Was It Worth It? Women’s Satisfaction with Earning the Online Education Doctorate

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Abstract

In the past 20 years the higher education world has grown and changed exponentially due in part to online education. By offering coursework and degree completion through a virtual platform higher education institutions have cast their net wider than ever before. Those who were once excluded from higher education due to geography, socioeconomic status and life circumstances could in many instances realistically earn a college degree. Though some stigma still surrounds online learning much of it has subsided enough to encourage intelligent and accomplished students to pursue doctoral degrees online. Women are enrolling in and completing Doctorates of Education (Ed.D.) in ever-increasing numbers, regardless of growing demands on their personal and professional time. Simultaneously, this signifies a time in history when more women are employed in the education industry than ever before. This qualitative, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) examined the lived experiences of six women ages 24 to 65 who worked fulltime while pursuing their online Doctorate of Education. The schools the participants graduated from were non-profit and their doctoral programs were Carnegie Project for the Education Doctorate (CPED) sponsored, a collaborative of 80+ colleges and schools of education “committed to working together to undertake a critical examination of the doctorate in education (EdD) through dialog, experimentation, critical feedback and evaluation”. The purpose of the study was to discover if the online doctoral journey and subsequent degree were worth the individual participants’ felt their efforts and sacrifices. Three emerging themes were found. First, a certain type of woman who can be described as highly motivated, organized and gritty is characteristically successful in and gravitates toward an online Ed.D. program. Second, women act as informed customers prior to and during enrollment in online Ed.D. programs. Third,
women find the online Ed.D. experience and outcomes to be worth their personal, financial and professional efforts.

*Keywords:* Women in education, resilience, the education doctorate, Ed.D., satisfaction, worth, online education, Carnegie Project for the Education Doctorate, outcomes
Dedication

My family is filled with incredibly strong and courageous women, namely my late grandmother Jane who raised eight remarkably compassionate, educated and accomplished children alone when her beloved husband passed away at age 39. Though she was not highly educated, she worked diligently to send all of her children to college, knowing the importance of formal education and the subsequent enlightenment it would bring.

One of those children was my mother Cathy, a true pioneer during a time when working fulltime while also being a wonderful mother to four children was intrepid. She is my inspiration and an exemplary role model for how to persevere in a modern, ever changing world. She taught me to persist in a world that often encouraged me to give up.

My late grandmother Marion also had great impact on my early years, teaching me to be a creative, inquisitive and thoughtful young woman. Her encouragement and gentle manner prompted me to explore the world around me with optimism and fervent curiosity. This was further reinforced by her son, my father, Peter.

A great deal of this dissertation is dedicated to him, it was he who used to playfully “page” me over an imaginary hospital loudspeaker, “Doctor Cerruto, Doctor Cerruto please report to surgery”. Although I am sure a Doctor of Education degree was not what he had in mind when I was four (sorry Dad!), he was the person who encouraged me to take the plunge into doctoral discourse and start changing the world around me for the better.

Most importantly, my parents never made me feel inadequate, inferior or self-conscious about my gender. For that, I am forever grateful, because I grew up thinking that a girl could be anything she wanted, and that has served me well into adulthood.
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Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

Her eyes blink open to the gentle tune she chose for her 4 AM alarm. His arm wraps around her waist, imploring her to both shut off the alarm and stay in bed just a bit longer. The warmth and relaxation found beneath her goose-down comforter on a frigid January morning is tempting. She resists, fumbling in the darkness for her glasses and $10 Wal-Mart fleece. Guided only by the incandescent light of her cell phone, she quietly sneaks out of the room. *He has a few hours until he has to wake up, might as well let him enjoy it.* She repels the urge to check on the baby, it will only make this harder. *Thank goodness for a programmable coffee maker.* She plods toward the refrigerator, fishing out the half and half. Over her coffee she checks her calendar, noting several very intense meetings slated for the day. She gets up, stretches, and begins to make lunches while thinking about how to incorporate her methodology into her dissertation. Slathering mayo onto the last piece of bread incites dread as she glances at the clock. *How am I going to do all of this? Why am I doing this?!* She looks up at the dusty light fixtures, feet on the frigid kitchen tiles, breathing deeply. She shoves the sandwiches into paper bags, chastising herself for taking far too long looking at her schedule. At the kitchen table sits her laptop, the keys well-worn and the letter “a” completely missing. Pulling her fleece close around her she reviews her advisor’s comments and begins to write.

She jolts awake, fluttering her eyes in the velvety darkness of the bedroom. She can hear him lightly snoring next to her, and she realizes it was just a dream. She has been graduated for almost three years, but she still has dreams (perhaps one would refer to them as nightmares) of her doctoral student days. She lays back down, snuggling under her down comforter and drifts back to sleep asking herself, “Was it all worth it?”
Was it all worth it?

The purpose of this study was to investigate individual experiences of women who worked full-time while enrolled in an online Ed.D. program. The goal was to capture and understand their perceptions of education as a way toward self-actualization and overall satisfaction personally, professionally and financially before during and after completing their program. Primarily, the study looked to understand why women are enrolling in and completing Doctorates of Education (Ed.D) in ever-increasing numbers, regardless of growing demands on their personal and professional time. Knowledge generated was expected to inform the development of Ed.D. programs. Additionally, findings could educate graduate admissions circles about core Ed.D. enrollment pools through evaluating student experience and outcomes after graduation. This study employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to illustrate women's reasons for pursuing both an Ed.D. and a fulltime career.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the research related to women working full-time while pursuing their Doctorates of Education, providing context and background to the study. The rationale and significance of the study follows, drawing connections to potential beneficiaries of the work. The problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions are presented to focus and ground this study. Last, the theoretical framework is introduced, serving as a lens for the study.

Context and Background

Arguably, the 21st century has been the best period in modern history for the rights, financial stability and societal advancement of American women; this directly correlates with women’s higher education attainment (United Nations, 2003). As the economy barrels away from manufacturing and service sectors to the advanced information age, higher education may
be more important than ever before due to an industry demand for complex skillsets. Since women’s impact has grown, women working in education can have a greater influence on the culture of and accessibility to American universities. Women have increasingly enrolled in the doctoral programs once exclusively populated by men, while typically opting for a non-traditional doctoral experience. It is important to understand the outcomes of the women who chose to enroll in Education Doctoral degree (Ed.D.) programs while also fully employed, as this describes the majority of those seeking the online degree. Understanding their career advancement goals and how they may impact the educational attainment of over half the U.S. population (women) may help researchers whose concerns are future nationwide economic prosperity in a competitive global economy (Berger & Fisher, 2013).

In the United States, it has been commonplace for underrepresented groups to see education as a means to success, a way out of poverty and oppression, a sacred place of enlightenment (St. Clair, 2008). Though women comprise half the United States population, they are still categorized as underrepresented (Aguirre, 2000). According to White House Council of Economic Advisers (2014), women are more likely to finish both undergraduate and graduate education than men, however, women are still more likely to make far less money than men over the course of a life time. Women of color are especially affected by this lack of financial parity, making an investment in higher education essential but with a relatively lower return on investment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Interestingly, women make up nearly 60% of all college students (Morris, 2011), yet there is a disparity between the numbers of women attending higher education institutions and the percentage of women in key academic or administrative positions within those higher education institutions. Therefore, it is important to study the
outcomes of highly accomplished women, who, must understand these statistics, yet still seek out the education.

In Jo's (2008) study regarding voluntary turnover of women administrators in higher education, it was found that little research had been conducted by the academy, even though women, mid-level administrators account for the largest group employed in most colleges and universities in the United States. Interestingly, the U.S. Social Security Administration found that women change jobs more frequently than men. “Research in this area is needed because women are more likely than men to switch jobs for noneconomic reasons (e.g., work/family conflict, poor employee/supervisor relations, etc.), while men are more likely than women to leave for higher-paying jobs” (Jo, 2008, p.566). Since women leave jobs more frequently than men, it is possible this affects their ability to progress through the upper ranks of an organization. According to Jo (2008), women college administrators typically stagnate in mid-level positions, with little authority to make important decisions. However, women still need to enforce and contend with the consequences of those decisions. Understanding an Ed.D. affects a woman’s ability to retain education industry positions, and also rise through the ranks, may shed light on economic outcomes and opportunity in the industry.

Conceivably, women working in higher education feel pressure to complete a professional degree to achieve their own self-actualization and goals, yet, not in the same manner that their male colleagues may pursue a doctoral degree.

"Even though higher education leads to individual returns in the form of higher income, women often need to have more education than men to get some jobs… Women continue to confront discrimination in jobs, disparities in power, voice and political representation and laws that are prejudicial on the basis of their gender. As a result well-educated
women often end up in jobs where they do not use their full potential and skills” (David, 2015, p. 12).

Women comprise the majority of many Doctor of Education programs in the United States today, with their numbers rapidly increasing. In 1971, Doctorates of Education Administration went to a mere 13% of women, however, in 2002, 62% went to women (England et al., 2007). Harvard's Graduate School of Education, a leader in the higher education industry, enrolls a 73% women student body (Harvard, 2016). Nevertheless, there is disconnect between women's degree attainment and moving past middle management to the executive ranks in education, especially in higher education institutions (ACE, 2016). In 2006, only 23% of acting university presidents were women (American Council on Education, 2007) and to date, (10 years later) a mere 3% increase to 26% of acting university presidents are women (American Council on Education, 2016).

History of Women in Higher Education

It can be argued that the modern history of American women participating in higher education is a relatively short one, with real momentum occurring around the time of the Civil War. Traditionally, higher education was reserved for boys and men. Only when there were empty seats available at select schools could women have the opportunity to be educated beyond basic reading and writing (Wood, 2003). Coincidentally, as men fought in the Civil War, colleges (sans all women's colleges) were more receptive to allowing women in the classroom. Interestingly, this boost in women college enrollments coincided with the first wave of feminism in the United States, with women legally gaining access to formal education (Wood, 2003). The pivotal decade for women seeking a higher education was ushered in by the 1930s. It laid the groundwork for another boost in women college enrollments during World War II. To illustrate
this increase in higher education attainment, Nash and Romero (2012) stated that in 1900, approximately 85,338 American women attended college, yet a mere 5,237 actually obtained a bachelor’s degree. By 1940, an amazing 77,000 of 600,953 American women earned bachelor's degrees, doubling women's graduation rates from 6% (in 1900) to 12% (by 1940). Moreover, between 1900 and 1940, there was a 14% increase in the number of women taking some form of higher education coursework (Nash & Romero, 2012).

In the midst of these advances, the first Ed.D. (Doctorate of Education) program began at Harvard in 1921 via the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HSGE) (Harvard University, 2016). Though it was not until the 1943 agreement between Harvard and Radcliffe (an all women college) that women were allowed to fully enroll at Harvard (The Seneca, 2016). However, HSGE was the first of Harvard's colleges to grant degrees to women. Harvard's Ed.D. was deeply rooted in professional practice and research based scholarship for 92 years, however, in recent years Harvard discontinued its pioneering degree and rolled out two new degree tracks which have seemingly split the former Ed.D. in separate foci. In 2009, the Doctorate in Education Leadership, (Ed.L.D.) a practice based program was introduced; in 2013 the Ph.D. in Education, a degree imbedded with research was approved and the Doctor of Education Ed.D. was phased out (Harvard, 2016). The discontinuing of Harvard's traditional Ed.D. marked another divide in how the academy viewed the Ed.D. versus the Ph.D.. Since the inception of the Ph.D. and Ed.D, there has been debate about applicability, research, rigor and outcomes concerning the two degrees, with critics citing a Ph.D. program as acceptable for scholarship and a professorial vocation; the Ed.D. was viewed as a strictly applied administrative degree. Yet, Shulman et al. (2006) maintained that in reality there is little difference between the degrees regarding dissertation requirements and curriculum. Therefore, this study sought to
understand/examine/investigate women's reasons for specifically pursuing an Ed.D. program and a career simultaneously. Additionally, the study wanted to gauge whether women perceived their online doctoral journey worth their efforts post-graduation.

**Rationale and Significance**

Since the market collapse in 2008, it can be argued that students and their families have become informed consumers focused on student outcomes, specifically, the cost and benefits associated with attending a higher education institution. In the past decade, student loan debt has soared while starting salary and earning potential has stagnated (Houle, 2014).

In the United States, the federal educational policy has begun to heavily push student success and outcomes, demanding accountability from higher education institutions (Department of Education, 2015). Similarly, students are increasingly demanding proof of a return on investment. In recent history, it was perceived that a college education guaranteed, at minimum, a middle class life. However, that perception is no longer as pervasive because student debt often delays major life milestones (Lee, & Mueller, 2014). Since women now make up the majority of those seeking a higher education, it is important for the academy to understand how their primary student population is still falling behind (their male counterparts) and equalize outcomes. If schools and colleges are increasingly pressured by both the federal government and its students to compete for enrollment dollars, it is important these institutions have systems and research supporting the outcomes of their women students. Otherwise, colleges and universities risk financial instability and a poor academic reputation. Theoretically, baseline college tuition costs are gender neutral, therefore the return on investment for men and women should be equal. At this time, however, this is not the case.
It is important to understand the competitive economic and financial outcomes for women Ed.D. graduates relative to the, “pink collar ghetto effect” (Stiehl, 2009). Historically, as more women flood into a profession or doctoral discipline, the legitimacy, worth and earning potential of that profession suffers (Pion, et al., 1996). Therefore, it has been found that as an area of study is populated primarily by women students, the creditability and more importantly, earning potential of that field’s graduates becomes significantly lower.

“Women get blamed for any decline in the autonomy, status and earning power of a profession because what people see is women come into it, and then the profession earns less money and is less well-regarded,’ says Cantor. ‘What really happens is that those facets start to decline, men leave and women come in to fill the vacuum.’ Similar trends occurred in other fields as well, she says, including pharmacy, real estate and public relations” (Cynkar, 2007, p. 2).

Curricula relevancy on a global level is lacking, and tuition costs are soaring as family earning power stagnates. Higher education is in desperate need of reform and leaders to create positive change. However, it is possible the pink collar ghetto effect will or has negated the legitimacy of the Ed.D. according to market trends. This study reveals how women perceived the outcomes of their Ed.D. degree attainment after graduation. As women earn the majority of higher education degrees, it is important for the academy to internally reflect those it serves. What is encouraged in the classroom should be representative in the university as a whole. This is especially salient as a college education makes women more aware of their inequality, “Fully 65% of women with a bachelor’s degree or higher say society favors men over women. This compares with 49% of women without a bachelor’s degree. Similarly, college-educated men
(46%) are more likely than men who have not graduated from college (32%) to say society is biased in favor of men” (Pew Research Center, 2013).

Interestingly, higher education institutions have reacted to market demands for doctoral programs, particularly part-time, online programs. These cutting edge programs are capturing the non-traditional doctoral student population, yet it is unclear if these programs provide adequate support and outcomes for women doctoral students beyond a flexible course format and cohorts of like-situated peers. Further there is little scholarly research on the perceived outcomes of Ed.D. graduates.

According to Offerman (2011), the population of non-traditional doctoral students will continue to grow, adding to the richness of thought and research within the academy. Offerman (2011) defines non-traditional doctoral students as: diverse, increasingly women, more than thirty years old, part-time study, married, has children or dependent parents, increasingly enrolled in professional research doctorates such as the Ed.D., has a career outside of their program, and self-funded. Conversely, a traditional doctoral student is typically single, white, male, aged 22 to 32, childless, funded through tuition waiver or stipend, immersed in study, pursuing a research doctorate (Ph.D.) and studies full-time.

Gardner (2009) maintains there are three types of contemporary doctoral degrees available to students, (1) professional doctorate or the first professional degree (MD, JD, or Psy. D), (2) professional research doctorate (Ed.D), and (3) research doctorate (Ph.D.)” (p. 29). Many programs catering to the non-traditional student, offer option (2), the professional research doctorate degree. Strangely, there is a divide of opinions about the rigor and applicability of a professional research doctorate (Ed.D) and a strictly research doctorate (Ph.D.). A quick search of nearly any online forum concerning this topic will reveal a true division in the academy
around the merits or downfalls of an Ed.D.. In 1999 Deering found little difference between the Ed.D and the Ph.D. “Today, one does not have to look far to find a practitioner holding a Ph.D., or a university professor with an Ed.D., each testimony to the similarity of the two doctoral programs in education”. Yet, the Ed.D. still faces stigma almost two decades later which correlates with the increase in scholar-practitioner based Ed.D. programs being created to attract the non-traditional student. Since the non-traditional student is primarily a women one, it can be argued that the Ed.D. is associated with women students and the Ph.D. is associated with male students. Similarly, it is possible the Ed.D., though virtually identical in scope, preparation and rigor to the Ph.D., has been relegated to the pink collar ghetto. Amongst many reasons, women obtain higher education to increase their chance of working outside of pink collar careers which are typically more prestigious and higher paying (Stoper, 1991). It is important for higher education institutions to promote women’s success in education and ensure they are not punished or stigmatized by those institutions upon graduation. The academy must understand and support their women students during and after the completion of an Ed.D. degree. This study adds robust and representative literature capturing the lived experiences of women doctoral graduates while illustrating their perceived doctoral outcomes and successes.

**Positionality Statement**

For the past 9 years I have been a higher education professional working as an online course instructor, in residential life and in all realms of the college admissions world. Early in my career I was not committed to the professional path of higher education and had plans to enter the corporate sector after the completion of my Master of Business Administration (MBA). However, several life events occurred shortly thereafter changing my trajectory, solidly planting me on the path of a higher education career. I quit my job working for a proprietary university
and began working at a traditional brick and mortar school, allowing me to experience university governance under an entirely different educational philosophy. During this time, I was sent on a recruiting trip to India and China, opening my eyes to the higher education global economy as well as diverse opportunities for a vibrant career in higher education. Luckily, I had the support and mentorship of family who recognized my potential and helped me see the pathway to making a real impact on the world around me.

My Father advised that to make real lasting change I had to be creditable and rise through the industry ranks, he simply asked what tools I needed in my toolbox to gain experience and creditability? I answered, “A doctorate”, and frankly, with much dread! I knew the rigor of a doctoral program would be challenging and that my personal life would suffer as would my bank account. Regardless, I began the process of diligently researching doctoral programs, yet I had a laundry list of needs I was certain no program could accommodate.

Admission work requires frequent long term travel, working on weekends and late hours, as a young woman just starting to advance in my career and with many bills to pay, I could not fathom quitting my job to attend a traditional doctoral program. I knew for-profit universities offered fully online doctoral programs however, having worked for a for-profit I did not want to go that route. I was especially concerned how my peers would view a proprietary online doctoral degree. The risk was too high to attend a school that may not exist one day or would be viewed unfavorably on a resume. After a diligent Google search I found an Ed.D. with an online or hybrid option from a very reputable school not far from where I lived. But I was unsure of what an Ed.D. was or meant versus its seemingly prestigious sibling, the Ph.D.. So began my journey through message boards and scholarly literature where all the answers were contradictory and muddled. Not one person could tell me whether the Ed.D. or Ph.D. was inherently different in
rigor, philosophy or practice; nearly all opinions were biased and based on the degree that particular person possessed. Nor could any of the scholarly literature tell me if earning an online Ed.D. would be worth my time, money, personal sacrifice and effort, especially not in the context of being a woman working fulltime in the education industry.

So began my quest to find out, not for myself, but for women who would inevitably encounter the same issue. I am extremely sympathetic to women’s time constraints and worries. I understand the importance of time management and long-term cost/benefit assessments. As a newly married woman starting my Ed.D. at 28 while also desiring to start a family in the future, I knew I had a very short window to enroll in and complete a doctoral degree. I also had a fervent desire to leverage doctoral work in conjunction with work experience into a successful career as a change agent. This competing internal and external pressure has defined my doctoral experience making the concept of doctoral worth and satisfaction even more salient. As I write this I am 6 months pregnant with my first child, I truly hope this study helps both women and men with similar life circumstances deduce if online doctorates, an Ed.D. (versus a Ph.D.), and/or a Carnegie Project for the Education Doctorate (CPED) program (versus a for-profit or non-CPED program) will be worth it (personally, professionally and financially) for them in the future.

Research Problem and Research Question

As education doctoral programs increasingly attract women non-traditional learners, more attention must be paid to this population, especially concerning how these programs affect a student’s personal, financial and professional trajectories after graduation. At this time, there is a general lack of literature exploring the outcomes of education doctoral students. The abundance of literature regarding outcomes typically focuses on undergraduate student programs. This is
due to a profusion of funding for undergraduate research, fueled by the former Obama Administration’s push to make colleges accountable for the undergraduate students they are graduating into the workforce. This is specifically linked to the relationship between quality of education, job attainment and the amount of student loan debt undergraduate students are incurring (Williams, Ari, Dortch, 2011). Second, doctoral degrees are considered a luxury by most American standards, whereas an undergraduate degree is now considered a necessity for middle class survival. Therefore, the majority of research dollars are funneled into researching, tracking and analyzing student outcomes (Rutherford et al., 2014). Since doctoral degrees are considered a luxury, it is possible that the doctoral student experiences are systematically discounted by a lack of attention and funding. The risks women are exposed to, particularly financial risks are therefore amplified by this dearth of reliable scholarly research on doctoral student satisfaction or even return on investment. Similarly, online student research reveals that taking online courses can be an isolating and lonely experience in general. Women have flocked to this type of learning as it provides flexibility, but often does not provide the support needed to feel included (Kramarae, 2001). Women are now considered that majority of the student body, therefore less attention may be paid to their struggles (Morris, 2011). Yet, most traditional doctoral programs tout the importance of in person cohort or peer to peer support systems as an indicator of post-doctoral success, something online programs generally cannot provide (West et al., 2011).

