Doctoral Student Experiences of Engagement in Social Media: An Exploration of #SADOC

Jessica G. Owens
Clemson University

Follow this and additional works at: https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_dissertations
Part of the Educational Leadership Commons

Recommended Citation
https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_dissertations/2310

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Dissertations at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Dissertations by an authorized administrator of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.
DOCTORAL STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA:
AN EXPLORATION OF #SADOC

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

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

by
Jessica G. Owens
May 2019

Accepted by:
Dr. Pamela Havice, Committee Chair
Dr. Tony Cawthon
Dr. Robin Phelps-Ward
Dr. Joseph Mazer
ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study aimed to understand how doctoral students perceived the influence of social media engagement, through Twitter, on their socialization and sense of belonging within academia. Eight participants were recruited from #sadoc on Twitter. Data from a participant selection questionnaire, in-depth, semi-structured interview, and posts to Twitter were used to understand their lived experiences in #sadoc. Thematic coding was employed to identify six common themes: (a) community of shared doctoral experiences; (b) exposure to doctoral education process; (c) celebration of doctoral student experiences; (d) expansion of boundaries; (e) doctoral student identification; and (f) visibility and authenticity of expression.

The results of this study provided insight into the lived experiences of doctoral students engaging in #sadoc. Any information gained about how social media influence socialization and sense of belonging among doctoral students contributes new information to the body of knowledge about doctoral student persistence. Additionally, the results of this study have implications for how doctoral programs can support student persistence through the integration of social media.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my Mom, Sharon Clemmons Thomas, who taught me the value of education from a young age. You showed me what it means to be strong, compassionate, and intellectually curious. I will always be grateful for the conversations we had throughout this process. Your genuine interest in my research and growth as a writer gave me energy.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I thank Brennen, my partner, for his unwavering support throughout this process. Thank you for encouraging me to keep writing even though it always meant less time for us. I could not have accomplished this without you. You were certain when I was not. I thank you for your constant faith in me.

To our adopted canine family members, Riggs, Jervey, and Rally, thank you for keeping me company while I wrote the pages that follow. You made sure I took breaks from writing to cuddle and care for you. To our families, immediate and extended, and friends, new and old, thank you for all of the ways you showered me with love, encouragement, and understanding. You all played an integral role in my success.

To Dr. Pamela Havice, the chair of my doctoral committee, you have been a source of inspiration since we met nearly five years ago. Thanks to your guidance, I grew as both a scholar and practitioner. I cannot thank you enough for choosing me as one of your final students.

To my doctoral committee, Dr. Tony Cawthon, Dr. Robin Phelps-Ward, and Dr. Joe Mazer, I am grateful for your time, energy, and advice. My doctoral journey would not have been the same without each of you. To my participants, Dan, Brock, Michael, Talia, Josephine, Rhett, Marin, and Eleanor, thank you for sharing your stories with me, so I could achieve this goal.

To Dr. Kathy Guthrie and Dr. Brad Cox, thank you for believing in my potential as a scholar and recommending me for admission to this program. You instilled in me the belief, feedback is love, which carried me through seemingly endless rounds of edits in the writing process.
To my supportive supervisors, Paula, Brian, and Sue, thank you for your support throughout this process. While I learned how to manage the expectations associated with this program alongside my professional commitments to you and the students we serve, you were flexible and understanding.

To my peers who graduated before me, especially Dr. Katie Maxwell, thank you for your willingness to share your experience and expertise with me. Not only did you provide clarity about the next steps in the process, attending your hooding ceremonies provided me the final motivation I needed to get to this point.

To my peers who will graduate with me or shortly after, I will forever be grateful we were on this journey together. I learned so much from each and every one of you, and I look forward to celebrating with you soon.

To my peers who recently began the doctoral program, especially the future Dr. Londan Means, while you will experience moments of uncertainty during this process, know you have a community of past, current, and future doctoral students to help you push through those moments.

To my #phdgrind writing group, Rebecca Atkinson, Marijohn Boyd, and Beth Solomon, thank you for keeping things light while holding me accountable to my goals. My cherished coffee mug, “Everyday I’m dissertating,” can finally be laid to rest.

No road is long with good company – Turkish proverb.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ABSTRACT ..................................................................................................................... ii

DEDICATION ................................................................................................................ iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .............................................................................................. iv

LIST OF TABLES ......................................................................................................... vii

LIST OF FIGURES ...................................................................................................... viii

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................. 1

  Background of the Study ................................................................. 3
  Statement of the Problem ............................................................... 5
  Purpose of the study ......................................................................... 5
  Conceptual Framework ..................................................................... 6
  Research Questions ............................................................................. 8
  Methodological Approach Overview ............................................. 8
  Significance of the Study ................................................................. 9
  Assumptions ......................................................................................... 10
  Positionality Statement .................................................................... 11
  Definition of Terms ............................................................................ 11
  Chapter Summary ............................................................................. 13

II. LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................................................... 14

  Chapter Overview .............................................................................. 14
  Doctoral Student Experiences ........................................................ 15
  Doctoral Student Attrition ............................................................... 19
  Social Media ......................................................................................... 20
  Key Concepts in Present Study ....................................................... 25
  Chapter Summary ............................................................................. 30
### Table of Contents (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>III. METHODOLOGY</th>
<th>31</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Overview</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for Methodological Approach</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positionality Statement</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Context and Participant Selection</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection and Data Sources</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS</th>
<th>57</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Overview</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme: Community of Shared Doctoral Experiences</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme: Exposure to Doctoral Education Process</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme: Celebration of Doctoral Student Experiences</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme: Expansion of Boundaries</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme: Doctoral Student Identification</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme: Visibility and Authenticity of Expression</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Themes</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS</th>
<th>88</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Overview</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion in Relation to Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Practice</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Research</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REFERENCES | 104 |
Table of Contents (Continued)

APPENDICES .............................................................................................................................................. 116

| A:          | Participant Selection Survey ................................................................. 117 |
| B:          | Interview Protocol .................................................................................. 120 |
| C:          | Examples of Personal Social Media Usage ............................................. 123 |
| D:          | Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Email .................................... 125 |
| E:          | Example of Memo .................................................................................... 126 |
| F:          | Example of Initial Coding Process .......................................................... 127 |
| G:          | Preliminary Codebook ........................................................................... 128 |
| H:          | Example of Focused Coding Process Using Preliminary Codebook ............... 129 |
| I:          | Revised Codebook .................................................................................. 130 |
| J:          | Example of Focused Coding Process Using Revised Codebook ................. 131 |
| K:          | Revised Codebook Following Peer Review Process ................................... 132 |
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Personal Tweets to #sadoc (@yeahthatowens)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Unique Tweets to #sadoc between May 1, 2017 and May 1, 2018</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Participant Vignettes</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Theme: Community of Shared Doctoral Experiences</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Theme: Exposure to Doctoral Education Process</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Theme: Celebration of Doctoral Student Experiences</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Theme: Doctoral Student Identification</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Theme Visibility and Authenticity of Expression</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>The Relationship Among Social Media, Doctoral Student Socialization, Sense of Belonging, and Graduation Among Doctoral Students</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The doctoral student experience is understood to be rigorous and demanding (Lovitts, 2001). This rigor spans academic, professional, and personal spheres. Doctoral student attrition continued to be an issue across disciplines in the United States (Council of Graduate Schools [CGS], 2010, 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Gardner, 2009b). These “lost scholars” resulted in consequences not only for students, but also for institutions, which invested university resources in these students prior to their departure (Caruth, 2015, p. 210; Strayhorn, 2012). For students, financial costs existed in the form of high interest loans without promise of increased compensation. For institutions, financial costs existed in the form of stipends without the anticipated return on investment (Gardner, 2009b). Still, Lovitts (2001) argued “the most important reason to be concerned about graduate student attrition is that it can ruin individuals’ lives” (p. 6).

An overview of literature related to doctoral studies identified six themes of inquiry (Jones, 2013): (a) teaching; (b) doctoral program design; (c) writing and research; (d) employment and career; (e) student-supervisor relationship; and (f) the doctoral student experience. The final theme, the doctoral student experience, provided insight to the present study. Socialization, sense of belonging, and support from peers were integral components to academic success, retention, and degree completion among doctoral students (Jones, 2013). For the purpose of my study, socialization was defined as “the processes through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring an advanced level of specialized
knowledge and skills” (Weidman et al, 2001, p. iii). Sense of belonging was defined as “students’ perceived social support on campus” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3). More robust definitions of these terms are provided at the conclusion of Chapter One.

Doctoral students sought and received support from peers, faculty mentors, friends, and family in many forms. This support possessed the potential to mitigate the stress associated with the pursuit of doctoral education. Specifically, support from family, friends, and other doctoral students was most beneficial when coping with challenges associated with progress toward students’ respective degrees (Byers et al., 2014). The level of support derived from interactions with peers exhibited a distinctive power due to a shared understanding of the doctoral experience that other sources cannot claim. Thus, support from other doctoral students was essential to persistence (Jairam & Kahl, 2012).

Social media served as one avenue through which various forms of support can be sought and received. For this study, social media were defined as “web-based services that allow individuals, communities, and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact, and build community” (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2016, p. 17). Interest in examining social media increased over the last decade (Snelson, 2016; Zhang & Leung, 2015). Zhang and Leung (2015) identified four primary themes through their review of literature related to social media in communication: (1) impression management and friendship performance; (2) network and network structure; (3) bridging online and offline networks; and (4) privacy.

Within higher education, studies focused primarily on undergraduate students (Zhang & Leung, 2015; Piotrowski, 2015). Researchers frequently examined the influence of social media engagement on students’ social capital, academic performance,
and engagement (Davis, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar, & González Canché, 2015). Meng, Martinez, Holmstrom, Chung, and Cox (2017) recommended future research further explore the relationship between social media and social support among college students.

Doctoral student experiences are underrepresented in the existing literature. Instead, researchers placed focus on the experiences of undergraduate students, faculty, and practitioners. Specifically, few studies addressed the experiences of doctoral students engaging in social media. Additionally, Facebook was the most common platform studied in the literature (Zhang & Leung, 2015; Snelson, 2016). My purpose for this study was to address this gap by exploring how doctoral students perceived the influence of social media engagement on their socialization and sense of belonging within academia.

**Background of the Study**

As a doctoral student in Educational Leadership, I had firsthand experience regarding the influence of community on sense of belonging and persistence to degree completion. I made the decision to pursue my degree while working full time as an administrator in advising. As a result, I rarely found consistency in the names on my class rosters for more than one or two terms at a time. Traditional pathways to developing community among my peers were inapplicable to my experience. There were times when I felt alone, not because I lacked support at home, at work, or from my advisor. I lacked a mechanism for continued support among my peers. Early on, I turned to social media as an avenue to connect with other doctoral students, specifically Facebook and Twitter.

One study found doctoral students who used technologies to connect with peers beyond the classroom reported a greater sense of connectedness than those who did not (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Heuvelman-Hutchinson, & Spaulding, 2014). Increased
connectedness was further associated with those students who connected via Skype, Facebook, and Twitter as alternatives to phone and email (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014). Researchers suggested social media could serve to foster a sense of belonging and connection for students, who are experiencing feelings of isolation or disconnectedness (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014). This potential translated to online and hybrid doctoral programs, as well as traditional programs.

Bennett and Folley (2014) conducted an autoethnographic examination of their social media usage during their doctoral studies in the United Kingdom. While the potential for negative outcomes existed, they argued social media, specifically Twitter, granted them access to a community of other doctoral students (Bennett & Folley, 2014). Positive outcomes included reduced feelings of isolation, accountability, academic identity formation, and motivation toward studies (Bennett & Folley, 2014):

Similarly, involving oneself in the #phdchat can be a positive way of experiencing mimicry where one becomes part of a community of practice of learning from others, sharing ideas, learning from others’ mistakes, understanding the nature of the PhD process, developing the language of being a PhD student, becoming known as an academic, building relationships with knowledgeable others and knowing how one’s discipline operates (pp. 5-6).

The argument outlined above provided a foundation for the merit of the present study. The results of my study contribute to a greater understanding among educators who support the work of doctoral students. This understanding will inform the way educators facilitate connections among doctoral students regardless of how they choose to pursue the degree.
Statement of the Problem

Nearly half of students who enroll in doctoral programs leave prior to earning their degree (Rigler, Bowlin, Sweat, Watts, & Throne, 2017; Caruth, 2015; Terrell et al., 2012). The rate of attrition was even higher (50-70%) for online doctoral programs (Rigler et al., 2017; Terrell et al., 2012). Both doctoral students and their respective programs experienced the consequences of attrition (Caruth, 2015, p. 210; Strayhorn, 2012). Support from other doctoral students was an essential contributing factor to persistence among doctoral students (Jairam & Kahl, 2012). McPherson, Budge, and Lemon (2015) suggested social media engagement had the potential to “inspir[e] thinking and motivate[e] academic practice” among scholars and practitioners (p. 126). Few studies examined the potential of social media within the context of doctoral education (Zhang & Leung, 2015; Piotrowski, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how doctoral students perceived the influence of social media engagement, through Twitter, on their socialization and sense of belonging within academia. Twitter provided doctoral students access to supportive communities beyond the traditional advisor-advisee relationship (Rainford, 2016). This examination centered on the #sadoc community, which was generally utilized by doctoral students in the field of higher education across the United States. Conversations taking place within this context seemed to lack facilitation by any professional organization(s), annual gathering(s), or structured chat(s). This study aimed to better understand how social media, specifically Twitter, influenced doctoral students’ perceptions of socialization and sense of belonging in academia, particularly within their programs.
Conceptual Framework

In the following section, I outline and describe the conceptual framework that guided my study. My conceptual framework was grounded in theories and concepts of: (a) doctoral student socialization (Gardner, 2009a; Gardner & Mendoza, 2010; Twale, Weidman, & Bethea, 2016); (b) sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Strayhorn, 2012); and (c) communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

Doctoral Student Socialization

Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) defined socialization as “the processes through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring an advanced level of specialized knowledge and skills” (p. iii). The Weidman-Twale-Stein Graduate Student Socialization Framework (2001) emphasized the process-driven nature of socialization within the graduate student experience. Preparedness for the academic and professional pursuits of graduates resulted in three types of outcomes: knowledge, skills, and abilities. Weidman et al. (2001) reported four stages of socialization exist for the graduate student: (a) anticipatory, (b) formal, (c) informal, and (d) personal. In Chapter Two, I describe these stages in further detail. Recent revisions to this framework aimed to enhance the framework’s applicability to the lived experiences of diverse student populations (Twale, Weidman, & Bethea, 2016). In Chapter Three, I discuss how this framework served as a lens through which I analyzed the collected data.

Sense of Belonging

For Strayhorn (2012), belonging was a basic human need that contributed to feelings of mattering. Strayhorn (2012) emphasized several core elements of belonging.
Strayhorn’s work was based on the related works of Maslow (1962) and Schlossberg (1985). Maslow (1954) defined belonging as a motivation to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness. Schlossberg (1985) defined mattering as the belief that one plays a significant role in the life of another. Strayhorn (2012), defined a sense of belonging as follows:

A sense of belonging refers to students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers). It’s a cognitive evaluation that typically leaders to an affective response or behavior. Sense of belonging is relational, and thus there’s a reciprocal quality to relationships that provide a sense of belonging (p. 3).

Strayhorn (2012) stated a sense of belonging promoted student retention and persistence to graduation, especially among students of color. In Chapter Three, I discuss how this framework served as a lens through which I analyzed the collected data.

**Communities of Practice**

Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) defined communities of practice (CoPs) as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (2002, p. 4). There were three main components of CoPs (Wenger, n.d.): (a) domain, (b) community, and (c) practice. Domain referred to the knowledge or discipline being considered by the group, which provided direction and purpose to the group’s interactions (Wenger, n.d.). Community referred to the interacting participants, who were
engaging with one another to enhance learning within the domain. Practice referred to a way of doing that is common among the groups’ participants. Communities of practice served to “foster a strong sense of student belonging, identity development, and networking opportunities that directly support student retention and completion” (Kaseworm & Bowles, 2010, p. 239). In Chapter Three, I discuss how this concept served as a framework to develop an interview protocol.

**Research Questions**

To understand how doctoral students perceived the influence of social media engagement, through Twitter, on their socialization and sense of belonging within academia, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How do doctoral students view the influence of engagement through #sadoc on Twitter upon their socialization as doctoral students?
2. How do doctoral students view the influence of engagement through #sadoc on Twitter upon their sense of belonging in academia?

**Methodological Approach Overview**

My study employed a phenomenological approach examining the experiences of doctoral students in the field of higher education. Participants were recruited based on recent participation in the #sadoc community on the social media site, Twitter. The digital nature of this investigation allowed for the inclusion of participants from a wide range of institutions, geographic locations, and educational backgrounds. I contacted users of #sadoc during the examined time frame via Twitter regarding their interest in participating in the study. Purposeful sampling was employed to develop a representative sample. The resulting sample consisted of breadth based on the following criterion: (a)
part-time versus full-time status; (b) delivery of degree program; and (c) progress in respective program. In the participant selection process, I valued breadth across these criteria because it allowed me to perceive themes that spanned variation.

Three sources of data were collected for each participant. The first data collection point was an initial questionnaire that each participant completed (Appendix A). This process allowed me to select a representative sample as described above. The second data collection point was the content shared by each participant via #sadoc during the previous academic year. This data was collected through Radian6, which allows researchers to download publicly available tweets by keyword search (Radian6, 2017). The keyword in the present study was #sadoc, which pulled publicly available tweets to the #sadoc Twitter community within the given time frame. The third source of data was in depth, semi-structured interviews with selected participants (Appendix B). Interviews focused on each participant’s experience as a doctoral student, engagement in #sadoc, and motivation for engagement in #sadoc. Participants were also asked to identify any consequences or outcomes of their engagement in #sadoc, both positive and negative. Finally, participants were asked to consider how their social media engagement, through Twitter, influenced their doctoral student experience, socialization, and sense of belonging in academia. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. I employed a series of initial and focused coding cycles to identify themes across the three data sources (Saldaña, 2016).

**Significance of the Study**

Doctoral student attrition continues to be an issue across disciplines in the United States (CGS, 2010, 2014, 2015a, 2015b). Attrition rates in doctoral programs were
consistently cited at 50 percent or higher (Rigler et al., 2017; Caruth, 2015; Terrell et al., 2012). Research connected attrition to feelings of isolation and lack of belonging (Rigler et al., 2017). Twitter provided doctoral students access to supportive communities beyond the traditional advisor-advisee relationship (Rainford, 2016).

