections on my subjectivity described internal conflicts about honoring participants’ time while generating data for the study. Notes on commitment revealed the researcher’s emotions and empathy for the participants’ struggles that at times related to my own. Finally, the discussion on community provided reflections on the collaborative environment that the participants and I had established, as well as the delicate balance between friends and co-collaborators of a research project.

The next section offers insights into how descriptions from the subjectivity statement and other data relate to this study’s conceptual framework, Schlossberg’s Four S System of Transition Theory.

**The Three Cs and Schlossberg’s Four S System of Transition Theory**

Data generated by participants along with commentary from the researcher’s subjectivity statement confirm, deny, and expand concepts within the Four S System of transition theory. As noted in Figure 2.1, the Four S System includes four aspects of adults’ experiences with transitions: (a) the situation, (b) characteristics of self, (c) support mechanisms, and (d) strategies involved in a transition. Movement through and between the Three C’s is nested within the Four S System with emotions at the helm.
The Conflicted theme of the Three C’s is anchored near the Situation arm of the Four S System, because throughout participants’ descriptions of being conflicted, they primarily discussed the emotions associated with the initial event of transitioning into the PhD program and the related identity and role changes that they experienced as a result of that transition. Participants then reflected inwardly and moved into the Self arm of the Four S System. Here, participants shared stories of their own resiliency and commitment to completing the program all while experiencing emotional difficulties. The culminating dialogue about their ability to persist is similar to how Schlossberg and colleagues (2006) framed the Self part of the Four S System whereby individuals evaluate their values, spiritual outlook, and other demographic factors in relation to experiencing a transition. The final arm of the Three C’s, Community, is anchored between the Support and Strategies sections of the Four S System to represent the coping mechanisms and types and functions of support that participants garnered throughout their matriculation in the PhD program.

There were other notable similarities between the Three C’s and the Four S System. Similar to literature on transition theory (Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995), this study found that adults continuously revisit their identity in light of a transition. For example, Jacob asked the question “who am I now?” in an attempt to make sense of a new identity forming because of his decision to leave a professional career and matriculate through a PhD program. In a similar way, Marie also explored her identity as she deliberated whether to enroll part- or full-time, and the
impact of such on her professional identity and ability to remain marketable in student affairs. Erin also tried to make sense of her changing identities as she adjusted to the rigor of academic writing versus the type of writing required on her former job. Derrick also revisited the issue of identity as he discussed the difficulties in shifting through and between a school leader identity and that of a student identity.

Scholars of transition theory also argued that experiences were central to identity formation and often determined an individual’s ability to cope with a transition (Goodman et al., 2006). All four participants in this study identified past experiences that helped them remain committed to following through until degree completion. Jacob recalled the value of work experiences that taught him the importance of strategically working through tasks. He also cited the importance of life experiences that helped him gain maturity in order to be resilient in his quest for a PhD. Marie’s experiences helped her to make connections between courses and real-life experiences. Erin’s narratives revealed appreciation for former experiences that helped her become more self-aware and better able to deal with the frustrations as part of the PhD process. Derrick also described periods in his life where life experiences helped him to remain steadfast in the doctoral program, attributing a childhood experience at a dance with teaching him lessons on perseverance.

Spirituality and self-awareness were also tenets of transition theory (Goodman et al., 2006) that surfaced in participants’ stories. Jacob and Derrick often referred to their spiritual beliefs as means for coping with difficulties experienced in the PhD program, and reasons for hope that in time they would reach degree completion. In a similar way
as Jacob and Derrick, Erin found that reflection techniques helped to calm her despite challenges in the PhD program. Reflection tools also gave Erin perspective on the important things in her life and the need to balance school-life responsibilities.

On a similar note, the participants’ pictures also depicted the emotional labor that participants described, and revealed the researcher’s struggles to place photographs within themes, because the photos often fit into multiple categories. This notion fits with transition theory in that adults’ progress through life in varying ways, and adults may move through the Four S System of Transition theory in a linear or nonlinear fashion (Goodman et al., 2006). More specifically, a participant may have mentioned experiencing challenges endured by adding the role of PhD student to their existing roles and identities, and move into a conversation about the emotions that went with it and the types of supports and strategies they used to get out of it. For example, Jacob’s picture captioned “Isolated and alone” described the emotions he was experiencing, but is also telling of his support system, or lack thereof. In the same way, Erin’s photograph captioned “Stuck and volatile” chronicles her struggles with professional identity, but also described feelings and emotions about those struggles. A picture that Marie took captioned, “Reading outside of class brings new perspectives…” could easily describe a strategy or a way that she is incorporating a practitioner-scholar identity. In other words, there was often no clear break as to where a picture and accompanying dialogue should be placed within a theme. Thus, as with transition theory, movement through and between the Three Cs (Conflicted, Commitment, and Community) was also a nonlinear process.
However, despite similarities, this study’s findings also revealed a major departure from Schlossberg’s (2006) model. Scholars of transition theory argued that transitions might result in stress depending upon the extent of change and whether the individual viewed the event as positive or negative (Goodman et al., 2006; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995; Schlossberg, 1984). However, the theory does not sufficiently highlight changes in emotions, other than stress, that an individual may experience because of changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. In contrast, emotions were the capstone of the PhD experience described by the participants in this study. Whether it was confidence, fear, doubt, or positivity, participants described emotions throughout the Three C’s that cannot be simply identified as stress. For example, Jacob described the loneliness he felt as an older, career-experienced individual in a PhD program. Jacob also described the severity of dealing with a serious medical illness as a PhD student that brought another role change to his life. Marie discussed the challenges of taking a course that disrupted her workday. Marie and Erin also noted the emotional effects that the PhD process brought to relationships with significant others. Erin further illustrated her emotions through photographs “stuck and volatile” and “linear but not” to describe the rollercoaster of challenges she faced leaving her full-time job to assume full-time study in a PhD program. Derrick’s sentiments regarding changed routines in the PhD were summarized in his photograph captioned “Clemson…the path is never straight” to depict the unending cycles of confidence followed by series of doubt. These findings regarding emotions are significant because the PhD is often likened to a cognitive experience in the form of academic courses, and written exercises such as
comprehensive exams and the dissertation, rather than a series of emotions that coincide with the academic component.

In sum, the Three Cs offer propositions towards furthering transition theory, rather than serve as an independent model or theory. Therefore, the researcher explains the Three Cs as being nested within transition theory such that the Three C’s are located near the appropriate arm of the Four S System, and emotions serve as the capstone of the PhD experience. To illustrate these points, the researcher provides a visual description of how the Three Cs relate to the Four S System of transition theory as depicted in Figure 4.39.
Figure 4.39. Relationship between the Three Cs and Four S System of Transition Theory
Study’s Answer to the Research Question

The following research question guided this study: *What are mid-career professionals’ descriptions of their experiences in seeking the PhD in educational leadership programs as generated from photo-elicitation methodology?* The photo-elicitation interview, photographs and captions provided the data to answer this question. In addition, field notes and a personal journal documented the researcher’s role in the co-generation of the data to develop an answer among four PhD students in one university’s educational leadership program.

Mid-Career Professionals’ EDL PhD Student Experiences

The mid-career professionals in this study described and illustrated their experiences in the doctoral program as conflicted, because they assumed the role and identity of a PhD student in the midst of balancing personal and professional lives. These students’ were also conflicted because in light of their former work and master’s degree experiences, they struggled to manage expectations between how they anticipated navigating through the PhD program and their reality in the PhD program. Participants’ experiences also revealed that mid-career professionals experience a series of emotions due to these conflicts that are ongoing throughout the PhD process. Emotions also revealed the participants’ awareness of how the PhD connected to their future career trajectory and thus the need to endure. Furthermore, the recall of how they persevered through former life and work experiences made them more aware of the need to remain committed to the program through degree completion.
The doctoral student experiences of the participants in the study also revealed that mid-career professionals rely on a variety of supports for community and use a number of strategies to matriculate through EDL PhD programs. While supports included an advisor, several faculty members, and one mention of the Paw Pals peer mentoring program, supports and strategies were primarily outside of the academic program. These supports included working professionals on campus, family, and faith. Faith also served as a strategy that mid-career professionals used to persevere through EDL PhD program. Other strategies included the graduate assistant offices (and hall), maintaining a positive attitude, giving back, utilizing additional academic resources outside of class, becoming aware of hidden rules associated with the PhD process, and using personal reflective practices.

Furthermore, the doctoral student experiences of mid-career professionals in this study showed that minimal differences existed between program concentrations. All four participants mentioned the desire to return to practice, but two participants (both females) were also interested in pursuing the professoriate. At least one participant, Marie, mentioned that a faculty member was grooming her for such a position.