The lack of literature focused on the outcomes, struggles, opportunities and successes of women specifically pursuing an online Doctorate of Education (Ed.D) while working fulltime should be addressed. The purpose of this study is to investigate the phenomena of women flocking to Ed.D. programs in increasing numbers, though entering such a program may
complicate women’s lives and have less lucrative returns/outcomes than their male counterparts. Specifically, understanding why and how women perceive their success in balancing a home life (that often includes the care of children and/or parents), full-time career and doctoral studies.

This study addresses how the demands of pursuing a Doctorate of Education degree online, while working fulltime, affect women’s lived experiences. Essentially, after a woman graduates from an online Ed.D. program, have they found their experience and the actual earned degree to be worth it relative to their personal, financial and professional lives? How have these demands affected a woman’s lived experiences 6 months to 5 years after completing an Ed.D. degree?

Definition of Key Terminology

This section features several terms frequently used throughout the study. While the terms align with conventional definitions, there are several noted alterations to the definitions serving the purpose of this study.

Woman- This study used the term, woman as a gendered term rather than a term describing sex. This term is primarily used to capture the lived experience of those who identify as women.

Majority Minority- This term is traditionally used to describe a population in which more than half represent social, ethnic, or racial minorities; but which fewer members of the more socially, politically, or financially dominant group are represented. However, for the purpose of the definition will include women as the gendered minority (Dictionary.com, 2016).

Ed.D.- Also known as an Education Doctorate or Doctorate of Education. In 2007, The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) redefined the meaning of the modern Ed.D. “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” (Perry, 2012).

**Doctoral Journey**- For the purposes of this study the “doctoral journey” refers to the time a prospective doctoral student first starts thinking about enrolling in a doctoral program and their experiences up to the graduation day. This includes but is not limited to researching prospective doctoral programs, enrolling in and taking coursework, being assigned an advisor, attending residency requirements, and writing the doctoral dissertation.

**Residency**- The Ed.D. programs reflected in this study all had a mandatory residency requirement for their enrolled students. Typically students were required to go to campus (regardless of where they lived) several weekends or weeks per year. Residency activities included in person classwork, group projects, enriching seminars and student social events.

**Self-Care**- For the purposes of this study, “self-care” refers to the basic needs a woman must fulfill in order to function on a personal and professional level. This will combine Maslow’s (1943) THM physiological (sleep, water, nutrition, sex, and breathing) as well as safety needs (humans must have a sense of security in their environment and feel they have enough money and supplies). Self-Care also refers to a woman’s contemporary standard of grooming (bathing, maintaining a hair style, make-up application, exercise, clothing etc.).

**Self-Actualization**- Refers to goals a person sets for themselves. Happiness correlates with realizing everything a person hopes to become. Humans only reach self-actualization when all other needs are met in part (Maslow, 1943, p. 382). For the purpose of this study, earning an Education Doctorate leads to self-actualization.

**Pink Collar Ghetto**- An industry, job or career primarily populated by women.
Online Education- Refers to college level coursework that is taken at least 90% of the time in an online class platform. Students rarely are required to physically appear in a class and may take courses in a variety of formats such as: accelerated, synchronous or asynchronous, part-time or full-time etc.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes a psychological theory, Maslow’s (1943), Theory of Human Motivation (THM) as its theoretical framework. Maslow (1943) argues there are five levels of hierarchical needs every person must fulfill in order to feel good, healthy and to become self-actualized. There are five levels of hierarchical needs a person must fulfill in part to move to the next level. Level one, a person must fulfill some or all food, water, warmth and rest requirements. Level two mandates a person must feel generally safe and secure. Level three represents a person’s need for love and belongingness. Level four states a person must have some degree of self-esteem to progress to level five, the final stage of self-actualization. Self-actualization signals the person has met their full potential. See figure 4 for visual details of the five levels of hierarchical needs. It can be argued that both maintaining a career and earning a doctorate are degrees of self-actualization. However, realizing potential (inaction) and achieving self-actualization (action) are very different. Maslow’s Theory of Motivation aligns well with the perceived path women in online doctoral programs take to reach a degree of self-actualization, the theory itself is structured around the actual experience of living and fulfilling the needs essential to life.

Critics of the Theory

Though many of Maslow’s ideas were borrowed from other psychologists, he significantly added to them and was deemed the father of Humanistic Psychology. Until Maslow,
psychological theory focused on mental illness or what made a person unstable, rather than mental health and what traits made a person function normally. Most importantly, Maslow believed in setting up a framework for future researchers to eventually add to, something he worked feverishly on until his death in 1970 (Hoffman, 2008). Though Maslow is greatly respected and cited to this day, there have been many criticisms of his Theory of Human Motivation (THM). The first major criticism is that THM is considered a Westernized and personally biased lens. According to McLeod (2014), Maslow’s study is greatly based on his own personal opinion and bias, therefore it is difficult to empirically test his theory, and therefore his findings cannot be blindly accepted in the scientific community.

“Critics maintain that Maslow’s theory is steeped in mainstream American views about the self and may not represent a cross-cultural view of human motivation. In attempting to erase dichotomy between the self and the social environment--reflecting Maslow's biographical synthesis of Freudianism and behaviorism (Hoffman, 1999)--he carries a faith in the simultaneous improvement of individuals and their society. This faith reflects a U.S. belief in progress, one fueled by other mainstream values such as newness and change, with education as a road to renewal of society as well as the self. Such humanistic assumptions are what receive strong reactions from critics” (Pearson, 1999, p 41).

Pearson (1994) argues that there is a small but important breakdown between Maslow’s definitions of the individual versus individualism. At times Maslow uses these terms interchangeably, although they are two different concepts. This discrepancy is where most of Maslow’s critics gain traction.
“We see Maslow as neglecting the distinction between individualism and individuality because his work focuses on individual acts and intentions; and although he gives weight to cultural forces, his lenses are primarily on individual efforts to resist these forces. But Maslow's conflation of individualism and individuality may be seen most clearly when individualism is defined in the metaphysical position that the individual exists apart from any social arrangement. His insistence on an intrinsic inner nature certainly takes him into this metaphysical territory” (Pearson, 1999, p 41).

Lastly, there has been question about the order of THM’s hierarchy, also pointing to a Westernized bias. From 2005 to 2010 Tay and Diener, (2011) tested Maslow’s Theory in a quantitative study of 60,865 people from 123 different countries. They found that Maslow’s Needs Assessment was accurate however the actual order of the arrangement was incorrect. Though Hagerty (1999) is not expressly a critic of Maslow, his study was the first to test both Maslow and Sirgy’s 1986 longitudinal predictions about the growth of Quality of Life (QOL) in a developing nation. Over 35 years, data was collected from 88 different countries. Hagerty (1999) disproved Maslow’s notion that a nation can only grow in one area while another area lays dormant. According to Hagerty (1999), the opposite is true, a nation can experience the correlation of growth in several areas. For example, a country’s increased health rates will also grow the gross domestic product (GDP).

**Marxist**

Similar to Pearson’s (1994) argument against Western individualistic value systems, Marxists believed excessive individualism in humanism and education are elitist. Marxists disagree with Maslow’s concept of slow social improvements, "A theory that predisposes one to focus more on individual freedom and development rather than the larger social reality, works in
favor of that reality” (Buss, 1979, p. 46). Shaw and Colimore (1988) argued that Maslow’s system is just a new form of Social Darwinism which will help perpetuate both capitalism and the powerful elite. Additionally, they contend Maslow’s theory may blame those who cannot reach self-actualization and that people who are not fulfilled must blame themselves, not the social injustice they may face.

**Postmodernism**

Postmodernists believe that people are acculturated to think they are a certain kind of person, it is not their intrinsic human nature that drives them but what societal powers have imbedded in them (Rabinow & Dreyfus, 1983). Michel Foucault (1979) is Maslow’s primary postmodern critic and emphasizes the *individual* is not as Maslow asserts, an intrinsically autonomous person but just a result of practiced power. Foucault (1979) rejects Maslow’s *self* and asserts that each person is tied to their identity through self-knowledge and conscience (which has been constructed by power practices). He mentions the concept of the *normal* prescribed social behaviors and judgments, which, if deviated from, generally lead to exclusion (Foucault, 1979).

**Feminism**

Feministic criticism of THM specifically focuses on the lack of participant diversity in Maslow’s research. The majority of the THM sample were educated, white, male, self-actualized individuals. Though, shortly before Maslow’s untimely death, he did study self-actualized women, however, they represented a small overall sample. There have been questions about generalizing his theory and applying it toward women, different ethnicities and people from lower social classes (McLeod, 2014).
Rationale

In 2011, more than half of the 3,840,980 people employed by higher education institutions were women (U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). In 1995, the National Center for Education Statistics found 54% of Ed.D. students were women. By 2010, 52% of all Doctoral degrees were awarded to women (Hussar & Bailey, 2013). Women are achieving terminal degrees at an impressive rate, yet there is disconnect between women’s terminal degree attainment and women’s securing of positions requiring a terminal degree within the education industry. “Maslow stressed the point that people need to develop their full potentialities, the need for self-actualization (superordinate goal) becomes more salient given other lower order needs have been made less salient through adequate satiation (subordinate goal)” (Sirgy, 1986). The rationale for the utilization of this theoretical framework relied on the notion that women viewed a doctoral degree as essential to self and career actualization. The process of women student’s motivation helps explain levels of career achievement later on.

Lastly, by applying THM to women’s lives, this study contributed to THM literature and what was known about women’s self-actualization, and addressed some feminist critiques of THM framework.

Application of Theory

Maslow’s (1943) Theory of Human Motivation provides a core structure for each section of this study. THM captured the conditions and tools necessary for self-actualization, a process of internal satisfaction rather than an outward reflection of success. THM promoted student self-reflection and acknowledges student journey’s on a somewhat linear timeline. Maslow distinguished aspects of self-care and well-being should be present, but not entirely fulfilled, before people move on to the next steps in the hierarchy. This is an important distinction as
women attempt to *do it all* in their everyday lives. This study attempted to understand the relative sacrifice and gain in each of the five hierarchical steps to self-actualization women experienced along their doctoral journey. This study prompts the academy to create positive changes, fostering women in the classroom and boardroom.

**Summary**

Academic research cited women experience graduate school differently than their male counterparts (Gardner, 2008; Glazer-Raymo, 1999; Hensel, 1991; Maher, Ford, & Thompson, 2004; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2003). However, more research must be conducted on how women see their own journeys, futures, and whether changes in the academy are necessary. This study acknowledged the great advances women have made within higher education, yet captured the nuance of daily life and aspirations.

**Organization of the Thesis**

This doctoral thesis is organized into five chapters. The first chapter presents the thesis topic, states the problem, offers a justification for researching the problem, significance and how it relates to audiences inside and outside of the education field, the study limitations, positionality of the researcher, and theoretical framework. Chapter two contains a review of the literature which explores the history of women in education, the Education Doctorate’s history and surrounding controversy as well as the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate. The third chapter covers the methodology chosen to examine this topic, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), while also covering data collection, analysis and a consideration of ethics. Chapter four presents the findings found via participant interviews and subsequent syntheses. Lastly, chapter five presents the themes found relative to existing literature
providing a detailed analysis of implications for students and the education industry.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Women’s Place at “The Table”

“Then there's pretty Dottie Henson, who plays like Gehrig, and looks like Garbo. Uh-uh, fellas, keep your mitts to yourself; she's married” (Abbot & Marshall, 1992). This iconic quote from a male, baseball newsreel announcer in the motion picture film, *A League of Their Own*, perfectly exemplifies the pressures many women feel they must succumb to in the working world. The notion to perform well in a traditionally masculine setting, while still retaining their femininity, may be daunting for someone who just wants to, ‘play ball’ and not worry about the implications of their gender. It also illustrates how men wanted to perceive and idealize women in a quickly changing sociocultural and economic system within the United States.

According the both the U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, the higher education industry employed a total of 3,840,980 people in 2011, up from 2,662,100 in 1995. Of those employed by higher education institutions in 2011, more than half, 2,086,267 were women (U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Since women make up the majority of the higher education workforce, it is baffling to still see very few of the top administrative positions filled by women. Therefore, it is important to investigate what is causing this disparity in higher education and the education industry in general, especially as more women flood into doctoral programs, a requisite degree for an upper-level administrator. Extensive research on this subject has been done in a corporate setting, but lesser so in education. Much of the sociological and business related research has been conducted from the vantage point of a woman, through a feminist positionality, or focuses specifically on the structures in place, which make women’s upward mobility difficult.
It is important to understand how women perceived their workplace triumphs, struggles and cultural structure as the number of women involved in some aspect of education has been on the rise. This literature review attempted to catalogue the history of women working in the United States, studies concerning women in education, seminal research on women, the modern education doctorate and gender studies.

**History of Women Working in America**

There has been a belief in Western culture that a vast difference between the sexes exists; with each having their own needs, abilities and value systems. There was a strong opinion that women were more suited for a domestic life while men were suited for a life in the workplace (Barnett, 2004). Historically, women have been viewed as the weaker sex who must be protected and cared for by men (Kessler-Harris, 2001). This had complex repercussions in the workplace, as it gave male supervisors reason to fire working women once they married, under the premise that a woman’s first and only priority was to run a household and raise a family. This was a hindrance to women who were of marrying age or who were already married but needed to work. Often, these women were never offered a position or had very little job security if employed (Kessler-Harris, 2001). In the beginning of the 20th century, women had many tough decisions to make, especially if they went to college. Between 1900 and 1920, a woman graduating from college had to decide whether she would pursue a career or a family, there was no middle ground as evidenced by the 40% of single women working and only 5% of employed married women (Goldin, 1992). It was also commonplace for certain professions to place employment bans on married women. This was particularly true of the one profession that was always open to women, teaching. Even when marriage bans in the United States were lifted in the 1950s many schools employing women teachers had pregnancy bans until the 1960s which not only controlled
women’s employment opportunities but also their personal and reproductive lives (Preston, 2003).

The real influx of women in the workplace began during World War II, when many women were called from the kitchens to fill the jobs their husbands left to serve in the Armed Forces (Mandel & Sinclair, 2002). The lack of civilian men filling positions in factories, stores and schools made way for married and single women, with or without children, to fill those positions and help the country carry-on while the men were fighting abroad. Icons like Rosie the Riveter were rolled out and women found themselves being empowered by the demand for their abilities and talents, helping them realize they could do the work of men and be paid for it (Preston, 2003). Unfortunately, the moment World War II was over, most women were pushed out of the factories to accommodate the men returning from war. Though the men were back, women’s mentalities toward work were never the same again. Many myths about gender and employment were irreparably dispelled. Although not commonplace, women working alongside men became more accepted yet a second wave of momentum did not occur again until the Civil Rights, Chicano and heated Feminist movements of the 1960s. Main tenants of these movements demanded equal pay for equal work. Interestingly, the tough U.S. economy in the 1970s brought stagnation to men’s wages forcing the need to have dual earners in a household. Women began to flood into the job market out of necessity and many of the former myths about women in the workplace waned while others held steadfast (Gilbert & Rader, 2001).

Women in Higher Education

Since the 1940s, a critical mass of women in the workforce has been steadily climbing. Women now occupy positions in nearly every industry and many have gravitated toward the education industry. The United States has become the worldwide leader in providing quality
higher education opportunities to students and as such, the higher education industry has grown tremendously providing the academic stimulus, support, and continued enrollment universities need to survive in a global market. The education and subsequent employment of women can be partially attributed to the rapid growth and success of the higher education industry, as well as increasing demand for higher education due to “academization” of the job market and modern society (Mizrahi & Mehrez, 2002).

According to Morris (2011), women have made up 60% of all students graduating from higher education institutions in the United States since 2000. Additionally, as of 2004, women comprised around half of incoming classes in medical and law schools and one third of students in Masters of Business Administration programs. Women doctoral students in general were reaching parity of numbers with men doctoral students (Barnett, 2004). Once awarded a doctoral degree, it is common to seek out a tenured professorship within a college or university, something a vast amount of researchers maintain is an inherently biased process within higher education employment (Reybold, Brazer, Schrum & Corda, 2012).

Tenure usually requires long hours of teaching and student advising as well as turning out multiple research articles in established, peer-reviewed journals. During this candidacy period, there is little time for personal endeavors. The usual timeline for a tenure candidate requires them to obtain tenure status within the first six to seven years of employment. For a woman, this timeline typically falls during her prime childbearing years and discriminates against those with family care responsibilities (COACHE, 2008). Additionally, 8,000 pre-tenured faculty members were surveyed, finding women faculty members were significantly less satisfied than their male counterparts when it came to support services in their work environments, quality of facilities and access to graduate assistants. Women also observed that other academics discouraged them
or assumed they were not as committed to their jobs as to their families (COACHE, 2008). The academy, as well as university employment staff structures are organized in a discriminatory manner, yet the discourse in the classroom preaches equality (Reybold et al., 2012). Students are being shown conflicting concepts throughout their higher education experience, suggesting a possible reason for pervasive workplace inequalities.

The classroom in many instances represents a microcosm of what society currently is and where it is headed. The classroom is also a powerful tool and has been to incite change in new generations, while measuring how students currently view their world and the people in it (Pittinsky, 2009). Higher education institutions, particularly public universities, have been used to instill a sense of civic duty in their student bodies, bettering the world through social change (Flanagan, Faust & Pykett, 2013).

Since over half of the students enrolled in, and graduating from, higher education institutions are women, it is possible that a critical mass is forming, and the future of women advancing through the employment ranks of higher education and education in general will increase exponentially. However, reliance on the power of a majority is not a guarantee to equality which can be seen in the very classrooms in which women are learning. Marchbank and Letherby’s (2006) study found that male students taking women’s studies classes reported being more accepting of and sympathetic to, women’s issues or struggles. However, by the end of the coursework, 38.7% of male students thought that the subject of women’s studies discriminated against men. It was concluded that these male students felt they were denied a voice in the curricula and therefore felt discriminated against.
Additionally, Flood’s (2011) research of men’s knowledge about feminism and changes in perception before and after taking women’s and gender studies classes indicate a drastic alteration in viewpoints, a greater appreciation of feminism and an increased understanding of gendered struggles. Interestingly, Flood (2011) also found that men professors teaching the discipline of, women’s and gender studies were graded up compared to their women counterparts. Men professors received higher marks in their course evaluations by students. Men were seen as less biased by their students when teaching women’s and gender studies, it is surmised that there may be perceptions of creditability in the privileged (man) teaching about the unprivileged (women/transgender etc.) (Flood, 2011).

These studies of how women’s and gender studies is presented in the classroom point to a major issue in contemporary, scholarly research being conducted. When one perspective or lens is used more persistently than another, the chances of causing unintended alienation or misunderstanding may increase. Though women’s and gender studies is an important subject, the delivery of the subject matter, and how it is perceived by various populations, must be taken into account maximizing student support of the concepts.

Additionally, these findings are inherently problematic as the colleges and universities who build the curriculum and educate these students are, in many cases, not providing real to life representations of the ideas they teach. In 2006, only 23% of acting university presidents were women. Though this number was up from a mere 9% in 1986, it does not come close to representing a number equivalent to the 60% of women college graduates that college presidents are helping to turn out (American Council on Education, 2007).
Women and Work: Exploring the Seminal Research

Much of the research conducted on gendered roles in the workplace has focused on either a corporate setting, through a managerial lens, and/or through a feminist position. It is important to understand the research behind American socioeconomic and cultural mores in both the corporate and education industries. The focus of this study is to understand women’s perceptions of their online Doctorate of Education degree while working fulltime; fully exploring women’s experiences while working is integral to understanding their sense of value, balance, and perceived outcomes.

Eskilson and Wiley (1996) acknowledge that though the influx of women in the workplace was revolutionary, it came with many strains and asked the question, “What role does experience with working women play in determining men managers’ views of women managers?” (Eskilson & Wiley, 1996). It was found that a man’s view of his women colleagues was often dictated by his own personal experiences. For example, when a male manager was asked how he would reprimand a woman employee who had failed at a task, his answer was generally dictated by his personal experience. If his wife or partner was employed outside the home and/or he had positive working experiences with women, he was more likely to bestow a less or equal punitive response to a male employee. However, male managers without this positive experience proposed much more severe punishments for a junior woman manager, many of which included termination (Eskilson & Wiley, 1996).

Though Atwater et.al. (2004) study acknowledges the importance of studying traditional gendered work roles in the United States, it is not the focus of their research. It has generally been held in American society, and in academia, that the nature of management is perceived as a masculine profession, where traditionally masculine traits are valued (Stevens & DeNisi, 1980).
Similarly, little research had been conducted on the actual traits that comprise an effective manager and how both men and women perceive individual traits in terms of gender (Atwater et al., 2001). It was found that in general, male respondents are far more likely than their women counterparts to see managerial sub-roles as being specifically masculine, whereas women see the same sub-roles as androgynous.

Greene, Stockard, Lewis and Richmond (2010) posit that a less than welcoming work environment may be the cause for the low numbers of women members of chemistry academe as compared to the total representation of women in the entire field. Though many colleges believe they are providing the same resources and opportunities for men and women professors, this study found that women perceived it much differently. Men received more mentoring, funding, and professional support according to women faculty members. Remarkably, it was reported that women in the chemistry field were far more likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs. The study surmised that the lack of departmental support for women made it more difficult to recruit women chemistry professors, thus perpetuating the male domination of resources (Greene et al., 2010). Though this study has added to the literature in terms of women working specifically in the field as chemistry instructors, it does not acknowledge why men are given more resources, mentoring opportunities and more of the available teaching positions.