The results of my study provided insight into the lived experiences of doctoral students engaging in #sadoc. Any information gained about how social media influences socialization and sense of belonging among doctoral students contributes new information to the body of knowledge about doctoral student persistence. Additionally, the results of this study have implications for how doctoral programs can support student persistence through the integration of social media.

**Assumptions**

Through this study, I sought to better understand how doctoral students perceive the influence of social media engagement on their socialization and sense of belonging within academia. Given the qualitative nature of this study, I assumed there was an essence of an experience to be captured. I assumed my findings would provide insight into this population and its use of social media, specifically Twitter, to support their educational pursuits. I entered this exploration with expectations of my participants regarding their experiences. I expected my participants to be open and engaged in the data collection process. My participants’ engagement in doctoral education and this study conveyed to me a value for doctoral education and its improvement. I anticipated my participants would disclose both challenges and successes from their doctoral experiences thus far. Perhaps, they would divulge experiences similar to my own. My participants’ engagement in #sadoc conveyed to me a value for social media. I anticipated my
participants would disclose both positive and negative outcomes of social media engagement. I was uncertain whether my participants would have prior knowledge of the key concepts guiding this study. Still, I assumed my participants would share their authentic experiences with me regarding their pursuit of doctoral education and engagement in #sadoc.

**Positionality Statement**

As a doctoral student and active user of social media as a source of community, I held an insider position while exploring the present phenomenon. My doctoral journey exposed me as a learner. Each step increased my expectations of my capacity to contribute to the body of knowledge. I experienced moments of uncertainty and isolation alongside moments of community and conviction. Recognizing my insider position, I purposefully engaged in several practices to limit the influence of my own experiences on my interpretation of the data. I discuss my positionality in greater detail in Chapter Three.

**Definition of Terms**

The following operational definitions will be used for this study:

- **Academia** – Defined as “the life, community, or world of teachers, schools, and education” (Academia, 2018).
- **Communities of Practice (CoPs)** – Defined as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p.4).
- **Doctoral students**– Defined as students pursuing the doctoral degree.
• Engagement- Defined as “quality of effort and involvement in productive learning activities” (Kuh, 2009, p. 6).

• Sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3) – Defined as “students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers). It’s a cognitive evaluation that typically leaders to an affective response or behavior. Sense of belonging is relational, and thus there’s a reciprocal quality to relationships that provide a sense of belonging.”

• Socialization (Weidman et al, 2001, p. iii) – Defined as “the processes through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring an advanced level of specialized knowledge and skills.”

• Social media – Defined as “web-based services that allow individuals, communities, and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact, and build community by enabling them to create, co-create, modifies, share, and engage with user-generated content that is easily accessible” (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2016, p. 17).

• Twitter – Defined as “an information network made up of short messages (including photos, videos, and links) from all over the world” (Twitter, Inc., 2018). While most profiles are public, users may choose to protect their tweets, allowing only followers to view their activity (Twitter, Inc., 2018).
Chapter Summary

This study focused on how doctoral students perceive the influence social media engagement, through Twitter, on their socialization and sense of belonging within academia. I examined the nature of the conversation taking place through #sadoc and explored the lived experiences of doctoral students engaging in that space. The results of this study provided insight into the doctoral student experience and the influence of communities of practice through an understudied avenue of social media. In the following chapters, I: (a) review the literature that provides a foundation for my study; (b) provide an overview of my methodological approach; (c) analyze and make meaning of the data collected; and (d) share my findings and their implications for scholarship and practice.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Overview

The purpose of this study was to understand how doctoral students perceived the influence of social media engagement, through Twitter, on their socialization and sense of belonging within academia. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do doctoral students view the influence of engagement through #sadoc on Twitter upon their socialization as doctoral students?
2. How do doctoral students view the influence of engagement through #sadoc on Twitter upon their sense of belonging in academia?

In reviewing the literature related to my research topic, I began by examining information on doctoral students and their experiences. More specifically, I looked for relevant literature regarding demographics, attrition, identity development, and persistence related to the doctoral student experience. Then, I examined the current literature on the influence of social media. Finally, I looked for relevant literature regarding social media as a mechanism of community among doctoral students.

By conducting a review of the literature related to my research topic, I identified a conceptual framework with three main components. My research is grounded in the following theories: (a) doctoral student socialization (Gardner, 2009a; Gardner & Mendoza, 2010; Twale, Weidman, & Bethea, 2016); (b) sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Strayhorn, 2012); and (c) communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Each of these concepts will be discussed further in this chapter.
Doctoral Student Experiences

According to the Council of Graduate Schools (1990), the purpose of the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree was “to prepare a student to become a scholar, that is, to discover, integrate, and apply knowledge, as well as communicate and disseminate it” (p. 10). The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate [CPED] (2018) stated the “professional doctorate in education prepares educators for the application of appropriate and specific practices, the generation of new knowledge, and for the stewardship of the profession.” Doctoral candidacy indicated, “in the judgement of the faculty, the doctoral student has an adequate knowledge of the field and the specialty, knows how to use academic resources, has potential to do original research autonomously, and presumably will complete the dissertation” (Council of Graduate Schools, 2005, p. 24). Admission to doctoral candidacy often required completed coursework, proficiency and/or comprehensive examinations, and/or one or more research papers (Council on Graduate Studies, 2005).

Graduates of doctoral programs were considered scholars who demonstrated mastery in their discipline and contributed to the body of knowledge within their fields of study (Kaseworm & Bowles, 2010; Millet & Nettles, 2010). Success in these programs required a mindset and skillset different from previous undergraduate and graduate experiences (Brill, Balcanoff, Land, Gogarty, & Turner, 2014). Doctoral students were expected to become self-directed learners as a result of their studies (Kaseworm & Bowles, 2010). Experiences varied by discipline and student characteristics where doctoral students navigated competing constraints on their time (Kaseworm & Bowles, 2010). For example, the National Science Foundation (2018) reported time to degree for
students in engineering and science fields was typically shorter than those pursuing degrees in other fields. Research regarding the doctoral student experience illustrated the argument “no generic adult learner exists” (Kasworm & Bowles, 2010, p. 236).

**Enrollment and Demographics**

Approximately one percent of United States citizens have earned a doctoral degree (Ryan & Seibens, 2012). Overall, the United States saw an increase in doctoral degrees awarded by two to three percent in the 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014 academic years (Caruth, 2015). About half of these degrees were awarded by public universities (49-50%) with 80 to 81 percent of graduates ranging in age from 25-39 (Caruth, 2015). Of these graduates 57 to 59 percent identified as White while 51 to 52 percent identified as female (Caruth, 2015). Although women earned less than half of total doctorates awarded in 2016, women accounted for 55 percent of doctorates earned in the life sciences, 59 percent in the social sciences, 70 percent in education, and 52 percent in arts and humanities (National Science Foundation, 2018).

The National Science Foundation (2018) reported the number of doctorates awarded increased on average by 3.3 percent annually. From 2006 to 2016, 54 percent of doctorates awarded to temporary visa holders were earned by citizens of China, India, and South Korea. During that same timeframe (2006-2016), the number of doctorates earned by African Americans and Hispanic or Latinos increased by 32 and 67 percent respectively. Of minority groups earning doctorates in 2016, African Americans were more heavily represented in education while Hispanics or Latinos were more heavily represented in psychology, social sciences, arts, and humanities than other minority groups (National Science Foundation, 2018). Similarly, temporary visa holders earned
approximately one third of doctorates awarded in the United States in 2016 (National Science Foundation, 2018).

Since 2002, the proportion of doctorates awarded to recipients under the age of 30 grew annually by an average of four percent (National Science Foundation, 2018). Degree recipients between the age of 31 and 40 saw an average growth of two percent, and recipients over age 41 saw a decline of two percent (National Science Foundation, 2018). In 2016, female doctoral recipients were approximately one year older on average than their male counterparts (National Science Foundation, 2018). Doctoral recipients, who identified as African American, Alaska Native, or American Indian, were more likely to be 41 or older in 2016 (National Science Foundation, 2018). Doctoral recipients in education were also more likely to be older with 40 percent of doctoral students earning their degree at age 41 or older and only 12 percent earning their degree under the age of 30 (National Science Foundation, 2018).

Ninety-four percent of doctoral recipients under the age of 30 reported funding their education through assistantships, fellowships, or grants (National Science Foundation, 2018). While the majority of doctoral recipients in science and engineering fields reported no debt at graduation, approximately one-third of graduates in psychology, social sciences, arts, and humanities reported debt totaling $30,000 or greater (National Science Foundation, 2018). In the field of education, 36 percent of graduates reported debt totaling $30,000 or greater (National Science Foundation, 2018).

Nearly half of doctoral students in education relied on their own financial resources to pursue their degrees (National Science Foundation, 2018). In a recent study, over half of graduate student participants reported being married or in a committed
domestic partnership (Millet & Nettles, 2010). In summary, doctoral students were diverse in background and discipline, which had implications for their persistence and completion (Kaseworm & Bowles, 2010).

**Doctoral Student Identity and Development**

Rodgers (1990) defined student development as “the ways that a student grows, progresses, or increases his or her developmental capabilities because of enrollment in an institution of higher education” (p. 27). Graduate and doctoral students experience growth while enrolled in their respective programs (Gardner, 2010; Gardner, 2009). Specifically, the doctoral student experience had implications for the three primary categories of student development (Gardner, 2010): (a) psychosocial development, (b) social identity development, and (c) cognitive-structural development.

Grounded in the work of Chickering and Reisser (1993), psychosocial development referred to the students’ development of independence, understanding of self, and cultivation of relationships (Gardner, 2010). Doctoral students were navigating relationships with peers, faculty, friends, and family as they gain a better understanding of themselves as scholars and students. Gardner (2010) stated doctoral students’ psychosocial development was deeply connected to their socialization as students and future professionals.

Social identity development referred to what and how doctoral students think about their social identity (Gardner, 2010). Social identity consisted of a doctoral student’s gender, race/ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, and many other factors (Gardner, 2010). Gardner (2010) argued, although much of this development occurs at the undergraduate level, doctoral students are often faced with these challenges at a
deeper level. Gardner (2010) suggested these challenges may be related to doctoral students joining departments that are less diverse and/or inclusive than their undergraduate institutions.

Baxter-Magolda (1992) defined cognitive-structural development as how students think, learn, and make meaning of knowledge. Many doctoral programs challenged students to reflect on their beliefs and assumptions around knowledge and knowing (Gardner, 2010). Gardner (2010) argued, over the course of their educational experience, doctoral students transitioned from receiving knowledge to producing and contributing knowledge to their disciplines.

Gardner (2010) provided several recommendations for fostering doctoral student psychosocial, social identity, and cognitive-structural development. For example, Gardner (2010) suggested doctoral program administrators should facilitate connections with peers at both the departmental and institutional level. In addition, Gardner (2010) recommended doctoral students be informed of ongoing professional development opportunities and facilitated discussions surrounding issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation. Finally, Gardner (2010) claimed doctoral students must be empowered by program administrators to become self-directed learners, providing incremental opportunities to engage in scholarly work prior to the dissertation (Gardner, 2010).

**Doctoral Student Attrition**

Doctoral student attrition continues to be an issue across disciplines in the United States (Council of Graduate Schools [CGS] 2010, 2014, 2015a, 2015b). A review of recent literature surrounding doctoral student attrition identified four major themes (Rigler et al., 2017): (a) chair agency and chair-candidate relationship; (b) candidate
socialization and support systems; (c) candidate preparedness; and (d) financial considerations. Multiple roles and responsibilities among doctoral students resulted in competing demands for students’ time and resources (Millet & Nettles, 2010; Stackhouse & Harle, 2014; Willis & Carmichael, 2011). The consequences of attrition are significant – financially, psychologically, and intellectually (Lovitts, 2001). Lovitts (2001) argued “failure to complete can leave individuals with psychological and family turbulence, massive debt, and limited career potential” (p.3).

Research studies connected attrition to feelings of isolation and lack of belonging (Rigler et al., 2017). Female doctoral students, especially in fields of science and engineering, reported negative experiences in their programs and feelings of isolation at a higher rate than their male counterparts (Salle, 2010). According to Rigler et al. (2017), institutions are responsible for providing doctoral students and candidates with adequate resources, including financial assistance, engaged dissertation chairs, and general support. Thus, institutions play a significant role in creating environments that foster doctoral student success (Rigler et al., 2017).

Social Media

McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase (2016) defined social media as “web-based services that allow individuals, communities, and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact, and build community by enabling them to create, co-create, modifies, share, and engage with user-generated content that is easily accessible” (p. 17). The term, social media, encompasses ten primary types (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2016): (a) social networking sites (e.g. Facebook and LinkedIn); (b) bookmarking (e.g. StumbleUpon); (c) microblogging (e.g. Twitter and Tumblr); (d) blog forums (e.g. Wordpress); (e) media
sharing (e.g. YouTube and Pinterest); (f) social news (e.g. Reddit); (g) collaborative authoring (e.g. Wikipedia); (h) web conferencing (e.g. Skype); (i) geo-location based sites (e.g. Foursquare); and (j) scheduling and meeting (e.g. Microsoft Outlook).

The influence of social media on its users and vice versa continue to be heavily examined (Baym, 2015; Slack & Wise, 2015; Van Djick, 2013). For example, Van Djick (2013) explored the history of social media and its evolution, arguing social media had its own set of rules and norms. As discussed in Chapter One, Facebook was the most common platform studied in the literature (Zhang & Leung, 2015; Snelson, 2016). In 2017, Facebook was widely considered the most popular social media with nearly 12.1 billion monthly active users and over 1.3 billion users (Facebook, 2017). Facebook users accessed the site daily “to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what’s going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them” (Facebook, 2017). Buck (2012) argued college students “integrat[ed] social media] into their every activity to the point that it [was] not possible to draw sharp distinctions between online and offline identities and activities” (p. 35).

**Motivations for Social Media Engagement**

Yang and Brown (2012) categorized motivations for social media engagement as follows: (a) electronic interactions; (b) voyeuristic actions; (c) self-presentation; and (d) gaming. Further, Facebook users at the undergraduate level were primarily concerned with the development or maintenance of interpersonal relationships as their motivation for engaging with the site (Aydin, 2012; Tosun, 2012). Entertainment, distraction, and procrastination were secondary motives reported among undergraduate students (Tosun, 2012). Some studies found motivations were tied to other characteristics such as the
authentic expression of self while online (Tosun, 2012) or social adjustment (Yang & Brown, 2012).

Although few studies explored motivation for social media use beyond the scope of Facebook, undergraduate students reported utilizing Twitter more frequently for social rather than academic purposes (Gooding, Yinger, & Gregory, 2016). Additionally, Beasley, Mason, and Smith (2016) found participants were more likely to express feelings on Twitter rather than Facebook. Anecdotally, participants reported they were less likely to share negative emotions and/or experiences as compared to neutral or positive ones (Beasley, Mason, & Smith, 2016). Wang (2013) characterized these actions of “strategically disclosing and/or concealing information to portray oneself in a desirable manner” as self-presentation (p. 870). Students were more likely “to share things about their entertainment and recreational activities to demonstrate their social lives, life-styles, and tastes, promoting a selective and optimized self-image” (Wang, 2013, p. 875). The literature demonstrated undergraduate students were motivated toward social media engagement for many reasons.

Scholar-practitioners were similarly motivated toward social media engagement in the development and maintenance of networks (McPherson, Budge, & Lemon, 2015). For example, Sauers and Richardson (2015) learned educational leaders within K-12 used Twitter “as a tool to enhance their leadership by engaging in conversations of interest and creating communities of practice [.. much like] a virtual learning social network” (p. 141). Differing from undergraduate students, scholar-practitioners seemed to be focused on furthering scholarship and practice versus a solely social motive.
Outcomes of Social Media Engagement

Social media engagement facilitated knowledge sharing and creative thinking among scholars and practitioners (McPherson et al., 2015). Few studies examined outcomes beyond undergraduate student populations (Zhang & Leung, 2015; Piotrowski, 2015). Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2014) conducted a causal-comparative study of 132 doctoral students enrolled in the candidacy course within a fully online Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) program. They examined the relationship between social media engagement and doctoral student connectedness.

Rockinson-Szapkiw et al (2014) distinguished between engagement with institution-initiated and student-initiated engagement, as well as the specific technology for engagement beyond the classroom. They utilized the Doctoral Student Connectedness Scale (DSCS) to measure connectedness among participants, which consists of two subscales, student-faculty and student-student. Through a two-way ANOVA, no significant relationship was found between engagement with institution-initiated social media and doctoral student connectedness, but greater connectedness existed among students who connected with one another outside of the classroom via technology. Greater connectedness existed among students who connected through platforms such as Skype, Facebook, and Twitter versus phone and email. Frequency of interaction did not have a significant impact on connectedness among students. Researchers suggested social media could serve as a mechanism for belonging and connection for students who were experiencing feelings of isolation or disconnectedness (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014). This potential translated to online, hybrid, and traditional doctoral programs.
Bennett and Folley (2014) examined their own use of social media during their doctoral studies in the United Kingdom through an autoethnographic approach. Having completed their studies in late 2013, they reflected on the influence of their engagement in #phdchat and academic blogs. In their study, they discussed the role of hybridized identities, which they defined as a tension deriving from their identification as experts in their professional roles as advising administrators in higher education and their identification as novices in their doctoral studies. Bennett and Folley (2014) felt their use of Twitter lessened the gap between these two identities, as Twitter required they share and connect across their personal, academic, and professional spheres.

Positive outcomes included reduced feelings of isolation, accountability, academic identity formation, and motivation toward studies (Bennett & Folley, 2014):

Involving oneself in the #phdchat can be a positive way of experiencing mimicry where one becomes a part of a community of practice of learning from others, sharing ideas, learning from others’ mistakes, understanding the nature of the PhD process, developing the language of being a PhD student, becoming known as an academic, building relationships with knowledgeable others and knowing how one’s discipline operates (pp. 5-6).

Bennett & Folley (2014) argued Twitter served as an extended learning space where they found an appropriate balance of both challenge and support throughout the pursuit of their studies.

Chretien, Tuck, Simon, Singh, and Kind (2015) employed digital ethnography to examine the use of Twitter among 31 medical students. They collected three data sources: (1) student tweets over eight months; (2) transcripts from 13 in-depth interviews; and (3)
structured field notes. They discovered students utilized Twitter purposefully across personal, academic, and social spheres. Doctoral students revealed two primary outcomes of their engagement: (a) access (to community); and (b) voice (to advocate). Chretian et al (2015) claimed Twitter had the potential to serve as a source of community through access to virtual mentors, information, and other students. In summary, social media had the potential to serve as communities of practice among scholars and practitioners in higher education (Britt & Paulus, 2016; Li & Greenhow, 2015; Noble, Mcquillian, & Littenberg-Tobias, 2016).