This study also highlighted differences between the experiences of mid-career professionals who enrolled in full- versus part-time study. All students’ experiences revealed issues with professional identity and difficulties with balancing school and other roles, priorities. However, part-time students had the most challenges with balancing work and school. The problems for full-time students encompassed finding a sense of belonging and camaraderie with peers. Consequently, when considering participants’
collective experience, the mid-career professionals’ experiences in an educational leadership program can be summed as a series of emotions intertwined with the academic experience.

**Contributions of Photo-Elicitation**

In addition to participants’ narratives, the research question investigated the contributions of photo-elicitation to participants’ doctoral student experiences. Mid-career professionals in EDL PhD programs primarily described the photo-elicitation process as a self-reflective exercise. They also attributed the opportunity to take photographs and write captions as a chance to investigate further, what they wanted to accomplish in the PhD program and who they wanted to be at the end of their PhD education. Further, there were no ethical challenges or issues with breach of confidentiality. Finally, photo-elicitation, at least in one case, revealed that pictures not taken reveal just as much as pictures that are taken about the experiences of mid-career professionals in EDL PhD programs.

Furthermore, the photographs themselves offered visualizations of the experiences of mid-career professionals in EDL PhD programs, and illustrated similarities and differences among them. For example, Jacob’s pictures by-and-large depicted his transition issues and struggles adjusting to the life of a nontraditional PhD student, more than anything because of his serious medical condition. On the other hand, Marie expressed the importance of balance, but only included one photograph depicting scenes outside of work and school. She also included pictures depicting how she has grown into and has become welcoming of a practitioner-scholar identity. Of all the
participants, Erin shot the most pictures depicting strategies she has used to navigate the doctoral student experience. However, Erin’s pictures show the most contrast between highs and lows she experienced in the PhD program. Good examples include her pictures of “Fluid” versus “Volatile,” and “Growth” versus “Individualized” (picture discussed but no visual provided due to issues of confidentiality). Similar to his part-time counterpart Marie, Derrick’s photographs are mostly of his work environment. However, these pictures are often symbols or representations of the dichotomy Derrick faces as a leader by day and student by night. Derrick’s narratives also offered up a repeated phrase about the role of principal and his enactment of that role and identity. Derrick was also the only participant who struggled to identify individuals who served as a support to him throughout the doctoral process.

Moreover, photographs taken by participants at times reflected gaps between literature explained in Chapter Two about mid-career professionals’ experiences in PhD programs and findings from this study. For example, there was only one picture and relatively little dialogue about faculty or peers serving in supportive roles—further supporting literature that the PhD is a solitary, individualized process (Hadjioannou, Shelton, Fu, & Dhanarattigannon, 2007; McCoy & Gardner, 2011; Youngs, 2007). Moreover, in contrast to literature that depicted family as primary supports (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012; McCoy & Gardner, 2011) only one person took a picture of a family member despite two others mentioned their families. Furthermore, participants’ took very few pictures depicting their personal lives outside of school and work.
Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a culmination of findings from the data analysis process. The findings resulted in the emergence of three themes (Conflicted, Commitment, and Community) and six subthemes (Roles, Identity, Emotions, Life Experiences, Support, and Strategies), named by the researcher as the Three Cs.

In the chapter, the researcher also provided highlights from participants’ narratives about the process of taking photographs to describe their doctoral student experiences. Reflections on the researcher’s subjectivity, along with confirmations and additions this study made to transition theory were presented. Answers to the research question followed the discussion on transition theory as evidence to the development of propositions about experiences of mid-career professionals in EDL PhD programs. This study’s answer to the research question also connected findings to literature presented in Chapter Two of this study.

Chapter Five provides a summary of the study and findings, as well as implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study used a visual methodology called photo-elicitation to investigate doctoral student experiences of mid-career professionals in the Educational Leadership PhD program at Clemson University. Chapter Five provides a discussion and concluding thoughts on (a) findings from the study, (b) implications for practice, and (c) recommendations for further research. The final section offers a summary and conclusion to the study.

Summary of the Study and Findings

The purpose of this study was to use photo-elicitation to explore PhD-seeking student experiences from the perspectives of mid-career professionals in an educational leadership program. The study was grounded in the interpretivist paradigm (Crotty, 1998; Sipe & Constable, 1996) and answered one research question: What are mid-career professionals’ descriptions of their experiences in seeking the PhD in educational leadership programs as generated from photo-elicitation methodology?

Rooted in the interpretivist paradigm (Loeffler, 2004b), the researcher engaged participants in the photo-elicitation process by taking 10 photographs and writing accompanying captions about their doctoral experiences that were then discussed in one-hour to one and a half hour photo-elicitation interview (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Harper, 2002; Rose, 2012). The researcher selected photo-elicitation as the research design in an attempt to enhance the research process by providing an opportunity for participants’
voices to be dominant. Scholars of visual methodologies have argued that participants may be limited in how they articulate their experiences without nonverbal cues, such as photographs (Harper, 2002; Keats, 2009; Smith et al., 2012). Furthermore, scholars have argued that photo-elicitation may assist participants with articulating their experiences (Guillemin & Drew, 2010; Pink, 2007), engaging in self-reflection (Clark-Ibáñez, 2007; Prosser, 2011), and eliciting more in-depth, authentic narratives ((Harper, 2002; Mitchell, 2011; Prosser, 2011).

The site for the study was Clemson University due to its membership as a University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) institution, its contemporary delivery model that provided flexibility for practicing professionals seeking a doctorate, and its focus on the PhD, rather than an EdD, in Educational Leadership. Four participants volunteered for the study and each met selection criteria including mid-career and part- or full-time study statuses. The Four S System of Transition theory (Schlossberg, 1984; Goodman et al., 2006) served as the conceptual framework, and provided the researcher with a roadmap to analyze study findings (Saldana, 2009; Wolcott, 1999).

The researcher explored the participants’ doctoral student experiences using a number of data generation techniques known to honor participants’ voice and equalized power differentials between the researcher and participants. Those data tools included information generated from the photo-elicitation interviews, photographic captions, and observations from what the researcher could derive from looking at the photographs. A
field notes instrument, the researcher’s personal journal, along with the researcher’s subjectivity statement rounded out the data generation methods.

Then, the researcher employed *in vivo* coding followed by theoretical coding to analyze transcriptions, photographs, and captions. During *in vivo* coding, the researcher identified common phrases within and across the transcriptions using the participants’ own voices (Saldaña, 2013). *In vivo* coding was selected to keep the participants’ voices germane throughout the research process, rather than ascribe terms to the participants’ descriptions. The researcher then employed a second cycle of coding, theoretical coding in order to synthesize or collapse *in vivo* codes across the data into categories and themes (Saldaña, 2013). The researcher used the themes to provide overarching descriptions of the participants’ experiences.

Throughout the research process, the researcher used several methods to maintain fidelity in the research process, including enlisting the critique of a critical friend who read the coding schema and subsequent themes (Gordon, 2006). The researcher’s subjectivity statement also provided transparency in the research process as a means to restrain biases or assumptions that could affect the research process (Eisenhart, 2006; Peshkin, 1988). The researcher also kept a personal journal, and developed a field notes instrument that served as a tool to document post-interview reflections (Nespor, 2006). Finally, participants verified the accuracy of the analysis process through member checks (Patton, 2002).
Discussion of the Findings

This study responds to repeated calls for research about the experiences of students in educational leadership programs (McCarthy, 1999; McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009; Murphy, 1992). This study also contributes to the body of knowledge about mid-career doctoral students in educational leadership PhD programs by providing one of few empirical investigations into the part- and full-time doctoral student experience, as well as across program concentrations in a single doctoral program.

Furthermore, while there have been previous studies about doctoral student experiences of nontraditional students who transition from full-time professional practice to assume full- or part-time doctoral study (Austin et al., 2009; McCoy & Gardner, 2011; Gardner & Gopaul, 2012), this study was purposeful to investigate those who make the transition into and through doctoral work specifically at mid-career.

Equally important to the study of doctoral student experiences, this study contributes to the dearth of literature on the uses of photo-elicitation to generate findings about the successes and challenges of mid-career professionals enrolled in doctoral programs. Finally, this study also offers propositions for the enhancement of Schlossberg’s model by offering evidence that mid-career doctoral students experience a range of emotions beyond stress.

The Three Cs Themes

A discussion on how findings from this study compare to literature in Chapter Two and otherwise is discussed along the Three Cs themes in the following section.
Conflicted.

Findings that included data from participants’ narratives, photographs and captions, and the researcher’s field notes showed that mid-career professionals in EDL PhD programs are conflicted. They are conflicted due to the ongoing struggles with adjusting to the type of thinking and academic rigor required in academe versus professional practice while balancing work responsibilities and other roles. As Brus (2006) put it, doctoral students “struggle to balance their academic pursuits with their personal lives and responsibilities” (p. 31). Hall and Burns (2009) found similar observations to Brus (2006) and findings from this study when they offered that navigating through a doctoral program is complex and nuanced and often requires changes in occupational roles and an adjustment to one’s professional priorities (Hall & Burns, 2009). In a similar way, research findings to this dissertation study by Brown and Watson (2005) and Watts (2008), found that graduate school presents challenges for individuals who have to adjust to the routine of academic assignments as well as the cultural differences between work and school settings. Data generated from this study were also consistent with research findings from McCoy and Gardner (2011) who found that nontraditional students often struggle with balancing multiple and competing roles.