Many researchers use gender hierarchy with corresponding status indicators to illustrate the impact of their findings. Martha Foschi (2000) has written many seminal articles in the field of gender studies, specifically the study of men and women in a work setting. She has generally defined the feminine gender as a lower status within American society. Foschi (2000) found that people of a lower status (most often women) were held to a stricter standard than those higher status employees in the work place (most often men) even when all the individuals being
observed had equal qualifications. Foschi (2000) refers to this as the double or even multiple standard, essentially a defining characteristic that differentiates individuals. Though it is argued that gender is most often the first differentiating characteristic, Foschi (2000) maintains that nationality, race, ethnicity and socioeconomic background can all contribute to the double standard.

In 2012, Foschi and Valenzuela delved deeper into the concept of misplaced bias and the practice of holding identically qualified people to different standards based on their sex or gender. This study was based in the Core Theory, linking anticipated outcomes (a candidate’s future job performance) with their status characteristics (their sex, organizational rank, or even beauty). By pairing a man and woman with identical qualifications, and having their resumes evaluated for the same job by both men and women participants. It was found that women gave harsher reviews than men when it came to other women who had poor academic performance on their resumes. It was also found that that men preferred the male candidates in more traditionally masculine employment situations. However, according to findings by Okamoto and Smith-Lovin (2001) and Foschi and Lapointe (2002) there are indicators that these seemingly pervasive biases are actually on the decline in North American society, which may denote a generational and cultural shift toward more fair and equitable employment opportunities for both men and women. Regardless, the issue of double or multiple standards is still pervasive indicating a higher likelihood of failure for women looking for high status employment opportunities.

Conclusion

Historically, women have faced immense challenges in pursuing both higher education and work opportunities. Fortunately, the climate has rapidly changed in the past century and while it is evident that many barriers still exist, women are earning their place. These studies,
though bleak at first glance actually indicate a slow decline in bias which may have roots in the increasing numbers of Americans receiving a higher education. Also the increase of women college graduates may be setting a new standard in the workplace. However, the research clearly indicates there is still a problem, even if it appears to be slowly changing for the better. Societal problems stagnate or grow larger if left alone, especially if the general public is lead to believe it is no longer a problem.

There is a rich, critical mass of literature exploring the reasons why men and women are different and how they can work together more effectively in the workplace, particularly in a corporate setting. Yet, there seemed to be a lack of literature regarding the staff who help run universities and colleges as most of the research on women in higher education focuses on academe and the tenure process.

**The Education Doctorate and Online Education**

**History of the Education Doctorate**

Around 1150 A.D., the first Doctorate of Philosophy was awarded in Paris, France. In the early years, the Doctorate was reserved for those in the Catholic Church who taught and interpreted the Bible, hence the inclusion of philosophy amongst traditional subjects and the name of the Ph.D. degree (Verger, 1999). The tradition of doctoral education began in Europe’s hallmark universities like Berlin, Bologna, Oxford, Cambridge and Paris. Women were not admitted to these universities for several centuries. Finally, in 1608, a Spaniard, Juliana Morell, defended her thesis at the papal palace of the vice-legate, earning the first ever doctoral degree awarded to a woman, a Doctorate of Law (Grendler & O’Malley, 1988). By 1678, the first Doctorate of Philosophy was awarded to a woman, Elena Cornaro Piscopa at the University of Padua. Soon after, other European universities followed suit and women were able to complete
doctoral work. England however, lagged behind by several centuries; Oxford refused to admit women students until 1920 and Cambridge awarded a Ph.D. to a woman scholar, 248 years after the University of Padua (Grendler & O’Malley, 1988). Interestingly, it was not until the late 19th and 20th century that the majority of professors at English speaking universities had a doctoral degree. Previous to this, doctorates were reserved for those with holy orders or the very senior scholars at the institution (Verger, 1999). However, in the 19th century most universities followed the German philosophy doctorate methodology of standardized research and lecture seminars, now considered the modern standard in Ph.D. training and practice (Verger, 1999).

Prominent American leaders and educators were educated in the 1600s and early 1700s at notable European universities. Clearly, universities of European caliber were not available in the Americas at this time; subsequently, Yale, Harvard, William and Mary, Penn and Columbia; America’s first and arguably most prestigious institutions were born of this intersection of educational supply and demand (Archbald, 2011). Initially, these new schools catered to religious and in some cases, agricultural training, educating a small fraction of the population. Yet, the need for higher education intensified after the American Revolution, the war solidifying the United States as a sovereign nation (Goodchilde & Miller, 1997). In 1787, the Constitutional Convention decreed a national university be built, and though the new nation’s first six presidents agreed, it never came to fruition (Goodchilde & Miller, 1997). However, in 1862, real progress towards federally sponsored universities occurred when the Morrill Land-Grant Act legislatively provided state universities with federal funded sponsorship. Importantly, the second Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1890 provided funds to start land-grant style universities in the South for African American students, starting a strong legacy of premier historically black colleges and universities (Goodchilde & Miller, 1997). Yet it was not until 1921 that the first black woman
was awarded a Ph.D.. Nonetheless, Saddie Tanner Mossell earned a Ph.D. in Economics at the University of Pennsylvania (not a land-grant college) and went on to complete her Juris Doctorate (Malveaux, 1997).

The Education Doctorate or Ed.D. degree has a short, but exceedingly interesting history in American colleges and universities. Prior to the mid-19th century, having a doctoral degree was not a requisite for professorial positions in American colleges and universities. However, the 1840s and beyond brought a new breed of particularly ambitious young academics to Germany with the hope of earning Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degrees in the sciences and then the arts (Geitz, Heideking & Herbst, 1995). That initial group of intrepid academics made it possible for the first doctoral degree to be awarded in 1870. A mere one hundred years later, 29,900 doctoral degrees were awarded (Bureau of the Census, 2012). As the United States’ higher education system grew, so did the demand for professors trained on the doctoral level. This was especially apparent as elite and well established colleges like Harvard and Yale began building and growing graduate programs and schools. Fascinatingly, the trend of constructing Ed.D. programs started with a Ph.D. program in 1893. James Earl Russell, a dean at Columbia University’s Teacher’s College, sought to further legitimize Teacher’s College with a doctoral program. However, the doctorate was still deeply rooted in theory rather than practice and clearly resembled all other Ph.D. programs of the day (Shulman et al., 2006). The 19th century was a time where the discipline of applied doctorates grew exponentially, with the Juris Doctorate in law and Medical Doctorate in health care gaining enrollments in leaps and bounds (Stevens, 1983; Ludmerer, 2000). In a sense, the popularity of these respected applied doctoral programs further legitimized applied doctorates in other fields.
The creation of the Ed.D. degree began in 1921 with Henry Holmes, the dean of Harvard’s newly formed Graduate School of Education. Holmes declared the creation of the Ed.D. to “mark [the school’s] separation from the faculty of Arts and Sciences” and to “train the [school] leaders” (Powell, 1980, p. 144). This new, applied doctoral program created excitement in the academy, as well as programmatic reflection. Several schools, including Stamford and Berkeley, decided to follow suit, adding Ed.D. programs to their graduate school offerings in the 1920s (Brown, 1990). A decade later, James Earl Russell’s son, William Fletcher Russell, the Dean of Columbia’s Teacher’s College, realized the Ph.D. in Education program his father created was an important step towards training education professionals but was not a practical enough application (Cremin, 1978). William Fletcher Russell decided to implement an Ed.D. program similar to Harvard’s which offered challenging, applicable coursework to teachers who planned to keep working as teachers, rather than entering the academy as researchers and professors. Courses included topics in, “Educational administration, guidance, and curriculum and instruction” (Cremin, 1978, p. 15-16). For many of the early years, schools offered both the Ed.D. and the Ph.D. which may have caused confusion surrounding the degrees from the very beginning.

Confusion Surrounding the Education Doctorate

“The Ph.D is to understand the world. The Ed.D is to change the world.

- Gordon Kirk, University of Edinburgh” (Wergin, 2011).

Upon inception, the Ed.D. was mainly a catalyst for newly formed schools of education to distinguish themselves from their traditionalist Arts and Sciences brethren, creating an applicable professional degree. However, this fervent desire for distinction actually caused immense confusion in the academy about the Ed.D., a debate that continues to this day (Perry,
The original Ed.D. from Harvard was both the birthplace of an innovative doctoral degree as well as the subsequent source of Education Doctorate confusion. Though Harvard’s Graduate School of Education desperately wanted to distinguish its Ed.D. degree from the Ph.D.s granted in Arts and Sciences, it had trouble doing so early on. Harvard’s program utilized many of the same techniques, professors and even research curricula as its Arts and Sciences counterparts. Less attention was paid putting theory into practice and more into academic research traditions through research heavy dissertations with a secondary focus on practical school applications (Perry, 2012).

Several of the other early adopters of the Ed.D. also had similar issues. It seemed university politics may have been the facilitator of Stamford’s Ed.D. program. According to Perry (2012) Stamford’s Ed.D. was created to break away from Arts and Sciences faculty while still training researchers within the academy. Berkeley also tried to break away from the Arts and Sciences faculty but remained unsuccessful, as was the case for many Ed.D. programs. Since programs were still gripped by Arts and Sciences faculty traditions, procedures and worldviews programs lacked a consistent mission while competing with other Arts and Sciences research based doctorates (Perry, 2012).

According to Toma (2002), there are many subsequent similarities between Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs. These similarities fed into the confusion, including the inception of Ed.D.s with nearly identical coursework to their Ph.D. counterparts. “Where both degrees are offered at a single institution, degree requirements have long been similar, as a rule, and Ph.D. and Ed.D. students typically enroll in many common classes” (Toma, 2002, p.4). Toma also alludes to an inferiority complex Ed.D. programs have developed throughout the years. He contends it is hard to argue the Ph.D. is not viewed as the more prestigious of the two degrees with students often
choosing to pursue the Ph.D.. To clarify, education as a discipline has had to work diligently to gain recognition from universities and colleges as a legitimate subject. Similarly, having the ability to grant a Ph.D. degree is the hallmark of a university or college making it in the academy. Once a college can offer a Ph.D., another layer of legitimacy is added to the college as a whole “…flagship institutions are increasingly likely to favor the Ph.D. over the Ed.D., with the latter commonly associated with comprehensive institutions who offer it because they cannot get state coordinating approval to grant the Ph.D.” (Toma, 2002, p. 5).

The Ed.D. suffers in ways other applied doctoral degrees do not. For example, the Juris Doctorate and Medical Doctorate are well respected and rarely need to defend the rigor of their programs. Toma (2002) contends that these degrees have always been governed by the rules of developing practitioners, not by the rules of the Arts and Sciences. This historical rooting in the Arts and Sciences has caused the Ed.D. to be viewed and treated as a second class degree in education, though intended to be first class. Interestingly, until 2012, Harvard intentionally did the opposite of its higher education counterparts. The prestigious school only offered the Ed.D. for nearly one hundred years, holding a hard line that the Ed.D. was a rigorous, prestigious applied doctoral degree. Much to the chagrin of Ed.D. proponents, Harvard recently discontinued its pioneering Ed.D. program, replacing it with an Ed.L.D. (Doctorate of Education Leadership) and a Ph.D. in education, arguably erasing the historical legitimizing stance the University had taken for so long (Harvard University, 2016). Toma (2002) argues that the Ed.D. should be used solely to teach education practitioners, claiming it is senseless to train an education administrator in the same way you would train a future English faculty member. In this example, a Ph.D. would be failing the professional community by, “…graduating students who have not acquired the competencies needed in professional practice.” (Toma, 2002, p. 7). Lastly, and perhaps most
importantly, Toma (2002) brands the popular perception of Ed.D. programs as, “Ph.D. lite”.

Subsequently, scholars like Perry (2012) and Shulman (2006) have frequently used this analogy, often as a catch phrase for the misconceptions around the Ed.D. degree.

With encouragement from the Deans of Education at the “Big 10” Universities, Woody (1947) was one of the very first researchers to explore the differences between Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs. In 1921, the first Ed.D. program was offered. By 1947 approximately 33 colleges offered an Ed.D.. Of those colleges, 27 offered both the Ed.D. and the Ph.D. As schools increasingly began to offer both degrees, Woody (1947) wanted to understand the nuance in admission requirements and ultimately, curricula in the classroom. He was looking to summarize, compare and contrast the requirements of each program. Surprisingly, Woody (1947) found far more similarities in the programs than differences.

Dale G. Anderson’s (1983) seminal work began with a fairly typical skirmish within the department he was chairing. There was an ongoing debate between the two education doctoral degrees offered in the school. The Ed.D. and the Ph.D. programs distinguished Anderson’s research in two distinct ways. First, the research would extricate the differences between the two programs. Second, to understand the differences between the programs’ past and their current status (Anderson, 1983). Anderson modeled his study after Woody’s 1947 inquiry, looking to compare and analyze historical findings and data alongside the comparison and contrasting of the Ed.D. to Ph.D.. Anderson selected 167 schools, of those, 86 or 51.5% offered both degree options. Subsequently, these colleges were sent surveys by Anderson. It was found that admission requirements for the two programs were nearly identical and if they were not identical, the requirements described by the schools were equally demanding in nature. “There was a substantial difference between the two degrees on the acceptance of a ‘practical problem’
or survey as a substitute for a basic research study. Exactly one-half of the Ed.D. programs accepted such activities, while this was seldom allowed for the Ph.D. (19.0%)” (Anderson, 1983, p. 56). Anderson’s study concluded that both degrees have continued to have philosophical and goal oriented differences. However, their knowledge bases, employment outcomes, competencies, and overall programmatic requirements were all very similar. Additionally, Anderson’s replication (1983) not only found historical data of these similarities, but confirmed them again by modern (the 1980s) standards of the time.

In 1993 Osguthorpe and Wong published what became another seminal article in the study of the Education Doctorate (Ed.D.). Osguthorpe and Wong collected institutional (university) catalogues from the 1980s to 1993 for analysis. They also sent surveys to several universities in an effort to determine the status and trends of the Ed.D. versus the Ph.D.. After intense analysis of the surveys and catalogues, Osguthorpe and Wong came to a similar conclusion as past seminal works. First, it was found that universities do not have a clear institutional preference toward the Ed.D. or the Ph.D.. This lack of preference is a main indicator of industry confusion. Second, it was found that comprehensive universities and colleges were more likely to offer the Ed.D. as the sole doctoral degree option while research universities were increasingly reluctant to only offer the Ed.D.. Lastly, Osguthorpe and Wong (1993) found that both doctoral titles prepared scholars with similar skills in statistics, research and discourse. Correspondingly, the admission requirements for both doctoral degrees were “remarkably similar” (Osguthorpe and Wong, 1993, p. 47). Not surprisingly, the researchers concluded that a strengthening of education professionals could be accomplished through increased national dialogue about Ed.D. and Ph.D. degrees.
In 2005, under the *Education Schools Project*, Arthur Levine, the then President of Teacher’s College, the premiere education school, published a report, *Educating School Leaders*. This report explored the education U.S. educators receive, revealing Levine’s dissatisfaction with the industry’s solutions to professional education. Levine spends a fair part of his report discussing the inappropriateness of degrees in the education field, saying “There are too many degrees and certificates in educational administration. They mean too many things, and they risk having no meaning at all” (Levine, 2005, p. 41). Levine (2005) analyzed the differences between Carnegie ranked schools, revealing the correlation between institutional emphasis on research and the likelihood of offering a Ph.D., an Ed.D. or both. “The weaker the research mission, the greater the likelihood that the university awards only the Ed.D.” (Levine, 2005 p. 42).

Levine goes on to profile a university where a lack of quality faculty and educational rigor turns out a 25% graduation rate and dissertations were deemed useless. Though his rendering of this university is harsh, he brings up an interesting point about education doctoral programs in both the lowest and highest education echelons. He cites too many practitioners in degree programs meant to train scholars and academic researchers. Further, these programs have little to no relevance to those doctoral students’ careers, rendering problematic outcomes. Since even the most prestigious programs are trying to make a, *one size fits all* Education Doctorate professors in research-heavy institutions find themselves holding their proverbial *noses* and passing the student. For those less research heavy institutions, Levine maintains the awarding of a doctoral degree at all is a *travesty* (Levine, 2005, p. 43).

Levine, continues his bleak account of education doctoral programs (both the Ed.D. and the Ph.D.) by recounting “Research in educational administration is criticized by the academic community and by education school faculty members and deans to a greater degree than research
in any other field examined in the course of this study” (Levine, 2005, p. 46). Additionally, Levine’s report alludes to onboarding a doctoral program (typically a degree in educational administration) as means for an institution to advance up the hierarchy of academic status, rather than contribute any real good to the academy.

Levine concludes that in general, doctorates in the field of education administration have not been particularly successful. Specifically, the Ed.D. should be eliminated for several reasons. The first is the Ed.D. program is considered a watered-down doctorate. Second, the Ed.D. serves as a means for weak education schools to award doctoral degrees essentially, back-dooring their way into a doctoral granting status. Third, Levine renders Ed.D. programs as a useless burdensome degree placed on the backs of administrators looking for promotion to senior leadership roles (Levine, 2005). Levine’s solution to the dissolution of the Ed.D. is to create the education industry’s equivalent to the MBA, a two year Master of Education Administration degree.

Flessa (2007) rebuts Levine’s (2005) arguments through a review of his report, highlighting the inherent and perhaps, false irony permeating Levine’s austere account of education doctorates (both Ph.D. and Ed.D.) past and future. Flessa points out that Levine may be painting a picture direr than reality. He specifically points to Levine’s idea that education schools have botched the Ed.D. beyond repair. Flessa sheds light on Levine’s suggestion that universities, specifically schools of education are the only ones who can fix the problem and also educate school leaders, a seeming contrary argument to the very heart of Levine’s disregard for the Ed.D.. Most powerfully, Flessa mentions the disheartening trend of the academy to quickly jump to the conclusion that students only pursue an Ed.D for professional gain rather than for the sake of curiosity, learning and intellectual exploration. “It is strange and disheartening to see our
field—scholars, educators—so quick to agree to a conversation about the purposes of teaching and learning in our programs that is limited solely to professional credentialing” (Flessa, 2007, p. 205). Flessa states that there is more to a doctoral degree than credentialing, academia has been quick to abandon the Ed.D. and the students who have earned one. Pointing directly to the issues and lack of clarity the academy has been neglecting to address about the Ed.D. and the issues that caused the debate in the first place. Flessa (2007) argues Levine (2005) and countless other scholars have drummed up hasty conclusions about the disbandment of the Ed.D. without effectively thinking through the consequences.

Wergin’s 2011 article explores the history of the Education Doctorate as well as what must be done to reboot the degree, however, Wergin takes and interesting perspective. Wergin maintains much of the Ed.D.’s troubles stem from the German education mentality (adopted by American schools in the twentieth century) that developing theory is the most important goal of scholarship. Further, the German model cites practice as merely the application of theory. Therefore, the Ed.D.’s level of intellectual rigor is questioned due to the focus on practice rather than theoretical development. Wergin then makes the case that typically, practical training in education programs happens during a student’s master level degree. This observation strongly suggests that there may be little to nothing left for a student to study about practice on the doctoral level. Lastly, Wergin (2011) focuses on the Ed.D. and its peer groups noting that “unlike other doctorates of professional practice, the Ed.D has not been regulated by a national accreditation body or guided by any commonly held or rigorously shared discipline or body of knowledge” (Wergin, 2011, p. 120). Since the Ed.D. lacks this common thread of regulation and group rigor, a lack of history and, in Wergin’s (2011) argument, principled guidance depict the Ed.D. as a less consistent and reputable degree.
Interestingly Wergin, (2011) rejects both Levine’s (2005) call to stop practical training at the master’s level and Shulman’s (2006) suggestion to change the Ed.D. to a PPD or professional practice Doctorate. Rather, Wergin (2011) proposes a reboot of the traditional Ed.D. degree to an education degree of the twenty-first century. Wergin (2011) argues the newly formatted Ed.D. should be built on four major principles. The first is the principle that education, on all levels, should emancipate rather than indoctrinate or conform its students. Education is an integral part of a democratic, free society as it is a powerful function of social change. Adult learning should be transformational rather than incremental learning, essentially a function of learning skillsets. Second, Wergin contends that all people with substantial pedagogical responsibilities can benefit from doctoral-level knowledge. Students do not have to be immersed only in school settings to reap the benefits of an Ed.D. degree. Third, the Ed.D. degree is not equivalent to a master’s degree in principle or practice. The Ed.D. does not just emphasize proficiency of practice but the continued scholarship of its students.

Wergin (2011) notes the presence of self-reflection as a stakehold in Ed.D. programs, a common and wildly important thread that greatly distinguishes the Ed.D. from a practice based master program. Lastly, Wergin (2011) believes the Ed.D. is not the bastardized version of a Ph.D. nor an offshoot of it, but a distinct course of study with specific learning outcomes which should culminate in a project or capstone replicating practical expertise in the educational field.

Shulman, Golde, Bueschel and Garabedian (2006) believe the problems surrounding the Ed.D. are “both chronic and crippling” (p. 25) primarily because, unlike other fields of study, education uses the doctorate to both train practitioners and researchers. If these problems are not addressed, it will render both the Ed.D. and education Ph.D. useless as neither program will have enough purposeful action to carry out a primary mission. This confusion in the purpose of the
degrees results in neither, preparing doctoral students well. Shulman et al. (2006) explores the inherent differences of who the Education Doctorate serves by looking at student demographics.