**Key Concepts in Present Study**

Through conducting a review of the literature related to my research topic, I identified a conceptual framework with three main components for this study. My conceptual framework was grounded in the following theories and concepts: (a) doctoral student socialization (Gardner, 2009a; Gardner & Mendoza, 2010; Twale, Weidman, & Bethea, 2016); (b) sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Strayhorn, 2012); and (c) communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

**Doctoral Student Socialization**

Doctoral student socialization served as a common lens through which the doctoral student experience was examined (Gardner & Mendoza, 2010). Austin (2002) defined socialization as “the process through which an individual becomes part of a group, organization or community,” which “involves learning about the culture of the group, including its values, attitudes, and expectations” (p. 96). Graduate student socialization was described as two-fold, where doctoral students were socialized as students and future faculty members simultaneously (Golde, 1998).
Faculty members, specifically doctoral advisors, were often described as “primary socialization agents” (Russell, 2015, p. 148). Still, peer socialization acted as a buffer to stress resulting from the doctoral student experience, especially among and between students of color (Winkle-Wagner, Johnson, Morelon-Quainoo, & Santiague, 2010). Support from peers was essential to persistence among graduate students (Weidman et al., 2001; Jairam & Kahl, 2012). The doctoral student experience and its actors shaped doctoral students’ attitudes and beliefs regarding their disciplines (Golde, 2010). The process of socialization must include all potential career outcomes for the graduate, including a socialization to teaching (McDaniels, 2010), research (Weidman, 2010), and service (Ward, 2010).

Weidman et al. (2001) defined socialization as “the processes through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring an advanced level of specialized knowledge and skills” (p. iii). The Weidman-Twale-Stein Graduate Student Socialization Framework (2001) emphasized the process-driven nature of socialization within the graduate student experience. Preparedness for the academic and professional pursuits of graduates resulted in three types of outcomes: (a) knowledge, (b) skills, and (c) abilities.

Weidman et al. (2001) reported four stages of socialization exist for the graduate student: (a) anticipatory, (b) formal, (c) informal, and (d) personal. Doctoral students entered the anticipatory stage of socialization upon enrolling in their respective programs (Weidman et al., 2001). Students became accustomed to the environment and expectations associated with their chosen doctoral programs in the anticipatory stage (Weidman et al., 2001). Doctoral students engaged in observation during the formal stage of socialization,
gaining increased understanding of their roles and responsibilities (Weidman et al, 2001).
Eventually, doctoral students entered the informal stage of socialization. During the informal stage, students began to transition into the professional role as they continued to observe interactions between faculty and other students. They began to transition from student to professional (Weidman et al, 2001). Finally, doctoral students individualized and internalized their new roles in the personal stage (Weidman et al, 2001). By moving through these stages, doctoral students became colleagues. Recent revisions to this framework aimed to enhance the applicability of the framework to the lived experiences of diverse student populations (Twale, Weidman, & Bethea, 2016).

Strayhorn (2012) argued socialization played an integral role in the success and persistence of graduate students across disciplines. Socialization among graduate students fostered many positive outcomes, including the development of a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). For Strayhorn (2012), a sense of belonging among graduate students may be fostered through “developing competency, forming supportive relationships, or affirming one’s professional identity” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 98). The next section discusses Strayhorn’s 2012 concept in further detail.

**Sense of Belonging**

Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed the belongingness hypothesis after aggregating findings from social and personality psychology regarding interpersonal relationships. The belongingness hypothesis defined the need to belong as “a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497). Further,
Baumeister and Leary (1995) argued the need to belong could only be satisfied by long term relationships that were stable.

Hurtado and Carter (1997) were among the first to examine belongingness within the context of higher education alongside Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, and Salomone (2002-2003). After reviewing the literature related to belongingness and sense of belonging within higher education, Strayhorn (2012) emphasized several core elements of belonging. Strayhorn (2012) stated belonging was a basic human need that contributes to feelings of mattering. Strayhorn’s work is based on the related works of Maslow (1962) and Schlossberg (1985). Maslow (1954) defined belonging as a motivation to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness. Schlossberg (1985) defined mattering as the belief that one plays a significant role in the life of another.

Guided by the works of Maslow (1962) and Schlossberg (1985), Strayhorn (2012) defined a sense of belonging as follows:

A sense of belonging refers to students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers). It’s a cognitive evaluation that typically leaders to an affective response or behavior. Sense of belonging is relational, and thus there’s a reciprocal quality to relationships that provide a sense of belonging (p. 3).

Strayhorn (2012) reported a sense of belonging promoted student retention and persistence to graduation, especially among students of color. Sense of belonging likely played a more significant role for students from marginalized backgrounds, including
first generation students, low-income students, and students, who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. Peers played an essential role in fostering a sense of belonging among college students (Strayhorn, 2012). The need to belong was not simply satisfied, as it is a process experienced uniquely by students (Strayhorn, 2012).

While the outcomes described above illustrate the significance of the relationship between sense of belonging and persistence, most of the literature surrounding this topic is related to undergraduate students (Strayhorn, 2012). Still, Strayhorn (2012) reported early findings from his own studies, which suggested sense of belonging may play a more significant role for doctoral students. Thus, among doctoral students, successful socialization likely fostered the development of a sense of belonging, which, in turn, likely influences academic success and persistence (Strayhorn, 2012).

**Communities of Practice**

Wenger (1998) expressed the concept of communities of practice (CoPs) was grounded in several traditions, including psychology, philosophy, sociology, and education. Wenger (1998) cited many theorists as guiding his work, including Bandura’s (1977) Social Learning Theory, Vygotsky’s (1934) zone of proximal development, and Piaget’s (1954) theory of cognitive development. Guided by the work of those cited previously, Wenger et al. (2002) defined CoPs as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p.4).

There were three main components of CoPs (Wenger, n.d.): (a) domain, (b) community, and (c) practice. Domain referred to the knowledge or discipline being considered by the group, which provided direction and purpose to the group’s
interactions. Community referred to the interacting participants, who were engaging with one another to enhance learning within the domain. Practice referred to a way of doing that was common among the group’s participants. White and Nonnamaker (2008) argued opportunities for doctoral students to connect with peers fosters development of sense of belonging, mattering, and ultimately, community. The combination of these three elements (domain, community, and practice) also supported identity formation and networking among students (Kaseworm & Bowles, 2010). Doctoral students should engage in multiple communities of practice to support their persistence, success, and ultimately, completion (Kaseworm & Bowles, 2010).

**Chapter Summary**

In reviewing the literature, knowledge regarding socialization and sense of belonging among doctoral students was limited. Specifically, there was a gap in the literature on doctoral students’ perception of the influence of social media engagement, through Twitter, on their socialization and sense of belonging within academia. The goal of this study was to address this gap in the literature by exploring the following two research questions.

1. How do doctoral students view the influence of engagement through #sadoc on Twitter upon their socialization as doctoral students?
2. How do doctoral students view the influence of engagement through #sadoc on Twitter upon their sense of belonging in academia?

In the next chapter, I provide an overview of my methodological approach to answering these questions.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Chapter Overview

The primary goal of this study was to understand how doctoral students perceived the influence of social media engagement, through Twitter, on their socialization and sense of belonging within academia. I examined the nature of the conversation taking place through #sadoc and explored the lived experiences of doctoral students engaging in that space. The results of this study provide insight into the doctoral experience and the influence of communities of practice through an understudied avenue of social media.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do doctoral students view the influence of engagement through #sadoc on Twitter upon their socialization as doctoral students?

2. How do doctoral students view the influence of engagement through #sadoc on Twitter upon their sense of belonging in academia?

This chapter is organized into seven sections: (a) rationale for methodological approach; (b) positionality statement; (c) research context and participant selection; (d) participants; (e) data collection and sources; (f) data analysis; and (g) trustworthiness.

Rationale for Methodological Approach

Pallas (2003) posed two essential questions regarding the legitimacy and development of knowledge:

(1) Can we count on our senses, or on reason, to distinguish that which is true about the world from that which is false? (2) Can knowledge of the world be
evaluated independent of the social and historical contexts in which it exists, or is it always contingent upon, or relative to, particular circumstances? (p.6).

I believe knowledge is constructed, “mutable and in a constant process of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction” (Love & Guthrie, 1999, p. 26).

**Philosophical Approaches to Qualitative Inquiry**

According to Merriam (2002), qualitative research is guided by “the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (p. 3). Three primary philosophical approaches exist within qualitative inquiry (Merriam, 2002): (a) interpretive; (b) critical; and (c) postmodern. The interpretive approach to qualitative inquiry aims to understand not just the experience of the individual, but also its meaning (Merriam, 2002). Examining how social and political factors influence our experiences is characteristic of the critical approach (Merriam, 2002). Finally, the postmodern approach, also described as post structural, requires researchers to “question all aspects of the construction of reality, what it is and what it is not, how it is organized, and so on” (Merriam, 2002, p. 4). Regardless of approach, Merriam (2002) argued four characteristics spanned all forms of qualitative inquiry (pp. 5-6): (a) researchers strive to understand the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences; (b) the researcher is the primary instrument; (c) the process is inductive; and (d) the product of qualitative inquiry is richly descriptive.

When I reviewed the three primary philosophical approaches to qualitative inquiry, I was drawn to the interpretive approach. As a researcher, I recognize the existence of multiple realities, as well as interpretations of those realities (Merriam,
In addition, I am interested in “understanding what those interpretations are at a particular point in time and in a particular context” (Merriam, 2002, pp. 3-4).

**Phenomenological Research Approach**

Phenomenology is considered a philosophy, as well as a methodological approach (Lichtman, 2010). The foundational philosophers within phenomenology were Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). While Husserl focused on the value of description in phenomenology, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre focused on the value of interpretation (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

We have come to see that the complex understanding of ‘experience’ invokes a lived process, an unfurling of perspectives and meanings, which are unique to the person’s embodies and situated relationship to the world (p. 21).

Phenomenological research approaches focus on understanding and interpreting the lived experiences of others (Patton, 2015). I chose phenomenology as my method to describe the essence or core meaning of the phenomenon explored in my study (Patton, 2015). In 1990, van Manen defined phenomenology as the exploration and description of phenomena through the lens of those experiencing it.

The phenomenon in my study was doctoral students’ engagement in social media, specifically #sadoc on Twitter. I aimed to understand how participants perceived the influence of their engagement in social media on socialization and sense of belonging. Individuals who experience a phenomenon may construct knowledge differently from others with the same experience (Crotty, 1998). Thus, the analysis of qualitative participant responses regarding the phenomenon enhanced the understanding of conversations taking place in #sadoc and their influence on the doctoral experience.
Positionality Statement

My role as a researcher was two-fold. I was both a researcher and a doctoral candidate. Throughout this study, it was critical that I maintained an awareness of my biases since this research focuses on the experiences of a student population with which I identified at the time of data collection and analysis.

My pursuit of doctoral education incorporated social media as a source of support, including #sadoc. During my first year in the doctoral program, I utilized #sadoc to find resources and make connections with doctoral students across the country. When I realized #sadoc might serve as the context of my dissertation research, I began limiting my engagement in that social media space. Table 3.1 provides examples of my tweets to #sadoc during my first year:

Table 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Unique Tweets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 30, 2017</td>
<td>TMW you create an amazon wish list for books related to your #sadoc research interests. Is this what adulthood feels like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 7, 2017</td>
<td>Snuggles after a long day #sapro #sadoc #sapups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 11, 2017</td>
<td>Tmw you spent the last six hours of your 27th year writing #sadoc #happybdaytome #phinishstrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 19, 2017</td>
<td>And so it begins again. #sadoc Week 1 readings w/ a side of house cleaning &amp; self care #SolidOrangeSaturday #PhDgrind #FallHasCome</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I utilized social media through other platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat to connect with other doctoral students in my program, family, and friends. For example, social media played a significant role in my preparation for the comprehensive
exam and proposal process. In early January of 2018, I solicited an accountability partner via Facebook for my studies and proposal development. Each week, I would share my goals with her and schedule for accomplishing those goals. Then, throughout the week I shared my progress through Snapchat.

There was a day where I committed significant time to preparing for my comprehensive exam. I utilized a whiteboard in my office to connect literature and concepts to my approach to the various topics. As I moved from one question to the next, I sent her a Snapchat of my progress. I did this five or six times over the course of an eight-hour period. This process took very little time away from my studies, but I believe it had a tremendous impact on my attitude and motivation. I felt less alone knowing that she was on the other side giving me the thumbs up. I also shared these snaps to my story, which allowed any of my friends on the platform to view photos of my progress for a twenty-four-hour period. I received several unsolicited messages of encouragement from friends and colleagues, who saw the photos on my Snapchat story. I also received questions about my experience of comprehensive finals and approach to studying from friends, who were pursuing doctoral programs elsewhere.

Over the course of my studies, I also used Facebook and Instagram to document and reflect on my progress. Recognizing my audience included family, friends, fellow doctoral students, and mentors, I intentionally chose to show all aspects of the experience. For example, on January 22, 2017, I tweeted, “2017 = glass case of emotions thus far thanks to #ClemsonNatty #Inauguration #WomensMarch #phdlife” alongside a GIF of Will Ferrell as Ron Burgandy stuck in a telephone booth. Then, just after midnight on April 11, 2017, I tweeted, “Tmw you spent the last six hours of your 27th
year writing #sadoc, #happybdaytome #phinishstrong.” On a lighter note, on April 23, 2018, I shared to Facebook a photo of myself and my six-month old puppy, Rally, with the following caption:

Introducing Jessica Owens, PhD Candidate! A campus wide power outage and subsequent cancellation of classes and closure of offices made today more of an adventure than I bargained for. We powered through (pun intended)! I am grateful for my committee chair, Dr. Pam Havice, for offering up her community clubhouse as a meeting location! I am appreciative of my committee members for their understanding as we changed locations three times in the hour leading up to our gathering! I cherish the diligence of my mom, Sharon Clemmons Thomas, for sending constant prayers through these unexpected obstacles! I am blessed to have unwavering support of my sweet husband, Bremen Owens, as well as friends, colleagues, and family leading up to this day! A lot needs to happen between now and May 2019, but no road is long when you have good company!

Finally, on November 10, 2018, I shared to Instagram a photo of my laptop and coffee mug, which read, “every day I’m dissertating,” with the caption, “Even on gameday, y’all! #gotigers #phdgrind.” I purposefully included moments of celebration and humor alongside moments of loneliness and uncertainty to convey to my various audiences that pursuing a PhD, while completely worth it, was a rollercoaster. See Appendix C for screenshots of the content described above.

As a result, I had an insider position when exploring this topic (Chavez, 2008). I was an insider in two ways. I identified as a doctoral student, and I regularly engaged in social media in support of my educational and professional pursuits. Because I identified
closely with the target population of this study, I personally experienced the potential of social media to serve as a connecting point among doctoral students and source of support and belonging. In the examples described previously, I received encouragement from a variety of sources, as well as validation and solidarity from fellow doctoral students and recent graduates. The ability to access a community of support both in and outside of the classroom influenced my persistence toward degree. In addition, I increasingly served as a resource to doctoral students within my program as I progressed toward completion.

My position as an insider within the higher education system allowed me access to otherwise understated knowledge. For example, I personally witnessed the influence of blending the academic and social aspects of the doctoral experiences. While this access had potential to bias my analysis process, access as an insider also provided me with a “nuanced perspective for observation, interpretation, and representation (Chavez, 2008, p. 479). Therefore, I needed to be diligent in recognizing how my position as an insider may influence the way I collected and interpreted the data as a researcher. I was mindful regarding the potential for my own experience to influence the way I engaged with my participants and analyzed the data as a researcher. I chose to actively note points of alignment between my experiences and those of my participants throughout the data collection and analysis process. Through reflective exercises (memos, journaling, etc.), I sought to understand myself and my experiences separately from those of my participants (Charmaz, 2008):

Insider scholars, on the other hand, need to be trained to get into their own heads first before getting into those of participants”; they need to know in which ways
they are like their participants and in which ways they are unlike them; they need to know which of their social identities can advantage and/or complicate the process (p. 491).

This process helped me ensure I collected and analyzed the stories shared by my participants in the most objective manner possible.

**Research Context and Participant Selection**

McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase (2016) outlined the opportunities and challenges associated with the study of social media. Access provided to volume, velocity, and variety of data allows researchers to answer questions about social media use itself, as well as examine social phenomena through a new lens (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2016). Questions exist regarding appropriate methodological approaches and how to address concerns regarding informed consent surrounding publicly available data (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2016). While Sloan and Quan-Haase (2016) discussed these questions in depth, they concluded “ethical decisions as being grounded in the specifics of the data being collected, the social group under study, and the potential repercussions for subjects” (p. 663). Still, Sloan and Quan-Haase (2016) argued challenges associated with social media research were no different from those experienced in traditional forms of inquiry.

**Research Context**

The research context for the present study was the #sadoc community on Twitter. To the best of my knowledge, users within this community were doctoral students at various stages within their respective programs in the field of higher education.

Conversations taking place within this context seemed to lack facilitation by any
professional organization(s), annual gathering(s), or structured chat(s). As a result, engagement in this community and conversations were considered voluntary. This context allowed for the inclusion of participants from a wide range of institutions, geographic locations, and educational backgrounds.

Data were collected through Radian6, which allowed me to download publicly available tweets by keyword search (Radian6, 2017). The keyword in the present study was #sadoc. Tweets meeting the search criteria (n = 4,659) from May 1, 2017 through May 1, 2018 were downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet. Radian6 (2017) collected not only the content of tweets meeting search criteria, but also their sentiment (e.g. positive, negative, or neutral), retweets, quotes, and other engagement metrics (e.g. location, followers, etc.).