In keeping with this study’s findings, other research found that increased roles are particularly the case for non-traditional and part-time students who are often older and have to juggle multiple and competing identities between work, family, and school responsibilities which can lead to doubt, disappointment, and feelings of failure (Archbald, 2011; Watts, 2008; Jackson & Clearly, 2010).
Findings from this dissertation study also revealed that mid-career professionals in terminal degree programs are conflicted due to ongoing struggles they encounter while trying to add a student identity to their existing professional and other identities. These findings were consistent with literature from Ibarra (1999) who argued that identities are often associated with previous roles--positions that carry expectations for who one is, what one does, and who one perceives and portrays oneself to be. Colbeck (2008) suggested that professionals transitioning into doctoral programs might experience stress resulting in conflicting identities if the multiple identities simultaneously carry contrasting meanings and expectations. Stryker and Burke (2000) offered similar observations from their work arguing that when incongruence occurs, competition or conflicts occur between identities, identity salience, and one’s perception of self. McCoy and Gardner (2011), and Austin and colleagues (2009) had similar results to this dissertation study as they found that students experienced a loss of professional identity as they transitioned into the doctoral program, particularly as they transitioned from being experts on their jobs to assuming novice positions as learners in the PhD program.

This dissertation study also offered some contradictory evidence from several other studies. The first of such evidence is a departure from Gardner and Gopaul’s (2012) study who found that the balance required to engage in doctoral work as a part-time student was different and more profound than for full-time students. In contrast, findings from this dissertation study described all of the mid-career professionals, not just part-timers, having issues with managing multiple, and or competing roles. These findings are consistent with research by Tubre and Collins (2000) who offered that it is
possible for anyone to experience role conflict if the demands faced by an individual are incompatible. Another departure from Gardner and Gopaul’s (2012) research is that this study found few distinctions between those enrolled in part- and full-time study.

Commitment.

Findings from this study also described mid-career professionals’ commitment to persevering in the PhD program despite conflicts and emotional upheavals. As Youngs (2007) noted, the adjustment to and the complexity of a doctoral program can “leave a developing practitioner researcher filled with conflicting emotions and thoughts” (p. 101). Nevertheless, findings from this dissertation study illustrated that participants’ resilience was due to their ability to recall lessons learned from former life and work experiences, and remain focused on their future career goals. These findings are consistent with research by Austin and colleagues (2009) who found that perseverance was an important aspect of the transition into a doctoral program.

Study findings regarding student persistence are also consistent with models of doctoral student development. These models attest to students’ ability to persist from entry to degree completion. One such model is from Tinto (1993; 2001). Tinto (1993) indicated that doctoral students persist through terminal degrees when they have experienced prior success, and by garnering “individual goals (educational and career) and commitments (goal and institutional)” (p. 239). In other words, students persisted in their programs when they remained committed to personal educational and career goals, and when they were committed to the institution—willing to complete the degree at the given institution. The extent of external commitments such as family obligations and
work responsibilities were additional reasons why students persisted or not through doctoral work (Tinto, 2001). In contrast to Tinto’s (1993; 2001) work, findings from this dissertation study did not indicate loyalty to the institution as a reason for participants’ persistence. However, the researcher of this dissertation study did find that students’ self-resilience and their focus on future goals such as making a career change or entering the superintendency were reasons they remained committed to reaching degree completion.

Another such model of doctoral student development is by Grover (2007) whose findings were comparable to this dissertation study. Grover (2007) work showed that students who remain in their programs seek help from peers and faculty, as minimal findings from this dissertation attest. They also maintain positive attitudes, and adjust to the academic rigor as findings demonstrated students’ doing in this study.

This study also offers a departure from Grover (2007) who argued that during students’ initial transition into doctoral programs, they realize that prior knowledge gained from jobs once held provide little reprieve from the cognitive skills needed to successfully complete the doctoral degree. In contrast, this dissertation study found that prior success getting through work and life experiences actually enhanced mid-career professionals’ awareness of the need to remain committed through degree completion.

McCoy and Gardner’s (2011) work also offered a contrast to this dissertation study. The researchers found that the transition is much more difficult for older students and those with families (McCoy & Gardner, 2011). While findings from this study acknowledge obligations to family, and the gap in work experience between mid-career
professionals and some of their peers, there is no indication that the transition into and through the PhD program as an older student would be more difficult. Rather, based on participant’s narratives in the Life Experiences subtheme, study findings showed that matriculating through a PhD program before acquiring significant professional work experience would have been more detrimental to students’ ability to remain committed through degree completion.

Contrasts between this study and Gardner and Gopaul’s (2012) study were also evident. The researchers found that experiences of part-time students are more complex than experiences of full-time students and therefore “required sustained and flexible efforts” such as activities to help them balance. In contrast, the participants in this study—both part- and full-time students—expressed a sense of juggling and thus, would benefit from ongoing and flexible support due to challenges and emotions that surfaced in route to their degree completion.

**Community.**

Mid-career professionals are also able to build a sense of community for themselves while matriculating through the PhD program—albeit at times not ideal. Their community consists of a variety of supports and strategies that provide the necessary outlook to transition into and navigate through the PhD process.

Similar to findings from this study, Gardner and Gopaul (2012) found that part-time doctoral students find outside-of-program supports to be most helpful in their matriculation through doctoral studies. An example of such is family that served as the primary support for students in their study, but was not an overarching support for mid-
career students in this study as McCoy and Gardner (2011) concluded. Other supports included partners, children, friends, and places of employment (Austin et al., 2009; Gardner & Gopaul, 2012; McCoy & Gardner, 2011). White and Nonnamaker (2008) found that students rely on internal department supports such as faculty and peers more so upon entering graduate school, but branch out to external supports across the campus community as they progress. This study found no incidents of a shift in supports over time.

While McCoy and Gardner (2011) found that nontraditional students primarily rely on faculty and peers for support, that was not the case in this study, or with Gardner and Gopaul (2012) or research by Austin and colleagues (2009). Rather, this dissertation study found that students lamented not having close relationships with peers. Gardner and Gopaul’s (2012) study supported findings about students’ desire to bond with peers despite only being on campus for occasional meetings with advisors. The researchers also found that differences in age prevented some relationships from forming (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012) as was the case with at least one participant in this study.

Finally, besides this dissertation study, none of the prior three studies mentioned in Chapter Two found faith or personal reflective tools to be supports or strategies used by mid-career students in doctoral programs. A scholarly scan of the literature turned up no studies regarding the faith of doctoral students. However, Service (2012) found self-reflection was critical part of growing and learning in the doctoral program. Gardner and Gopaul (2012) found cohorts to be a significant strategy in helping doctoral students find
balance and camaraderie. McCoy and Gardner (2011) and Austin and colleagues (2009) found self-reliance to be a hallmark of surviving the PhD process.

**Implications for Practice**

This study has implications for individuals and institutions responsible for the enrollment, development, and matriculation of students in PhD programs. An important point for individuals working with doctoral students is “The fact that graduate students have previously navigated the higher education system successfully does not mean that they will not need assistance as they pursue their graduate degrees” (Stimpson & Filer, 2011, p. 74). Given that findings revealed a number of conflicts that mid-career professionals face in matriculating through PhD studies, faculty and coordinators for doctoral programs should make clear the expectations for academic scholarship (Austin, 2002) and the requirements for advancing from one stage in the program to the next (Gardner, 2009; Golde, 2005; Golde, 2008; Austin et al., 2009).

Findings from this study also indicated that mid-career professionals have various and sometimes competing roles and responsibilities, each demanding time and attention (Stimpson & Filer, 2011). Similar findings were noted in all three of the prior studies in Chapter Two (i.e. Austin and colleagues, 2009; Gardner and Gopaul, 2012; and McCoy and Gardner, 2011). In order to effectively manage work-life-school balance, doctoral students have to make tradeoffs and hard decisions about what is important to their success in school and personal happiness (Brus, 2006; Gardner, 2009; Martinez, Ordu, Della Sala, and McFarlane 2013; Offerman, 2011). For example, Martinez et al. (2013) noted that exercising, having a drink, and crying were ways full-time doctoral students
released stress. Brus (2013) argued that institutions must work to develop policies that acknowledge work-life-school balance issues of mid-career professionals. However, the context of this study indicates that a variety of learning modes, such as online and weekend courses, are already in place for busy mid-career professionals. Haynes et al. (2012) recommended a number of coping mechanisms that students might use to deal with the stress of serving multiple roles, including eating healthy, talking with friends, seeking professional help, and social support.