Education Doctorates attract an older, more experienced student than a typical Arts and Sciences Ph.D. program. For example, students receiving their doctoral degrees in the education field have a median age of 43. These students are usually mid-career professionals who seek to complete their doctoral work a decade or more after completing their bachelor’s degrees. Correspondingly, education doctoral students overwhelmingly complete their degrees (at night, on weekends, online) while working fulltime. Conversely, Arts and Sciences Ph.D. students are much younger and typically begin their doctoral work just two years after completing their undergraduate degrees (Shulman et al., 2006). Lastly, Shulman et al. (2006) mention that only 1 in every 3 Education Doctoral students go into the professoriate whereas nearly all Arts and Sciences students seek faculty positions upon completion. Shulman (2006) and his colleagues suggest a clear division between the Ed.D. and Ph.D., neither being better or worse, just different in their educational goals. It is no surprise that Toma and Shulman’s (2006) fervent advocacy for strong, consistent Ed.D. programs lead to greater studies. Not surprisingly, it was Dr. Shulman (2006) who spurred the creation of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate through his own extensive research about the confusion surrounding the Ed.D.

The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate

In 2007 the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate or CPED was created to “Reclaim the Ed.D. with the goal of making it the degree of choice for professional practice preparation in education” (Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, 2016). Essentially, CPED was created to quell the confusion surrounding the curricula, goals and outcomes of Ed.D. programs in the United States. Reinstating the Education Doctorate’s legitimacy via reforms and
programmatic redesign was and still is a key pillar of CPED. Nearly a decade from Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate’s inception there are 82 voluntary consortium member schools committed to reinventing and reclaiming their education doctorate programs through critical examination of past and present efforts while planning for future improvement initiatives (Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, 2016). The 82 members have accepted that CPED is a design experiment and have agreed to CPED’s three pillars:

1) “The development of a professional practice preparation program in education needs to be both purposeful as well as fluid. As the needs in PK-20 change, so should the preparation of those who will lead in the field;

2) No one-size-fits-all model of preparation will meet the diverse needs throughout our country and our public education system.

3) The measure of quality and success in professional practice preparation should be the measure of IMPACT on educational practice” (Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, 2016, p.1).

In 2014 Storey and Hesbol analyzed the outcomes of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, attempting to measure the impact this initiative had on Ed.D. programs. While they found evidence of positive and progressive change, the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate still has many barriers to overcome. Storey and Hesbol (2014) highlight the ingrained academic culture, proliferated by tradition and the notion of being steeped in doctoral customs via the customary five chapter dissertation. Though Carnegie has moved the academy in a positive direction, much work must still be done as a gap between scholarship and practice still exists.
Redesigning the Ed.D. has been extremely popular in the past decade, most of these restructurings can be traced back to the Carnegie Project yet, old programmatic habits still perpetuate in many cases (Buttram, 2014). According to a study conducted by the University Council for Educational Administration's Taskforce on Evaluating Leadership Preparation Programs of University Based Doctoral Programs in the United States, "Ed.D programs still require a research-based dissertation as the final capstone project" even after a full redesign (Buttram, 2014, p. 4).

In 2008 Archbald reviewed Education Doctorate dissertations, finding the use of empirical social science research language as the primary style of communication. In both Archbald’s 2008 and 2010 studies it was concluded that though there is a desire to reform Ed.D. dissertations two distinct societal and cultural realities need to be addressed and modified. The first is the existence of seasoned faculty who continually default to the academic language they have been using for decades when advising Ed.D. candidates (Archbald, 2010). Second, there is an external expectation from organizations, clients and even academic peers when the findings of a dissertation are being presented. Namely, these studies must be presented in empirical research terms and in many cases research jargon, lending a sense of legitimacy to the study. However, it is determined that this sense of legitimacy may be viewed more favorably than impact and action. Specifically, it is better to sound intelligent through academic language rather than innovative and impactful (Archbald, 2010).

While acknowledging that CPED was still a fairly new initiative relative to the nearly century old Ed.D. degree Zambo, Zambo, Buss, Perry and Williams (2014) focused on how CPED affected primarily Ed.D. students in newly redesigned programs. Through an online questionnaire the researchers sought to capture the perceptions of Ed.D. students seeing if the 21
CPED sponsored programs (newly designed and redesigned Ed.D. programs) were in fact changing. The most common theme of their research was students’ interest in leading change through their respective careers. Students sought programs that would help them meet their professional goals in industry. Each student demonstrated some semblance of dissatisfaction with the status quo and saw their Ed.D. program as a conduit or, in some cases, a requisite for inciting change. Similarly, the CPED Ed.D. degree was sought by students as a means of self-improvement in a format and philosophy that made sense to the adult learner. Students cited flexible course schedules, developed student to faculty/advisor relationships, relevant applicable curricula, cohorts (leading to close peer networks), and developing raw skillsets as integral to their choice in program and ultimate satisfaction with their CPED influenced doctoral programs (Zambo, Zambo, Buss, Perry & Williams, 2014). The researchers acknowledge continued need for analysis of the Carnegie Project for the Education Doctorate, but note this preliminary study gives good indication of the positive impact CPED programs are having on their students. Namely, CPED principles are reflected in the overall satisfaction of students enrolled in newly redesigned or designed Ed.D. programs; therefore, the initiative is moving the Ed.D. in a positive direction.

Perry, Zambo, and Wunder, (2015) conducted a benchmarking study on the 21 original Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) consortium members evaluating the progress of the initiative. Overall the results were impactful and positive, students felt included in the programmatic changes and hopeful for their futures as scholar-practitioners. Interestingly, it was found that admissions departments benefitted greatly from CPED, as it clearly defined the kind of applicant who would be successful in a scholar-practitioner model. For example, students who worked within the K-20 realm, who had several applicable years of experience, and
importantly, who wanted to remain working in the industry were cited as excellent candidates for admission. Since programs focused on work experience and leadership rather than standardized testing and master level research, a more vibrant and diverse student body emerged, bolstering the classroom dynamic and rigor (Perry, Zambo & Wunder, 2015).

Additionally, it was found that the patterns of engagement had shifted from a fairly hands off faculty advisor model to an interactive highly engaged faculty and student relationship. CPED affiliated programs expected faculty to have frequent and meaningful engagements with their advisees throughout the dissertation phase, a vast departure from the former model. Though faculty recognized the merits of this and in most cases thoroughly enjoyed their increased student mentorship, many faculty mentioned increased competing demands on their time. Student mentorship is extremely time consuming, thus cutting down on the time to write and publish. A few faculty divulged that the reinvented programs would not hesitate in asking a faculty member to leave the program if mentoring duties were not adequately fulfilled. This student focused approach is commendable, however, programs should consider balancing faculty workloads to ensure programs do not slip back into their old ways (Perry, Zambo & Wunder, 2015).

**Outcomes of Carnegie Project on the Education Dissertation**

The Carnegie Project on the Education Dissertation (CPED) has managed to stay relevant through consistent self and public reflection. CPED was founded to redesign the Ed.D. at 21 of its voluntary membership schools. Almost a decade later the Ed.D. has in fact morphed and now CPED is looking to expand its membership while creating branch initiatives which will bolster a reinvigorated Ed.D. programmatic offering throughout the United States. In 2016 CPED created its own peer reviewed journal, *Impacting Education: Journal on Transforming Professional Practice*. *Impacting Education* (IE) “is an international, peer reviewed, open-access journal
housed at the University of Pittsburgh. IE encourages the submission of research manuscripts, essays and book reviews authored by academics and practitioners that support the focus and scope of the journal” (Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, 2016). The creation of the journal significantly enhances the stature of the Ed.D. as it will serve as a respected receptacle of scholarly knowledge specifically for the Education Doctorate and the growth and renewal of professional practice within the education field.

Boyce’s 2012 study illustrates the outcomes of CPED and acknowledges the two common solutions for the mitigation of confusion surrounding the Ed.D. and Ph.D. in Education. She argues that the elimination of a degree is not a viable option and supports the redesign and refocusing of the Ed.D. in lieu of complete abandonment. Boyce (2012) highlights the University of Virginia (UVA) as an example of her stance on reform rather than abandonment of the Ed.D.. UVA successfully replaced its traditional dissertation with a capstone-dissertation hybrid rooted in action based research. Concurrent with the call for action based research, Boyce mentions the implementation of training experiences for Ed.D. students. Practica in local school districts and a higher education institutions would build student skill sets in both research and problem solving true to a scholar-practitioner model “…these problem-solving experiences would empower Ed.D candidates to use research in the form of disciplined inquiry to guide and study their own professional practices” (Boyce, 2012, p. 28).

The Doctorate of Education program redesign at the University of Virginia included a total of 54 hours of practica and action based research for each student coupled with relevant coursework in applied research. Each applied research course tied a practicum project to the course and spanned topic ranging from behavioral and organizational theory to adult learning and educational law to leadership. Boyce highlights the triumph of UVA’s redesign but
adequately acknowledges the troubles Ed.D. programs will continue to have in the immediate future regardless of redesign. The first is that faculty need to reexamine their long held belief systems concerning doctoral education. The majority of current faculty have been trained in the traditional, Germanic method of scholarship, learning and instruction. Therefore, it has proven to be difficult to incite true change via Ed.D. redesign if faculty understand that change and departure from tradition is the true essence of the practice based doctorates. Second, Boyce (2012) maintains the largest challenge ahead for the Ed.D. is convincing non-education faculty that Ed.D. and other practice based doctoral programs are as academically rigorous as Ph.D. programs. Further, Boyce implores faculty to support Ed.D. programs “…the burden of academic rigor for any program rests with the faculty within that unit. We must learn to trust our colleagues’ professional judgment and areas of expertise” (Boyce, 2012, p. 32). Essentially, redesigned Ed.D. programs must instill academic rigor, external scholars must see evidence the redesigned Ed.D. programs were designed with academic rigor.

Far from UVA, across the United States in the early 2000s, the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education started an initiative to change the school’s Ed.D. program according to the guidelines set forth by CPED. This well-established doctoral program started awarding Ed.D.s in 1931 and at one point in its history produced one third of all superintendents in the State of California (Rueda, Sundt, & Picus, 2013). The University of Southern California (USC) experienced many of the same problems common to Ed.D. programs. Specifically, confusion around the difference between the Ed.D. and the Ph.D. offerings, yet the Ed.D. was perceived as the lesser of the two degrees. General distrust between the tenured faculty and the clinical/practitioner based faculty was rampant. Due to a University wide focus on improving distinction and quality, this conflict magnified.
In 2001, several years before the formal start of CPED, USC began the decade long restructuring of their education doctoral programs. The changes commenced with a ‘Future Changes’ meeting between all faculty, staff and stakeholders in the two education doctoral programs. It was decided that the programs must be eliminated rather than tinkered with and rebuilt from the ground up, a very challenging feat to accomplish. Once all the students in the existing programs graduated, USC began a reverse engineering approach to building new education doctoral programs. First, they envisioned the type of graduate they desired for each program and worked their way backwards, thus, refocusing the new programs on the most important aspect of the doctoral degree, student outcomes. Second, and in close correlation with the Carnegie Project’s philosophy, USC built a competitive, rigorous Ed.D. program designed for working adults. They modeled their Ed.D. in the style of an executive MBA program which utilized a working professionals time in the most effective and efficient way. Admission requirements were changed and strengthened, students had to possess a master’s degree and have at minimum three years of post-master’s experience to be considered for the program.

Interestingly this change also multiplied the number of students allowed to matriculate into the program from a mere 20 to around 150. Perhaps most importantly, USC stopped asking what the faculty wanted and started asking what the students desired. This led to more night and weekend course offerings and a thematic approach to the dissertation. Online courses, specifically a one credit online asynchronous course which broke down the dissertation process and guided students at their own pace was an integral part of the new program. This also led to higher student satisfaction and perceived outcomes according to a WestEd study of the new USC Ed.D. program (Rueda, Sundt, & Picus, 2013). Students felt supported by a program which was both rigorous and understanding of a working adult student’s daily struggles as demonstrated by
some impressive programmatic statistics “…70.1 percent of students in cohorts starting in 2003 through 2009 have completed the program in three years…Our thematic dissertation efforts have paid off handsomely. We initially anticipated 80 percent of our students would participate in the thematic option…Over time, 93.3 percent of our students have taken the thematic dissertation path…” (Rueda, Sundt, & Picus, 2013 p. 263). Though it took USC a relatively long period of time to reinvent their Ed.D. program it was clearly worth the time and effort, their program now stands as a hallmark of education doctoral programs while bolstering the importance of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate.

**Online Education**

In the past two decades online education has made a distinctive impact on nearly every tier of the higher education world. Born as a cross between traditional distance learning and technology, the prevalence and reputation of online education has increased rapidly. In the 1980s the internet was not yet open to the public so the concept of the internet was not widely embraced. With the exception of computer companies and university research labs the internet was little used or known by the general public. So it was revolutionary when the first online degree program was developed at the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute (WBSI) in La Jolla, California. However, since the concept was so technologically novel it gained little traction (Hamilton & Feenberg 2012). However, in 1994 online courses gained traction when they were offered by Open University of Catalonia in Barcelona, Spain. Not long after in 1999 Jones International University, the first fully online college began offering its first online coursework in the United States (Pease, 2000).

Online education’s infancy was fraught with controversy as an industry famous for its emphasis on tradition faced a wave of change. Arguably, online education put student consumers
at the helm of inciting change, students demanded the option to have rigorous coursework taught in a more convenient format (Pease, 2000). Additionally, as the economic structure changed from a manufacturing, to a service and ultimately an information economy the need for working adults to improve their skillsets through education was more prevalent than ever before (Weller, 2016). According to Lederman “More than 6.7 million, or roughly a third, of all students enrolled in postsecondary education took an online course for credit in fall 2011” (2013, p. 1). Virtually all levels of higher education are represented through an online format. Students can take very basic level online courses at a public community college as well as doctoral level online courses at an Ivy League school and anything between, thus boosting the popularity and creditability of online courses.

However, online education’s fairly short history is not without industry pushback and controversy. It is important to note the main arguments against online education seemed to parallel arguments made against changing or improving education doctorates in general. Feenberg’s 2015 article identified and explored relevant and poignant arguments against the proliferation of online education. While Feenberg understands the importance and staying power of online education he points to several trends which seem to undermine the university system as a whole. He points to the increased trend of hiring less qualified non-tenure track instructors or adjuncts to teach courses once normally reserved for a tenure track professor. He acknowledges this trend happens in both the on-ground and online formats but argues that the online format has exacerbated the trend, “This trend reduces costs at the expense of graduate students and young faculty who can no longer expect the kind of academic careers their teachers enjoy” (Feenberg, 2015, p. 1). The devaluation of tenured faculty plays directly into Feenberg’s main argument that the automation of educational content delivery homogenizes the education experience and may
eventually exclude faculty all together. Online education allows a course to be developed and copied indefinitely, thus cutting the cost of faculty labor. Since faculty salaries make up a huge proportion of the overall higher education budget it makes sense to cut those costs by developing a tenured faculty quality course that can be taught by a non-tenured faculty member (Feenberg, 2015). Though initial course development costs may be high, Feenberg believes the longitudinal costs would be drastically lowered, something that will continue to devalue the academic profession and quality.

Regardless of the pushback, it is clear online courses are now an established part of the higher education industry as evidenced by growing student enrolments. Though online course offerings may equally appeal to both men and women, it seemed that women are in most need of online courses. A 2011 study by Arric et. al cites pursuing a graduate degree as a women can be more difficult than their male counterparts experience “primarily due to financial constraints, lack of affordable and flexible child care, and lack of health insurance, women graduate students with children are the single most at-risk population for attrition from their on-campus, full-time graduate programs” (p. 144). Arric et. al surmises women have reached parity in degree attainment in the past 15 years due to the availability and increase of online coursework. Women generally are responsible for balancing multiple responsibilities like family and community obligations, careers, homecare etc. In the past, these obligations would have prevented or slowed down graduate studies for women. Online courses have allowed women to pursue their advanced learning according to their busy schedule and from their homes or places of work. Price (2006) also found that women valued many unanticipated benefits from an asynchronous online format. Having an equal opportunity to participate in class is important to women. Online course formats provide them with a sense of anonymity and curtail perceived bias in the classroom giving the
students free intellectual reign to delve deeply into course topics. It was also found that flexibility was perceived as a main benefit of online coursework.

Muller (2008) conducted a seminal study on persistence rates of women in both undergraduate and graduate online programs. Remarkably her research reveals a juxtaposition between traditional doctoral classroom teaching methods and new student lead demand for online coursework. Muller found that online students tend to view themselves as customers, their needs and questions are expected to be answered in a timely, interactive and customer-service friendly way. Arguably, quite the opposite from doctoral education where much of the expectation for learning, problem solving and research is placed back on the student. Interestingly this directly corresponds with Rueda, Sundt, and Picus’ 2013 study on the University of Southern California’s recreation of their Ed.D. program to include involved faculty, online course format and an interactive responsive dissertation writing process.

Kumar and Dawson (2014) focus on how online doctoral programs can develop student professional growth. The study indicated “…that an online professional program embedded in practice can have substantial impact on students’ professional growth and professional practice” (p. 89). Kumar and Dawson (2014) studied the professional growth of 37 students enrolled in an online Ed.D. program. One student showcased in the study demonstrates the connection from the program to her professional practice well. This student runs a school which uses an expensive accelerated reading computer program, since the student was enrolled in an online Ed.D. program she learned the skills of research, read the scholarly studies on the accelerated reader and concluded it does not work. This saved her school precious funding and allowed her to reinvest those funds into more effective and impactful initiatives. They concluded the online format enabled her to be both a successful practitioner and student simultaneously. Similarly,
three common threads ran throughout each student’s testimonial. First, they were able to fulfill academic and other obligations while remaining in their professional practice environments due to the online format of their program. Second, they believed their reflective and transformative learning was bolstered by participating in online program activities. Lastly, the online Ed.D. students thought they were better equipped to facilitate change since they could take the scholarly practices learned in class and immediately apply them to their professional practice. Students were not forced to choose between their practice or studies, but successfully tackled both (Kumar & Dawson, 2014).

Similarly, Fuller et al. (2014) studied the reflections of students in an online doctoral program in educational technology. “Due to the newness of these (online doctoral) degree programs, there is a dearth of information in the literature on learner perspectives of effective online teaching and learning strategies” (Fuller et al., 2014, p. 73). Their research specifically highlights coursework and instructional design rather than general student reflections about the program. Though the program was deemed a success by its students there were some key factors in need of improvement. The first was a need for developing a social presence in the virtual classroom. It was noted that an initial orientation from day one needed to occur, that way more sincere social connectedness could organically grow in the virtual classroom. Another issue identified was the need for faculty to address and help those online learners who were unfamiliar with online learning itself (Fuller et al., 2014). Since Ed.D. cohorts tend to be diverse in age, experience and technical ability there was a learning curve for many students. Similarly, online programs needed to devote more resources helping improve students’ writing skills. Some students had been out of school for decades and their skillsets were lacking the technical and
analytical acumen for academic writing. It was concluded, supporting online students in these areas would positively influence their perceived doctoral outcomes.

**Conclusion**

The history of doctoral degrees is long and steeped in tradition. The Education Doctorate (Ed.D) has a short but volatile past, spurring pioneering initiatives like the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate to incite change. These changes have strengthened the argument that leaders in education need intrepid and relevant doctoral programs with clear educational outcomes for any real change to occur in the United States’ education system. Women now outnumber men in overall degree attainment and in online Ed.D. programs, representing one of the many changes occurring in higher education. Online studies have become more important than ever before yet, it is apparent there is little recent scholarly research on students enrolled in online education doctoral programs.

**Non-Academic Student Outcomes**

Academia is fueled by tradition and arguably resistant to change. Brody, a President of Johns Hopkins University recently wrote that if one was to walk into a classroom in 1900s America and into one now, you would not be able to tell the difference. Classroom pedagogy has stayed relatively the same with the exception of online learning (Feenberg, 2015). According to Golde (2006) the problems in the education world are rapidly changing yet the doctoral programs charged with preparing leaders to solve these problems are all too often churning out doctorates who “…are ill-prepared to function effectively in the settings in which they work” (p. 5). When students do not possess the skillsets needed to successfully grapple with problems of practice their non-academic perceived outcomes can be greatly affected. This includes but is not limited
to personal outcomes like confidence and self-worth, professional outcomes like the ability to attain and successfully participate in high level education leadership positions, and the financial implications of increased career opportunity. Or, in the case of an ill prepared student, job loss or demotion.

As noted by Muller (2008) online doctoral students view themselves as student customers, therefore outcomes and preparedness are held extremely high when choosing, completing and ultimately using a doctoral degree. Halse and Mowbray (2011) cite the modern doctorate “…as both a process and a product” (p. 514) a departure from the long tradition of Ph.D. education which is judged by the ability to secure grant funding, scholarly placements, and research productivity. Kumar and Dawson (2014) discovered there was little literature concerning the impact of a professional practice doctorate, especially in the field of education. Similarly, it was found that the impact of a professional practice doctorate remained unclear and undefined in the little scholarly research found. Zambo et al. (2014) echoes “There is a scarcity of research on students in newly designed or redesigned Ed.D. programs” (p. 127) referring to CPED influenced programmatic outcomes.