After retweets and quoted tweets were removed, 2,240 tweets remained for content analysis. Tweets originated from 260 users across eight countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, France, Germany, Pakistan, Switzerland, and the United States. Sixty-one tweets originated from an unknown location. These 260 users followed an average of 1,249 users. Additionally, these 260 users had an average of 1,575 followers and 11,854 tweets. Outside of #sadoc, the five most popular hashtags included #sapro, #sagrad, #sachat, #heywithquaye, and #highered. The five most popular mentions included @acpa, @naspatweets, @lmudocoral, @acpaprez, and @shsucoe. Radian6 (2017) categorized the majority of tweets as positive (n = 942) or neutral (n = 969). Table 3.1 provides examples of tweets from the #sadoc community between May 1, 2017 and May 1, 2018.
Table 3.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unique Tweets to #sadoc between May 1, 2017 and May 1, 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unique Tweets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Neverending Story isn't really about stopping the Nothing...it's the collective experience for anyone writing a dissertation. #SADoc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One. More. Paper. is standing in between me and the end of the semester. Send inspiration. And coffee. Please. #SADoc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>While I think many other #SADoc folks encounter this part, too, I need to become more conscious of celebrating the writing I'm doing. In 2018, the plan is to really ensure I'm writing 30-60 minutes a day because the blocks aren't working like they used to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#EverydayBlackness is choosing to not tone down one's blackness. #ACPA #SAPro #SAChat #SAdoc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filling out an IRB application is like applying to sit at the cool kids' table at lunchtime. Translation: Please view me as a credible, trustworthy, and valuable contributor to the field of Education. #SAdoc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant recruitment and selection, as described in the sections that follow, occurred following approval from the Institutional Review Board at Clemson University. The approval email from the Institutional Review Board can be found in Appendix D.

**Participant Recruitment**

I began recruiting participants on May 10, 2018 via Twitter. First, I identified users, who connected to #sadoc between May 1 and May 10 and contacted them via direct message (DM) regarding their interest in participating in the study. Additionally, I tweeted at #sadoc on five different occasions between May 10 and June 10, 2018. See below for an example of a tweet to #sadoc on May 22:
If you are a doctoral student who has ever engaged in #sadoc, please consider sharing your experiences with me to support my dissertation: [LINK]. DM with questions. Please RT!

The abbreviation, DM, referred to direct message, and RT, referred to retweet. Each request included a brief description of my target audience and a link to the selection questionnaire, which was completed online (Appendix A). During the recruitment timeframe, my requests received 22 retweets and ten favors via Twitter, which increased the reach of my request.

I used Qualtrics, an online software program, to create and distribute the questionnaire, collect, and analyze data online (Qualtrics, 2017). After each participant reviewed the informed consent statement, the selection questionnaire collected the following information: (a) first and last name; (b) Twitter handle; (c) email address; (d) city/state of residence; (e) degree program; (f) program delivery; (g) full-time versus part-time status; (h) candidacy status; (i) anticipated completion date; (j) gender identity; and (k) racial identity. Data collected remained confidential through password protection provided by Qualtrics (Qualtrics, 2017). The questionnaire provided information that assisted me in the selection of participants.

**Participant Selection**

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) recommended between four and ten interviews for doctoral students employing a phenomenological approach. Initially, I aimed to complete interviews with ten participants based on feasibility within the context of the data collection timeline. I provided an incentive (e.g. gift card) to participants in an effort to meet the sample size goal.
Participants were selected from the #sadoc community on Twitter in late spring 2018. Users of #sadoc during the examined time frame were contacted via Twitter regarding their interest in participating in the study. The tweet included a link to the selection questionnaire, which was completed online (Appendix A). I intended to employ a combination of purposeful and maximum variation sampling to identify an information-rich, representative, and diverse sample (Patton, 2015). The number of users, who completed the questionnaire, matched the number of participants desired for my study.

All participants, who completed the questionnaire, were invited to participate in an interview regarding their experiences with #sadoc. Still, the final sample consisted of breadth based on the following criterion among doctoral student participants: (a) part-time versus full-time student status; (b) delivery of degree program (e.g. traditional, hybrid, or online); and (c) progress in respective program (first year student, doctoral candidate, etc.). While ten #sadoc users completed the questionnaire between May 10 and June 12, eight users ultimately completed an interview. While citizenship was not a requirement for selection, all participants were U.S. citizens connected to #sadoc, who identified with the doctoral student experience.

**Participants**

The sample for this study included eight participants. In this section, I provided vignettes (Table 3.3) followed by a brief description of each participant. Information collected in the selection questionnaire and semi-structured interview provided data for these descriptions. I provided each participant the opportunity to select a pseudonym to provide confidentiality (Cresswell, 2013). In some cases, participants declined to choose a pseudonym; instead, these participants allowed me to choose on their behalf.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Institution*</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Program Delivery**</th>
<th>Status*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Research 1</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>Full-Time Candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not-for-Profit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brock</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>M 1</td>
<td>EdD</td>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>Full-Time 2nd Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not-for-Profit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Research 2</td>
<td>EdD</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Full-Time Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not-for-Profit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Research 2</td>
<td>EdD</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>Full-Time Candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not-for-Profit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josephine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Research 1</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Part-Time Candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not-for-Profit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhett</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Research 1</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>Full-Time 2nd Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not-for-Profit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>Research 3</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Full-Time 4th Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>For-Profit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Research 1</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>Full-Time Candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not-for-Profit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Classifications were selected by The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2017).

**Note: Participants self-reported program delivery and student status.
Dan. Dan was a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) candidate, who was enrolled full-time (7 to 9 credits) in a primarily face-to-face doctoral program at a Research I institution in the Midwest. Dan defined candidacy as having successfully completed coursework, as well as passing a qualifying exam. Dan was a Black or African American male and funded his education through a research assistantship and scholarships. Dan described his motivation to pursue a doctoral program as the result of having “too many questions” while working in student affairs following the conclusion of his Master’s program. He described feeling as though opportunities to engage in research were limited to staff members versus doctoral students at his institution. Additionally, he felt there were boundaries to engaging in research as a professional staff member that were not there for doctoral students.

Outside of his program, Dan was involved in the campus and surrounding community through leadership and service. Specifically, he served as a mentor to students of color where he talked with them about “what it mean to kind of do high school well and what does college mean and what [he was] doing in a Ph.D.” program. On his campus, he previously served in leadership roles within the graduate student community; however, more recently, his role as a leader became more organic due to his involvement in campus activism. Dan claimed this work was “important because if we’re gonna be about the work of social justice and say we’re about that work, then we probably should be about the work in other ways.” Although he had taken a step back to focus on his doctoral work, Dan argued “scholarship can be [his] activism” until he was able to graduate. Dan was entering his fifth year and anticipated graduating in May 2020. He described students in his program as having equal interest in pursuing administrative
versus faculty routes after graduation. He was primarily interested in pursuing a tenure-track faculty position; however, he was open to administrative roles depending on the job market at that time. Dan learned about #sadoc through NASPA and/or ACPA and considered those organizations to be heavily connected to #sadoc.

**Brock.** Brock was a second year Doctor of Education (EdD) student, who was enrolled full-time (6-9 credits) in a hybrid doctoral program at a regional comprehensive institution in the Midwest. Brock was a White or Caucasian male and funded his education through employee tuition assistance benefits and unsubsidized loans. Prior to enrolling in his program, Brock applied to another program to which he was not accepted. Brock described his hybrid program as cohort-based and “designed for working professionals” where students met in person approximately five times per semester over the weekend and completed the remainder of their coursework online through the institution’s learning management system. Although Brock was not yet considered a candidate, he defined candidacy in his program as the successful completion of a core set of courses. He also planned to complete a graduate certificate related to his professional role as part of his doctoral education. Outside of his program, Brock was a full-time administrator in higher education, who also had commitments to his family and service work. Brock described the challenge of balancing these multiple identities, especially given he began the program with an infant at home. Although this program was structured to be completed in three years, Brock anticipated graduating in May 2020, after which point, he hoped to pursue advanced career opportunities within higher education administration.
Michael. Michael graduated in December of 2017 from a primarily online EdD program at a Research II institution in the Southeast. Michael was a White or Caucasian male, who funded his education personally. Michael began his pursuit of the terminal degree at a more traditional institution in the Southeast prior to transferring to the program where he completed his enrollment. Michael’s program transitioned from hybrid to primarily online over the course of his degree. Michael described his initial motivation to pursue the terminal degree as extrinsic, with a focus on the credential required to advance within his field; however, as he progressed in his program, he shared his motivations became “less and less about the extrinsic.” For Michael, this transition inspired his dissertation, which focused on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations associated with degree attainment for higher education. He argued those who become ABD “become complacent because the extrinsic motivator [promotion] has been met, and the intrinsic motivators within themselves aren’t strong enough to let them finish.” While enrolled in his program full-time (~6 credits), Michael worked full-time within higher education in addition to balancing commitments to his family. Over the course of the six and a half years in which he was enrolled, Michael experienced three changes in employment and welcomed three children to his family. In addition, he was heavily involved in the professional organization associated with his professional role in student affairs. Michael continued to work full-time in administration within higher education after completing his degree.

Talia. Talia was an EdD candidate, who was enrolled full-time in a primarily face-to-face doctoral program at a research II institution in the Southeast. Talia was a Black or African American female and funded her education through unsubsidized loans.
Talia described her program as an “executive EdD program” where coursework was completed over one long weekend per month with a cohort of thirteen working professionals. Within her program, candidacy was obtained after the completion of coursework and a standardized comprehensive exam. Talia entered her fourth year and was working on chapter four of her dissertation at the time of the interview, which focused on “Hispanic-serving institutions and organizational culture and change.” Outside of her program, Talia worked full-time in higher education while also fulfilling commitments to her partner and family, volunteer organizations, and professional organizations. Specifically, Talia recently transitioned out of a leadership role in a professional organization related to her professional position. While Talia anticipated graduating in December of 2018, she was still exploring what would come next, having interests in advanced opportunities within higher education administration, as well as higher education adjacent opportunities.

Josephine. Josephine was a PhD candidate, who was enrolled part-time (~6 credits) in a primarily online doctoral program at a Research I institution in the Northeast. Candidacy in her cohort-based program was defined as the successful completion of coursework and comprehensive exam. Josephine was a White or Caucasian female and funded her education personally. Josephine described her program as primarily online with “intensive research seminars, usually over the summers.” She always intended to pursue a doctoral program after completing her Masters; however, she was advised to work for several years prior to pursuing that goal. Josephine described her motivation to pursue the doctorate as a combination of its associated credence and ability to contribute to the field. She chose her program after connecting to one of its students via #sadc
based on her interest in how learning takes place in an online environment. Outside of her program, Josephine had full- and part-time employment responsibilities, as well as family commitments. She received several promotions over the course of her five years in the doctoral program, each of which came with increased responsibilities. In addition, Josephine had taken on commitments in teaching, research, and service. Josephine anticipated graduating in December of 2018 with three publications. After graduation, she hoped to pursue advanced career opportunities within higher education administration where she could supplement her work with teaching and research opportunities. Outside of her academic and professional responsibilities, Josephine had a partner of nine years, who was also in higher education. While they did not have any children at the time of the interview, they invested time and energy into two dogs and their home.

Rhett. Rhett was a second year PhD student, who was enrolled full-time in a primarily face-to-face doctoral program at a Research I institution in the Northeast. Rhett was an Asian male and funded his education through an administrative graduate assistantship. Rhett chose not to pursue any additional commitments outside of his program during his first year of enrollment because he “didn’t want to take on more than [he] could chew.” He described his program as having a focus in international education policy. At the time of the interview, Rhett was serving as a graduate assistant internationally. Rhett anticipated graduating in May of 2021.

Marin. Marin was a fourth year PhD student, who was enrolled full-time in a primarily online doctoral program at a for profit institution. Marin was a White or Caucasian female and funded her education through unsubsidized loans. Marin described full-time progress at her institution as one, eight- to twelve-week course at a time in
which she was the only student enrolled. While Marin was not a candidate at the time of
the interview, she was in the process of completing her coursework and comprehensive
exams. She described her program as requiring her “to be an incredibly independent and
intrinsically motivated student to be successful.” She chose to pursue a terminal degree in
higher education for two reasons: (a) knowledge that she was the first in her family to do
so; and (b) knowledge that doors would open after graduation she didn’t even know
existed. Outside of her program, Marin worked full-time in higher education, where she
experienced a number of job changes, including one in January of 2018. Additionally, she
described commitments to her partner and family, volunteer organizations, and pets.
Marin anticipated graduating in November of 2019, after which point she hoped to pursue
advanced career opportunities within higher education.

**Eleanor.** Eleanor was a PhD candidate, who was enrolled full-time in a primarily
face to face doctoral program at a Research I institution in the Southeast. Eleanor was a
White or Caucasian female and funded her education through a research assistantship.
Eleanor chose to pursue the terminal degree in higher education for career advancement.
She commuted up to two hours one way for classes that met in person on her campus.
She defined candidacy as the completion of coursework and the comprehensive
examination process. Outside of her program, Eleanor taught part-time at another
institution while also fulfilling commitments to her partner and children. She anticipated
graduating in August of 2019, after which point she hoped to advance her career in higher
education.
Data Collection and Data Sources

Three sources of data were collected for each participant: (a) participant selection questionnaire (Appendix A); (b) participant #sadoc tweets from May 1, 2017 through May 1, 2018; and (c) semi-structured interview (Appendix B). The first data collection point was an initial questionnaire that each interested participant completed (Appendix A). This process allowed me to select a representative sample as described previously.

The second data collection point was the content shared by each participant via #sadoc during the previous academic year, May 1, 2017 – May 1, 2018. This data was collected through Radian6, which allowed researchers to download publicly available tweets by keyword search (Radian6, 2017). Radian6 (2017) collected not only the content of tweets meeting search criteria, but also their sentiment (e.g. positive, negative, or neutral), retweets, quotes, and other engagement metrics. The keyword in the present study was #sadoc. This keyword search pulled publicly available tweets to the #sadoc community within the given time frame, May 1, 2017 – May 1, 2018. I chose this timeframe for two reasons: (a) to access data within a timeframe close to my data collection process; and (b) to access twelve months of data from within #sadoc and, therefore, an entire academic year of conversation. Tweets meeting the search criteria were downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet. From there, I was be able to filter content by username and/or date. This process allowed me to understand the nature of participants’ engagement in #sadoc.

The third source of data was transcripts from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with selected participants. See Appendix B for interview protocol. In depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted one-to-one between the participant and researcher.
Through this approach, I was able to obtain rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon from each participant (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). While interviews were guided by a protocol, conversations were driven by the participant (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Interviews focused on each participant’s experience as a doctoral student, engagement in #sado, motivation for engagement in #sado, and outcomes for engagement in #sado. Participants were asked to consider how their engagement in #sado influenced their doctoral student experience, socialization, and sense of belonging in academia. They were asked to reflect on content they have shared within the examined time frame, May 1, 2017 – May 1, 2018. Although my focus centered on the topic described previously, I followed up on relevant concerns shared by my participants as the phenomenon expert (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). I scheduled interviews over the course of a five-week period, allowing two weeks for scheduling from the point of selection.

Data Analysis

All interviews were audio recorded via two, simultaneous techniques: (a) handheld electronic recorder; and (b) phone application. Interviews were then transcribed verbatim from the recordings by a paid transcriptionist. To protect the identity of each participant, I removed identifiers from the transcripts prior to beginning the analysis process. All participants were provided with an opportunity to review and provide clarification regarding their transcribed interviews. Figure 3.1 provides a visual representation of my data analysis process:
I began the analysis process by conducting an initial reading of all interview transcripts, which allowed me to develop a sense of the data overall. After this initial review, I developed one to two-page memos for each transcript (Appendix E). While Birks, Chapman, and Francis (2008) recognized memos as traditionally associated with grounded theory approaches, the researchers argued memos were “central to the process of investigating phenomena within the qualitative domain” (p. 69). The memos in my study included the following: (a) descriptors of each participant (e.g. racial and gender identity, progress within the doctoral program, etc.); (b) connection to #sadoc; (c) common themes to emerge; (d) other points to note; (e) connections to researcher experience; and (f) resonating examples. I purposefully allowed time between the first review of each transcript to clear my recollection of those transcripts read previously. A minimum of five hours passed between each review; in most cases, eight hours of sleep separated transcript reviews. This process helped me to document my reactions to the responses of my participants, as well as acknowledge connections to my own experience that might influence my interpretation of the data.

I employed an emergent analytical process (Charmaz, 2008). According to Charmaz (2008), emergent methods are “inductive, indeterminate, and open-ended” (p. 155). Researchers employ emergent methods to explore dynamic phenomena since these methods “allow for new properties of the studied phenomenon to appear that, in turn,
shape new conditions and consequences to be studied” (p. 155). Further, emergent methods allow researchers to make adjustments throughout the research process as more is discovered about the studied phenomena (Charmaz, 2008). By adopting emergent methods, researchers can account for processes discovered in the empirical world and direct their methodological strategies accordingly (Charmaz, 2008, p. 155). I chose to employ emergent methods in an effort to reduce the influence of preconceived ideas on my analysis process.

My coding process consisted of two primary strategies: (a) initial coding; and (b) focused coding. While this progression within coding was often associated with grounded theory approaches, Saldaña (2016) recommended initial coding as a starting point for novice researchers. Initial coding “breaks down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examines them, and compares them for similarities and differences” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 295). I reviewed transcripts line by line, noting important and/or striking comments from participants. I also noted my questions and reactions, in the margins of each transcript. See Appendix F for an example of the initial coding process. Following this initial coding process, I reflected on identified codes and my reactions to the sentiments shared by my participants. Once again, I took note of any connections to personal experiences that might drive my interpretation of the data. This process culminated in the development of a preliminary codebook (Appendix G). My codebook provided a set of categories or codes to guide the coding process, allowing for simultaneous revision of definitions during the analysis process (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011).
Focused coding, which typically follows initial coding, then “searches for the most frequent or significant Initial Codes to develop the most salient categories in the data corpus” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 294). Utilizing the preliminary codebook, I employed focused coding across the transcripts (Appendix H). I used various colored pens during the focused coding phase to identify salient codes. During the focused coding process, I noticed overlap between some of the codes I identified in the preliminary codebook. Through this process, I developed a revised codebook (Appendix I), which I utilized to conduct a final round of focused coding. See Appendix J for an example of this final round of focused coding. I utilized this codebook as a framework to analyze the #sadoc tweets collected from May 1, 2017 to May 1, 2018. Thompson et al (2016) and Mazer et al (2015) demonstrated the value of employing qualitative analyses with social media content, specifically on Twitter. For the purpose of the analysis process, I viewed #sadoc as a ninth participant. This method allowed me to quickly identify the most salient themes across the data sources.

**Trustworthiness**

I utilized Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) four constructivist criteria to assess the trustworthiness of this study: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. Schwandt (2007) defined credibility as attending to “the issue of the inquirer providing assurances of the fit between respondents’ views of their life ways and the inquirers reconstruction and representation of the same” (p. 299). To address credibility, I utilized member checking and peer debriefing. In the context of this study, member checking involved providing an opportunity to each participant to review the interview transcript to confirm its accuracy (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). In addition to
member checking, I identified two recent graduates of doctoral programs on my campus to conduct a peer review of my analysis. While I describe this process in depth in Chapter Four, the primary goal of the peer review process was to provide opportunity for my analysis and resulting themes to be challenged by someone familiar with qualitative analysis (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). This process helped me to rethink some of the language I initially chose to describe the themes emerging from the data.