Providing avenues for increased social support with peers provides another implication for practice. Programs servicing mid-career professionals in doctoral work should consider developing structured ways for doctoral students to engage and find community and social support with peers. Findings from this study indicated that students desired for peer relationships. Gardner (2010) argued, “The level of collegiality perceived by students is a predictor of both academic and nonacademic satisfaction in graduate school” (Gardner, 2010, p. 47). Golde (2000) argued that peers serve as viable forms of social support because they are sources of information, and act as a professional network who can help one another interpret and make sense of assignments, department norms, and expectations. In other words, peer relationships matter to successful matriculation and positive psychological health.

In addition to peers, doctoral programs may satisfy the need for and enhance community through student organizations (Gardner, 2009) and cohort models. Saltiel and Russo (2001) argued that cohorts are types of learning communities used to promote peer networks that are both deep and broad in scope. Benefits to cohort models that are
relevant to the scope of this study and provide implications for practice include reduced loneliness (Maher, 2004; 2005; McCarthy, Trenga, & Weiner, 2005; Saltiel & Russo, 2001).

In addition to building a community of support among peers, other findings from this study revealed ways results may be applied to practice. For example, findings from this study offered that graduate student offices, or shared, common space is part of the mid-career experience. Therefore, individuals working with doctoral students, and universities at-large, should provide space within the department or on a university campus solely dedicated to the support and development needs of graduate students (White & Nonnamaker, 2008).

Mid-career professionals in terminal degree programs may also use findings from this study to improve their own support systems and coping mechanisms. Although findings from this study indicated that mid-career professionals were committed to and resilient in their pursuit of a PhD, and often rely on life and work experiences to recall their commitment, they struggled to adjust to expectations from their work settings to those in the PhD program. In order to strategize solutions, doctoral students might use findings from this study to strategize solutions for themselves, such as engaging in systematic and ongoing moments of reflection, using academic resources outside of class to further growth of a practitioner-scholar identity, and clinging to their faith for support.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The goal of this study was to explore doctoral student experiences of professionals at mid-career who are pursuing a terminal degree. Although this study
contributes knowledge to the field, the researcher notes several limitations of the findings. First, there is the matter of sampling. This study enlisted a small number of informants to generate data and subsequent findings about mid-career professionals in a PhD program at Clemson University. Given the small sampling size, the findings are not generalizable to other settings (Patton, 2002). Future studies could build upon findings from this study to broaden the scope by enlisting additional participants or expanding the institutions involved. Researchers who chose to further this research could also investigate experiences between ethnic, racial groups and male and female mid-career doctoral students, since the number of individuals representing these groups in this study was relatively small.

Second, questions on the field notes instrument should expand beyond documenting and addressing subjectivities. Questions on the form should account for emotions experienced by the researcher or address issues that may have surfaced because of personal relationships between researcher and participants. In addition, future researchers could use the modified field notes form to investigate more fully a particular theme, such as emotions, in order to extend transition theory or aide in the development of a new theory.

Third, the instructions the researcher gave participants created a limitation. While 10 photographs may have permitted rich opportunities for participants to gather images in 10 days, these photos provided an overabundance of opportunities for reflection. Even though the researcher restricted the photo-elicitation interview to a discussion of just three of the photos, three proved too many to discuss in an interview limited to one hour.
In all four interviews, nearly 30 minutes had expired in discussion of only one of the three photographs. Furthermore, given that most participants took pictures using their cell phones in a matter of days, it is still unclear whether participants needed the full 10 days to generate photographs or if that allotment of time simply shows respect for busy professionals. Future research could investigate these issues more fully.

Beyond limitations, findings from the study raised other questions that researchers could explore in future studies. For example, findings indicated that at least one participant, the practicing school leader, lacked individuals who could serve as supports because he felt the need to be strong for everyone else. Further research could explore more fully the doctoral experiences of practicing leaders, given that research shows that professionalism of schools and the idea of the heroic leader discourages this population from being vulnerable to others (Ackerman Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004). Studies that aim to build upon this dissertation could also delve into the experiences of ethnic, racial groups, particularly around camaraderie as a participant in this study experienced challenges.

Findings from the study also confirmed that common space for doctoral students was a part of mid-career professionals’ experience. Future research could examine ways in which environmental factors, such as space, affect students’ experiences in a terminal degree program. Furthermore, given that findings revealed some interest in mid-career professionals leaving practice and entering the professoriate following PhD degree completion, researchers could explore this notion more fully in future investigations. Finally, given that emotions was the underpinning of the mid-career experience, further research could explore more fully ways in which the PhD experience conjures emotions.
Chapter Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to situate findings from this study with results from previous studies on the experiences of nontraditional students in doctoral programs. This chapter began with a summary of the study and led into a discussion of the findings. Implications for practice were provided as well as recommendations for further research.

In conclusion, the findings from this study expanded the work of previous researchers of nontraditional doctoral student experiences and transition theory. More specifically, findings from this study contributed to understanding mid-career professionals’ experiences in a terminal degree program by illustrating their conflicts due to increased roles and struggles with identity in the PhD program. Findings further demonstrated that this population of students remained committed to persevering through the doctoral program despite emotional upheavals. Findings also revealed the types of internal and external supports and coping mechanisms mid-career professionals use to advance through doctoral work.

The findings of this study have implications for policy and practice towards the knowledge base in educational leadership, researchers of the doctoral student experience, and those interested in emergent methods. Findings address repeated calls for research about graduate students in educational leadership programs, and offer literature towards understanding both full- and part-time experiences of doctoral students. This study’s findings also provide evidence towards the contributions of nontraditional data generation methods, specifically the use of photography in research. Finally, study findings have implications for individuals who are responsible for the development and matriculation of
PhD students who will assume meaningful leadership roles that will directly and indirectly impact the lives of students in P20 settings.
Appendix A

Permission to Link to NCES or Replicate Information

LINKING to NCES: All information on our site is in the public domain. If you feel that a link to our website from yours is beneficial, please feel free to create a link.

REPLICATION: Unless specifically stated otherwise, all information on the U.S. Department of Education's NCES website at http://nces.ed.gov is in the public domain, and may be reproduced, published or otherwise used without NCES' permission. This statement does not pertain to information at websites other than http://nces.ed.gov, whether funded by or linked to, from NCES or not.

Please use the following citation when referencing NCES products and publications: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

Appendix B

Clemson University

Exploring Doctoral Student Experiences of Mid-Career Professionals Using Photography Study

IRB Exempt Research Approval

Dear Dr. Lindle,

The chair of the Clemson University Institutional Review Board (IRB) validated the protocol identified above using exempt review procedures and a determination was made on November 1, 2013 that the proposed activities involving human participants qualify as Exempt under category B2, based on federal regulations 45 CFR 46. The approved consent document is attached for distribution. Your protocol will expire on October 31, 2014.

Please note that the University of South Carolina’s IRB office might require additional approval before you can recruit or collect data from students at their institution. Please contact their office and notify us of any changes.

The expiration date indicated above was based on the completion date you entered on the IRB application. If an extension is necessary, the PI should submit an Exempt Protocol Extension Request form, http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/forms.html, at least three weeks before the expiration date. Please refer to our website for more information on the new procedures, http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/guidance/reviewprocess.html.

No change in this approved research protocol can be initiated without the IRB’s approval. This includes any proposed revisions or amendments to the protocol or consent form. Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects, any complications, and/or any adverse events must be reported to the Office of Research Compliance (ORC) immediately. All team members are required to review the “Responsibilities of Principal Investigators” and the “Responsibilities of Research Team Members” available at http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/regulations.html.

The Clemson University IRB is committed to facilitating ethical research and protecting the rights of human subjects. Please contact us if you have any questions and use the IRB number and title in all communications regarding this study.

Good luck with your study.
All the best,
Nalinee

Nalinee D. Patin  
IRB Coordinator  
Clemson University  
Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
Voice: (864) 656-0636  
Fax: (864) 656-4475  
E-mail: npatin@clemson.edu  
Web site: http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/  
IRB E-mail: irb@clemson.edu  

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Appendix C
Clemson University

Exploring Doctoral Student Experiences of Mid-Career Professionals Using Photography Study

Invitation to Participate in Study Email Script

Dear Educational Leadership Doctoral Students (P-12 and HE):

You are invited to participate in a research study that uses photography to document selected doctoral students’ experiences leading to a PhD in Educational Leadership at Clemson University. The research question for the study asks: What are mid-career professionals’ descriptions of their experiences in seeking the PhD in educational leadership programs as generated from photo-elicitation methodology?

The specifics about the role of participants and eligibility requirements are listed below.

If you qualify for and would like to participate in this study, or if you have questions, please contact Co-Investigator, Ms. Kenyae L. Reese at kenyae@clemson.edu or (678) 478-4178.