Financial and Professional

Zambo et al. (2014) found “Those with professional and career-related goals sought an Ed.D. in order to move up the career ladder, have more options, be marketable, and feel secure in their position” (p. 131). Clearly, many students enrolling in CPED Ed.D. programs are interested in the associated career outcomes and advantages they may provide. Since CPED Ed.D. programs inherently emphasize and incorporate relevant work experience into their programs, it is no surprise the perceived outcomes also accentuate career success.
As mentioned before, there is a scarcity of recent data studying the perceptions of Ed.D. students much of the literature combines studies about the professional practice doctorate, a category of degree the Ed.D. falls into (Zambo et al., 2014). In 2004 Scott et al. studied professional practice doctoral (PPD) students and found that students pursue PPDs for extrinsic and intrinsic reasons. Interestingly, they found a continuum of varied enrollment reasons dependent on years of work experience. Those who pursued a PPD for professional development (extrinsic reasoning) were considered new in their professions. They saw the PPD as a means to advance their careers by becoming experts in the field. Correspondingly, more seasoned professionals sought a professional practice degree for career advancement and industry knowledge yet they had intrinsic motivation as well. For example, mid-career students desired more security in their current jobs while developing their leadership skillsets and contributing to their profession (Scott, 2004). Arguably, career aspirations were the main reason students started an Ed.D. program. Likewise, it is the top outcome students who have completed the program highlight. However, this is only true for students in the beginning to mid-level of their careers. Desiring an intellectual challenge and other purely intrinsic goals were characteristics of a much older, well established students. Students whose careers were seasoned sought a PPD for intrinsic personal and professional reasons. These students were little concerned with theory but wanted to spur research that made a difference in their industries while simultaneously developed self-discovery and fulfillment (Scott, 2004).

**Personal**

Studies which captured the outcomes and student goals in Ed.D. programs revealed a surprising amount of personal aspiration. Debatably, career advancement and security are desired student outcomes, yet students’ personal outcomes are much more nuanced and diverse. Zambo
et al. studied 266 current students and graduates from CPED Ed.D. programs seven years after programmatic redesigns. The researchers hoped to capture “…students’ perspectives of newly designed and redesigned Ed.D. programs” (Zambo, 2014, p. 131). The intrinsic desire to change themselves and the world around them ranked very high with students in Zambo et al.’s study. Ely’s (1978) study on inciting change found a main condition for change is discontent with the status quo. Students in Zambo et al. sought to incite substantive transformation through the leadership learned in the Ed.D. program and then, alter stale policies and systems. Students cited the importance of becoming change agents in their own lives.

Amrein-Beardsley et al. (2012) focused on the more personal affects Ed.D. programs have on graduates via interviews and exit surveys. It was found that students were empowered to address social justice, motivation and achievement challenges not only in their careers but in their personal lives due to their doctoral studies. The students highly valued a sense of community they had built, hoping to carry on their relationships far past graduation. Lastly, the students hoped to leverage their strong academic community during their careers, looking to collectively problem solve and data share rather than working in alone (Amrein-Beardsley et al., 2012).

Sweitzer (2009) studied the importance of doctoral student social networking both during and after doctoral study, another area that lacks appropriate study. Though Sweitzer mainly focused on traditional Ph.D. programs, the information found can be considered universal across all doctoral programs. Sweitzer concludes that social networks are more important than ever due to the increasing demands on tenure track faculty and on students in general. Her study reveals that often, personal and professional lives merge, thus drastically affecting a student’s identity. Additionally, she argues “…that most, if not all, individuals rely on relationships in and out of
the work context to provide support, advice, guidance, and nurturing. Doctoral students are no different…” (Sweitzer, 2009, p. 30). Lastly, Sweitzer also points to a severe lack of scholarly research on students’ personal perceptions after graduation.

Conclusion

The lack of scholarly research on the perceptions and outcomes of Ed.D. students after graduation is troubling. Much of the research focuses on two main aspects: The first seeks to understand why a student enrolls in an Ed.D. program while the second focuses on what students would like their outcomes to be after graduation. Very few studies actually capture the lived experiences and views of Ed.D. students, especially CPED education doctoral students six months to five years after graduation. This lack of literature could be attributed to the CPEDs relatively new impact on the Ed.D., it has only been nine years since CPED’s creation. However, this does not mitigate the need to know how these programs affect women’s lives financially, professionally and personally in the long term.

Summary

The histories of women, higher education and the Education Doctorate Ed.D. are rich and interwoven with struggle, confusion and innovation. Some Ed.D.s have been reinvented, experiencing a renaissance and refocusing. Though the CPED initiative is still young by most higher education standards, this refocusing has turned the CPED Ed.D. from a muddled lesser respected degree into, what may be an innovative, pointed and cutting edge professional practice degree. This may be a mammoth advancement for women as the majority of Ed.D. holders are women. As previously noted, there is a tendency for a women majority program to be categorized as lesser than or less creditable than academic programs/careers mostly populated by
men. However, a renewed interest and respect for the Ed.D. may help assuage the pink collar
ghetto effect. The purpose of this study was to investigate individual experiences of women who
graduated 6 months to 5 years ago from an Ed.D. program. These women worked fulltime while
enrolled in a part-time online CPED Ed.D. program. Capturing and understanding their
perceptions of education as a way toward self-actualization and increased professional
opportunity was essential to this study. Primarily, the study looked to understand why women are
enrolling in and completing Doctorates of Education (Ed.D.) in ever-increasing numbers
regardless of growing demands on their personal and professional time.
Chapter Three: Research Design

This study explored the lived experiences and reflections of women who have graduated from an online Education Doctorate (Ed.D.) program designed according to the guidelines set forth by the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED). This chapter described the study’s research design and impetus behind the selection of methodology. First, the chapter explored the research design and why it was chosen for this study. Second, the chapter focused on presenting a thorough explanation of how the study was conducted, focusing on ethical procedures, the researcher’s positionality and trustworthiness, and the potential for limitations.

Research Question

The main research question of this study sought to better understand the time after a woman graduates from an online Ed.D. program. Specifically, had women found their experience and the actual earned degree to be worth it relative to their personal, financial and professional lives? How had these demands affected a woman’s lived experiences 6 months to 5 years after completing an Ed.D. degree? This inquiry was inspired by Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs framework which took into account the various levels of motivation, goals and needs people in a Western culture must fulfill in order to reach their own version of self-actualization. Additionally, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs addressed human life goals as a perpetual story rather than a stagnant linear process.

Qualitative Research Approach

This study sought to understand the research question through qualitative methods. “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.3). According to Creswell (2007) qualitative research begins with an
assumption, a potential theoretical lens, and a world view. Qualitative research explores issues concerning the meaning of social or human problems individuals and groups may experience in their lives. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) have studied the practice of qualitative research extensively, their definition of qualitative research has changed as the field grew and morphed. To them, qualitative research “…involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world…qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). The fundamental aspect of true qualitative study is to capture participants’ world-views, experience and thoughts in their natural setting rather than a “contrived situation” (Creswell, p. 37) like a laboratory or by sending out static surveys. Foremost, qualitative study captures the essence of a subject’s life and experience rather than merely testing a theory or variables within a study (Patton, 2002).

Several hallmarks of qualitative inquiry can be found in nearly any study qualitative study. The first is researcher as a key instrument emphasizing researcher involvement in actually collecting data through naturalistic observation, examining documents, and interviewing participants. Typically qualitative researchers rely on themselves rather than collecting data with instruments developed by other researchers or questionnaires (Creswell, 2012; Hatch, 2002). Second, according to LeCompte and Schensul (1999), Marshall and Rossman (2006) and Creswell (2012) multiple sources of data are important to qualitative inquiry. Multiple forms of data such as interviews and observations are collected rather than a single data source. Reviewing the data, organizing it and then making sense of the data allow researchers to draw themes and conclusions across all forms of information. Similarly this helps the researcher stay focused on what the participants believe the meaning of problem is, rather than the researcher projecting their beliefs and conclusions (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Inductive data analysis
allows qualitative researchers to work with deduced patterns and themes from a “bottom-up” model. Researchers may work with emerging themes while interacting with participants drawing out and shaping “abstractions that emerge from the process” (Creswell, 2012, p. 39). Arguably emergent design may be one of the most important distinguishing factors in a qualitative study. The initial projection or plan for a qualitative study cannot be easily prescribed. To clarify, it is highly likely that a researcher’s form of data collection will shift and questions may change once the researcher enters the field to collect data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Hatch, 2002).

Another key indicator of qualitative study is the researcher’s theoretical lens. At times a study may organize around a historical, political or even social identity or context. “Qualitative researchers often use a lens to view their studies, such as the concept of culture, central to ethnography, or gendered, racial, or class differences from the theoretical orientations…”(Creswell, 2012, p. 39). Correspondingly, interpretive inquiry reflects what the researcher herself hears, sees and understands. It is important to acknowledge the impossibility of separating a researcher’s interpretations from her own context, background and history. Concurrently, the readers of the research also interpret the study according to their own lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The last hallmark of qualitative study is taking a holistic view of social phenomena; essentially, the researcher is responsible for constructing a macro view of the findings (Hatch, 2002).

**Philosophical Assumptions**

Philosophically, this qualitative study supported the constructivism-interpretivism paradigm which is generally perceived as the traditional approach to qualitative inquiry (Ponterotto, 2005). Constructivists argue that realities are self-defined and do not rely on universal truths to explain individual lived experiences and that multiple realities exist for each
individual. As mentioned previously, the role of the researcher is extremely important within this paradigm. Constructivists highly value the interactions between the researcher and the participant in order to draw mutual qualitative conclusions within the inquiry. Therefore the researcher is critical to this type of qualitative research (Creswell, 2012). Similarly, this study was rooted in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory, which relied upon both the researcher and the participants’ reflections on self-actualization in order to gauge whether fulfillment of one’s perceived potential has been met. Further, if self-actualization had not been met, the theory points to several levels and percentages of each individual’s needs being met on the journey to fulfillment and self-actualization. The interpretivist-constructivist paradigm paired with the theory of self-actualization befitted this quantitative inquiry well; participant self-reflection, value systems and perceptions were vital to this study as was the researcher’s interpretation and positionality.

**Methodology**

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is the methodology employed in this study. IPA is a fairly novel methodology introduced in a mid-1990s psychology journal paper by Jonathon Smith. Smith called for a shift in traditional quantitative research paradigms so commonly utilized in psychology, advocating for qualitative and experiential dimensions to be included in modern psychological research (Smith et al., 2009). Since interpretative phenomenological analysis’ relatively recent inception, the method has quickly increased in popularity. Originally a psychological concept it has flourished and been used in many academic disciplines including but not limited to business, sexuality, sociology, anthropology, education, health and organizational psychology (Smith, 2011).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis is rooted in phenomenology and hermeneutics, focusing on how certain phenomena are interpreted by specific people in a given context.
Typically these are experiences of a personal nature which are highly concentrated in major life events or relationships (Smith, 2007). This study sought to understand a select group of individuals’, their perspectives and interpretations of a life event while also surveying their relationships during and after this life event. Therefore, given those parameters, interpretative phenomenological analysis was an appropriate method to facilitate the research needed to answer the thesis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Interpretative phenomenological analysis is defined by the following three theoretical pillars: idiography, phenomenology, and hermeneutics (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

**Idiography.** According to Gill (2014) “IPA’s idiographic nature separates it from most other phenomenological methodologies” (p. 126). Idiography maintains the unique essence of each research participant, though, the IPA methodology is flexible enough to accommodate larger focus groups. An idiographic approach suggests that all people are unique, therefore studying them in an individual way is necessary. Idiography provides a more complete understanding of the individual than other forms of phenomenological and nomothetic research (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The spirit of IPA research is exemplified by the individual cases collected, the details drawn from those cases and the intricacies of each distinct case. IPA also facilitates the collating of these details and intricacies so high level themes may emerge, creating an intersection of individual experiences and communal trends.

**Phenomenology.** According to Moran (2000) a phenomenon is anything that appears to someone in their conscience experience, thus creating phenomenology as the study of phenomena. Phenomenology is the study of personal experience. Phenomenological experience however, is far more complicated a concept than traditional definitions of “experience”. Existence or the act of being must always be in relation to a phenomena, giving each human
experience context. However, it is important to understand the origins of this theoretical approach to research, “While a variety of philosophers have advanced and developed phenomenology, most types of phenomenology draw principally from the work of Edmund Husserl or Martin Heidegger” (Gill, 2014, p.119). Husserl and Heidegger are the fathers of the two divergent yet coinciding phenomenological branches: descriptive and interpretive.

Husserl, a German philosopher, is regarded as the founder of phenomenology. His transcendental phenomenology was born of Husserl’s insistence on the exhaustive investigation of the human experience in a natural setting, ultimately allowing for the transcendence of typical assumptions about the world. Husserl used epoché or bracketing to segregate one’s predeterminations and bias about the surrounding world, enabling a true and strong understanding of the phenomenon itself (Smith et al., 2009). This also ‘purified’ the phenomena from associations with everyday life (Husserl, 2012).

A student of Husserl, Martin Heidegger developed his own version of phenomenology diverging from Husserl’s transcendent descriptive philosophy. Heidegger focused on the act of being combined with hermeneutics, coining the term Dasein, “‘Self and world belong together in the single entity, Dasein’” (Heidegger, 1988, p. 297). He defines the methodological meaning as interpretation rather than describing the phenomena. Interpretation is an integral aspect of descriptive phenomenological research.

**Hermeneutics.** Hermeneutics is essential to IPA, it is a theory of interpretation distinguishing IPA from other forms of phenomenology. In its inception hermeneutics started as the theory of text interpretation originally applied to biblical scriptures. However, it has since been expanded to theories of general interpretation, taken out of its more literal context and thrust into theories like IPA (Grondin, 1994). Understanding the true intent of an original text
and capturing its essence through translation is a critical point in hermeneutics theory. Further, a researcher/interpreter must look beyond the written words on a page and dig deeply into the layers of meaning behind each word (Smith et al., 2009). The layers behind each word are clues to context, perspective and ultimately, lived experiences. This conclusion of lived experience can be accomplished by two styles of hermeneutics, critical or empathetic. Critical interpretation (the outside perspective) demands the interpreter remove herself from a situation in order to observe the layers of lived experience from an unbiased perspective. Conversely, empathetic hermeneutics (the inside perspective) delves the interpreter deeply into a situation so that empathy and a comparison of lived experiences emerge (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

**Rationale for IPA**

IPA research amplifies the voices of participants by recording an intricate analysis of their lived experiences. Yet, IPA is a malleable method, the rules of the methodology do not muffle the uniqueness of each participant. Profound stories about the human spirit and experience can flourish within IPA while still categorizing these unique happenings into a comprehensive analysis (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

This study interconnected well with IPA as it sought to understand the unique lived experiences of women who worked fulltime while completing their education doctorate online. The main premise of an IPA study is to interview participants who care deeply about the research question and give them a forum to tell their stories in. Giving a voice to those who normally would have no forum to speak in was a significant facet of this study (Smith et al., 2009). According to Kramarae (2001) taking online courses rather than being in the classroom can be an isolating and lonely experience for students. Correspondingly, Brailsford (2010) cites the dissertation writing process as being very lonely for most students who are used to a tightknit
cohort community and see their classmates every week. Conversely, online doctorate students do not have this weekly person to person connection with their classmates due to the online format, giving them less opportunity to share their personal stories, struggles and to bond in-person regularly. Lastly, according to Arric et. al (2011) more women than men are enrolled in, and positively impacted by online coursework (at the undergraduate and graduate level). Therefore, it was important to give these women an opportunity to voice their experiences as online doctoral students in hopes of both proliferating their stories and as a catalyst for creating positive change for future online doctoral students.

**Participants**

According to Smith et al. (2009) a sample of participants who can speak in depth about the research topic should be chosen and as a result IPA sampling should be small and consistent. The sample consisted of six women who worked fulltime while completing an online Ed.D. degree. All participants were interviewed over the phone or through video teleconferencing software.

**Sample Characteristics.** IPA research relies on context and pooling the unique experiences of individuals into group similarities, therefore, a uniform sample of participants is necessary for IPA research (Smith et al., 2009). Consequently, this study sought to recruit participants who identified as women ages 24 to 65, who worked fulltime while enrolled in an online education doctoral program. Participants graduated from their program no less than 6 months before the interview and no longer than 5 years from the time of interview. No race, ethnicity or socio-economic level was excluded except for those who identify as men. Though male lived experiences are important, the majority of those pursuing an education doctorate were women, so it was important to understand this growing demographic. To determine who
qualified as a participant, social and professional networks were used to actively select potential candidates.

**Sampling Procedures.** Purposeful sampling, the practice of selecting participants who can inform the research question, was utilized to recruit participants (Creswell, 2007). Purposeful sampling provided a group of participants who experienced a specific phenomenon for study uniformity (Smith et al., 2009). Purposefully selected recruits practices occurred as follows:

a) Higher education list-serves and personal contacts were used to find potential participants fitting the criteria.

b) Potential candidates were identified and invited to participate by email (see Appendix A). The written request included a short synopsis of what the study premise and criteria entailed, followed by an invitation to engage in a private question and answer session between the researcher and the potential participant via phone call or email.

c) If the researcher did not get a response within one week to the initial email the researcher resent the recruitment email and/or called or texted the participant (see Appendix B for recruitment message).

d) When the participant showed interest in participating the researcher and participant engaged in a private question and answer session via phone call or email so the participant could ask questions about the study freely. When the participant agreed to participate in the study, the researcher confirmed a mutually convenient date and time for the interview. No remuneration was offered.

**Research Site.** This study was not limited to one particular research site due to the population sought and nature of the study. This study specifically worked with students who already graduated from their Education Doctorate (Ed.D.) programs and was not be limited
to a specific program, school or location. This study was inherently remote and sans physical site, representing participants who met on an intangible online platform to complete their coursework rather than a physical site. In that vein, participant location was varied, though most were concentrated in the Northeastern region of the United States.

**Procedures**

This study followed standard IPA research recommendations. The IPA methodology influenced the research design, the research question, data collection and meaning-making within this study. Details about data collection and analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, bias and limitations can be found in the text below.

**Data Collection**

The data for this IPA study was collected once Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted. The researcher first collected the signed informed consent form (see Appendix C) and answered any additional questions participants had prior to the start of interviews. Additionally, the interviewer verified any biographical and categorical details that remained unclear as a secondary check which ensured the participant was a satisfactory candidate for participation. Additionally, each participant was given their own pseudonym in lieu of their true identities, they could change the pseudonym at any time (Creswell, 2007).

Interviews were conducted at a mutually convenient location and time. Each interview was recorded using digital software in addition to the researcher taking detailed notes (with the participant’s permission). Each interview lasted between 30 minutes to an hour. Most questions asked to participants were denoted through a prescribed semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix D). However, through organic conversation the researcher asked questions not found
on the interview protocol. Participants were often asked to delve more deeply into a topic or concept. All questions were open ended and the interview was flexible concurrent with IPA guidelines. Questions from the interview protocol were in some cases asked out of order depending on how the participant’s answers flowed and appropriateness of each question to the context of the situation. The researcher remained an active listener and encouraged participants to elaborate throughout the interview concurrent with Smith et al. (2009) recommendations. Lastly, each participant was emailed a copy of an interview synthesis which validated the researcher’s factual interpretations (Creswell, 2007) (See Appendix E: Syntheses 1-6).

Security and maintaining the anonymity of all participants was very important to the researcher. Participant names, places of work, names of associates and doctoral programs were revealed in the study. Participants were not asked to provide names in their testimonial. Additionally, each participant was given a pseudonym for tracking, confidentiality and publishing purposes. Participants were selected from a wide demographic of backgrounds and geography so reasonable deduction of their identity was difficult or impossible. To ensure confidentiality all interview materials were kept on a thumb drive which, when not in use were locked in the researcher’s desk drawer (the researcher was the only one with key access to the drawer). Only the corresponding participant and the researcher had access to the data and transcripts.

Lastly, all written correspondence with the interviewee before, during or after data collection was deleted no more than nor less than three years after dissertation defense.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through several steps relative to traditional IPA analysis structure. Some of the steps allowed the researcher to isolate each participant interview for
analysis which preserved the individual uniqueness of each case. Once all the participant interviews were conducted and analyzed individually the last step was employed. This final step allowed the researcher to cross analyze all interviews so important overarching themes were deduced (Smith et al., 2009). Throughout the entire analysis process the researcher was actively thinking about, reflecting on, and interacting with the data in an effort to create context and connection with participant lived experiences. Once superordinate themes were inferred they were cross-referenced or ‘fit’ into Maslow’s hierarchy of needs for additional phenomenological context (Maslow, 1943).

1) The researcher’s main goal during this initial step was to be thoroughly acquainted with the participant, their interview, what they said and how they said it. All of these elements helped build participant context and assisted in pulling out small yet important intricacies (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher listened to the participant recording several times, then read through the transcript at least three times, highlighting and bracketing unique attributes that stood out while endeavoring to bracket any bias or predetermined ideas.

2) The researcher also focused on the minutia of the interview highlighting and making small notes. Each line of the transcript was analyzed picking out the narrative flow and meaning of the participant’s words. Next descriptive summaries were written by the researcher, she noted how the participant said words rather than just the literal meaning.

3) The researcher attempted to make cursory interpretations while pulling out developed themes. This included connecting patterns and correlations from the notes taken in previous steps. Lastly, the researcher reflected and took notes on these reflections as evidence of later interpretive claims.
4) Overarching themes emerged during this phase of analysis. It also created concrete context about the participant, their experiences and even how they answered interview questions. Steps 1-4 were conducted until all participant interviews had been categorized and analyzed individually.

5) The last step in analysis simply prompted the researcher to look for overarching themes across all participant interviews (Smith et al., 2009).