The criterion of transferability attended to the issue of how findings might be applied to other populations (Schwandt, 2007). To address transferability, I employed purposeful sampling to identify information-rich cases as described in Chapter Three (Patton, 2015). This approach increased the quality of description and allowed me to identify significant patterns that transcend heterogeneity (Patton, 2015). In addition, I checked my biases and subjectivity by revisiting my positionality and researcher memos throughout to identify any instances where my personal biases may have influenced the way in which I interpreted the data. Finally, I discuss the limitations regarding the generalizability of my study in Chapter Five.

Dependability and confirmability were concerned with reliability and objectivity within the data collection and analysis processes (Schwandt, 2007). I addressed these criteria through employing triangulation via the use of multiple data sources (Patton, 2015). This allowed me to observe whether my findings were consistent across the three data sources, which contributed to the trustworthiness of the research. Additionally, my peer review process described in Chapter Four served as an auditing function.
Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided my methodological approach to understanding how doctoral students perceive the influence of social media engagement, through Twitter, on their socialization and sense of belonging within academia. I outlined and described my rationale for this approach and my positionality as a researcher. I provided an extensive description of #sadoc and the context for this study. I introduced my participants by providing a summary table followed by descriptive vignettes for each participant. Finally, I described my plan for collecting and analyzing data through a phenomenological approach. In the next chapter, I explain my data analysis process and report the findings of the study.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Chapter Overview

The purpose of this study was to understand how doctoral students perceive the influence of social media engagement, through Twitter, on their socialization and sense of belonging within academia. The following research questions guided this study:

3. How do doctoral students view the influence of engagement through #sadoc on Twitter upon their socialization as doctoral students?

4. How do doctoral students view the influence of engagement through #sadoc on Twitter upon their sense of belonging in academia?

In order to address these questions, I employed a phenomenological approach and selected eight participants who met specific criteria. As discussed in Chapter Three, three sources of data were collected for each participant: (a) participant selection survey (Appendix A); (b) participant #sadoc tweets from May 1, 2017 – May 1, 2018; and (c) semi-structured interview (Appendix B).

Following data collection, I began the coding and analysis process. My coding process consisted of two primary strategies: (a) initial coding; and (b) focused coding. While this progression within coding is often associated with grounded theory approaches, Saldaña (2016) recommended initial coding as a starting point for novice researchers. As described in Chapter Three, I developed a preliminary codebook (Appendix G) after employing initial coding with the interview transcripts. I revised the
codebook (Appendix I) after employing focused coding prior to reviewing transcripts a third and final time.

To enhance the trustworthiness of this study, I recruited two peer reviewers to examine my analysis process and provide feedback regarding my codes. Both of my peer reviewers were recent graduates of doctoral programs on my campus. Each reviewer was familiar with qualitative research, and, specifically, emergent methods (Charmaz, 2008). I provided each peer reviewer with the following documents: (a) Chapter One of the dissertation study; (b) redacted interview transcript for Dan; (c) redacted interview transcript for Marin; (d) revised codebook (Appendix I); and (e) Chapter Four of the dissertation study.

My goal in the peer review process was two-fold: (a) to reflect on overlap and misalignment of peer reviewer codes versus researcher codes; and (b) to engage in discussion with each reviewer to develop my final iteration of the codebook (Appendix K). I used the final codebook to identify the results and findings of the study which are outlined in this chapter. For each unique theme, I provided a summary of topics discussed, which contributed to the development of the theme. To illustrate each theme, I provided direct quotes from participants, as well as tweets from #sadoc during the examined time frame. Thompson et al (2016) and Mazer et al (2015) demonstrated the value of employing qualitative analyses with social media content, specifically on Twitter. For the purpose of the analysis process, I viewed #sadoc as a ninth participant.

This chapter was organized into eight sections: (a) theme: community of shared doctoral experiences; (b) theme: exposure to doctoral education process; (c) theme: celebration of doctoral student experiences; (d) theme: expansion of boundaries; (e)
theme: doctoral student identification; (f) theme: visibility and authenticity of expression; (g) summary of themes; and (h) chapter summary.

**Theme: Community of Shared Doctoral Experiences**

During semi-structured interviews with each participant, I asked questions surrounding the value and purpose of #sadoc as part of their doctoral student experience (Appendix B). Additionally, I asked each participant to reflect on their motivations for engaging in #sadoc as both consumers and/or producers of its content. In reflection on their engagement, I asked each participant to discuss what, if any, outcomes they experienced as a result of their engagement (Appendix B).

Seven of eight participants (Dan, Brock, Michael, Talia, Josephine, Marin, and Eleanor) described #sadoc as a community of shared doctoral experiences. Specifically, these participants shared instances where they received encouragement, commiseration, motivation, support, and accountability from other users. Several of these participants described their connection to #sadoc as responsible for reducing feelings of loneliness within their doctoral student experience.

Michael shared the following related to the isolation that accompanied the dissertation writing process:

> There's lots of research out here- out there about it as well, so many people when they become ABD and they get out of that classroom environment where they had that natural support group, there becomes this isolation that is, you know, working on your dissertation, which is- that's part of the process, is that you're supposed to be isolated and working on your own. But I think people get- people that don't succeed or people that allow themselves to become isolated and then they just slip
through the cracks, whereas something like #sadoc allows people to stay connected, to stay in a community even if they're working on their own (Michael, personal communication, May 30, 2018).

Michael expanded on the perceived impact of #sadoc on feelings of isolation:

People that I know, the people that are doing a job similar to me, people that are doing work similar to me that have the same, you know, responsibilities and commitments are finding a way to chip away at this and get through the process. I think that's what really helped me (Michael, personal communication, May 30, 2018).

Eleanor described the comfort and solidarity found in these moments of loneliness:

I mean there might be some instances where I'm looking for information, but I think it'd be more of the, um, more of the complex sending things into the void slash comfort. You know, looking to see what other people are, you know, grumbling about or whatever. Like finding solidarity more than anything else like, yeah. A reminder that you're not alone (Eleanor, personal communication, July 3, 2018).

Marin, like Eleanor, described comfort, but also motivation derived from the #sadoc community:

I know if I put something out into the ether, somebody is gonna get back to me at some point, um, hopefully. Um, that, that is, that to me is very comforting and it's very motivating to kinda continue to kinda put myself out there, because it's like, you know, I'm ... Especially as I think about like I'm, I'm very close to finishing up the coursework and kinda moving into the constant dissertation phase. I'm like
I’m really gonna need this community over the next year-and-a-half. Like I’m really gonna need these people. […] It makes me feel, um, not alone because for 98% of my program, I’m 100% alone, you know. […] I need other people to understand what I'm going through and have recently been through it, um, or are going through it at the same time, um, because I think a sense of belonging and a sense of community is needed for anything that we do, um, and do it well (Marin, personal communication, June 25, 2018).

Talia, in contrast, discussed how she would provide comfort and motivation to others when appropriate:

I don’t know that I go to the hashtag to inspire or necessarily motivate others if that makes sense. And that might be very selfish on my part, but… I mean, if I happen to go there and someone needs, need those words of affirmation, I’ll certainly provide them, but that’s not my main motivation for using it (Talia, personal communication, June 11, 2018).

While many participants shared stories of one point in time connections that influenced their experience, Josephine provided an example of an ongoing connection through #sadoc:

We connected, um, and [NAME] actually sent me, um, you know, some syllabi of, uh, potential courses that I might take while I was thinking about making my decision. Um, and we- we connected in a nice way and then after I got accepted, she actually sent me, um, some, um, [INSTITUTION] Jamberry nails. She had a hand-written card and it said, um, ‘Wear these to your defense.” Um, and that was five years ago. So, that was in the fall of 2013 that I got accepted. Um, and
they're- they're sitting in my drawer waiting for the momentous occasion

(Josephine, personal communication, June 13, 2018).

Josephine also described how this connection influenced her engagement in #sadoc with others:

I plan to, uh, pay that forward. And I have been paying that forward, um, as we've been- as I've kind of been going through the process (Josephine, personal communication, June 13, 2018).

Two participants (Dan and Marin) described #sadoc as a place to engage in critical discourse regarding important topics within the field of higher education; a community where both information and opportunities were accessed. Specifically, Marin shared:

Every couple of weeks or so, um, there's a couple of, you know, kinda players in the space that will bring up some pretty, um, critical commentary on some things happening in higher ed (Marin, personal communication, June 25, 2018).

Dan described these critical conversations in further detail:

It's a space in which I see um, less seasoned scholars, less seasoned folks, grad students, engaging pretty robustly in conversations, um, that aren't always at the forefront of our conversations in student affairs. [...] It’s a smaller more intimate space—as much as a digital space can be intimate—and a place where like, I feel pretty okay with critiquing things or asking questions in a way that critiques, but also being able to be critiqued. [...] I also find it a really, to be a really fun space for conversations that are like, that are critical, and critical like I mean, specifically around, around power and privilege and race, racism, genderistic
orientation, all, all of the above, so I think that space is also very fruitful to have those discussions there (Dan, personal communication, May 29, 2018).

Brock described the humor present within #sadoc that contributed to feelings of community:

I saw somebody just posting like, "This- this is what writing in here um, in the summer feels like," and it was a picture of a- of a cat, like trying to go outside or something like that. But it couldn't. (laughs) It couldn't. Like, it was- it was running up against a screen door or something. It was like, um, yeah, so there's that sort of levity that it brings as well sometimes. Where that- that feeling of like, "Okay, I'm not the only one going through this crazy frustrating place." And so, I think in that way, yes, I feel like I can find some attachment um, at that point (Brock, personal communication, May 30, 2018).

Dan also referenced the cat GIF described by Brock, which demonstrated to me at any given moment, two individuals, connected by nothing but #sadoc may experience joy and commiseration from the same tweet.

In my review of #sadoc tweets between May 1, 2017 and May 1, 2018, I identified unique tweets consistent with the theme. Table 4.1 provides examples of #sadoc tweets.
Table 4.1

**Theme: Community of Shared Doctoral Experiences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unique Tweets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have been unsuccessful in trying to explain it to friends and family why I’m always studying or thinking about studying... #SADoc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have all these things I need to do but when I sit down to do them this happens... anyone else? #phdlife #sadoc <a href="https://t.co/z3SNmUczwf">https://t.co/z3SNmUczwf</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My dissertation chair says that I have a habit of leaving out words. I think it is because my brain is thinking faster than my fingers will type. Yeah, we'll go with that. #sadoc #writingprobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I actually think that's a legit thing. Even though my typing speed has increased dramatically since I started my #SAdoc, I still leave words out too. HA!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The importance of a village to get you through the #phdlife and process cannot be understated. I’m not here without my people; I’m not going anywhere without them. #sadoc #phdchat.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rhett, who completed his first year of doctoral study shortly prior to his interview, did not refer to #sadoc as a community of shared doctoral experiences. Instead, Rhett identified outcomes related to increased understanding of and reflection regarding the doctoral student experience, which will be discussed within future themes. During his interview, Rhett suggested his feelings of ownership over or belonging to #sadoc would increase as he progressed in his program. Many of his reflections on #sadoc pointed to what he felt it could become in his future as a doctoral student, how he would eventually engage in #sadoc, etc. His early position within the doctoral student experience may have contributed to this focus on what #sadoc could look like versus what it currently was in his experience.
Theme: Exposure to Doctoral Education Process

Within the context of semi-structured interviews with each participant, I asked questions surrounding the value and purpose of #sadoc as part of their doctoral student experience. Additionally, I asked each participant to reflect on their motivations for engaging in #sadoc as both consumers and/or producers of its content. In reflection on their engagement, I asked each participant to discuss what outcomes, if any, they experienced as a result of their engagement. All eight participants (Dan, Brock, Michael, Talia, Josephine, Marin, and Eleanor) described the role of #sadoc in exposing them to the process and normalizing the doctoral student experience. For example, Rhett utilized experiences shared via #sadoc to identify where he was in the process, as well as what it could look like for him in the future:

   It’s just kinda cool to see, like, how other doctoral students in the field are going through and like, what are they doing right now? Uh, where are they in their experience as a doctoral student? Is this gonna be what it’s gonna be like for me when it’s my time to get candidacy and, you know, when it’s my time to defend and graduate? […] I think it gives other doctoral students something to look at, um, to just kind of map out and understand what the journey might be like (Rhett, personal communication, June 17, 2018).

Michael shared similar sentiments with me regarding his experience with #sadoc:

   It served the purpose of better understanding of what the next steps for me would be, and so understanding what that dissertation- that doctoral journey process looks like, um, from start to finish (Michael, personal communication, May 30, 2018).
Josephine spoke to the value of normalization more directly:

I was noticing this, like, trend-unscientific trend, um, where pretty much like everyone at some point in their doctoral program seems like they had this moment where it was like, ‘I can’t do this anymore. I don’t know why I’m doing this. I’m overwhelmed,’ right? And then they would…they would put that out there. Um, and that to me was like oddly sad, but also, um, oddly comforting to know, like, that everybody experienced it […] Just kind of, you know, having that exposure is a critical part of doctoral education that I don’t know was always being taught. I think a lot of it was, quote end quote, behind the curtain and now having this very public space where we can talk about these things and think about, you know, how they implicate our students is definitely something that is moving the field forward […] It’s been helpful to see everybody go through these things and know, like, it’s possible. Yes, there’s hiccups, um, but watching other people get it done in writing has been really helpful particularly when I don’t belong to a cohort. (Josephine, personal communication, June 13, 2018).

Josephine reflected further regarding her own participation in #sadoc related to normalization:

I want to normalize sort of the unspoken parts, um, particularly for folks who are not, you know, in a cohort type of program, who are at a distance. Um, to say, you know, hey, like here’s some of the stuff that happens. Here’s, like, some of the good stuff, here’s some of the bad stuff, um, here’s some resources, here’s some, um, you know, just random things I’m thinking about. […] I’ve been told that, you know, potential [INSTITUTION] students will look at my tweets to, like, see
about different things in the program and see how things are handled (Josephine, personal communication, June 13, 2018).

In reflection on their engagement, several participants shared the outcome of validation related to the pre-, during, and post-doctoral student experiences. Specifically, Marin discussed the lack of clarity in the doctoral education process:

You get to that doctoral level and there's so much, um, there's so much grayness and, um, um, the high-level expectations, the constant high-level expectations, high performance and, and high writing and high reading skills and high everything that I think sometimes that kinda backs us into a corner, um, and, and can be a bit debilitating when you know everyone has this like incredibly high expectations of you (Marin, personal communication, June 25, 2018).

Talia also spoke to lack of clarity in the process of dissertation writing during her interview:

Like no one ever tells you, ‘This is how you write a dissertation,’ you know? So like I got, so obviously got through chapters one, two, three, defended, IRB was passed, and then I remember when I got my IRB approval letter, I panicked. Um, I had like a oh, crap moment. ‘Now what do I do,’ you know? Um, and so looking to see like, okay, what does this whole next step look like, if you will. Um, that’s kind of how I used it (Talia, personal communication, June 11, 2018).

Dan argued, more than normalization, #sadoc provided a space where myths could be addressed and, in many cases, busted by recent graduates and scholars in the field:

It helps kind of galvanize um, a conversation around like the neoliberal academic practices and the myths are kind of built in that space. Um, and that was really,
really relieving to, to hear. Because no one here's telling me that as much, honestly. Um, but to have folks who are really, really respected in the field and whose work I use for my own work, um, having them say that to me was really, really affirming […] And all these things that like, we're, we're told. We're not, not that we're told, but that we hear. Or there's some like, writing on the wall some, in some, someplace in the hallways and I'm, I'm thinking about a particular conversation that two professors were just like, yo, that's lie. That's not true. You don't have to have all these things. And then, another professor was like, yo, I've never been to AERA and I'm, I still have a great job. And like, look at where I am. It's great […] And that's really cool to kind of see senior scholars kind of pop in and be like, hey those are myths. Hey those don't make any sense. Like, enjoy your lives. Do really good work. Right? (Dan, personal communication, May 29, 2018).

Additionally, #sadoc provided participants exposure to related experiences beyond the participant’s institution. Eleanor spoke to this directly, identifying the value of the exposure:

I think it's easy to get kind of stuck in your own reality of like the institution that you're at or the program that you're working in. In that moment you're feeling like, alright well this is just what it is, and #sadoc reminds me that like my experience is just one of so many (Eleanor, personal communication, July 3, 2018).

Brock shared similar sentiments during his interview:
Lurking in a positive way uh to see folks' experiences, see what they were talking about um, you know, sort of feel out not maybe- not necessarily asking direct questions of folks. But, you know, uh, following folks' feeds that were in doctoral programs to sort of see what was going on and how they were engaging in the space (Brock, personal communication, May 30, 2018).

In my review of #sadoc tweets between May 1, 2017 and May 1, 2018, I identified unique tweets consistent with this theme. Table 4.2 provides examples of #sadoc tweets.

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Exposure to Doctoral Education Process</th>
<th>Unique Tweets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too many #research courses; text books ignore discussing the researchers as part of the research process. Reflexivity and positionality are integral, particularly in #qualitative studies. #phdchat #sadoc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I found out today that I'm ~a year away from Quals. Nobody told me we were actually going to be tested on this stuff! #PhDream #SADoc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The one thing we didn't talk about... wardrobe for the #SADoc dissertation defense. For those who have done it... or about to... how/what did you wear for your defense? #HigherEd #SAPro #SAChat.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting poll results from my question yesterday. Introduction leading the pack as most difficult to write along with significant comments on challenges of the discussion/implications. #sadoc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m sharing this publicly because some of us in this #SADoc journey may be hitting a wall we didn’t know was a wall. For a while, I didn’t understand why I couldn’t write because YA BOY WAS READING, OKAY?!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants’ engagement in #sadoc seemed to provide validation that their experiences were not out of the ordinary from individuals, other Twitter users, who understood the experience more intimately than family, friends, or colleagues.

**Theme: Celebration of Doctoral Student Experiences**

Within the context of semi-structured interviews with each participant, I asked participants to reflect on situations where they might choose to engage in #sadoc. Seven of eight participants (Rhett, Michael, Talia, Josephine, Dan, Marin, and Brock) described #sadoc as a place where they could reflect on the doctoral student experience. Participants discussed the value of #sadoc as a space to document and celebrate milestones and/or accomplishments within their doctoral student experience, as well as within the experiences of others:

I might make a post if I have like a significant, uh, what’s the word, milestone. So like when I finish my interviews or when I defended my proposal and got IRB approval, things like that (Talia, personal communication, June 11, 2018).