Role of Participants in the Study:

- Participants will use their own digital camera or phone equipped with photograph capabilities to take 10 photographs that describe their experiences in a doctoral program and write captions about the photographs.
- Participants will have 10 days to take 10 photographs and process their images.
- After 10 days, participants will give all photographs and captions to the researcher as artifacts of their doctoral student experiences.
- Upon submitting photographs and captions, participants will be invited to participate in a 30-minute to one-hour face-to-face interview with the researcher.
- If you do not have a camera, one will be provided for you.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Participants must be enrolled full- or part-time in the Educational Leadership program at Clemson University (P-12 or HE concentrations)
- Participants must have at least eight years of professional work experience prior to enrolling in the doctoral program
- Participants must be willing to take photographs and write captions of their doctoral student experiences and participate in a 30-minute to one-hour interview.
If you qualify for and would like to participate in this study, or if you have questions, please contact Co-Investigator, Kenyae L. Reese at kenyae@clemson.edu or (678) 478-4178. Those currently involved in the project are envisioning a major contribution to awareness of issues related to mid-career professionals in doctoral programs.

Sincerely,

Ms. Kenyae L. Reese, EdS
PhD Candidate in Educational Leadership
Moore Research and Teaching Assistant, Eugene T. Moore School of Education
Secretary of Government and Student Affairs, Graduate Student Government
Clemson University
308F Tillman Hall
Clemson, SC 29634
kenyae@clemson.edu
678-478-4178 (cell) / 864-656-1322 (fax)
Appendix D

Clemson University

Exploring Doctoral Student Experiences of Mid-Career Professionals Using Photography Study

Faculty Nomination Email Script

Dear [insert faculty member’s name]:

I need your help in soliciting volunteers for participation in a dissertation research study that uses photography to elicit doctoral students’ narratives about experiences leading to a PhD in Educational Leadership at Clemson University. The research question for this study asks: What are mid-career professionals’ descriptions of their experiences in seeking the PhD in educational leadership programs as generated from photo-elicitation methodology?

Participants in the study must be enrolled in the Educational Leadership PhD program (P-12 or HE concentrations) at Clemson University. Participants may be engaged in full- or part-time study. Participants must have at least eight years of professional work experience prior to enrolling in the doctoral program. I hope you will solicit volunteers from among your advisees and other PhD students enrolled in your courses. Attached is a volunteer form, which interested students may complete and send to me via email (kenyae@clemson.edu) or fax (864-656-1322).

The role of participants in this study will be to use their own digital camera or phone equipped with photograph capabilities to take 10 photographs that describe their experiences in a doctoral program and write captions about the photographs. Participants will have 10 days to take the 10 photographs and process their images. After 10 days, participants will give all photographs and captions to the researcher as artifacts of their doctoral student experiences. Upon submitting photos and captions, participants are invited to participate in a 30-minute to one-hour face-to-face interview with the researcher.

Thank you for your help in finding participants for this study. I will follow up in a couple of weeks to see if anyone has come forward to participate, or whether you, or any potential participants, have any further questions. Those currently involved in the project are envisioning a major contribution to awareness of issues related to mid-career professionals in doctoral programs.

Sincerely,
Ms. Kenyae L. Reese, EdS
PhD Candidate in Educational Leadership
Moore Research and Teaching Assistant, Eugene T. Moore School of Education
Secretary of Government and Student Affairs, Graduate Student Government
Clemson University
308F Tillman Hall
Clemson, SC 29634
kenyae@clemson.edu
678-478-4178 (cell) / 864-656-1322 (fax)
Exploring Doctoral Student Experiences of Mid-Career Professionals Using Photography Study

Photographs of the Doctoral Experience Volunteer Form

Name: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

Years in the Doctoral Program: ___________________________ Credit Hours accumulated: __

Anticipated Graduation Semester/Year: ___________________________

Full-time: ____ Yes   _____ No   Minor/Concentration: ___________________________

Phone #: ___________________________ email: ___________________________

Preferred time of day for contact: ___________________________
Appendix E

Clemson University

Exploring Doctoral Student Experiences of Mid-Career Professionals Using Photography Study

Information about Being in a Research Study

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study conducted by Jane Clark Lindle, PhD and Ms. Kenyae L. Reese. Dr. Jane Clark Lindle is a faculty member at Clemson University. Ms. Reese is a doctoral candidate at Clemson University and is administering this study with the help of the study faculty.

The purpose of this study is to use photography to document selected doctoral students’ experiences through their professional and academic programs leading to the PhD at Clemson University and the University of South Carolina.

Your part in this particular study will be to use your own digital camera or phone equipped with photograph capabilities to take 10 photographs that describe your experiences in a doctoral program and write captions about the photographs. You will have 10 days to take the 10 photographs and process their images. After 10 days, participants will give all photographs and captions to the researcher as artifacts of their doctoral student experiences. Upon submitting your photos and captions, you are invited to participate in a 30-minute to one-hour face-to-face interview with the researcher. If you prefer to participate in an interview via phone or email, as opposed to participating in a face-to-face interview, the researcher will conduct the interview through those modes. The photos and captions should be submitted to co-investigator, Kenyae L. Reese, via email at Kenyae@clemson.edu.

In order to prepare for the interview, the researchers ask that you bring three of your 10 photographs and captions that most represent your experiences in a doctoral program to the interview session.

During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions about the photographs you took, how the photos relate to your experiences as a doctoral student, and your experiences using photographs to document your journey in a doctoral program. Interviews will be recorded for later transcription.

Please be aware that if you take pictures of individuals other than yourself, you must secure those individual’s consent prior to taking their photograph. If they agree to participate, you will have to provide them with a release form that is attached to this
email and return a signed copy of the form to kenyae@clemson.edu by emailing it as an attachment.

It will take you about one hour to participate in the interview portion of this study.

**Risks and Discomforts**
There are no known risks or discomforts that you might expect if you take part in this research. Should you withdraw from participation in this study there are no penalties or risks of retaliation.

**Possible Benefits**
We do not know of any way you would benefit directly from taking part in this study. However, this research may help us to understand the experiences of doctoral students that could inform future studies.

**Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality**
We will do everything we can to protect your privacy and confidentiality. We will not tell anybody outside of the research team that you were in this study or what information we collected about you in particular. We will use a pseudonym, which you may create, and we will remove all identifying information during our data analysis. However, if you submit pictures of yourself someone who sees the publications or presentations may recognize you. The audio recordings will be destroyed after transcriptions approximately 3 months after collecting them. Therefore, it is unlikely that anyone reading the results will know you are a participant.

**Choosing to Be in the Study**
You do not have to be in this study. You may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

**Contact Information.**
If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Dr. Jane Clark Lindle at 864-508-0629 or jlindle@clemson.edu. You may also contact Ms. Kenyae L. Reese at 678-478-4178 or Kenyae@clemson.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-6460 or irb@clemson.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC’s toll-free number, 866-297-3071.
Consent

I have read this form and have been allowed to ask any questions I might have. I agree to take part in this study.

Participant’s signature: ___________________________ Date: ______________

Please sign the attached consent form and return to kenyae@clemson.edu by emailing a signed copy as an attachment.
Appendix F

Clemson University

Exploring Doctoral Student Experiences of Mid-Career Professionals Using Photography Study

Public Photograph Release Form

I, _________________________________am participating in a research study conducted by Jane Clark Lindle, PhD and Ms. Kenyae L. Reese. Dr. Jane Clark Lindle is a faculty member at Clemson University. Ms. Reese is a doctoral candidate at Clemson University and is administering this study with the help of the study faculty.

The purpose of this study is to use photography to document selected doctoral students’ experiences through their professional and academic programs leading to the PhD at Clemson University.

As part of my participation in this study, I am requesting permission to take your picture and use it to document my doctoral experience.

Your name or any identifying information will not be used during the discussions or be revealed in any publications or presentations. However, someone who sees the publications or presentations may recognize you. Remember, your willingness to be photographed is completely voluntary and you may decline at any time.

Contact Information.
If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Dr. Jane Clark Lindle at 864-508-0629 or jlindle@clemson.edu. You may also contact Ms. Kenyae L. Reese at 678-478-4178 or Kenyae@clemson.edu.

By signing this form, I give permission to have my picture taken by a participant in the study titled “Exploring Doctoral Student Experiences of Mid-Career Professionals Using Photography” and for the photographs to be used in presentations and publications about this project.

Signature: ____________________________________ Date: __________________

Print name: ____________________________________
Appendix G

Clemson University

Exploring Doctoral Student Experiences of Mid-Career Professionals Using Photography Study

Photograph Ownership Release Form

I, ________________________________ give permission for Jane Clark Lindle, PhD and Ms. Kenyae L. Reese to own, use, and publish my photographs developed during the “Exploring Doctoral Student Experiences of Mid-Career Professionals Using Photography” study. They are free to use the photographs for presentations and publications about this project.

Contact Information.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Dr. Jane Clark Lindle at 864-508-0629 or jlindle@clemson.edu. You may also contact Ms. Kenyae L. Reese at 678-478-4178 or Kenyae@clemson.edu.