**Ethical Considerations**

This study was conducted with the utmost attention for minimized participant and third party risks. The likelihood of risks impacting participants’ daily life and functioning were miniscule, especially as all aspects concerning identity of the participant and doctoral program were kept anonymous. There were no known risks to participants in this study. All participants, their places of work and schools were completely anonymous. To abate social harm all participants were consenting, well-informed adults. Participants clearly understood that they could withdraw from the study at any time, that they were not required to answer any question they preferred not to answer, and that no penalties would be held against them if they decided to no longer participate. Participants were notified of their risks, how the study would be conducted, analyzed and the unlikely possibility of discomfort in clear, concise language that was at an 8th grade reading/speaking level or below.

The data collected was stored on a thumb drive specifically designated for this study. All data, including audio recordings were destroyed no less than nor longer than three years after dissertation defense. Data was retained for at least three years in the event the dissertation required edits or a second look at that data. Consent forms were sent digitally, the researcher has kept them on a thumb drive, locked in her desk drawer for three years.
Trustworthiness

Several precautions were taken by the researcher in order to maintain trustworthiness of the data and analysis. The first was to collect the data consistently and with integrity. All participants had the opportunity to choose how they were interviewed, where and whether or not to answer certain questions. Participants were given the opportunity to member-check their contributions through a detailed synthesis the researcher authored. The synthesis included facts and quotes from the participant as well as the researcher’s interpretation of the participant’s thoughts, feelings and perceptions. Concurrent with IPA methodology participants were encouraged to fact check but not to change the way the researcher interpreted the interview. Valid feedback from participants was incorporated into the final version of the dissertation. There were also two external readers charged with vetting the validity and integrity of findings within the dissertation ensuring the data was consistent and transferable.

Potential Research Bias

The researcher’s interest in the research question stems from her own experience as a woman who worked fulltime as a higher education admissions professional while pursuing her online Ed.D. degree. Through her own lived experience the researcher believed there was an important phenomena occurring which needed further exploration. Additionally, the researcher’s professional life involved attracting and enrolling top candidates into a brick and mortar Ed.D. program in the Northeast United States, a program toying with the idea of offering a fully online option. The program also primarily attracts women who are highly accomplished in their professional lives and often lead full personal lives. Therefore, the researcher was fully invested in researching student experience and supporting student voices so improvements and progress could be made.
Writers usually hold preconceived notions about their research due to opinions, attachments, and personal experiences, it is clear the researcher could relate to the participants well (Machi & McEvoy, 2012). However, the utilization of empathetic hermeneutics (the inside perspective) allowed the researcher to leverage this inherent bias. A deep analysis and comparison of participant lived experiences occurred with empathetic hermeneutics (Smith & Eatough, 2007). Similarly, the researcher exercised Husserl’s concept of bracketing, making herself aware of potential biases and casting them aside for the sake of analysis.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study that should be noted. The first concerns generalizability of findings which was difficult since the sample size was small; the heart of this study was to capture the individual lived experiences of each participant. Therefore, it cannot be concluded that this study was representative of all women’s experiences. Similarly, the next limitation deals with race and ethnicity. This study has touched upon race as a factor of lived experiences through the literature review and research findings however, this study did not expressly or explicitly include different racial viewpoints yet, it did not exclude them either. The purposive participant sample strove to include as many races and/or ethnicities as possible nevertheless, this model is not explicitly built into the sampling criteria. Third, this study is limited to women’s perspectives, while some of the data collected may be transferrable to men and their experiences it was an inherent limitation of the study. Lastly, the research was collected via open ended interview questions, therefore each participant answer was vastly different in content, length, detail and depth. Which made cross-analysis for themes very difficult.
Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

Women comprise the majority student population in many Doctor of Education programs in the United States today, with their numbers rapidly increasing (England et al., 2007). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate individual experiences of women who worked fulltime while enrolled in an online Ed.D. program. The goal was to capture and understand their perceptions of doctoral education as a way toward self-actualization and increased professional opportunities. Primarily, the study looked to understand the phenomena of women enrolling in and completing Doctorates of Education (Ed.D) in growing numbers, regardless of ever-increasing demands on their personal and professional time. Knowledge generated was expected to inform the development of Ed.D. programs. Second, to educate graduate admissions circles about their core enrollment pool through evaluating student experience and outcomes after graduation. This study also served as a scholarly and reliable source of information for women who may considering enrolling in an online Ed.D. program.

Data Demographics

This study explored the stories of six women who attended and graduated from a Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) sponsored online Education Doctoral program. The study guidelines called for women of all races and backgrounds aged 24-65 to be considered for the study. Additionally, all women had graduated from their respective doctoral program no less than 6 months and no more than 5 years prior to the interview. All women could be considered a part of the well-educated middle to upper-middle class at the time of interview. Though participants from all over the United States were invited to participate, the actual participants lived on the United States Eastern seaboard, with the majority living in the Northeast. Four of the six participants identified as Caucasian, one identified as Caucasian Latina...
and the other participant identified as African American. Participant ages ranged from 33 to 60 at the time of interview. Interestingly, a majority of the women worked in K-12 education as former teachers and current administrators, only a select few had higher education or other employment backgrounds.

Half of the women were married while the other half were either single or divorced. A majority of the women had multiple children and were either parenting and/or pregnant while completing their doctoral work. Most importantly all of the participants were working fulltime in an education related field while enrolled in their online Ed.D. programs. All participants continued to work fulltime after graduation, this included the time of the interview (note: one participant was on maternity leave from her fulltime job at the time of interview). Lastly, the majority of participants took an average of 3-4 total years to complete their doctoral coursework and dissertation. However, one participant completed the doctoral journey in just 2 years while another took over 7 years (note: the program this participant was enrolled in mandates all degrees must be conferred within 7 years, this particular student was able to petition an extension).

Participants

Dr. White was a Caucasian woman in her early 40s living in the Northeast with her husband and children at the time of interview. Dr. White was a part-time faculty member and had her own private practice where she worked as an educational consultant and career coach. Dr. White had been out of her doctoral program for nearly two years.

Dr. Red was a Caucasian Latina in her early 30s currently who lived in the Northeast at the time of interview. She was not married and did not have children, yet maintained a close
relationship with her sister and mother. Dr. Red worked full-time as an assistant principal at a high school, however, she started her career as an English and literacy teacher. Dr. Red graduated from her doctoral program nearly 4 years ago.

Dr. Rose was a Caucasian woman in her late 30s living in the Northeast with her husband of 5 years and two young children (a 4 year old and an infant). At the time of interview she was an assistant principal, however, she began her career as a biology teacher. She has been graduated from the program for 7 months.

Dr. Blue was a Caucasian woman in her late 40s living in the Northeast. She had never been married or had children. Dr. Blue had a diverse and long career in the education field. She was a school teacher, assistant principal, principal, school leader and now works for a company which evaluates education programs. Dr. Blue was the type of person who needs a change and/or challenge in her professional life every 5-7 years. This drive to improve and challenge herself led her to seek out a doctoral program. Dr. Blue graduated from her program almost 4 years ago.

Dr. Silver was a 41 year old African American woman who grew up in the U.S. Virgin Islands and at the time of interview lived in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States with her three children. She was divorced at the time of interview. Dr. Silver had a 17 year long career as a school psychologist, she has also taught undergraduate psychology courses, and is an independent contractor for an organization specializing in math, science and reading intervention. Dr. Silver describes herself as a special education advocate working tirelessly in her school district to educate and help parents of special needs children. Dr. Silver has been graduated from her program almost 4 years.
Dr. Gold was a 60 year old Caucasian woman living with her husband in the Northeast at the time of interview. Dr. Gold had two adult children and a vibrant career as a vice president of institutional advancement for a public university. She was fairly new to her this position and university having started less than a year prior. She has been in the higher education industry for many years and completed her Ed.D. one year ago.

Table A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identifier</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Years to degree completion</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. White</td>
<td>Early 40s</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Red</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>Latina/Cauc.</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Blue</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Dr. Rose</td>
<td>Late 30s</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Silver</td>
<td>Early 40s</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor Gold</td>
<td>Early 60s</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Widowed/Married for Second Time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis. After each interview was conducted and recorded the researcher began the analysis for themes. The interviews were listened to fully and detailed notes were taken during the interview. Interpretive analysis began with the researcher synthesizing each interview into a 2-3 page summary. The summary included factual information, researcher interpretations and direct quotes from the participants. After each participant member checked their synthesis for factual accuracy the researcher pulled out reoccurring themes from the text. After again listening to the interviews and reading through the notes and synthesis, themes were apparent. Each theme was placed in Table B below. Once all potential themes were identified some of the less
prevailing themes were pared down and taken out of the table or combined with other like themes. Once a solid list of themes was compiled, Figures 1-3 were created to show how each individual theme was related on a macro level.

**Figure 1**
Figure 2

Alignment of needs and lifestyle

Value of an online or hybrid format

Figure 3

Overall Satisfaction

Personal life satisfaction

Professional and financial outcomes

Disatisfaction in personal life led to eventual satisfaction
Table B: Table of themes from Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Answer number/Participant</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resiliency</strong></td>
<td>Q1/Dr. Red</td>
<td>“During the dissertation my Dad died of cancer”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hard work</strong></td>
<td>Q23/Dr. Blue</td>
<td>“…it should be hard work and a lot of it is perseverance”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality</strong></td>
<td>Q12A/Dr. Silver</td>
<td>“I almost ruled out ‘UM’ completely because it wasn’t online, CFPU is a quality program”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time Management</strong></td>
<td>Q9/Dr. White</td>
<td>“It was a juggling act, always prioritizing, often I was like a chicken with its head cut off, at times it was very stressful”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support</strong></td>
<td>Q7/Dr. Rose</td>
<td>“My Husband said, ‘you need to get this (the doctorate) and we will do whatever it takes’”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Luck</strong></td>
<td>Q23/Dr. White</td>
<td>“I am incredibly fortunate”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alignment of needs</strong></td>
<td>Q18C/Dr. Gold</td>
<td>“Wouldn’t have done it without it being online”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value of online format</strong></td>
<td>Q11/Dr. Rose</td>
<td>“The more I got used to online the more I liked it”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfaction</strong></td>
<td>Q15Bii/Dr. Gold</td>
<td>“I am thrilled to be done with it, very satisfied with it”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Satisfaction</strong></td>
<td>Q20/Dr. Blue</td>
<td>“I had been in a 20 year relationship, after I finished the Ed.D. we split up”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional &amp; Financial Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>Q18/Dr. Blue</td>
<td>“I took a pay cut but my satisfaction in life was higher”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*is a superordinate theme
Superordinate Theme One: Resiliency, Grit and Perseverance, as Means to Satisfaction

All women interviewed in this study mentioned incidences of resiliency, grit or perseverance, in many cases the women demonstrated all three on a daily basis. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines resilience as “…the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. It means "bouncing back" from difficult experiences” (APA, 2017, para. 4). Duckworth et al. (2007) describes grit as:

“…perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina. Whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the course (p. 1087-1088).

All participants had to exercise perseverance throughout their doctoral journey with the vast majority of issues stemming from personal tragedy, workplace stress and general life complications. In many cases participants anticipated potential issues while pursuing their degrees however, they decided to enroll anyway.

Fulltime Work. The majority of traditional doctoral students do not work fulltime while pursuing their doctoral degrees, as work adds a complicated layer to an already dense and difficult process (Offerman, 2011). All of these women demonstrated resiliency, grit and perseverance in some form by continuing to work fulltime in the education field while pursuing coursework and personal endeavors. Dr. Red mentioned she had no choice but to work fulltime
while pursuing her Doctorate of Education, even though it would have been far easier for her and less stressful to proceed only as a fulltime student. For Dr. Red the thought of not working fulltime while taking classes was almost comical.

“That’s (working fulltime while enrolled in classes) just what you did culturally. During my undergraduate program my Dad lost his job so I had to work and take classes to help support my own education while living at home”.

This common thread of regarding work and school like an obvious or expected action was reflected in all participant interviews. Most participants gave a chuckle when asked why they worked and attended school at the same time. Dr. Rose said in a matter of fact way, “ Couldn’t afford not to [work fulltime]”. However, Dr. Rose mentioned how it was important for her children to see her working, as it set a good example and made her own children more resilient. Referring to her doctoral journey and its difficulties, Dr. Rose says, “It will be a great story to tell the kids when they are ready to give up”.

Dr. Silver was very financially motivated due to her family life circumstances:

“I didn’t have a choice! Having three children, um trying to go to school fulltime was not an option for me”.

Dr. Blue alluded to the precedence of her already working fulltime as a key factor in remaining fully employed for the duration of her doctoral journey:

“Because I was already working fulltime, I needed to make money, you know mortgage and car payments?”
Similarly, Dr. Gold starts off joking that she started the doctorate “…because my kids wanted nothing to do with me!” Dr. Gold has had a long successful career and one of the main reasons she started doctoral coursework was to secure a community college presidency position in the future. She could not feasibly secure an executive position like that if she had a recent lapse in her work history so quitting her job was most likely out of the question. Dr. Gold then continues on to explain that though she felt compelled to work it may have been the best possible working situation for her to be successful:

“I mean as I said, I was in a position that I could do a reasonably good job without working very hard because I knew everything and I had seen everything at least twice before. I didn’t feel very challenged so I said ‘you might as well go for the doctorate’ . I am a person who likes to be busy”.

Dr. White had a similar viewpoint regarding work as Dr. Gold. Both participants seemed to have a greater sense of control over their working situation than the other women.

“I worked fulltime for financial reasons. But because I am an entrepreneur I have control over the clients and work being taken on. Typically I would work a 30-40 hour work week but I um have great time management skills and could manage my client schedule around when papers were due. I was truly lucky in that sense”.

**Personal Tragedy.** The participants mentioned resiliency in some form, as being important to the completion of their journey. All of the women interviewed demonstrated exceptional levels of resiliency throughout their doctoral journeys, however, most of the grit and determination stemmed from very sensitive personal incidents. Several of the candidates dealt
with the death of a parent while in the midst of their doctoral coursework or dissertation. Dr. Red spoke about the loss of a parent and balancing her commitments:

“I have a younger sister, I had two parents, during the time of the doctorate my father had passed away from cancer about a year before, and then both of my grandparents who were in their 90s at the time started failing with their health so that is what I was balancing while trying to do my doctoral work. And for the most part we were a really close family”.

Dr. Red also spoke about the failing health and eventual loss of her grandfather. He served as a mentor for her throughout her doctoral journey and she credits him as both inspiration and motivation to finish her degree:

“My grandfather was sick and we knew he wasn’t going to live much longer, like getting him to the point where I had my dissertation, he actually went into the hospital like four days after I defended and then it was finishing up the paperwork and getting to that point was like, for me, hell or high water I was getting that done so he knew we had hit our goal”.

Dr. Gold also dealt with the failing health of both her parents while she was enrolled in her Ed.D. program.

“At the same time I lost both my parents, both of my parents died while I was doing the doctorate. Actually my mother had been living with me, um, and you know just, we ended up being care givers and there was probably 6 to 9 months of when I was working on the doctorate where I was trying to take care of her, take care of my father to a much lesser extent but it was still high maintenance. And you know, still be around for my kids
in whatever form they needed me and keep all the ships afloat. And that, was an emotionally and mentally draining time and I am pretty sure I shortchanged just about everybody in my life and I am pretty sure I shortchanged some of the teachers, working on papers, during the doctorate because there were some days where I didn’t feel like I had an ounce left in me and I just sort of, would fall into bed and wake up the next morning, kind of rinse and repeat and do it again. So there was a whole stretch of time during the doctorate where I was doing that automatically”.

Dr. Silver faced serious difficulty in her personal life as one of her three children is on the autism spectrum. She mentions her special needs child several times throughout the interview as both a challenge and inspiration in her life. Clearly she loves her three children however, being divorced, working a fulltime and part-time job, and raising three children, one of them with special needs was particularly challenging while on the doctoral journey:

“But I will say this [the Ed.D.] was not the only degree I was working on at the same time? Yeah I was actually working on my MBA simultaneously, I got accepted in 2010 [to the Ed.D.] so for one full year, I was working on my um first year at Coy Fish Pond University [CFPU] while working on my MBA at another school, another online program! I know, Y’all is crazy, I know [laughs]... I did finish my MBA December of 2011 and then two years later I finished my doctorate… I started the MBA a few months before my second child had turned one… I know, I was crazy I know”.

**Pregnancy.** Half the women in this study were pregnant during a portion of their doctoral journey. Dr. White, Dr. Rose and Dr. Silver all bore children during at least one phase of the doctoral program and all of the women either described themselves or would have been deemed a geriatric mother by medical standards for one or more of their pregnancies. Billari (2010)
defines geriatric mothers as women who are over 35 which signal the following: “Medical risks are related to an ageing reproductive system and an ageing body, whereas social discourse prescribes the way in which older pregnant women are regarded as mothers, and when it is ‘considered’ that women ‘should have’ children” (p. 617). This designation adds an additional level of stress on the participants as mentioned by Dr. Rose.

Dr. Silver though very ambitious, knew the coming of her third child would be her breaking point if she did not complete her doctorate before the child was born. She became pregnant while in the dissertation phase of her program and had a very tight timeline to complete. She had to be completely focused and driven:

“I knew I was not able to juggle having a third child um past the 3 year mark but honestly, I don’t think I would be done had I extended it beyond that time period”.

Dr. Rose’s doctoral journey started fairly uncomplicated as she was in her early 30s, had not yet met her husband, did not have children and was working fulltime (leading to plenty of disposable income). Dr. Rose describes the coursework portion of her doctoral journey as manageable and enjoyable citing:

“The classwork was not difficult at all while working”.

Dr. Rose finished her coursework section within the suggested 2 year timeline however, as she finished up her coursework she met her husband, they fell in love and got married. She also changed from her predictable biology teaching job to an assistant principal position in a new school district. At that point she was required to start the dissertation phase of her doctoral journey but decided to take her time, putting the dissertation on hold for a few years.
“The dissertation part of it for me, was much more cumbersome and time consuming with the research and all that while working fulltime and having a new baby at home. And I literally kind of put it on the shelf for years and did not think I was ever going to get it done because I just couldn’t be an administrator, because as much as I am singing the praises of the luxuries I have at times and as much as people are understanding there’s still a huge time commitment at my job. And then I was you know, the mother of an infant at that point and married and we needed to keep our marriage intact as well. I had put it on the shelf for years and in my mind I had actually quit because I didn’t think I would have the time…. And then I found out I was pregnant with my daughter”.

Later in the interview Dr. Rose mentioned her biggest regret in her doctoral journey was thinking she had time to spare (7 total years to complete) and putting her dissertation on the proverbial shelf. However, several major life events happened and nearly derailed the completion of her doctorate for many years.

Dr. White was also pregnant during the dissertation phase of her doctoral journey. Though she was determined to finish her degree quickly the pregnancy did not seem to have such a worrying effect on her like it had with Dr. Silver and Dr. Rose.

“I was pregnant during the doctoral process so maybe that impacted it [her experience of the doctorate] so maybe?”
**Hard Work**

All participants cited hard work as a requisite for getting through the Education Doctorate. Dr. Blue summarized the need to be dedicated and work hard as a staunch requisite of her online Ed.D. program.

“It [the Ed.D program] was pretty grueling and life changing, it had lots of impact on my personal and professional life”.

Dr. White mentioned the long hours she put into her schoolwork and dissertation only amplified her desire and eventual need to graduate in a 3 year timeline.

“All after meeting with clients all day and tending to the kids, I would usually sit down each night to write my dissertation from 10PM to 2AM”.

All participants expected to work harder than ever before to complete their doctorate. The work was representative of the rigor expected in the program. The students programs were therefore, perceived as quality and transformational doctoral experiences.

**Quality**

Attesting to both the importance of hard work and its inherent indication of quality Dr. Blue comments on how both elements of quality and hard work must coexist in a creditable online education doctoral program.

“I think Coy Fish Pond University is a quality program, I think it should be hard work, a lot of it is perseverance. Um I think you want it to be that way because you don’t want it to turn into where everybody will be able to earn a doctorate. You know you have seen it with the master’s and now everybody has the master’s. You don’t want everyone and her
brother or sister to earn the doctorate without a little bit of perseverance and a little bit of sweat and hard work. I think it is ultimately worth it… um working while you are pursuing advanced degrees is hard work. I think Coy Fish Pond University kind of understands that and hopefully it’s a means to an end. I mean if nothing else you can feel good about yourself that you have done it but hopefully you can use it as a career changer or expander”.

Dr. Silver’s definition of a quality program involved some name recognition as well as an action oriented doctoral curricula. She wanted to be a “real change agent in education” and she realized in order to do this she needed a quality credential.

“I wanted a quality program, um where I could expand my knowledge base as an educator. Like I said before, being a school psychologist narrowed my scope a bit”.

However, when asked whether she told her employer about enrolling in an online Ed.D. program Dr. Silver hesitated. She carefully continued her narrative by explaining that she had told her employer she was enrolled in an Ed.D. program but purposefully excluded the fact it was a mostly online program. She clarified this was not because she viewed the program to be lacking in quality but that her colleagues and even society may take issue with or discredit her degree because of the online component.

“I think a lot of it was because of stigmatism of online learning. And for people to hear that you are getting your doctorate online most people automatically assume the University of For-Profit, or Proprietary University or something of that nature. Um and so being that a lot of the administrators who had that doctorate degree, where that degree
came from brick and mortar schools to say ‘well okay you’re working on your doctorate online’”.

Before discovering her degree granting Ed.D. program Dr. Red took a course at a competing local State University. Dr. Red found the course was not interactive nor was it challenging. Dissatisfied with the course, Dr. Red started looking for other quality programs with an online format. After attending an open house for her degree granting program she decided to enroll.