Similarly, Dan discussed the value of celebrating the process:

I use it to grow and um, think more seriously about this entire process. Like, um, also, and I think, so I think kind of, um, in line with what I said previously, kind of. It's a space to humanize and I think through, through celebrations as well. Like I think, um, these spaces are spaces I think that we can just really celebrate and engage each other in a way that we don't, um, or that we can't when I'm in the library in a cubicle (Dan, personal communication, May 29, 2018).

Brock discussed specific milestones and/or accomplishments he might share via #sadoc as he progressed within his program:
If I were to in the future have anything um, recognized or published, or whatever, I would share it there. If I were to you know, be able to share any kind of accomplishment really, to then hopefully get some positive feedback. You know, get that dopamine hit of a favorite, or a reply, or whatever. (laughs) Um, and I think to- to- in the same way that um, you know, you connected with the space to- to advertise your research, I think that will, um, to the extent that I'm able, um ... it probably won't be in the same way, but to the extent that I'm able to sort of share and advertise whatever my research project is approved in and move forward (Brock, personal communication, May 30, 2018).

Similarly, Marin discussed the value of seeing documentation of this sort among other users within #sadoc:

I think the other piece has, um, that’s, that’s particularly exciting to me is, um, when people are getting to the, to the place of defense, um, of really kind of seeing that culmination and how people are really like cataloging and kind of like transcribing that experience of going through their defense and, you know, the pictures with their committees and all that sort of stuff (Marin, personal communication, June 25, 2018).

Some participants moved beyond documentation into reflection on the doctoral student process:

Whereas for me, the purpose was just to sit back and reflect. It wasn't necessarily to engage as much as to reflect, if that makes any sense (Michael, personal communication, May 30, 2018).
Two participants (Rhett and Josephine) disclosed they would look back on their tweets after graduation to reflect on their experiences further. Rhett stated:

I think I use it primarily when I’m, like, documenting major milestones. […] When I’m on my way out, hopefully I’ll take a look at how the experience was by following my hashtag (Rhett, personal communication, June 17, 2018).

Josephine spoke to reflection more directly than other participants:

It’s a microblog of my doctoral experience. […] Like when milestones happen, and I-this is interesting and potentially important-when milestones, happen, it’s one of the first places I want to go. Um, and tell my #sadoc peeps, right? […] it’s almost an odd, um, natural thing to write in a tweet about my doctoral process. […] There’s certainly I know the moment that, you know, someone tweets, ‘Oh hey, I um finished this milestone,’ or I did, you know, ‘I defended’ or whatever, like there’s this whole group that is going to be like, ‘yay, rah,’ you know, cheering you on […] It has allowed [my advisor] to see some of like my organic and real feelings as I go through the process. Um, that she normally maybe wouldn’t see because we’re at a distance. […] My plan is once I’m done to go back through and look t it all, um, and kind of, you know, just reflect again on the process, reflect again on what I would potentially do different (Josephine, personal communication, June 13, 2018).

Eleanor, on the other hand, did not articulate #sadoc as a space for documentation and reflection. Instead, Eleanor focused more on #sadoc as a community that normalized the doctoral student experience and provided a space for commiseration:
I mean it’s not like I ever go to Twitter and think, oh I don’t feel like physically lonely anymore, but I definitely feel like I’m not the only one. So that’s a good distinction for me to make is, okay, you’re not the only one who is, you know, trying to find a source and can’t find it or literally celebrating the fact that, you know, when you went down that rabbit hole, it actually led you somewhat. You know? Instead of I just got distracted and researched the wrong thing for an hour or whatever (Eleanor, personal communication, July 3, 2018).

In my review of #sadoc tweets between May 1, 2017 and May 1, 2018, I identified unique tweets consistent with this theme. Table 4.3 provides examples of #sadoc tweets.

Table 4.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Celebration of Doctoral Student Experiences</th>
<th>Unique Tweets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All day I'm dissertatin'&quot; should really be a new hit song to describe my life... #sadoc #highered #writing #EdD.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying to explain to my parents what a dissertation proposal is and why having it approved is a big deal, but not the biggest deal. #sadoc [LINK]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The acknowledgements section of my dissertation will include Diet Coke and all the snacks in my house. #SADoc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisdom from [NAME] this morning: &quot;sometimes you write something that only you are ready for&quot;. #SAdoc #SAchat.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First #selfie as Dr. [NAME]!!! #sadoc #sapro #dowork [LINK]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme: Expansion of Boundaries**

Within the context of semi-structured interviews with each participant, I asked each participant to reflect on who belongs to #sadoc. Seven participants (Brock,
Josephine, Talia, Marin, Eleanor, Rhett, and Dan) out of eight described #sadoc as an inclusive community that spanned typical boundaries associated with identity. Participants discussed belonging as connected to intention in addition to identity. Dan stated:

I don't really like bounding things as much, particularly communities, and so I'd say like, I think that the space is useful for a variety of people. [...] Um, so I don't want to say who belongs, who doesn't belong. I would just, I would just say like, anyone whose intentions for like, were good, I think, is an okay member (Dan, personal communication, May 29, 2018).

Specifically, participants reported the variety of disciplines and points in career present in #sadoc. Marin explained:

I think some of it is the, the, the programs that belong in #sadoc partially are because of the people who are pursuing them, um, and then partially because of the programs that they're pursuing themselves (Marin, personal communication, June 25, 2018).

Rhett described the variation among #sadoc users regarding where they were in their careers (e.g. prospective student, current student, recent graduate, faculty member, etc.):

I would have to say, largely, current doctoral students or probably faculty members, too, if their trying to address something related to doctoral students, or maybe, uh, folks who are in the field who are interested in pursuing a doctoral degree (Rhett, personal communication, June 17, 2018).

Talia focused on the value of #sadoc for prospective doctoral students:
For those individuals who are aspiring doctoral students, I think it’s an incredible resource. […] I see it also used by people who were doctoral students. Um, so those who are, you know, on the other side, as I like to say […] It does encompass those who are going to stay on the practitioner side, as well as those who are going to be on the faculty side (Talia, personal communication, June 11, 2018).

Additionally, participants spoke to the capacity of #sadoc to span place and space.

Brock shared:

I think a subsection of that though is to engage with people um, outside of my office, or my region or my program. Like, just to have a little bit broader reach of thoughts, opinions, and- and experiences (Brock, personal communication, May 30, 2018).

Josephine added:

It doesn’t necessarily need to be something that, um, continues to bind us. Um, I think it was a vehicle to a network […] I think a subsection of that though is to engage with people um, outside of my office, or my region or my program. Like, just to have a little bit broader reach of thoughts, opinions, and- and experiences (Josephine, personal communication, June 13, 2018).

Eleanor discussed the belonging of those, who are not visibly engaging in the space:

For those individuals who are aspiring doctoral students, I think it’s an incredible I think anyone who uses it could belong, but even people who don't use it can belong. If that makes sense. […] I always presume that someone I can't see is reading something I'm tweeting, and they might find value in it. So they’re still
members even if we don't know they're members (Eleanor, personal communication, July 3, 2018).

In some cases, #sadoc influenced participants’ perception of doctoral education and the field of higher education as a whole. Marin shared feelings of encouragement related to seeing continued motivation to enter the field and pursue doctoral education:

Like this is very exciting that even amidst, you know, this higher education landscape that seems to be just kind of like flushing its own self continuously down the toilet like on the regular, um, I feel like we're doing it to ourselves over and over again and wondering why we still keep going and flush down the toilet. Um, there still are people who are finding reason and motivation and desire to want to pursue this degree even with the economy still being as unstable as it is, with the field not being, um, not being super tied to terminal degrees as requirements yet for certain positions. Um, I, it, there's a bit of that that makes me just kind of like, "Oh, yeah, there are some good things in the world, (laughs) you know, because people still want to pursue this degree (Marin, personal communication, June 25, 2018).

Michael, on the other hand, did not specifically describe #sadoc as spanning boundaries. He did, however, attribute these qualities to another social networking platform where he connected to professionals pursuing doctorates. Michael described this alternate social media community, separate from #sadoc, as having prospective, current, and former doctoral students:

When we started it, we were all in different points of working on our doctorates. Some of us has started and were in the middle of it, some of us were thinking
about it, and now, I think as of last semester, there are one, two, three, four of us – three or four of us – that are completely finished, and one that’s working on her dissertation right now, and the, we have two or three that are in coursework. So, there’s a good group of us, and it’s a really good support group (Michael, personal communication, May 30, 2018).

For Michael, this group also provided community and normalization similar to #sadoc.

In my review of #sadoc tweets between May 1, 2017 and May 1, 2018, I did not identify unique tweets consistent with this theme. Instead, I noted the participation of faculty, prospective students, and doctoral programs in addition to current doctoral students in the space. Thus, the theme was implicitly present through the users engaging in the space.

**Theme: Doctoral Student Identification**

Within the context of semi-structured interviews with each participant, I asked participants to reflect on their feelings of belonging related to #sadoc, as well as their doctoral student experience as a whole. All eight participants articulated belonging to #sadoc as connected to their identities as doctoral students. Josephine dismissed the idea that #sadoc served as a descriptor:

I feel like I belong when I’m connected to it, but it’s certainly not something that, um, is a descriptor of me. […] Now that faculty from programs are there, um, I’m wondering if that changes people’s, um, what they talk about, how they reveal, you know, even from a prospective student point of view, like, how, um, how that plays out. You know, are you less- are you more guarded because you know
faculty from the program you’re interested are lurking? (Josephine, personal communication, June 13, 2018).

Talia, on the other hand, discussed:

I think I belong just from the sheer fact that I’m an #sadoc. But I don’t know that that means that I am an active contributor. […] I found that I was using #sadoc a bit more when kind of entering into uncharted territory, if you will. So there weren’t a ton of people in my cohort who had gotten to certain stages yet […] If you were to look at my Twitter, would it fully encapsulate what my interests are? (Talia, personal communication, June 11, 2018).

Two participants (Marin and Brock) expressed feelings of imposter syndrome related to engagement in #sadoc. Marin described these feelings as follows:

I used the term lurker before. And I think, um, it, it was that curiosity and maybe that like impostor syndrome of like, "I'm not really part of this community," and then I was like, "But I am," like, "I'm taking classes," you know? That kind of early stage like, "Oh, this is really exciting and my classes are really easy, so I don't really have to like worry too much," and, you know, whatever. Um, my motivation for engaging have, um, have changed a lot as high as I kind of got over the crest of the halfway point in my program. […] Nobody has ever said like, "What is your program and what- school do you go to as like an entrance requirement to be able to like utilize this hashtag or, or participate in this conversation?" I think it's one of those like if you're using it, there's this assumption that you, you are a part of the crew, you know? […] I always think, um, it's, the, the engagements, what motivates me too is kind of to maintain my
own presence in the field and my own name and my own, I guess you could call brand out there as a reputable student affairs professional (Marin, personal communication, June 25, 2018).

Brock shared the following:

There have been some layers of imposter syndrome as it relates to my doctoral work, and so, I think that- that, excuse me. Um, definitely and with respect to that, um, SAdoc, has influenced my perception of saying, ‘Hey I,’ you know, ‘There are other people doing this, there are other people going through the same you know, rough situation that I’m going through or whatever that is.’ And so, you know, I- I can be a part of this community too (Brock, personal communication, May 30, 2018).

Rhett, Talia, Brock, and Marin each expressed feelings of ownership over the space once they were admitted to programs. Three participants (Rhett, Eleanor, and Brock) identified shifting motivations and/or activity within #sadoc as they moved through their program. Those early in their programs, like Rhett, expressed anticipating increases in their activity as they moved into the program:

It’s really other people who seem to be a part of it than I am. […] I really just like to observe instead, um, because I don’t think I’m in a place yet where I want to kind of engage with other people on those topics […] I might start engaging in the hashtag more just because I have to do more stuff that seems related to being a doctoral student (Rhett, personal communication, June 17, 2018).

Eleanor also felt her engagement might shift as she moved beyond coursework:
I think it's always been kind of touch and go and I use it when I need to. Otherwise, I don't really think about until, you know, the next need arises. So I don't think it's really changed. Um, I think it might change when I really am done with coursework and not seeing people [laughter] anymore […] I don't want one tweet to be like misinterpreted or taken out of context (Eleanor, personal communication, July 3, 2018).

Brock shared similar sentiments regarding his engagement and imposter syndrome:

It's helped me identify that, you know, as I talked about, that my higher ed doc program was a place that I could be, and exist, and- and engage in, and- and be you know, supported, but also could do the work (Brock, personal communication, May 30, 2018).

When asked to expand on his hesitancy to engage as a producer of content in #sadoc, Brock continued:

I feel underqualified. I identified earlier that I attribute that space, and sort of those conversations to a lot of times folks actually writing their dissertations. And so, I feel like there's sort of a threshold that I maybe haven't crossed yet to be able to engage (Brock, personal communication, May 30, 2018).

Participants reflected on their engagement in #sadoc as consumers versus producers of content. Michael stated:

I was kind of this outlier on the periphery just participation through just- just being in, you know, just being there. (laughs) Um, I wouldn't really call it necessarily engaged because I- I believe that engagement is a two-way street; you have to give and receive, whereas I was more, like I was saying, a collector of
information is more of what I would describe myself (Michael, personal communication, May 30, 2018).

In my review of #sadoc tweets between May 1, 2017 and May 1, 2018, I identified unique tweets consistent with this theme. Table 4.4 provides examples of #sadoc tweets.

Table 4.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Doctoral Student Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unique Tweets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A question for other part time grad students: Is it just me, or does your job feel extra exciting + totally doable after a day of doing school work? Bad sign? #sadoc #phdlife [LINK].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6yo: mommy, when you graduate, what kind of doctor will you be? Me: of Philosophy. 6yo: hm. So, what kind of people will you fix? Me: ALL OF THEM. #sadoc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positionality isn't just a statement you put in your thesis, dissertation, article, or chapter. Positionality is about bringing yourself, biases, identities front and center as part of the research process, and with participants #sadoc #sagrad [LINK].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm beginning to see I'm entering the #SADoc phase of trying to write things for my dissertation proposal and I'm hella critical of my writing. Nothing sounds right. I don't like the word choice. It's not conveying what I want it to say. I'm too much in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hello. It’s me. #SAPro #BlkSAP #SADoc [LINK].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme: Visibility and Authenticity of Expression

Within the context of semi-structured interviews with each participant, I asked participants to reflect on who belongs to #sadoc. While participants were not asked to reflect on their specific identities related to race, gender, program, etc., four participants (Dan, Marin, Brock, and Rhett) identified concerns related to visibility and authenticity of expression within #sadoc. For example, participants described a desire for authentic
expression while simultaneously expressing concerns regarding how specific audiences might misinterpret their engagement in #sadoc. Dan, for example, reflected on authenticity within #sadoc:

Like, what does authenticity mean, what does it mean to kind of perform that, who gets to perform authentically? And then, what if my authentic self is seen as dangerous or, or whatever. Um, I think of it a lot cause I'm, I'm a Black man, if you didn't know. Um, so this Black dude. Um, and so I have, I have to walk around like in public. Like in the physical space, wondering what and how I present. How I'm received. Like I, I think about that a lot. Um, and like I don't think about that in email or things where you really can't see my face. But Twitter, like my Twitter is like a headshot of my face and it's very obvious like I'm a black guy. (Laughs.) And so like, um, and there are days when I will say things on Twitter that are like, very pointed […] But like, the matrix of domination, like we're like straight up like thinking about who, what, when, where, and why? Is there a context for this tweet? That like, I'm saying this radical ridiculous thing that could be completely and totally interpreted else, in, in a different way in two months. Or in two years. And we've seen stories of academics who've said things, in a, and then one person got his tenure taken away from him, right? How much of myself can I really put out there. […] So I wonder about a lot, like what does it mean to kind of perform this like persona on Twitter? (Dan, personal communication, May 29, 2018).

Participants also discussed instances where voices were missing from the conversation or where their identities influenced how they chose to engage in #sadoc. Dan spoke to
diversity more broadly and the importance of discussing the how alongside the what when it came to inclusion:

I mean they are in like, everyone's speaking about diversity, everybody’s speaking about inclusion, but like, no one's speaking about like the material reality of what that means and how we go about it in our work. Not no one, but, in #sadoc, I'd say there's, there's a specific um, intention oftentimes with some folks, who are really trying to engage, um, those topic areas (Dan, personal communication, May 29, 2018).

Similarly, Marin argued for more visibility among underrepresented and/or marginalized communities:

There isn't really like a visibility space for those of us who are just kind of like journeying independently. […] I think there still is a lack of visibility of none, um, of non-faculty type doctoral students. Um, although I think it's becoming more, I don't wanna say common but more common place for people to be pur-pursuing doctoral-level education in student affairs, um, I think there still is a lack of visibility of none, um, of non-faculty type doctoral students. […] I'd like to see more use of that space for underrepresented and underserved SADoc students ... that are pursuing their journey, their journeys, um, because I just don't think that there's enough visibility in any spaces for any of us, but I think especially in the doctoral space, um, there's, there's a certain type of a profile that we assume to be, um, in, in that type of study and I think there's more to that than we think (Marin, personal communication, June 25, 2018).
Alternatively, Rhett spoke to how his identity as a South Asian male in Student Affairs impacted his perception of #sadoc as well as his engagement within the community:

I’m one of the very few South Asian people in student affairs, let alone, uh, you know, being someone who’s getting a doctoral degree in this field. […] I see current doctoral students, especially, like, doctoral students of color, boasting about their experience, uh, it’s really interesting to me because then I’m like, ‘oh, am I gonna experience this? Is this something I’m gonna have to deal with? […] Some people might talk about, like, experiencing racism or sexism or something like that while being in a doc program. Um, and then, just, they’re trying to bring to light that these experiences do exist and that something needs to change, or something needs to be fixed. (Rhett, personal communication, June 17, 2018).

Brock identified instances where his identity as a White male influenced his choices to engage in #sadoc.

I'm a White male, so I benefit from privilege; however, I'm not gonna talk about that type of conversation, um, about, why those LGBTQ folks on our campus are so affected by the hate speech of some, you know, crazy religious preachers that come our campus occasionally and- and speak freely about their stupid stuff. Um, sorry, I'm over generalizing that, but that's the situation. Um, at same point, um, I'm not gonna speak to that in that space because of how that might be perceived, um, and then how that might have professional impact on me. And so, um, as such, if I could separate those two voices, if you will, or- or identities a little bit more, or reconcile them differently (Brock, personal communication, May 30, 2018).
In my review of #sadoc tweets between May 1, 2017 and May 1, 2018, I identified unique tweets consistent with this theme. Table 4.5 provides examples of #sadoc tweets.