Participant’s signature: __________________________ Date: __________________

Participant’s name: ____________________________
Appendix H
Clemson University

Exploring Doctoral Student Experiences of Mid-Career Professionals Using Photography Study

Interview Protocol

Name of Participant (Pseudonym): __________________________ Date: ______

Researcher/s: __________________________

Start time: _________________ End time: ________________ Length of interview: __________

Script:

Hello [insert participant’s name], it is nice to meet you and thank you again for participating in this study. As you may recall from the consent form, this study is about the use of photography to document selected doctoral students’ experiences through their professional and academic programs leading to the PhD at Clemson University. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions about the photographs and captions that you took, how the photos relate to your experiences as a doctoral student, and your experiences using photographs to document your journey in a doctoral program. All information will be confidential. We will not disclose your name in any way. The findings of this study, including your pictures, may be used for conference presentations and/or publications. The interview should last about an hour. Would you like to select a pseudonym that will assist with confidentiality? [wait for answer] Okay, well let us begin. Which photograph would you like to begin with?

Interview Questions:

Photograph #1

1. Tell me about this photograph as it relates to your experiences as a mid-career professional in an educational leadership doctoral program.

Probes:

a. Why did you select this photograph to discuss today and not another?
b. How did taking this picture [or all of these pictures] help you think about your experiences as a doctoral student?

2. [If full-time student]: Tell me about your experiences transitioning from a work environment to the PhD program.

Probes:

a. When did you first think about going to graduate school?

b. Why did you select this university to earn your PhD?

3. [If a part-time student]: Tell me about your experiences working full-time and entering the PhD program part-time.

Probes:

a. When did you first think about going to graduate school?

b. Why did you select this university to earn your PhD?

4. What are your career plans following degree completion? Tell me more about those specifics.

Photograph #2

1. Tell me about this photograph as it relates to your experiences as a mid-career professional in an educational leadership doctoral program.

Probes:

a. Why did you select this photograph to discuss today and not another?

b. How did taking this picture [or all of these pictures] help you think about your experiences as a doctoral student?
2. [If full-time student]: Tell me about your experiences transitioning from a work environment to the PhD program.

Probes:

a. When did you first think about going to graduate school?

b. Why did you select this university to earn your PhD?

3. [If part-time student]: Tell me about your experiences working full-time and entering the PhD program part-time.

Probes:

a. When did you first think about going to graduate school?

b. Why did you select this university to earn your PhD?

4. What are your career plans following degree completion? Tell me more about those specifics.

Photograph #3

1. Tell me about this photograph as it relates to your experiences as a mid-career professional in an educational leadership doctoral program.

Probes:

a. Why did you select this photograph to discuss today and not another?

b. How did taking this picture [or all of these pictures] help you think about your experiences as a doctoral student?

2. [If full-time student]: Tell me about your experiences transitioning from a work environment to the PhD program.

Probes:
a. When did you first think about going to graduate school?

b. Why did you select this university to earn your PhD?

3. [If a part-time student]: Tell me about your experiences working full-time and entering the PhD program part-time.

Probes:

a. When did you first think about going to graduate school?

b. Why did you select this university to earn your PhD?

4. What are your career plans following degree completion? Tell me more about those specifics.
Appendix I

Clemson University

Exploring Doctoral Student Experiences of Mid-Career Professionals Using Photography Study

Field Instruments Form

Researcher: ___________________________ Date: ______________________

Participant’s Name: __________________ Location: ________________

1. What were the particularities of the interview that were important for contextualizing the analysis of transcripts?

2. What questions evoked emotional or affective responses from participants?

3. Were there any noticeable changes to participants’ body language or voice during the photo-elicitation interview? If so, what questions or responses were they attached?

4. What self-reflective narratives were told as a result of the photographs?

5. What insights were gained into the participant’s experiences by the use of photography?

6. Were there moments during the photo-elicitation interview that the researcher’s biases and assumptions may have interfered with the conversation with the participant? If so, what were they? What are ways to address these subjectivities?

7. What are items to keep in mind for future interviews?
Dear Participant,

It's time for member checks!

In the attached documents, I have provided for you information about the themes and how your photos fit within the themes, and your transcription. Of course, we didn't discuss all of your photos, but I made some decisions based on the captions, what was in the photos, and what you said throughout the interview.

Here's what I need from you:

1. Let me know if you have a problem with the themes and/or their descriptions (see attached conceptual map and related verbiage)
2. Let me know if I have accurately placed your pictures in the right themes. (see attached chart)
3. Let me know if some of the verbiage is wrong in your transcription (see attached transcription)
4. Furthermore, I have been informed that I have to analyze all pictures, not just the ones (3-5 photos) we discussed in the photo-elicitation interview. If you have any problems with that, please let me know.

Placing pictures in the right theme is the majority of the holdup, because I want to be sure. Please get back to me as soon as you can :).

Email or call with any issues, concerns, questions. Now is the time. Thanks!

CONCEPTUAL MAP OF THEMES (In-Progress)
DESCRIPTION OF THE THEMES (Prior to Editing):

The use of photographs in the research process serves as a point of self-reflection and memory recall for participants (Guillemin & Drew, 2010; Harper, 2002), as well as a power equalizer and conversation stimulus between participant and researcher (Collier & Collier, 1986; Harper, 2002; Loeffler, 2004). Photographs also provide a means to elicit deep, emotional narratives through which people can understand and make sense of their experiences (Pink, 2007). Participants in this study discussed their experiences through photographic images that led to three central themes and two corresponding subthemes within each theme. The three themes were Conflicted, Commitment, and Community.

The theme Conflicted described the conflicts and challenges that Jacob, Marie, Erin, and Derrick endured as a result of adding school to their existing identities and established roles. From the theme Conflicted, two subthemes surfaced Roles and Identity. The subtheme Roles described the types of roles for which participants engaged, how those roles fit within the context of being doctoral students, and tools participants used to balance multiple and or competing roles. The second subtheme Identity explored how the four participants’ perceptions of identity were in conflict with or changed as a result of entering a PhD program. Identity also examined participants’ feelings of legitimacy as they experienced changes from what they do and who they are as professionals to what and who they are as doctoral students.

The second theme Commitment described the participants’ ability to be self-aware of what they were experiencing and the effects of such as a result of entering a doctoral program. Commitment is supported by two subthemes: Emotions and Life Experiences. Emotions described the ups and downs they experienced as a professional in a PhD program. Emotions also explored the participants’ awareness of how the PhD was connected to their future career trajectory, and thus were willing to deal with the difficulties they experienced in route to degree obtainment. Life Experiences is the second subtheme within Commitment. Certain life experiences of participants, along with age, and maturity—not necessarily stage in career—helped them cope with the emotions and ups and downs experienced in the doctoral program. While Life Experiences may seem like a strategy participants used to help them cope, participants are talking about it in the sense that life experiences have made them more aware of the need to cope i.e. deal with the challenges in a PhD in order to matriculate, not that they used life experiences as a mechanism for coping.

The third and final theme that emerged from the analysis process was Community. The theme Community was not intended to describe characteristics of the four participants. Rather, the theme described participants’ support systems that helped them cope or supports that would help them feel a sense of belonging, community, or accomplishment if in place. Community was represented by two subthemes: Support and Strategies. The first subtheme, Support explored the types of support systems that served as participants’ strategies for coping with difficulties incurred in the doctoral program. Strategies, the second subtheme, were a compilation of recommendations and suggestions made by the participants for PhD program improvement. These suggestions were either explicitly recommended by participants as ways to help them transition and cope with challenges in the PhD program or were implied through the participants’
narratives on support systems. Narratives and photographs related to each theme are discussed in the following sections followed by a summary of the participants’ collective experiences.

It should also be noted that although participants took 10 photographs each totaling 40 photographs, only 36 pictures are presented throughout the chapter because they fit within the themes. This was determined during the data analysis process by analyzing captions of the photographs, interpreting meanings of the photographs based on what the images appeared to be about, and by what the participants said about the photographs. Moreover, each participant confirmed accuracy of the data analysis process and eventual findings during member checks. The other 4 pictures were not included as they represented an experience by a particular participant that was not commonly found among the other three participants.