Dr. White admits her experience of her online Ed.D. program was an extremely positive one, however, she belongs to several facebook groups where students from her program can get together and “vent to or support each other”. She mentions that not all students have had the quality experience she has had, noting that some faculty and advisors do not get back to students in a timely manner nor give them feedback so they could improve. Dr. White says that if based solely on her own doctoral experience she would “wholeheartedly recommend the program to friends and family”. Dr. White then continued on to say that since she is now a dissertation coach for students in other problems this problem may not be isolated to her particular Ed.D. program. She says there are similar issues at brick and mortar doctoral programs as well.

**Time Management**

Time management proved to be an important factor of the participants’ perceived success and satisfaction with their online Ed.D. programs. Misra and McKeen (2000) state “The concept of time management is generally defined in terms of clusters of behavior that are deemed to facilitate productivity and alleviate stress. Effective time management strategies increase academic performance and are frequently suggested by academic assistance personnel as aids to
enhance achievement…” (p. 41). All of the participants mentioned their aptitude for time management, some honing their skills and schedules during the process while getting used to the rhythms of the curricula while other’s described themselves as type-A, extremely organized and structured.

Dr. Red attributes her success and her ability to finish the program in such a short amount of time due to her “type-A personality and organization”. She then continues on to describe how one misstep in her time organization would take a greater toll later in her week.

“I positively had to be on my game. I didn’t have time to not be planned for my classes [when she was teaching]. If I let myself slip at all it would take my doctoral study time and mess up my week. It was key for me not to work all the time. Usually every two weeks or so I would go to Starbucks and work out my plan for the next two weeks including food prep. It was really good for learning time management, you have to be good at time management to do this program. For work, I would take a personal day and I was out! When I was studying I would put my work phone in the drawer so I could get things done”.

Dr. Silver also identified as “type-A, very organized and structured”. She also recognized, like many of the participants, that the online format both helped her structure her life and allowed her a greater sense of work, life, school balance. Though online courses allowed for some flexibility in her life, her schedule left little room for error.

“I would literally start my schoolwork at about 4 o’clock in the morning, because my kids were sleeping and I didn’t technically have to be up until 5 o’clock. From 4 to 4:45 I would do my school work then I would go, you know take my shower
and all that stuff. Then do my mommy duties, drop my kids off at daycare. Go to work, come back, help my kids with their homework then we would have dinner. And then I would probably spend another hour just reading and highlighting stuff. Weekends, we would do our regular chores but aside from using my reading as my kid’s bedtime story, my goal was to not have my kids see me focusing on schoolwork early on because I know that they needed their mommy time. During the latter part of the course of study I started reading in front of my kids and studying so they could see the value of doing homework… it was important for my oldest to see the importance of study. We would set up our materials and we would be doing homework together”.

Dr. White also found her schedule to be very busy and even though she was extremely organized and had some control over her schedule as a self-employed educational and counselling consultant she often felt overwhelmed.

“It was a juggling act, always prioritizing, often I was like a chicken with its head cut off, at times it was very stressful”.

All of the online Ed.D. programs participants enrolled in had a residency requirement. All students, regardless of where they lived had to attend class on campus for a brief but designated period of time. Most participants enjoyed this part of their programs immensely. However, residency added stress to several of the participants’ lives as their time management structures were completely disrupted. Dr. Silver mentioned she almost did not enroll in her program because of the week long summer residency requirement. The next year she decided to enroll since her particular program allowed her to complete residency over a condensed weekend.
Dr. Gold had a similar concern with the residency but much to her surprise, found it beneficial to her time management and mental health.

“Then there was the week down in [the town where the University is physically located] for residency. The first time I did it, I didn’t know how I could get away from the house, you know my mother needs help and this and that and it turned out that all the times I went down there it was like a respite, to get away from everything that I needed to juggle here and actually just focus on it there. If I were home I would be trying to cook dinner while trying to throw a load of laundry in and reading an academic research paper at the same time. I like to multitask but there were times where I really thought my hair was going to catch on fire, if I did it for much longer. I like a happy stress level, I don’t like an overdosing stress level. I was like at an overdosing stress level”.

Support

“With the right support system you can do anything!” (Dr. Rose, 2017). The support participants either received or did not receive was a reoccurring theme throughout many of their answers. Though not all of the participants received help and support from a social network the majority of participants did. Dr. Rose received a great deal of support during the dissertation phase of her degree from her family. She credits her family to her ultimate success and completion of the doctoral degree:

“I had put it [the dissertation] on the shelf for years and in my mind I had actually quit because I didn’t think I would have the time. I couldn’t even fathom having the time to do it. I got a letter from Coy Fish Pond University saying ‘you either get it or you lose it’ the 7 years were up. And my husband actually saw the letter and looked at me and said
‘You can’t give this up, you put too much into this. Whatever we have to do we will do it’. Um my parents, we kind of went to my mother and father and said ‘this is what is going to happen’ as I said before my parents think education is very very important and they said ‘whatever you need we will help you with’. And I basically would go down to their house for weekends at a time and drop my son off …and go to the library and write and that’s how we got it done. I also had Joanne as an advisor and if you read the beginning of my dissertation you will see she has always been my perpetual cheerleader. She said ‘you can do it, you can do it, you can do it!’ And there were times when she was the ‘you can do it!’ rah rah cheerleader and there were times where she kind of let me have it and would say ‘you can’t give up on this now’ and told me, not necessarily what I wanted to hear, but what I needed to hear. She heard me laugh, she heard me cry, she heard me say ‘I can’t do this’. So I had a lot of support in the end and like I said before it kind of just came down to the wire. And then I found out I was pregnant with my daughter, that August graduation was coming so it just had to be done”.

Many of the participants including Dr. White mentioned how supportive and inclusive their classmates were both in the virtual classroom and through social means like facebook groups, texting or face-to-face interactions outside of the classroom. Dr. Blue spoke of how she personally supported her classmates since she was well supported.

“My friend just finished the program, just a wonderful wonderful woman and I used to tell her ‘just call me when you need a little pumping up, you know just get on it!’ So when you are feeling like ‘I can’t do this, this is just stupid’ drop me a line or shoot me an email and I will be your biggest cheerleader’. Because, at the end of the day it’s so worth it!”
While many of the participants were supported at work philosophically, financially (some places of employment helped pay for the women’s doctorates), gave the women extra time or flexibility from work to pursue their doctorate. Some of the participants also experienced a lack of support from their employers. Dr. Silver mentions:

“…but more importantly to say that I was working on a doctorate that was not psychology related because one of the things I was afraid they [her colleagues] were going to ask me was ‘why are you trying to move away from psychology? Are you trying to get another job?’ I had to be cognizant of what I shared because I didn’t want them to think I was using that particular school district as a stepping stone to try and move elsewhere”.

Dr. Red did not feel supported at all by her administration. When she first started the coursework she was still a teacher, she went to her administration, a principal and assistant principal, to let them know she was enrolled at Coy Fish Pond University’s Ed.D. program.

“They couldn’t have cared less and it felt like the assistant principal thought I was competing with her because she was enrolled at University of For-Profit. It was a very rigid system and the principal is the reason I ended up leaving after two years of being an assistant principal”.

**Luck**

Many of the women interviewed referred to luck or fortune when talking about their accomplishments or their roads to academic success. According to Kramer & Block (2008) luck is success or failure seemingly conveyed by chance rather than through one's own actions.
When referring to her work situation as a business owner and the flexibility she was able to schedule for herself Dr. White said “I feel incredibly lucky in that sense”. At the tail end of her interview when asked if she could change anything about her doctoral journey she again refers to luck by saying “No. I wouldn’t change anything, I am incredibly fortunate. I loved the whole journey”.

Dr. Rose referred to luck when asked about what her dream job would be. After explaining that her current job may be her dream job at the moment, citing her current work situation is very flexible and supportive “They have been very good to me”. As she is “deep in the trenches of motherhood to two young kids” she cannot “picture moving to another position….I am very lucky”.

Often associated with perceptions of luck, having imposter syndrome is another often subconscious reaction to success for many successful women. Many women feel they are lucky to have gotten as far as they have in life because they have fooled those around them into thinking they actually belong (Clance & Imes, 1978, p. 241). A lack of confidence in one’s abilities can be construed as a reliance on luck. Dr. Gold mentioned this at the end of her interview. She did not display any indicators of imposter syndrome nor did she refer to luck in her own context, yet she fully acknowledged these traits in other women and in her own past. She pointed to her age several times in the interview, referring to the fact that perhaps at one point in her career she had these feelings of self-doubt but at this point in her life she has sorted out the difference between self-doubt and self-limitations.

“Ahhhh, well I think I mentioned early on how I think women have more self-doubt than men do and feel more often that they’re imposters…but I think it [the Ed.D.] means more to women than it does to men and that might sound like a sexist comment but I think it’s
almost more important for women to get a doctorate and I think just speaking from my own personal experiences, that it helped a lot in my professional self-confidence. And it makes other people see you and take you more seriously”.

**Conclusions.** The participants were clearly smart, motivated and accomplished women who encountered many seen and unforeseen obstacles throughout their doctoral journey. Many of these obstacles would derail a person from getting through the first course in the doctoral journey. Yet these women prevailed, acknowledging their troubles and in many cases proudly wearing each difficult scenario like a badge; the women were proud of their accomplishments and even prouder of the issues they overcame on the doctoral journey. Most of the participants expected there be some difficulty in their journey as a means of legitimizing their doctoral work. They wanted to it be rigorous, difficult and challenging both academically and personally. However, participants still wanted their doctoral experience to be manageable, hence the decision to enroll in an online program. Lastly, the women fully acknowledged (if they had one) their support network and how important it was to their academic accomplishments. The women took much of the credit for completing their doctoral journey but ensured the researcher knew they were not alone in the journey, this included the concept of luck, fortune or chance. Many of the women believed they “lucked out” in some aspect of their life, whether it was their dissertation advisor assignment or that they had a robust support network luck was notably referenced.

**Superordinate Theme Two: Alignment of Needs**

All of the participants expressed the importance of enrolling in a doctoral program which aligned with their personal, professional and financial needs. Women were not prepared to totally sacrifice their personal and professional lives in order to pursue their doctoral aspirations.
Though, the participants understood their professional and especially, their personal lives would be altered significantly. Financial sacrifice seemed to be the only area the participants did not seem as concerned with, yet programmatic cost was certainly a factor for some. The participants mentioned that quality/rigor, flexibility and action-based curricula were all requisites a program had to offer to align with their needs. Due to Dr. Gold’s personal and work situation she was staunchly against enrolling in a program where a substantial amount of her time was spent in the car commuting to and from her classes “Wouldn’t have done it [the Ed.D.] without it being online”.

Dr. White had gone to a large research university for her undergraduate career and then to an Ivy League University for her master’s degree. She was thoroughly steeped in traditional collegiate curricula with many philosophical underpinnings. By the time she considered doctoral work she had her own thriving private practice rooted in action based solution concepts. Dr. White truly enjoyed helping her clients in meaningful hands-on ways, therefore, the doctoral program she was looking for had to reinforce those values.

“I did not want to do the traditional Ph.D. Program I wanted to do the Ed.D. which is a scholar-practitioner model, it’s more of a practical degree than the Ph.D.. The thing with Coy Fish Pond University was the online flexibility, so you were able to work fulltime while completing it. Ummm I found it incredibly manageable”.

Dr. Silver had similar criteria when looking for a viable education doctoral program. She was looking to get a doctorate of some sort but not convinced either the Ed.D. or the Ph.D. was the degree she needed. It was her specific program and its philosophy which fit her assessment of needs.
“It wasn’t even the Ed.D. it was more about the program, it was more action oriented. And that’s what lead me to Coy Fish Pond’s program it was the action based curriculum not the Ed.D. itself”.

All of the participants were highly qualified for doctoral work however, it seemed their decision to enroll in a doctoral program was not based on whether they could get into the program or not, but rather how the program they were interested in aligned with their needs and requirements.

**Value of Online Format**

All of the participants recognized the value of an online formatted Education Doctorate, citing the format as a main factor in aligning a prospective doctoral program with their daily needs. Some of the participants did not understand the true value of their online class offerings until later in their doctoral journey. Dr. Rose mentions when she first started her doctoral journey she did not mind driving into the city to take a course or two in person, however, as her journey wore on and her personal and professional life grew more complicated she “is not sure I would have completed” if her courses all had to be done in a brick and mortar location.

Similarly, Dr. Red was unaware of the positive impact the ability to take her courses online had on her life until after she had graduated.

“Reflecting on it, online courses were more important than I realized because of family obligations”.

Most of the women were very conscious about the positive impact online courses would have on their lives, treating the availability of online coursework as a requirement for their enrolling in the doctoral program.
**Time to Completion.** Time to completion was also a serious consideration for all of the women. Many of the women attributed an online course format to their successful completion of the program in a timely manner (the suggested 3 year timeline). The women understood this program was achievable if it mostly aligned with their life needs. More importantly the women seemed to acknowledge there was a short span of time where “they could run on all cylinders” and three years was the most common timeframe. Dr. Gold reflected on her degree attainment:

“I am completely satisfied! I am thrilled to be done, very satisfied with it but also really glad it’s over. Not sure I could have kept up that pace for much longer”.

Dr. Red mentions how important the online coursework was for helping her meet a goal of having a doctorate by age 30. Finishing in 2 years most likely would not have happened for her in a traditional format.

“The online format made it much easier to complete, I could preplan and go ahead when needed. If the work was open early I was ready to go. A traditional format would have slowed me down a lot.”

Dr. White would not consider completing an on-ground or even hybrid doctoral program as those kinds of programs did not align with her or her family’s needs. It was common for the participants to interpret their families’ needs as their own needs. If a program did not align well with the familial needs participants would not consider enrolling.

“I didn’t want to do a hybrid program because I have a child who is actively involved in sporting events on weekends so I needed the flexibility of online”.

Overall the single most important factor to the participants was that they could take their courses online in a quality doctoral program at a reputable school. All of the participants
mentioned they had the opportunity to take courses on campus if they so desired and they could network with classmates during the mandatory residencies lending a balance of flexibility and camaraderie to their experiences. Yet the online component was an absolute necessity to their overall wellbeing and success.

**Conclusions.** It was very important for the participants to have a program that complimented their life needs. If a program did not meet their needs, the student would not enroll or, in the case of two participants, they would transfer to a program that would meet their needs and expectations. The programs had to be rigorous, perceived as a quality program and have some name recognition. The Ed.D. program had to offer a completely online option even if on ground classes were available. The participants knew that working fulltime and being enrolled in a rigorous doctoral program would have its own complications, therefore it was perceived that online coursework could alleviate obstacles and stressors (commute time, being tied to a specific timeline etc.). Timeline to completion was also an important factor for many of the women. The participants in part, credited the online coursework with their timely doctoral completion.

**Superordinate Theme Three: Satisfaction**

Satisfaction during the doctoral journey was a pervasive theme throughout this study. All participants commented on and reflected about their satisfaction levels while being interviewed. Satisfaction was a good indicator of programmatic outcomes as modern students, especially adult online students view themselves as discerning customers according to Muller’s study (2008). Yet, satisfaction with education as a product or service was not the only level of satisfaction captured in the interviews. Many participants revealed their satisfaction with various facets of their personal and professional lives directly related to the doctoral journey. Satisfaction is
defined as “fulfillment of one's wishes, expectations, or needs, or the pleasure derived from this” (Oxford Dictionary, 2017).

Without some level of associated satisfaction doctoral programs, as most things, would cease to exist. Interestingly, there seemed to be a level of dissatisfaction associated with the doctoral journey that was expected, and in a sense, demanded by the participants. It was perceived that if the program did not cause dissatisfaction or moderate turmoil at some point in their personal or professional lives the doctoral program may have been deemed uncreditable, lacking quality and rigor. The participants were prepared for a certain level of “suffering” or “sacrifice”. For some participants there seemed to be scale, the more dissatisfaction and/or more grit they had to demonstrate during the doctoral journey the more highly satisfied they were with their outcomes after graduation.

Dr. Rose is an excellent example of this. She took the longest of the participants to finish her degree. She gave up significant opportunities for self and family satisfaction to finish her Ed.D. degree. Though her professional and personal outcomes returned to status quo after the completion of her doctorate she seemed the most elated of the group to have earned the degree stating:

“When I got the word I was done I cried. Other than my two children, the Ed.D. is what I am most proud of in my life because it took a lot to get it done.”

After the completion of her degree, Dr. Silver hoped to transition her career into a new field, however due to life circumstances that had not happened in the years following her graduation. Her professional life has remained status quo. Yet, she was thrilled with her doctoral attainment, pointing to the social and family dissatisfaction during the doctoral journey.
“As a whole I am very satisfied with the program!”

Dr. Red mentioned her satisfaction with her online doctoral program has only grown since graduation. She has found some inherent frustration with the application of the skills learned in the doctorate to her professional situation, however, she seemed excited to have the challenge:

“For me the satisfaction level has increased since graduation I do notice some frustration at school, because you know it’s fact based because you studied it and people look at you and go ‘well I don’t know about that’. Though, that can be a little frustrating, but you have the satisfaction and the confidence to know you can create and execute something, it definitely makes things easier for you”.

**Personal Satisfaction**

Personal satisfaction may have been the one element of this study which drew the most heartfelt answers from participants. Participants were often conflicted between short-term personal satisfaction like going out to dinner with friends and long-term satisfactions such as earning a terminal degree and the pride that comes with it. Participants had to “trade in” many short-term satisfactions to earn a long-term satisfaction.

**During the Doctoral Journey.** Dr. Gold frequently commented on the short-term personal dissatisfactions she incurred during her doctoral journey while also mentioning dissatisfaction her family felt due to her doctoral work.

“I don’t think I brought as much to the table for my family. I was crankier thank I normally would be. I think everyone in the family made some sacrifices for me to do that [complete the Ed.D.]”.
Regardless, Dr. Gold felt plenty of satisfaction throughout her doctoral journey. She described how at the beginning of her doctoral work she was not adept at academic writing but, through hard work found her stride. She spoke fondly of her qualitative methods course, proudly talking about the B she earned in the course. She prefaced her pride with her distain and relative ineptitude for qualitative methods, she struggled through the course but succeeded because she wanted to learn, she wanted to understand and put the extra work in. Successfully completing this dreaded course gave her an immense sense of satisfaction and self-pride.

Dr. Gold and Dr. Blue both acknowledged the importance of keeping some semblance of a personal life intact. Though they both noted their personal lives were bound to suffer a bit, they were not willing to cut out a social life completely like some of the other participants. Dr. Gold stated she and her husband had a vacation cottage, rather than staying home and studying all weekend she would accompany him to the cottage:

“I would try not to fall out of routine, I was always trying to work. We have a cottage in the Northeast and I would have papers all over the car on the drive up. I would grab time whenever I could, in 10-15 minute increments”.

Dr. Gold also mentioned she did not want to give up going out with other couples, seeing her children and husband etc. Dr. Blue mentioned she tried to get as much of her schoolwork done during the week, reserving the weekend to “conduct life business accordingly”. When asked to clarify the meaning of “life business” she mentioned social engagements and relaxation.

The vast majority of the participants derived their satisfaction from doctoral coursework itself. They enjoyed the support and camaraderie from their classmates. In general, they found the coursework to be interesting and helpful to them. But most importantly the participants felt
they were meeting their intrinsic need to earn a doctoral degree. They felt confidence when they received good grades and positive feedback from their professors.

**After the Doctoral Journey.** It seemed that after a personally trying doctoral journey most of the participants either became immensely satisfied with their personal lives or happily returned back to their “status quo” personal situations. When asked whether they were satisfied with their life trajectories after completing the doctorate, all participants responded with a resounding, “Yes!” Dr. Blue mentioned that no matter what happened in her life no one could take away her doctorate and this gave her great joy and satisfaction. Interestingly, about half the women do not think their gender impacted their experience or satisfaction in earning the Education Doctorate.

However, the doctoral journey did have significant impact on some of the women after they graduated. Their relationships with friends, family and significant others were greatly changed or irreparably damaged. It is important to note that many personal problems stemmed from the doctoral journey and culminated after graduation.

Dr. Blue was in a long term relationship with her partner however, the start of her doctoral journey spurred the end of her relationship. Once she completed the doctorate Dr. Blue and her partner decided to split up, something quite difficult for Dr. Blue.

“...[the doctorate] Had a lot of impact on my personal life. Uhhh yeah I had been in a relationship for 20 years and um basically after I earned my doctorate we um ended up separating and splitting off. I won’t blame it solely on my Ed.D. program but when you are in a relationship you have to pay attention to your partner and um my attention was more on work and my doctorate than the person who I was supposed to love. So um it’s a
cop out to say that’s what caused the breakup but that was definitely a contributing factor. And I told people after just be cautious and just be careful because it has an impact on your personal relationships and when you are not paying attention to people, you can drift apart and that’s exactly what happened”.

Dr. Red also mentions that the doctorate has affected her romantic life, citing the credential intimidates men:

“I do find, in terms of dating that guys are incredibly weirded out by the doctorate. There’s one guy that I have been talking to but the fact that he deems me so much smarter than him, like to him its intimidating and to me it’s stupid because we work in two totally different fields so to me it’s like apples and oranges. And I have dated some guys that once they find out you have this degree, it becomes like a power thing where you are suddenly more powerful than they are because you are ‘smarter’ than they are and it almost becomes insulting. So that stops the relationship from going any further. They become fixated on the fact that you have more degrees than them. I have learned not to announce it”.

Dr. Red started her doctorate in her late 20s, arguably a prime time for young women to socialize. Dr. Red freely admits her doctoral work severely hindered her social activities during that critical time, and may have caused residual consequences from not being as social during those years:

“My sister has always set it as a goal to get married and I always set it as an event. Sometimes events don’t happen but the whole goal piece put a lot of pressure on her that isn’t necessary so I kind of thought of it as an event but my social life definitely took a
hit. Umm I look back now and I say ‘Where did everybody go? Anybody?’ And most of my friends, they either have kids or you know they are teachers and you know us teachers, we just want to be in bed by 8 o’clock. But it definitely affected my social life”.