Table 4.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme: Visibility and Authenticity of Expression</th>
<th>Unique Tweets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#CiteASista began as an actionary response to all we learned/ discussed about #whiteness &amp; #whitesupremacy in our #SAdoc program...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will you do with the privilege that you have? #ACPA18 #SAdoc #sapro.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you project inclusion while silencing folx in the department you call a family? #ACPA18 #SAdoc #SAPro #SAGrad.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of Themes**

Participants in this study provided insight into their lived experiences as doctoral students within the #sadoc context. I gained a better understanding of how their experiences influenced their socialization as doctoral students and sense of belonging in academia through semi-structured interviews and a content analysis of the research context. While participants expressed that #sadoc was a space for prospective students and members of the faculty alongside current doctoral students (theme: expansion of boundaries), they expressed increased feelings of ownership over #sadoc upon admission to or progression within their respective programs (theme: doctoral student identification). Participants viewed #sadoc as a supportive community (theme: community of shared doctoral experiences) where they could reflect on their doctoral student experience, celebrate successes, and unpack setbacks (theme: celebration of doctoral student experiences). Additionally, participants cited #sadoc as a reminder they
were not alone in this process even when they were working independently. Participants perceived #sadoc as a space where they could gain increased understanding of the coursework and dissertation process (theme: exposure to doctoral education process).

All eight participants were able to identify positive outcomes related to their engagement in #sadoc, as well as articulate its value within their doctoral journey. Participants specifically linked their engagement in #sadoc, or similar communities within social media, to their success thus far in their programs. While participants found value in their engagement, several identified opportunities for the space to increase its value, including greater representation of the doctoral student population (theme: visibility and authenticity of expression). Four participants (Dan, Marin, Rhett, and Talia) specifically identified the need for increased visibility among underrepresented and underserved populations within the community.

As described in Chapter Three, I coded 2,240 unique tweets at #sadoc between May 1, 2017 and May 1, 2018. All but one of the six identified themes (theme: expansion of boundaries) were prevalent throughout the #sadoc research context in the content of these 2,240 unique tweets. See tables 4.1 through 4.5 for specific examples. The theme of expansion of boundaries was implicitly present in the #sadoc research context. Users engaging in #sadoc during the examined timeframe presented as faculty, prospective students, and doctoral programs in addition to current doctoral students.

**Chapter Summary**

I began this chapter by revisiting my research questions and methodological approach. I introduced and described the six themes identified in my study: (a) community of shared doctoral experiences; (b) exposure to doctoral education process;
(c) celebration of doctoral student experiences; (d) expansion of boundaries; (f) doctoral student identification; and (g) visibility and authenticity of expression. Within each theme description, I provided direct quotes from participant interviews and relevant unique tweets found in #sadoc between May 1, 2017 and May 1, 2018. Finally, I provided a summary of these themes.

In Chapter Five, I provide a summary of the study and its findings while simultaneously making connections between the findings and the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. I also discuss implications for future practice and inquiry.
Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I revisit the purpose of my study and guiding research questions prior to discussing my findings in relation to my conceptual framework. Then, I describe implications for practice among doctoral program administrators on how to support students with the integration of social media. Finally, after identifying the limitations of this study, I provide areas for future research prior to summarizing this chapter.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand how doctoral students perceive the influence of social media engagement, through Twitter, on their socialization and sense of belonging within academia. This examination centered on the #sadoc community, which was generally utilized by doctoral students in the field of higher education across the United States. This study aimed to better understand how social media, specifically Twitter, influenced doctoral students’ perceptions of socialization and sense of belonging in academia, particularly within their programs.

Research Questions

To understand how doctoral students perceive the influence of social media engagement, through Twitter, on their socialization and sense of belonging within academia, the following research questions guide this study:

1. How do doctoral students view the influence of engagement through #sadoc on Twitter upon their socialization as doctoral students?
2. How do doctoral students view the influence of engagement through #sadoc on Twitter upon their sense of belonging in academia?

**Limitations**

While the sample in the present study was relatively diverse across several areas of interest, there was little variation across doctoral student status. Because the sample included only two of eight participants, who had not yet entered the proposal development process, the results of this study may not be reflective of the full doctoral student experience. Alongside student status, the time of year during which data collection took place may serve as a limitation in this study. Data were collected during the months of May and June outside of traditional academic terms. Participant responses possibly differed from responses they may have provided if interviewed in the midst of coursework.

The nature of social media is another limitation of this study. Specifically, Twitter allows its users to be selective about what, when, and how they share their experiences, attitudes, and beliefs. Twitter users may choose to minimize certain experiences while highlighting others versus conveying a more authentic representation. I assumed my participants were honest in their conversations with me regarding their engagement in #sadoc; however, the nature of social media potentially impacted the connection between our conversations and their Twitter content.

While the above-mentioned concerns are limitations, the primary limitation of this study is my limited experience as a researcher. As mentioned earlier, my personal connection to this research put me in a position where I had to work to separate my experiences from those of my participants. While every effort was made to separate my
personal experiences and minimize their influence on my interpretation of the data, my position as a novice researcher has implications for the extent to which I was able to accomplish this goal.

Finally, my study was not meant to capture the stories of all doctoral students, or even the stories of all doctoral students engaging in #sadoc on Twitter. Participants in this study came from higher education or student affairs academic programs. Doctoral programs in education likely have different expectations of doctoral students as it relates to coursework, candidacy, and dissertation requirements as compared to other academic disciplines. Therefore, these findings cannot be generalized to other fields of study.

**Discussion in Relation to Conceptual Framework**

I discussed my conceptual framework in Chapter Two. Three theories and concepts served as my conceptual framework: (a) doctoral student socialization (Gardner, 2009a; Gardner & Mendoza, 2010; Twale, Weidman, & Bethea, 2016); (b) sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Strayhorn, 2012); and (c) communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

**Doctoral Student Socialization**

Austin (2002) defined socialization as “the process through which an individual becomes part of a group, organization or community,” which “involves learning about the culture of the group, including its values, attitudes, and expectations” (p. 96). For graduate students, socialization occurs simultaneously as a student and future faculty member (Golde, 1998), introducing students to potential career outcomes, including a socialization to teaching (McDaniels, 2010), research (Weidman, 2010), and service (Ward, 2010). Typical socialization agents include faculty members, specifically doctoral...
advisors, as well as peers (Russell, 2015; Winkle-Wagner, Johnson, Morelon-Quainoo, & Santiague, 2010). Weidman et al. (2001) defined socialization as “the processes through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring an advanced level of specialized knowledge and skills” (p. iii).

Within my study, each of the six themes illustrated components of socialization among doctoral student participants within the research context of #sadoc: (a) community of shared doctoral experiences; (b) exposure to doctoral education process; (c) celebration of doctoral student experiences; (d) doctoral student identification; (e) expansion of boundaries; and (f) visibility and authenticity of expression. Participants discussed how their exposure to the experiences of others (current doctoral students, recent graduates, and faculty members) provided knowledge about the doctoral student experience (themes: expansion of boundaries; exposure to doctoral education process). Although participants benefited from exposure to faculty members, they oftentimes provided examples of peer support as contributing more directly to their increased understanding within #sadoc (themes: celebration of doctoral student experiences; community of shared doctoral experiences). Additionally, participants reported increased understanding of the field of higher education, specifically the variety of inquiry within current scholarship (theme: exposure to doctoral education process). Participants identified opportunities for critical conversation among users within #sadoc, which also allowed for greater understanding of the field of higher education and its current direction (themes: community of shared doctoral experiences).
Participants consistently described #sadoc as a supportive community *(theme: community of shared doctoral experiences)* where they could reflect on their doctoral student experience, celebrate successes, and unpack setbacks *(theme: celebration of doctoral student experiences)*. Additionally, participants cited #sadoc as a reminder they are not alone in this process even when they are working independently *(theme: exposure to doctoral education process)*. Participants identified shifts (or anticipated shifts) in motivation and/or engagement in #sadoc over the course of their respective programs *(theme: doctoral student identification)*. Oftentimes, participants connected these shifts to an increased sense of belonging to #sadoc through identity or intention and increased ownership of the doctoral student experience *(theme: doctoral student identification)*. To me, these comments demonstrated growth (or anticipated growth) over time. Only four of eight participants identified the influence of race, gender, and other identities on their engagement in #sadoc *(theme: visibility and authenticity of expression)*. Still, these four participants argued the value of #sadoc could be further increased by greater visibility among often underrepresented populations *(theme: visibility and authenticity of expression)*. These comments illustrated participants’ increased ownership of #sadoc as a community and commitment to their field of study as future scholars and practitioners.

Brock and Rhett were less explicit than other participants when describing these outcomes. They were at the earliest points in their doctoral programs, having both completed their first years of coursework shortly prior to completing the interview process. Brock and Rhett anticipated increased ownership over #sadoc and gaining value from its community as they progressed within their programs. This distinction among participants suggests students earlier in their programs are in the earlier stages of the
socialization process, and, therefore, were less able to articulate specific examples of outcomes as readily as other participants, who were further into their coursework. After reviewing the literature on socialization and comparing its key components to my findings, I determined #sadoc served as a positive influence on the socialization process among participants in this study.

**Sense of Belonging**

Strayhorn (2012) defined a sense of belonging as “a students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)” (p. 3). For Strayhorn (2012), a sense of belonging was “relational, and thus there’s a reciprocal quality to relationships that provide a sense of belonging” (p. 3). While faculty members certainly contribute to a sense of belonging among students, peers play an essential role (Strayhorn, 2012).

Within my study, each of the six themes connected to a sense of belonging among doctoral student participants within the research context of #sadoc. Those themes were: (a) community of shared doctoral experiences; (b) exposure to doctoral education process; (c) celebration of doctoral student experiences; (d) doctoral student identification; (e) expansion of boundaries; and (f) visibility and authenticity of expression.

Alongside outcomes of encouragement, support, inclusion, and motivation, participants mentioned reduced feelings of loneliness through their connection to #sadoc (**theme: community of shared doctoral experiences**). Specifically, participants identified
support from #sadoc as supplemental to what they were gaining in their respective programs. In some cases, participants described #sadoc as their source of support in their academic journeys (theme: community of shared doctoral experiences).

Participants’ exposure to the experiences of other doctoral students and recent graduates normalized their own experiences thus far in their programs (theme: exposure to doctoral education process). Participants’ exposure seemed to influence the extent to which participants identified as members of the community both within #sadoc, as well as the larger higher education doctoral student community (theme: doctoral student identification). Specifically, connection to #sadoc seemed to address feelings of imposter syndrome, especially as it related to connection with recent graduates and faculty members (themes: doctoral student identification; expansion of boundaries).

Participants identified #sadoc as an avenue through which faculty members and recent graduates were able to demystify what comes after doctoral study (themes: exposure to doctoral education process; expansion of boundaries). In addition, it seemed documenting and celebrating the accomplishments of one another through #sadoc contributed to feelings of mattering among participants (theme: celebration of doctoral student experiences).

As mentioned earlier, Brock and Rhett were less explicit than other participants when describing these outcomes, anticipating increased connection to #sadoc and its community members once they finished coursework and/or moved further along in their dissertation development. Similar to socialization, this distinction among participants suggests students earlier in their programs are still in the process of developing a sense of belonging to the community, their programs, and the field of higher education. After
reviewing the literature on sense of belonging and comparing its key components to my findings, I determined #sadoc fostered a sense of belonging among participants in this study, not only to the community itself, but also to the field of higher education as a whole. Still, it is important to note four of eight of participants identified the need to increase visibility among underrepresented populations within #sadoc (theme: visibility and authenticity of expression). This lack of visibility likely has implications for how Twitter users engage in #sadoc, as well as their feelings of belonging within academia.

Community of Practice

Social media serve as communities of practice (CoPs) among scholars and practitioners in higher education (Britt & Paulus, 2016; Li & Greenhow, 2015; Noble, Mcquillian, & Littenberg-Tobias, 2016). Social media may have the potential to serve this function for doctoral students, who are emerging scholars within their respective fields. Wenger et al. (2002) defined CoPs as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p.4). The research context within my study, #sadoc on Twitter, served as a community of practice among my participants. Within #sadoc, the domain was the doctoral student experience within higher education. The community consisted of Twitter users connecting to #sadoc. The practice was engagement in Twitter as a consumer(s) and/or producer(s) of content within #sadoc.

The function of #sadoc as a community of practice was further demonstrated through themes described in Chapter Four. Specifically, three of the six themes identified in my study were explicitly connected to communities of practice. Those themes were: (a) community of shared doctoral experiences; (b) exposure to doctoral education
process; and (c) celebration of doctoral student experiences. The nature of #sadoc allowed participants to interact on an ongoing basis, supporting one another through reassurance (theme: community of shared doctoral experiences) and reflection (theme: celebration of doctoral student experiences). Engagement in #sadoc assisted its users in developing a better understanding of the expectations associated with the academic journey (theme: exposure to the doctoral education process).

Connecting the Concepts

Early investigations by Strayhorn (2012) regarding the influence of a sense of belonging on graduate student persistence conveyed the positive relationship between these two constructs likely translated to the doctoral student population. Successful socialization fostered the development of a sense of belonging, which, in turn, influenced academic success and persistence (Strayhorn, 2012). The findings in this study aligned with earlier findings, suggesting #sadoc positively influenced doctoral student socialization and sense of belonging, which may even further influence persistence toward degree. As discussed in Chapter Four, all eight participants in this study were able to identify positive outcomes related to their engagement in #sadoc. Participants specifically linked their engagement in #sadoc, or similar communities within social media, to their success(es) thus far in their respective programs.

Figure 5.1 below represents how the narratives in this study illustrated the relationships among social media, doctoral student socialization, sense of belonging, and ultimately graduation.
Figure 5.1: The relationship among communities of practice, doctoral student socialization, sense of belonging, and graduation among doctoral students.

Recommendations for Practice

My recommendations for practice are organized by audience: (a) doctoral program and graduate school administrators; (b) doctoral program faculty; and (c) doctoral students. Noting the prevalence of concern among participants regarding imposter syndrome and isolation, the first recommendation for practice among doctoral program and graduate school administrators would be to examine whether these concerns are relevant within and among their own student populations. For program coordinators, I
recommend coordinating a focus group of doctoral students to explore these topics. Program coordinators should identify someone outside of the doctoral program to facilitate these conversations in an effort to foster an environment where students can be forthcoming about their experiences. Graduate school administrators are encouraged to coordinate multiple focus groups to provide a larger cross-section of the institution’s doctoral student population. Information gathered through these focus groups would allow administrators to, not only understand the relevancy of concerns regarding imposter syndrome and isolation, but also to explore what roles administrators can play in alleviating these concerns among students.

Noting concerns regarding lack of clarity regarding expectations and processes among participants, the second recommendation for practice among doctoral program and graduate school administrators would be to examine their policies and procedures for greater clarification. Specifically, I recommend administrators examine policies related to comprehensive examinations, candidacy, and the proposal/dissertation defense process, as these were specifically mentioned by participants in this study. For example, what constitutes candidacy within the program? If a comprehensive examination process is required, what is that supposed to look like? When should it take place? To accomplish this goal, I recommend seeking external reviewers, such as administrators within other doctoral programs at the same institution or administrators at institutions with similar doctoral programs. Additionally, I recommend including current doctoral students, as well as recent graduates, in this review process to share feedback regarding points in their process where they were uncertain of the next steps. Information gathered through this review process would allow administrators to understand gray expectations within their
doctoral programs and address them in collaboration with students. Once these policies are reviewed and revised when appropriate, I recommend administrators host annual doctoral student seminars to discuss these policies with students, faculty, and staff associated with the doctoral program. I believe this will increase transparency from year to year, as well as provide students with the opportunity to ask questions at important points in their academic careers.

Similarly, the first recommendation for practice among doctoral program faculty would be to be more transparent regarding expectations and processes associated with the various steps within the doctoral program. This is especially important as faculty members engage with students as chairs and/or members of doctoral committees. One mechanism to increase transparency would be to provide opportunities for doctoral students to see dissertation proposal and findings defenses early in their programs. Additionally, doctoral program faculty could facilitate connections among the doctoral students for whom they are serving as doctoral committee members or chairs.

Since several participants cited benefits related to engaging with faculty members via #sadoc, I also recommend doctoral program faculty to consider engaging with students both within and outside their programs via these platforms to provide greater exposure to the expectations of post-doctoral experiences. Recognizing there will be varying levels of familiarity among faculty regarding the various social media platforms, I recommend department chairs provide training regarding social media platforms and best practices for engagement as faculty members in their respective programs. Further, doctoral program faculty members could incorporate Twitter and/or other social media platforms into their courses by requiring a specific type of engagement among students as
part of a course assignment. For example, a faculty member could host a Twitter chat in place of a discussion facilitated in person or via a learning management system. Alternatively, faculty members could host office hours via Twitter, where valuable advice can be received by students enrolled in other doctoral programs in addition to their own students.

The final recommendation for practice applies to doctoral program and graduate school administrators, faculty, and students. Recognizing the various positive outcomes experienced by #sadoc users, I recommend participation among doctoral students in #sadoc or other social media to support socialization, sense of belonging, and ultimately, graduation. Specifically, I believe faculty members and administrators should consider dedicating specific times throughout the academic term to search the #sadoc hash tag on Twitter and respond to student questions and comments. Similarly, I recommend doctoral students incorporate #sadoc or similar communities into their process for seeking information and community while pursuing their degrees. While I believe this engagement can result in positive outcomes among all doctoral students, the influence may be greater among more advanced students. As described by participants in this study, #sadoc became more relevant as they entered uncharted or unfamiliar territory in their respective programs.

Implementation of one or more of these recommendations may present a challenge to each of the audiences described above. Still, these efforts have the potential to address the problem of attrition among doctoral students and ultimately minimize its consequences for students and institutions.
Recommendations for Further Research

The phenomenological nature of this study allowed participants to reflect deeply on their doctoral student experiences, socialization, and sense of belonging as it related to #sadoc. The first recommendation for future research would be to continue this study longitudinally with current participants. I believe it would be informative to reconnect with the seven participants currently enrolled in their doctoral programs following their dissertation defense to learn whether their experiences progressed as anticipated, as well as understand how #sadoc involvement may or may not have evolved for each other them.

While the experiences of students of color were included in this study, my second recommendation for future research would be to replicate this study solely among this student population. I believe it would be informative to have a greater understanding of the influence of social media on socialization and belonging among students of color. For example, how do doctoral students of color view the influence of engagement through #sadoc on Twitter upon their socialization as doctoral students? How do doctoral students of color view the influence of engagement through #sadoc on Twitter upon their sense of belonging as doctoral students?