PHOTOS BY PARTICIPANT BY THEME

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1: CONFLICTED</th>
<th>Jacob</th>
<th>Marie</th>
<th>Erin</th>
<th>Derrick</th>
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<td>Roles</td>
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<td>Outlook Calendar</td>
<td>Waterfall</td>
<td>Staff Meeting</td>
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<td>Redfern</td>
<td>Caffeine</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No More Chains…</td>
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<td>All Work No Play</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Ongoing Travel…</td>
<td>Car Window</td>
<td>Stuck &amp; Volatile</td>
<td>Late Night Debate</td>
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<th>Derrick</th>
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<td>Linear but Not</td>
<td>Path Never…</td>
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<td>No pic</td>
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<td>Reflection</td>
<td>I See the World…</td>
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<th>Derrick</th>
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<td>Havice</td>
<td>Support</td>
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<td>Time Saver</td>
<td>Faithful Highlighter</td>
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Appendix K

Curriculum Vitae

Kenyae L. Reese
Clemson University
Eugene T. Moore School of Education
Dept. of Leadership, Counselor Education, Human and Organizational Development
308F Tillman Hall, Clemson, SC 29634
Phone: 678-478-4178 Fax: 864-656-1322
kenyae@clemson.edu

Education

PhD  Educational Leadership, Expected May 2014, Clemson University, Clemson, SC

  Dissertation: Exploring Doctoral Student Experiences from the Perspectives of Mid-Career Professionals in Educational Leadership Using Photo-Elicitation
  Committee: (Chair) Jane Clark Lindle, PhD, Eugene T. Moore Professor of Educational Leadership; Tony W. Cawthon, PhD; Hans W. Klar, PhD; Robert C. Knoeppel, PhD
  Cognate: Health Communication (Certificate Earned), Department of Communication Studies

MEd  School Leadership (Principal Licensure), 2011
  Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA

EdS  Guidance & Counseling, 2006
  University of Georgia, Athens, GA

MEd  College Student Affairs Administration, 2005
  University of Georgia, Athens, GA

BS  Marketing, 2000
  Hampton University, Hampton, VA
Professional Work Experience

Research Experience
2012-present Eugene T. Moore Research & Teaching Assistant, Educational Leadership, Eugene T. Moore School of Education, Clemson University, Supervisor: Professor Jane Clark Lindle, Eugene T. Moore Professor of Educational Leadership
2011-2012 Research Assistant, Educational Leadership, Eugene T. Moore School of Education, Clemson University, Supervisor: Professor Russ Marion.

School Leadership
2010-2011 Principal Intern, Josiah Quincy Upper International Baccalaureate School, Boston, MA
2009-2011 College Access Specialist, Booker T. Washington High School, Atlanta, GA (Educational Leave 2010-2011)
2008; 2009 Site Coordinator, Project GRAD Residential Summer Institute-University of Georgia, Athens, GA

Professional School Counseling and Small School/Small Learning Community
2008-2009 Professional School Counselor & National Collegiate Athletic Association Coordinator, North Atlanta High School, Atlanta, GA
2007-2008 Professional School Counselor, South Atlanta School of Health & Medical Sciences, Atlanta, GA
2006-2007 Professional School Counselor, South Atlanta High School, Atlanta, GA
2005-2006 Intern, Guidance and Counseling, Clarke Central High School, Athens, GA

College Student Affairs
2003-2006 Graduate Advisor, Student Activities Office, University of Georgia, Athens, GA
2004 Practicum Student/Co-Instructor, Career Center, University of Georgia, Athens, GA
2004 (Sumr) Intern, Department of Multicultural Services, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX

Corporate
2001-2004 Zone Manager, Ford Motor Company, Ford Sales Division, Atlanta, GA
1999 (Sumr) Intern, Product Development Division, Allstate Insurance Company, Northbrook, IL
1999 (Spr) Co-op Student, Brand Management Department, Johnson & Johnson-Merck, Fort Washington, PA
1997 (Sumr) Intern, Risk Management/IT Division, JP Morgan, New York, NY

Non-Profit
2004 Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Collegiate Candidates, Incorporated 501(c)(3), Athens, GA
Licenses/Certifications

- State of North Carolina Continuing/Standard Professional II School Administrator (K-12); School Counselor (K-12)
- State of Tennessee Beginning Administrator License (P-12); Apprentice Special Group School Counseling (P-12)
- State of Georgia Clear and Renewable Certification in School Counseling (P-12)
- State of Massachusetts School Principal and Assistant School Principal Initial License (5-12)
- Tenured School Counselor, Atlanta Public Schools, Atlanta, Georgia

Publications


Book Chapters Under Review


Manuscripts Submitted or Under Review


**Featured Publications**

**International Scholarly Presentations**

**National Scholarly Presentations**

Lindle, J.C., Klar, H.W., Knoeppel, R.C., Campbell, M., Reese, K., & Della Sala, M. (2013). Rising above the constraints of time and mandates to empower principals’ success: The nexus of performativity, agency, and efficacy. Paper presented at the annual conference of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), Indianapolis, IN.


Reese, K.L. (2013). *Mirrors, lenses, windows: Documenting the doctoral experience through photomethods*. Presentation presented at the annual conference of the National Black Graduate Student Association (NBGSA), Detroit, MI.


**Regional Scholarly Presentations**


Reese, K. L. (2004). *Barriers that limit African-American access to higher education*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SACSA), Chattanooga, TN.

Reese, K. L. (2004). *Name discrimination*. Presentation presented at the Diversity Training Institute (DTI), Texas A&M University, College Station, TX.

**State Scholarly Presentations**


**Local Scholarly Presentations**


Reese, K.L. (2013). Looking, seeing, knowing: Documenting the doctoral student experience through photomethods. Poster presented at the Graduate Student Research and Discovery Symposium (GRADS), Clemson University, Clemson, SC.


**Invited Professional Presentations, Workshops & Lectures**


Reese, K.L., & Vines, J. (2012). Doctorate 101. Panelist for the Palmetto PhD Project of the Charles H. Houston Center, Clemson University, Clemson, SC.


Reese, K.L. (2009). *Attending to rising seniors*. Presentation presented at the Atlanta Public Schools High School Counselor Professional Development Training Seminar, Atlanta, GA.

Reese, K.L. (2008). *College readiness*. Panelist for the Project GRAD Family Access Weekend, Emory University, Atlanta, GA.

Reese, K.L. (2007). *Dining etiquette*. Presentation presented at the South Atlanta School of Health & Medical Sciences Girl’s Retreat, Atlanta, GA.

Reese, K.L. (2007). *College readiness*. Panelist for the Project GRAD Family Access Weekend, Emory University, Atlanta, GA.

Reese, K.L. (2004). *Ten steps to college*. Presentation presented at the Hilltop Baptist Church Young People’s Department College Workshop, Athens, GA.


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**Grants Awarded**

$1,000, College of Health, Education and Human Development Graduate Student Travel Grant to present at the 2014 annual conference of the American Counseling Association (ACA), Honolulu, HI.

$500, School of Education Travel Grant to present at the 2013 annual conference of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), Orlando, FL

$1,000, College of Health, Education and Human Development Graduate Student Travel Grant to present at the 2013 annual conference of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), Orlando, FL.

$500, School of Education Travel Grant to present at the 2013 annual conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), St. Louis, MS.

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**Teaching Experience**

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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Course</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall, 2013</td>
<td>Clemson University, Clemson, SC</td>
<td>EDL 911 Systematic Inquiry in Educational Leadership (Guest Lecture)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring 2013</td>
<td>Clemson University, Clemson, SC</td>
<td>COMM 470 Health Communication (Guest Lecture)</td>
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</table>
Spring 2013  Clemson University, Clemson, SC
EDL 980 Current Issues in Educational Leadership (Co-Instructor)
(Course focused on professional practice, data use, school-based
assessment, evaluation models)

Fall 2012  Clemson University, Clemson, SC
EDL 885 Educational Intelligence (Co-Instructor)

Fall 2012  Clemson University, Clemson, SC
EDL 885 Cognitive Coaching (Co-Instructor)

Summer, 2012  Clemson University, Clemson, SC
EDL 925 Instructional Leader (Co-Instructor)

Spring, 2004  University of Georgia, Athens, GA
ECHD 3050 Career and Life Planning (Co-Instructor)

*Student Database Proficiency: Blackboard, SASI, Infinite Campus, Basic Proficiency in
NVIVO and SPSS

** Academic Service Activities

**Editorial and Reviewer**
2012-present  Managing Editor, ENGAGE: An International Journal on Research and
Practices in School Engagement
2012-present  Assistant to the Editor, Political Contexts of Educational Leadership:
ISLLC Standard 6 book.
2012-present  Manuscript Reviewer, Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership
2012  Manuscript Reviewer, Politics of Education Association (PEA) Yearbook
Series

**Board Member**
2012-present  External Advisory Board Member, Eugene T. Moore School of Education,
Clemson University
2012-present  Advisory Board Member, Minority Student Success Initiative, Office of
Institutional Diversity, Clemson University
2013-present  Student Advisory Board Member, College of Health, Education and
Human Development, Clemson University

**Hiring & Recruiting**
2013-present  Search Committee Member, Founding Dean, Eugene T. Moore School of
Education, Clemson University
2013  Search Committee Member, Professional Development Coordinator,
Graduate School, Clemson University
2012-2013  Search Committee Member, Clinical Faculty of School Counseling,
Eugene T. Moore School of Education, Clemson University
Student Affairs Service Activities