While this study included participants from institutions with a variety of program delivery methods (e.g. face to face, hybrid, online, my third recommendation for future research would be to replicate this study solely among doctoral students pursuing the degree online. I believe it would be informative to have a greater understanding of the influence of social media on socialization and belonging among students pursuing doctoral programs online. For example, how do doctoral students pursuing their degrees
online view the influence of engagement through #sadoc on Twitter upon their socialization as doctoral students? How do doctoral students pursuing their degrees online view the influence of engagement through #sadoc on Twitter upon their sense of belonging as doctoral students?

While a concerted effort was made to include participants at several points in their respective doctoral programs, five of eight participants in this study were actively dissertating, and one participant graduated shortly prior to the interview. My fourth recommendation for future research is to replicate this study with first year students only. I believe it would be informative to have a greater understanding of the influence of social media on socialization and belonging among these students, who, within the context of this study, more often expressed feelings of imposter syndrome and indirect benefits of engaging in #sadoc. For example, how do first year doctoral students view the influence of engagement through #sadoc on Twitter upon their socialization as doctoral students? How do first year doctoral students view the influence of engagement through #sadoc on Twitter upon their sense of belonging as doctoral students?

As mentioned previously, participants in my study were primarily pursuing doctorates in fields of higher education (e.g. student affairs, educational leadership, educational policy, etc.). My final recommendation for research is to replicate this study within the context of hashtag communities associated with other disciplines. I believe it would be informative to have a greater understanding of the experiences of doctoral students from disciplines beyond education.
Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I revisited the purpose of my study and guiding research questions prior to identifying limitations of the present study. I discussed my findings in relation to my conceptual framework. Then, I described implications for practice among doctoral program administrators on how to support students with the integration of social media. Finally, I provided directions for future research to address concerns related to generalizability to other disciplines and student populations.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
Appendix A

Participant Selection Survey

Do you identify as a doctoral student?

Yes  No

First and Last Name: ________________________________

Age (in years): ________________________________

Twitter Handle (e.g. @twitter): ________________________________

Preferred Email Address: ________________________________

City/State of Residence: ________________________________

**Gender Identity**

Please identify your gender:

Female  Male  Non-binary

**Racial Identity**

Please identify your race/ethnicity (circle one or more)

Asian  Black or African American

Hispanic  White or Caucasian

Other ________________________________

Residency Classification

How would you describe your residency classification?

U.S. citizen  Permanent resident  Temporary visa holder

If you are not a U.S. citizen or hold dual citizenship, please indicate your country (or countries) of citizenship: ________________________________
**Doctoral Program Description**

Degree Program (e.g. PhD, EdD, etc.): ______________________________________

Program Discipline (please be specific): ______________________________________

How would you describe the delivery of your program?

- Primarily Face to Face
- Hybrid
- Primarily Online

**Academic Classification and Funding**

Would you consider yourself a full-time or part-time doctoral student?

- Full-time Doctoral Student
- Part-time Doctoral Student

How many credit hours did you complete in Fall 2017? _______

How many credit hours did you complete in Spring 2018? _______

Are you considered to be a doctoral candidate?

Admission to doctoral candidacy typically requires one or more of the following: (a) completed coursework; (b) proficiency and/or comprehensive examinations; and (c) one or more research papers.

- Yes
- No

Have you completed your comprehensive examination (if applicable)?

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

Have you successfully defended your dissertation proposal (if applicable)?

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

Have you successfully defended your cumulative scholarly product (if applicable)?

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

Please provide the academic term and year in which you plan to graduate: _______

How are you funding your doctoral program (e.g. research assistantship, teaching assistantship, scholarships, subsidized loans, unsubsidized loans, employee tuition assistance program, etc? ________________________________
Open-ended Questions

Please describe what, if any, commitments you typically have beyond taking coursework toward your degree (e.g. employment, volunteer work, etc.).

Why did you choose to pursue a doctoral degree?

What Social Networking Sites (SNS) do you personally use?

Interview Availability

Please select the dates and times you would be available to participate in a 90-minute interview. Interviews will take place via phone or skype.

Option 1
Option 2
Option 3
Option 4
Option 5

Specific dates and times for initial interviews have yet to be determined; however, they will likely take place in Summer 2018.
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Prior to beginning the interview, I introduced myself and verified with each participant that the identified time was still suitable for them. Then, I completed an informed consent statement:

I’m conducting research about the doctoral student experience and the influence of engagement in social media. I’m interested in your experience with #sadoc on Twitter. The purpose of this study is to understand how doctoral students perceive the influence of that engagement on their socialization and sense of belonging within academia. You are being asked to engage in a one on one phone interview, which will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes, depending on our conversation. This research has no known risks. The study will provide insight into the lived experiences of doctoral students engaging in #sadoc. The results of the study will have implications for how doctoral programs can support student persistence through the integration of social media. Please know I will do everything I can to protect your privacy through this process. Your identity and personal information will not be disclosed in any presentation or publication that may result from the study. Notes taken during the interview will be stored in a secure location. You received an informational letter via email. Do you have any questions prior to moving forward with this interview? Would it be alright if I audio taped our conversation?
After receiving confirmation from each participant, I moved forward with the interview protocol as follows:

Please tell me a little bit about yourself and your doctoral program.

How did you learn of #sadoc?

Can you describe your connection to #sadoc?

In your own words, what is the purpose/value of #sadoc?

   For you?

   For others?

In your opinion, who belongs to the #sadoc community and why?

Would you say that you belong to the #sadoc community?

   Why or why not?

How would you describe your level of engagement in #sadoc?

Can you describe a situation in which you would choose to engage in #sadoc?

What motives drive your participation in #sadoc?

In what ways have these motives changed as you have progressed in your program?

What role does #sadoc play for you?

What outcomes, positive or negative, have resulted from your engagement in #sadoc?

How do you talk about #sadoc? To other students? To faculty? To family/friends?

Is there anything else you would like to share about yourself, your program, your research, etc. that you’d like for me to know as I process our conversation today?
Throughout the conversation, I asked follow up questions based on the answers of each participant. Specifically, I requested clarification (if appropriate) regarding answers to questionnaire (e.g. How do you define part-time enrollment?; How do you define candidacy?; etc.). At the conclusion of the interview, I requested participants’ permission to follow up with them via email during the analysis process. I also asked them for the best email address to which I could deliver the Amazon gift card.
Appendix C

Examples of Personal Social Media Usage

Jessica Owens @YeahThatOwens · 22 Jan 2017
2017 = glass case of emotions thus far thanks to #ClemsonNatty #Inauguration #WomensMarch phdlife

Jessica Owens
Introducing Jessica Owens, PhD Candidate! A campus-wide power outage and subsequent cancellation of classes and closure of offices made today more of an adventure than I bargained for. We powered through (pun intended)!

I am grateful for my committee chair, Dr. Pam Hance, for offering up her community-clubhouse as a meeting location! I am appreciative of my committee members for their understanding as we changed locations three times in the hour leading up to our gathering! I cherish the diligence of my mom, Sharon Clemmons Thomas, for sending constant prayers through these unexpected obstacles!

I am blessed to have the unwavering support of my sweet husband, Brennen Owens, as well as friends, colleagues, and family leading up to this day! A lot needs to happen between now and May 2019, but no road is long when you have good company!
yeahthatowens

yeahthatowens Even on gameday, y'all! #tigers #philigmind
quixotic_blu_1 Definitely need this in a few years.
yeahthatowens @quixotic_blu_1 I got it on Amazon!
Appendix C

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Email

Dear Dr. Havice,

The Clemson University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the protocol “An Exploration of Doctoral Student Experiences of Engagement in a Social Networking Site” using exempt review procedures and a determination was made on May 01, 2018 that the proposed activities involving human participants qualify as Exempt under category B2 in accordance with federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101.

No further action, amendments, or IRB oversight of the protocol is required except in the following situations:

1. Substantial changes made to the protocol that could potentially change the review level. Researchers who modify the study purpose, study sample, or research methods and instruments in ways not covered by the exempt categories will need to submit an expedited or full board review application.
2. Occurrence of unanticipated problem or adverse event; any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects, complications, and/or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Research Compliance immediately.
3. Change in Principal Investigator (PI)

All research involving human participants must maintain an ethically appropriate standard, which serves to protect the rights and welfare of the participants. This involves obtaining informed consent and maintaining confidentiality of data. Research related records should be retained for a minimum of three (3) years after completion of the study.

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 when referencing the study in future correspondence.

Good luck with your study.

Best,

Amy Smitherman
IRB Coordinator
OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE
Clemson University, Division of Research
391 College Avenue, Suite 406K-1., Clemson, SC 29631, USA
P: 864-656-6460
Appendix E

Example of Memo

FT work in higher ed on west coast. 1 course @ time in online, for-profit, nontraditional semesters and structure. Beginning fourth year. White female. Engaged to be married. Disclosed female partner.

#sadoc connected through seeing others use it. Active observer, less active producer of content. Active engagement increased as progressing through the program.

Common Themes to Emerge

• Seeking community and encouragement not provided by the program.
• Understand experience of others. See what was coming next. Map out own timeline.
• Imposter syndrome early on.
• Concern regarding how others might perceive for-profit pursuit.
• #sadoc could level the playing field. If you’re there, you belong. No questions. Your opinion is valid.

Other Points to Note

• Getting married in September
• Should complete comprehensive exams in fall term.
• Serves as primary caregiver to elderly relative.
• Wants more underrepresented voices in #sadoc.

Connections to Researcher Experience

• This participant has a lot in common with me regarding job transitions. Most of her experiences resonated with me. Hoping to keep in touch!
• She is purposeful in building a community as she prepares to enter the next phase of her journey.

Notable Examples

• Getting connected to this study.
• Welcoming new students into #sadoc space.
• Clicks on shared links.
## Appendix F

### Example of Initial Coding Process

| Participant 7: | Yeah. Ugh, that's a really great question. Um, I think, I think part of it, um, part of it is my own personality of, um, I'm, um, the type of person that I really think kind of you, you, you get what you give. |
| Researcher:   | Mm-hmm (affirmative). |
| Participant 7: | Um, and you give what you get. And, um, and so if you put good energies and good positive connections and good relationship out into the world, that's the type of things that you get back. Um, and I have, um, over the years, I guess nearly 10 years now that I've been engaged in Twitter, um, have, have been overwhelmingly positively, um, impressed with the, the type of communications and engagements and the friends that I've made and like the people that, like I'm never gonna meet any, like I, you know, like, like I think like might you and I meet in person someday? Maybe but probably not. |
| Researcher:   | Yeah. |
| Participant 7: | You know? But like when you feel like you can make a connection with somebody and you can help somebody out, like that's very motivating. And it's very, um ... I always tell people when I'm talking about like why they get into Twitter to begin with, it's like sometimes I can get responses to a professional question from people that I've never met that are hundreds or thousands of miles away from me than I can from the people down the hall, you know. |
| Researcher:   | Yup. |
| Participant 7: | Um, and, um, and, and sometimes those answers are incredibly valuable and critical and, um, enlightening in a way that, you know, you can't be an expert in your own territory and so you have to go outside. Um, and so I think the, the motivation is, um, is, is to build up some of that kind of positive energy and positive relationships out into the world. Um, I also have been around in the field long enough to know that like we're all about four or five people apart from working for each other and working with other. (laughs) Um, and, you know, if we all start rattling off the institutions that we've worked in school, that is like, "Oh, yeah, do you know, poo, poo, poo, poo, poo," you know? |
| Researcher:   | Right. |
| Participant 7: | Um, and so I always think, um, it's, the, the engagements, what motivates me too is kind of to maintain my own presence in the field and my own name and my own, I guess you could call brand out there as a reputable student affairs professional. Um, I think some of the other motivation
### Appendix G

**Preliminary Codebook**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community of Shared Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• To combat loneliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support transcends #sadoc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Connection/Networking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes of Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Scholarly, social, activism/discourse, information seeking, commiseration, accountability, motivation, giving back, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shift of motivations and activity as program progressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Opportunities to grow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Influencing decision making,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boundary Spanning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Spans place and space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discipline (not just SA or HE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Point in Career (not just doctoral students)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Missing Voices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Reference to race, gender, &amp; other identities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belonging to #sadoc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Belonging connected identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Belonging connected to user intention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Imposter syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Intimacy of space, pure, no drama, non-competitive, inclusive, levels the playing field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consumer versus producers of content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demystification of Doctoral Student Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Pre-, During, and Post- doctoral student experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exposure to doctoral student experience beyond current institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Normalize/validate doctoral student experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supplemental to Program/Providing something the program does not/will not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Influences perception of doctoral education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Celebration of Doctoral Student Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Documentation/celebration of experience/milestones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reflection on process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authentic Expression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Guarded against audience perception</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence on Perception of Field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix H

Example of Focused Coding Process Using Preliminary Codebook

| Participant 7 | Yeah. Ugh, that's a really great question. Um, I think, I think part of it, um, part of it is my own personality, um, I'm, I'm the type of person that I really think kind of you, you, you get what you give. |
| Researcher | Mm-hmm (affirmative). |
| Participant 7 | Um, and you give what you get. And, um, and so if you put good energies and good positive connections and good relationship out into the world, that's the type of things that you get back. Um, and I have, um, over the years, I guess nearly 10 years now that I've been engaged in Twitter, um, have, have been overwhelmingly, positively, um, impressed with the, the type of communications and engagements and the friends that I've made and like the people that, like I'm never gonna meet any, like I, you know, like, like I think like might you and I meet in person someday? Maybe but probably not. |
| Researcher | Yeah. |
| Participant 7 | You know? But like when you feel like you can make a connection with somebody and you can help somebody out, like that's very motivating. And it's very, um ... I always tell people when I'm talking about like why they get into Twitter to begin with, it's like sometimes I can get responses to a professional question from people that I've never met that are hundreds or thousands of miles away from me than I can from the people down the hall, you know. |
| Researcher | Yup. |
| Participant 7 | Um, and, um, and, and sometimes those answers are incredibly valuable and critical and, um, enlightening in a way that, you know, you can't be an expert in your own territory and so you have to go outside. Um, and so I think the, the motivation is, um, is, is to build up some of that kind of positive energy and positive relationships out into the world. Um, I also have been around in the field long enough to know that like we're all about four or five people apart from working for each other and working with other. (laughs) Um, and, you know, if we all start rattling off the institutions that we've worked in school, that is like, "Oh, yeah, do you know, poot, poot, poot, poot, poot, you know? |
| Researcher | Right. |
| Participant 7 | Um, and so I always think, um, it's, the, the, engagements, what motivates me too is kind of to maintain my own presence in the field and my own name and my own, I guess you could call brand out there as a reputable student affairs professional. Um, I think some of the other motivation |
Appendix I

Revised Codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doctoral Student Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Desire for authentic expression. Somewhat guarded against audience misperception.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Express feelings of imposter syndrome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Express feelings of belonging to #sadoc through identity and/or intention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consume versus produce content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shift motivation and/or activity as program progresses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community of Shared Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Reduce feelings of loneliness through connection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Receive non-competitive and inclusive encouragement, commiseration, motivation, support and accountability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Share information and opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engage in critical discourse.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Missing Voices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Reference to race, gender, &amp; other identities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boundary Spanning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Span place and space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discipline (not just SA or HE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Point in Career (not just doctoral students)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflection on Doctoral Student Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Document milestones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Celebrate accomplishments of self and others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reflect on the process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normalization of Doctoral Student Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Validate the pre-, during, and post- doctoral student experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expose doctoral student experience beyond current institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supplement support provided by individual program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Influence perception of doctoral education and field as a whole.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix J

Example of Focused Coding Process Using Revised Codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher:</th>
<th>Yup.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7:</td>
<td>Um, and, um, and, and sometimes those answers are incredibly valuable and critical and, um, enlightening in a way that, you know, you can't be an expert in your own territory and so you have to go outside. Um, and so I think the, the motivation is, um, is, is to build up some of that kind of positive energy and positive relationships out into the world. Um, I also have been around in the field long enough to know that like we're all about four or five people apart from working for each other and working with other. (laughs) Um, and, you know, if we all start rattling off the institutions that we've worked in school, that is like, &quot;Oh, yeah, do you know, poo, poo, poo, poo, poo,&quot; you know?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher:</th>
<th>Right.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7:</td>
<td>Um, and so I always think, um, it's, the, the engagements, what motivates me too is kind of to maintain my own presence in the field and my own name and my own, I guess you could call brand out there as a reputable student affairs professional. Um, I think some of the other motivation for engaging, um, is, is really, I'm, and, and I think probably most people can make sense of this, too, but that idea that, you know, you get to that doctoral level and there's so much, um, there's so much grayness and, um, um, the high-level expectations, the constant high-level expectations, high performance and, and high writing and high reading skills and high everything that I think sometimes that kinda backs us into a corner, um, and, and can be a bit debilitating when you know everyone has this like incredibly high expectations of you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| | Um, that just being able to know that there's this like this committee, not committee, this community that like I can't put my finger on it, I don't necessarily know who's a part of it. But I know if I put something out into the ether, somebody is gonna get back to me at some point, um, hopefully. Um, that, that is, that to me is very comforting and it's very motivating to kinda continue to kinda put myself out there, because it's like, you know, I'm ... Especially as I think about like I'm, I'm very close to finishing up the coursework and kinda moving into the constant dissertation phase. I'm like I'm really gonna need this community over the next year-and-a-half. Like I'm really gonna need these people. |

| And so, for the last six months, for me, it's been how do I engage more and more so that I seem trustworthy and worthwhile for people who are also monitoring this hashtag |
Appendix K

Revised Codebook Following Peer Review Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community of Shared Doctoral Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Reduce feelings of loneliness through connection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Receive non-competitive and inclusive encouragement, commiseration, motivation, support and accountability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Share information and opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engage in critical discourse.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposure to doctoral education process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Validate the pre-, during, and post-doctoral student experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expose doctoral student experience beyond current institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Normalize doctoral student experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supplement support provided by individual program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doctoral Student Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Express feelings of imposter syndrome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Express feelings of belonging to #sadoc through identity and/or intention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consume versus produce content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shift motivation and/or activity as program progresses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Celebration of Doctoral Student Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Document milestones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Celebrate accomplishments of self and others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reflect on the process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expansion of Boundaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Span place and space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discipline (not just SA or HE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Point in Career (not just doctoral students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Influence perception of doctoral education and field as a whole.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visibility and Authenticity of Expression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Desire for authentic expression. Somewhat guarded against audience misperception.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Describe concerns related to missing voices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reference to influence of race, gender, &amp; other identities on expression.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>