**Appointments**

2013-present  Division of Student Affairs Student Advisory Board Member, Clemson University
2013-present  Secretary of Government & Graduate Student Affairs, Graduate Student Government Clemson University
2013-present  Board Member, Joint City and University Advisory Board (JCUAB), Clemson University/City of Clemson, SC
2012-2013  Secretary, Black Graduate Student Association, Clemson University
2012  Founder, Paw Pals Peer Mentoring Program for Doctoral Students in Educational Leadership and Curriculum and Instruction, Eugene T. Moore School of Education, Clemson University
2010-2011  Chairperson, Black Student Union Commencement Celebration, Harvard Graduate School of Education
2003-2004  Philanthropy & Community Service Chairperson, University of Georgia Student Personnel Association (UGASPA)
2003  Moderator, Southern Association for College Student Affairs Conference (SACSA), Annual Conference, Chattanooga, TN
2002-2003  Chairperson, Student Recruitment and Retention Committee, Hampton University Alumni Association, Atlanta Chapter

**Committee Work**

2013-present  Committee Member, G.O.A.L. Team 2 for the Enhancement of the Graduate Student Experience Division of Student Affairs, Clemson University
2012-present  Committee Member, 50th Anniversary of Integration at Clemson: A Legacy of Inclusion, Office of Institutional Diversity, Clemson University
2012-present  Planning Team Member, Annual Student Meeting for Educational Leadership and Curriculum and Instruction Doctoral programs
2011-present  Committee Member, Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) Annual Celebration, Clemson University
2011-2012  Member, Diversity Committee, Eugene T. Moore School of Education, Clemson University
2004  Multicultural Committee Member, Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SACSA)

**Hiring & Recruiting**

2004  Search Committee Member, Assistant Director of Student Activities, Department of Student Affairs, University of Georgia
2004  On-Campus Resource Fair Representative, Department of Multicultural Services, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX
Public Schools Service Activities

**Secondary Committee Work**
2010-2011 Professional Development Committee Member  
Josiah Quincy Upper International Baccalaureate School, Boston, MA
2010-2011 High School Grade-Level Team Member,  
Josiah Quincy Upper International Baccalaureate School, Boston, MA
2010-2011 Student Life Committee Member,  
Josiah Quincy Upper International Baccalaureate School, Boston, MA
2008-2009 Partnership Coordinator, North Atlanta High School, Atlanta, GA
2007-2008 Co-Coordinator, Charitable Giving Campaign,  
South Atlanta School of Health & Medical Sciences, Atlanta, GA
2007-2008 Student Support Team (SST) Coordinator,  
South Atlanta School of Health & Medical Sciences, Atlanta, GA
2007-2008 Free and Reduced Lunch Forms Coordinator,  
South Atlanta School of Health & Medical Sciences, Atlanta, GA
2007-2008 Credit Recovery After-School Program Coordinator  
South Atlanta School of Health & Medical Sciences, Atlanta, GA

**Instructional Leadership Team:**
2010-2011 Josiah Quincy Upper International Baccalaureate School, Boston, MA
2009-2011 Booker T. Washington High School, Atlanta, GA
2007-2008 South Atlanta School of Health & Medical Sciences, Atlanta, GA
2006-2007 South Atlanta High School, Atlanta, GA

**Discipline Committee Member:**
2010-2011 Josiah Quincy Upper International Baccalaureate School, Atlanta, GA
2007-2008 South Atlanta School of Health & Medical Sciences, Atlanta, GA

**Parent Outreach:**
2010-2011 Committee Member,  
Josiah Quincy Upper International Baccalaureate School, Boston, MA
2007-2008 Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) Coordinator,  
South Atlanta School of Health & Medical Sciences, Atlanta, GA

**Graduation Committee Member:**
2009-2011 Booker T. Washington High School, Atlanta, GA
2008-2009 North Atlanta High School, Atlanta, GA
2006-2007 South Atlanta High School, Atlanta, GA

**Attendance Committee Member:**
2007-2008 South Atlanta School of Health & Medical Sciences, Atlanta, GA
2006-2007 South Atlanta High School, Atlanta, GA

**Hiring & Recruiting**
2010 & 2011 College Readiness Liaison position  
Project GRAD Division of Atlanta Public Schools, Atlanta, GA
2010 Interim College Access Specialist position  
Project GRAD Division of Atlanta Public Schools, Atlanta, GA
2009 & 2010  College Readiness Manager position  
Project GRAD Division of Atlanta Public Schools, Atlanta, GA  
Atlanta Public Schools Job Fair Representative (teaching positions):  
2009  District Job Fair, North Atlanta High School, Atlanta, GA  
2008  District Job Fair: South Atlanta Health & Medical Sciences, Atlanta, GA  

**Athletic Coaching & Student Organization Advising**  
2009-2010  Junior Varsity Cheerleading Coach, Booker T. Washington High School, Atlanta, GA  
2007-2008  Founder & Advisor, Culture Seekers Student Organization, South Atlanta School of Health & Medical Sciences, Atlanta, GA  
2007-2008  Co-Adviser, Student Government Association  
South Atlanta School of Health & Medical Sciences, Atlanta, GA  
2006-2007  Co-Advisor, South Atlanta High School’s Step Team  
2006-2007  Co-Advisor, South Atlanta High School Basketball Dance Team “Purple Flame.”  
2005-2006  Co-Advisor, Clarke Central High School Step Team, Athens, GA  
2002-2003  Cheerleading Coach, New Birth Missionary Baptist Church (5-7 year old league), Lithonia, GA. Certified by the National Youth Sports Coaches Association  

**Corporate Service Activities**  
2007  Council Member, Atlanta Falcons Youth Sports & Education Conference, Atlanta, GA  
2003  Community Service Chairperson, Atlanta Region, Ford Motor Company, Atlanta, GA  
2001-2003  Mentor, Minority Dealer Development Intern Program, Ford Motor Company, Atlanta, GA  
1999  Assistant Editor-in-Chief, Co-op Student Newsletter, Johnson & Johnson-Merck, Fort Washington, PA  

**Awards & Special Recognition**  
2012-2014  Barbara L. Jackson Scholar, University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA)  
2013  David L. Clark Scholar, National Graduate Student Research Seminar in Educational Administration and Policy, University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA)/Division A&L of the American Educational Research Association (AERA)  
2013  (2nd Place) Winner, Graduate Student Research and Discovery Symposium, Clemson University, Clemson, SC  
2013  Banner Bearer, Graduate Student Government, Victor Hurst Convocation, Clemson University
2012 Alumni Admissions Interviewer, Harvard College, Harvard University
2012 (1st Place) Winner, Spring Research Symposium Poster Competition, College of Health, Education & Human Development, Clemson University
2010 Student Admissions Ambassador, Harvard Graduate School of Education
2009 Accepted, 2009 Class of LEAD Atlanta
2009-2010 Government Relations Co-Chair, Georgia School Counselor Association
2007-2008 Membership Co-Chair for Region 3, Georgia School Counselor Assoc.
2006 Scholarship Award Winner, Martha Nunnally Scholarship
Alpha Delta Kappa-Psi Chapter, Athens, Georgia
2006 Nominee, Graduate Advisor of the Year, University of Georgia Student Leadership Center S.O.A.R. Awards
2004 Scholarship Award Winner, University of Georgia Black Faculty & Staff Organization Founders Award & Scholarship Program
2004 Certificate Awarded, University of Georgia, Terry College of Business Non-Profit Board Member Seminar
2004 Choreographer and Dancer, University of Georgia Pamoja Dance Company Spring Show: “Spinderella”
2004 Lead Actress, University of Georgia Black Theatrical Ensemble
Spring Production: “Little Red Riding Thru’ Da’ Hood”
Jan. 2003 & Feb 2003 Award Winner, Ford Motor Company Zone Manager of the Month
2000 Award Winner, Outstanding Collegiate Member of the Year Award
Hampton Roads Chapter of the American Marketing Association
2000 Charter Member, Alpha Mu Alpha Honors Society (Marketing majors)
Hampton University
1999 Participant, The LeaderShape Institute, Champaign, IL

Professional Memberships & Affiliations

2013-present American Educational Research Association (AERA)
2013-present National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA)
2013-present Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE)
2013-present National Black Graduate Student Association (NBGSA)
2012-present South Carolina College Personnel Association (SCCPA)
2011-present University Council for Educational Administration, University Membership (UCEA)
2011-present The Guild, Clemson University Educational Leadership Doctoral Student Association
2006-present Georgia School Counselor Association (GSCA)
1998-present Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated (AKA)
2012-2013 Society for Chaos Theory in Psychology & Life Sciences (SCTPLS)
2006-2007 Institute for Student Achievement (ISA)
2003-2005 Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SACSA)
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<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>2003-2005</td>
<td>University of Georgia Student Personnel Association (UGASPA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>American Marketing Association (AMA)</td>
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REFERENCES