Dr. Silver mentions she had many friends and social engagements prior to enrolling in her online Ed.D. program. Her friends would often invite her to participate in social engagements at the beginning of her doctoral journey. But after years of doctoral coursework her friends eventually stopped inviting her to social engagements since Dr. Silver could rarely, if ever attend. Dr. Silver seemed fine with this during the doctoral journey since she was busy focusing on her children, work and school. Once she graduated, she assumed her friendships would resume where she had left them 3 years earlier, she was disheartened to find many of her friendships were no longer intact.

“(Laughs) I think going through it, it put a lot of stress on things just because you want to do things but you have to study. So you end up saying ‘Oh no I have a paper! Oh no I have a group project!’ Unfortunately people found other people to hang with. When I was finally done I was like ‘Okay! I am ready now, let’s go out!’ and I think people were like ‘Uhhhhhh well you know… me and so-and-so are going somewhere’. So I would be like ‘Okay’. I feel like I became the third wheel, but I didn’t put the effort in so…”

Many of the positive participant responses toward personal satisfaction bled into professional and financial outcomes. This was to be expected since all participants worked fulltime while pursuing the doctorate, therefore, a substantial part of their lives were spent in the workplace.
Professional and Financial Outcomes

Professional developments stemming from earning an Ed.D. such as promotion to a high profile or flexible job, receiving a raise or being given more interesting and meaningful work easily spilled over into personal and general satisfaction levels. For example, a few of the participants earned substantial raises or new jobs which paid significantly more. These pay increases, though professionally based, increased participant quality of life, fueling their personal value systems (hobbies, where they can live, vacation, tangible items they can provide to their children etc.). Additionally, professional attainment, which was not associated with generating more financial income, positively affected the women’s sense of self satisfaction. Nearly all participants mentioned an increase in confidence after their doctoral journey.

After the Doctoral Journey: Professional Outcomes. Dr. Gold had some strong observations about her professional life before having “doctor in her title” and after. She suggests not having to work quite as hard as she once had to earn respect. It seemed to please her, adding to the satisfaction she had with her degree attainment.

“People taking me more seriously? Yeah you know, they make the assumption, preconceived notions I think. People have preconceived notions about people with a doctorate. That they know what they are talking about. For the most part I think that’s true, so for the most part I don’t think I have to convince an audience at the university because they know I have a doctorate so they come in prepared to believe me. So I don’t have to win people over I guess”.

Dr. Silver has not advanced in her career yet but hopes to leverage her doctorate into career change when her children are a bit older.
“Though I am still a psychologist it’s not the end all be all. I think it’s more of a mindset the Ed.D. has given me…the self-doubt isn’t there anymore”.

Dr. White was a fervent advocate of her degree attainment. When asked how her Ed.D. affected her fulltime work she responded:

“Completely positively. The opportunities I’m getting would never be there without the Ed.D.. The national conferences I have attended, the book I have written, the types of teaching jobs I have been offered, without the credential they wouldn’t exist”.

**Financial Outcomes.** Dr. Gold was particularly pleased with her increase in pay and also the attainment of a much “higher profile” position. Though she cannot credit the attainment of the job entirely to her doctorate she knows it helped her, “It set me apart from the others”. As mentioned previously, all of the participants gained a sense of confidence which was incredibly satisfying. Dr. Gold reflects on this confidence:

“Yep, and as a matter of fact my confidence in getting the doctorate, when I was offered the position I have now, I negotiated an increase in pay before I would have accepted the position. Which, I don’t think I ever would have done if I hadn’t gotten the doctorate. Yeah, I think that’s what drove me more than anything else, because I am not a negotiator. I couldn’t believe the words were coming out of my mouth but I don’t know if I would have felt as strongly about it if I hadn’t gotten the doctorate”.

Dr. Blue had the opposite experience once she earned her doctorate. However, she seemed just as pleased as Dr. Gold about her career opportunities. Dr. Blue had a long career in education. Prior to earning her doctorate she had been a principal and then a head of school, both very stressful jobs where much of the administrative burden was placed on her shoulders. Once
she earned her doctorate she was able to leverage a career change working for an educational consulting company, something she truly loved and was happy doing.

“No, you want to know what the funny thing is, I actually took a decrease in pay with this job that I’m in now, but as I say I have a whole lot more of a work life balance. I do not work nearly as hard as I used to and I wouldn’t say I had creditability because of the doctorate but, I may have gotten the job because of the doctorate and then I earned the creditably through my work. So while I get paid less than I would have, I have so much free time it’s worth it”.

Dr. Silver experienced a more typical outcome for the K-12 education field. Toward the end of her doctoral journey Dr. Silver moved to a “better” school district, this district had an advanced step program for raises and awarded any staff member with a doctorate a $5,000 increase in pay. Since that initial increase, she earned and additional $4,000 in raises and anticipates more as her district’s contracts will be reviewed again in the near future.

Dr. Rose has not seen any pay increases nor professional advancement, but she attributes this to two factors. The first is “it’s too soon to tell” as she graduated just 7 months from the time of interview. Second, she has been on maternity leave since October and her contract could not be negotiated until her return in April. It is important to note Dr. Rose was very happy in her assistant principal position and had no desire to seek promotion at that moment, mostly due to her family situation. She was hopeful she would get a raise in pay once her contract was negotiated upon her return from maternity leave.

Dr. Red had an interesting point of view on her increased financial wellbeing. Though she was ecstatic about her increase in pay and her ability to work in a more supportive school
district she viewed the situation under a very pragmatic lens. Dr. Red realized that she is relatively young compared to her colleagues with similar credentials. Therefore, she may have “pigeon holed” her-self into K-12 administrative positions.

“Yes! It pushed me into a different pay category once I got the doctorate! However, at 34 I wedged myself into administration, no one will hire a teacher with 13 years of experience and their doctorate. I make too much now”.

Overall the women were thrilled with their professional and financial outcomes. Most of the women either used their doctorate to change their career paths or they were keeping their doctorate as “a tool in the tool box”. These participants were not sure when or how they would use their doctorates but regardless, were satisfied with the degree and knew they would leverage it sometime in the future.

**Conclusions.** Overall participants were pleased with their life trajectories, satisfied with their doctoral attainment and satisfied with what the future could potentially hold for them. Not all of the women agreed their direct doctoral outcomes after degree attainment were satisfactory yet, they mainly attributed dissatisfaction to life situations and not the doctorate itself. If women were not directly using their doctoral credential during the time of interview they were happy to acknowledge the credential had great potential. Specifically, it would help them professionally in the future. The completion of the degree made all the women have a feeling of intrinsic accomplishment. Though they may have started doctoral coursework for extrinsic reasons (a mentor pushed them into it, they needed the credential for a job) participants thought the actual desire and dedication required to the degree had come from within. Participants felt like they were on a different level intellectually after doctoral completion. Internal satisfaction clearly trumped external satisfaction.
Conclusion

This study sought to answer a very simple question: was it worth it? The researcher has concluded that pursuing an online Education Doctorate while working fulltime, though difficult is worth the time, effort and sacrifice for women. The participants were well represented throughout this study with large sections of their interview answers presented to the reader as direct quotes. The women were candid and forthcoming, excited to have their stories presented in a forum for potential action and change. The participants were greatly challenged throughout their doctoral journey personally, professionally and academically. However, each challenge seemed to convey a greater sense of accomplishment and satisfaction to the participants. The next chapter will deeply investigate the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the participants. The researcher will use a double hermeneutic method to make sense of the participants own post-doctoral interpretations.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications for Practice

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate individual experiences of women who worked fulltime while enrolled in an online Ed.D. program. The goal was to capture and understand participant perceptions of education as a way toward self-actualization and increased professional opportunities. Primarily, the study looked to understand the phenomena of how and why women complete online Doctorates of Education (Ed.D) regardless of ever-increasing demands on their personal and professional time. Knowledge generated was expected to inform the development of online Ed.D. programs. Additionally, information could educate graduate admissions professionals about their core enrollment pool. Evaluating student experience and outcomes after graduation can help ensure the right students are admitted to these types of doctoral programs. This study also served as a scholarly and reliable source of information for women who may consider enrolling in an online doctorate. Overall this study’s findings aligned well with existing literature while specifically capturing women’s reflections about earning an Education Doctorate online.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilized a psychological theory, Maslow’s (1943), Theory of Human Motivation (THM) as the theoretical framework. Maslow (1943) argued there are 5 levels of hierarchical needs every person must fulfill in order to feel good, healthy, and self-actualized. It was argued that both maintaining a career and earning a doctorate are gradations of self-actualization. However, realizing potential (inaction) and achieving self-actualization (action) are very different. Maslow’s theory of motivation aligned well with the perceived journey women in higher education took to
reach a degree of self-actualization. The theory is structured around the actual experience of living and fulfilling the needs essential to life.

**Qualitative Approach**

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used as the qualitative methodology in this study. IPA research amplified the voices of participants by recording an intricate analysis of participant lived experiences. Profound stories about the human spirit and experience can flourish within IPA while structuring unique participant reflections into a comprehensive analysis (Smith & Eatough, 2007). This approach was integral to capture and interpret findings within the study. IPA allowed subtle details in participant interviews to be amplified and analyzed as key findings.

**Themes and Structure**

This study’s participant interviews yielded three major themes and a great many subthemes. The first major theme was the concept of resiliency. The second major theme was student demand for doctoral programs which aligned with their needs. The last major theme gauged overall satisfaction, personal satisfaction and professional or financial outcomes of the participants. This chapter addressed each finding as related to the themes and corresponding literature. It then discusses limitations of the study, conclusions and recommendations.

**Theme One: It Takes a Certain Kind of Woman to Be Successful**

This study incorporated and represented women from various backgrounds and age groups. Within the sample of women participants it was evident that certain types of woman were successful in the program. To clarify, ‘type’ merely means a set of traits these participants possessed, enabling them to cope with highly stressful and demanding conditions. This is
especially interesting as women online students are at higher risk for dropping out of their degree programs than men due to their competing life circumstances (Arric et. al, 2011). All of these women were non-traditional students. As working professionals, mothers, financial heads of household, caretakers, partners, and entrepreneurs these women could not and would not enroll in a traditional doctoral program. This corresponds with Shulman et al. (2006) noting that most people enrolled in an Ed.D. program are non-traditional, mid-career, generally older and more experienced students than those enrolling in a traditional Ph.D. program.

By understanding the traits successful post-doctoral women students have, prospective students may better understand how to succeed during and after an online Ed.D.. Additionally, Ed.D. programs can better understand their student bodies, building support programs for academically qualified students who may not possess all of these successful traits. All of the women had exemplary professional experience in the education field, had a master’s degree and some sort of support network (personal, professional or financial). All (but one) of the women assumed a caretaker role while completing their doctorate. Their caretaking roles were often viewed as a hardship while completing their doctorates, however, each participant acknowledged that their caretaking role amplified post-doctoral satisfaction levels.

**Privilege.** Privilege is a substantial indicator of women’s success and satisfaction during and after the doctoral journey. For the purpose of this study privilege is defined in terms of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943). Under the hierarchy of needs it is assumed that all participants had fulfilled each of the five needs in-part (see figure 4). Privilege, for the purposes of this study, is simply an adequate baseline of essential needs relative to Maslow’s theory of motivation (1943) (see figure 4).
For example, all of the women had all or part of their physiological needs met (food, water, warmth and rest). Safety needs were met in part, though this was not expressly stated in interviews. Although, friendships suffered and the women felt lonely at times they all had some sort of network to rely on. All participants had their esteem needs met, though not fully as several of them described the doctoral journey as “humbling”. Lastly, and most importantly, the doctoral journey helped facilitate a sense of self-actualization. While the younger women in this study did not indicate they had met all of their goals and met their full potential, the older women clearly indicated they were very happy and fulfilled. Though open to new opportunities, the older women had no desire to actively seek them out.

The concept of luck was mentioned by several of the women. The luck they described directly reflected their hierarchy of needs being met, thus spurring the motivation, grit and desire to complete a doctoral degree. In a sense, participants were acknowledging their privilege, essentially conceding that their baseline threshold of needs had been met. Some of the women mentioned the concept of luck on more than one occasion often in conjunction with the concept of grit.

As supported by the seminal research of Clance and Imes (1978) and Kramer and Block (2008), it is possible that these women, though thoroughly accomplished, hardworking and deserving of their degrees deferred back to a historically feminine gendered trait of mitigating their own accomplishments and efforts into a more humble euphemistic context, luck.
Perseverance. Correspondingly, it was assumed these participants are all reasonably intelligent as evidenced by their ability to not only enroll but succeed in their doctoral programs. Yet, there was much more to their success than natural ability. Howe (1999) studied the backgrounds and biographies of several renowned geniuses (Darwin, Einstein etc.) and then disputed the postulation that achievement originates from exceptional mental ability, “Perseverance is at least as crucial as intelligence. . . . The most crucial inherent differences may be ones of temperament rather than of intellect as such” (p. 15). This is not to discount the women’s intelligence but to emphasize that much more than intelligence went into their degree attainment and overall satisfaction with their performance.
The women faced varying levels of difficulty throughout their doctoral journeys with few difficult instances directly involving academics. The most trying hardships included the care and/or subsequent death of a family member, deteriorating friendships or intimate partner relationships, and a lack of support in the workplace. Many of the women experienced some or all of these hardships yet persevered. This finding was supported by both the American Psychological Association (2017) and Duckworth’s et al. (2007) definition of perseverance and grit. Further, this study posited in some cases the more difficulty (exercised perseverance) the woman experienced during her doctoral journey, the higher her level of satisfaction.

Additionally, there was a relationship between increased perseverance during the doctoral journey and a strong feeling or belief of personal and professional transformation (self-actualization). The participants cited a better understanding themselves as people, students and reflected on their inherent limitations. These self-reflections about they successfully reaching their potential (self-actualization) certainly dictated the type of program they ultimately enrolled in.

**Theme Two: What Women Want**

The women very clearly approached the doctoral degree search like informed, confident customers. Directly corresponding with Muller’s 2008 study, which found online students tended to view themselves as customers. Interestingly, some of the participants started in alternate Ed.D. programs, found they were not satisfied with the program, and promptly transferred out to a program that met their well-defined needs. The participants candidly identified qualities doctoral programs had to possess to be viable options. This study found that all participants (in varying levels) had an idea of the criteria their Ed.D. program had to meet during after the doctoral journey. This is a departure from the traditional doctoral ethos of the lowly 22 year old student
conforming and succumbing to the doctoral structure and course delivery methods. It was made clear that all of the women were working and spending hard earned money on a doctoral program. It was expected their Ed.D. adequately challenge them in all the right areas (academics, thought processes, assumptions, curricula designed to promote educational innovation) and flexible in the areas perceived as less valuable (in person lectures, commuting to a physical classroom, attending class at prescribed times etc.).

**Quality.** The participants all wanted a *quality* innovative program which complimented their diverse social and professional roles. In the past it seemed quality had to be compromised for time management convenience. Online education had either an inherent industry stigma and/or was facilitated by a proprietary university, which also held a weighty stigma in the education industry. These online proprietary programs were and often still are, considered to be low quality (Karl & Peluchette, 2013). The participants felt that enrolling in a quality program was essential. They also repeatedly mentioned that quality was absolutely present within their online Ed.D. programs. However, they still perceived some outside stigma associated with online education, especially at the doctoral level. Some participants were secretive about the concentration of online courses they took to avoid judgement from peers whom completed their doctorates in a traditional format. Markedly, some of the participants highlighted the hybrid or residency aspects of their program’s (if any existed), thus reminding their audience that coursework and in-person accountability was still present in their programs.

Remarkably, this study contradicts Levine’s 2005 findings which stated “The weaker the research mission, the greater the likelihood that the university awards only the Ed.D.” (Levine, 2005, p. 42). All of the women participating in this study graduated from a Carnegie Project for the Education Doctorate (CPED) Ed.D. program. The schools participants attended qualified as
top 100 research universities in the United States, yet these schools offered an Ed.D. rather than a Ph.D. in education (Association of American Universities, 2017). This finding expressly contradicted Levine’s conclusion.

**CPED versus Non-CPED Programs.** Though none of the women mentioned the Carnegie Project for the Education Doctorate (CPED) all of them demanded specific aspects of a CPED program when looking to enroll in an Ed.D. program. It was clear these women did not view all online programs as equals; all of the women had high standards for perceived quality, innovation, applicability, name recognition, and accessibly. Several of the women were enrolled in non-CPED Ed.D. programs prior to transferring to a CPED online program. The women cited inadequate coursework and instructor interaction, and/or a general lack of perceived quality as their reason for transferring. A few of the women specifically mentioned not wanting to enroll in a large online program generally, run by for-profit universities. They acknowledged industry stigma as well as their own biases with proprietary Ed.D. programs making it very clear they did not want to be categorized with students who took this pathway. Overall, the women wanted a program where they could fully become scholar-practitioners. Participants sought degrees they could leverage to actively problem solve and research or publish. This aligned well with the CPED mission and its dedication to cultivating the scholar-practitioner through its sponsored programs:

“The Scholarly Practitioners blend practical wisdom with professional skills and knowledge to name, frame, and solve problems of practice. They use practical research and applied theories as tools for change because they understand the importance of equity and social justice. They disseminate their work in multiple ways, and they have an obligation to resolve problems of practice by collaborating with key stakeholders, including the
university, the educational institution, the community, and individuals” (Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, 2017).

The women’s desire to use their fulltime work experience during doctoral coursework and then leverage their doctorate for expanded professional opportunities was apparent. Again, this finding aligned with the CPED scholar-practitioner model. Further, this finding supported Boyce’s (2012) study on the implementation of a CPED action based scholar-practitioner model at the University of Virginia “…these problem-solving experiences would empower Ed.D. candidates to use research in the form of disciplined inquiry to guide and study their own professional practices” (Boyce, 2012 p. 28).

Work. It was essential for participants to remain working fulltime while earning their Education Doctorates which again aligned with the CPED mission. All of the women stated they had to remain working for financial reasons, the thought of quitting their jobs to pursue fulltime study was literally laughable to the majority of the women. This aligned with David’s (2015) finding that often women in education are required to remain working to maintain their competitive and financial edge. Moreover, women wanted to remain working to preserve professional momentum. Additional, work allowed the participants to practice doctoral concepts learned in their programs in real life professional experiences. Again, David (2015) found that “…women continue to confront discrimination in jobs, disparities in power, voice and political representation and laws that are prejudicial on the basis of their gender. As a result well-educated women often end up in jobs where they do not use their full potential and skills.” It is possible that if participants left their established careers to attend a fulltime traditional doctoral program they would lose the career capital they had earned.
Clearly, the women wanted to effectively utilize their curricula and careers simultaneously for amplified learning. Pragmatic reasoning aside, the participants wanted to set a positive precedent for their own children, for the students they taught, or their support-networks. Furthermore, participants wanted to illustrate that though life can be demanding, seemingly impossible of difficult tasks can be successfully accomplished. Most strikingly, the women all spoke about the importance of fulfilling one’s own potential. The participants wanted to earn the doctorate for their own intrinsic reasons and motivations. The women sincerely wanted to continue or improve their career paths, earn the doctoral credential, and self-actualize.

**Online Education.** It was found that the option to take quality, robust online courses was a top priority for women researching Ed.D. programs while working fulltime. Women have many roles to play in modern society and it was perceived that online education allowed the women to fulfill their most demanding roles either somewhat or completely. Most of the women mentioned they would not have considered a traditional on-ground Ph.D. or Ed.D. due to their life circumstances. This demand for completing their coursework online merged with other hallmark programmatic requirements like career development, practical applications coupled with scholarly research, and creating lasting connections with peers and faculty via an online platform. This corresponded with Zambo, Zambo, Buss, Perry and Williams’ findings (2014), students in their study cited flexible course schedules, developed student to faculty/advisor relationships, relevant applicable curricula, cohorts (leading to close peer networks, and developing raw skillsets as integral to their choice in program and ultimate satisfaction with their CPED influenced doctoral programs.

As Price’s (2006) study suggests participants benefited from anonymity online courses provided. The women established themselves in the classroom with few preconceived biases
from their peers, then created lasting friendships during residency. Dr. Red specifically indicated that she was treated with less respect and creditability in a traditional classroom setting because of her age, gender and her inner-city work situation. She noted that in an online setting her intelligence, thoughts and words were presented to her class without predetermined judgements based on who she appeared to be. She and some of the other women found this aspect of online education to be freeing.

Theme Three: Satisfaction Levels and Perceptions of Worth

Throughout this study satisfaction was tied to the concept of worth. If student satisfaction was not present then the perception of worth would be impacted. There also seemed to be a threshold of satisfaction which needed to be present in order for the women to ultimately deem the experience “worth it”. For example, Dr. Silver was not satisfied with the lack of support she received from her program in parlaying her doctorate into a successful career change. However, she perceived the overall quality of her program to be very high, her financial satisfaction was present and she enjoyed the learning experience. Therefore, she deemed the doctoral degree highly satisfactory and worth the time, effort and money. Interestingly, all participants had some complaints about their program yet all rendered the overall doctoral experience and outcomes highly satisfactory and worth the sacrifices or struggles encountered.

Social. All participants were extremely satisfied with most of the online Ed.D. components, though some mentioned a more robust social network would be helpful in the future. Participants pointed to facebook groups and residencies as key indicators of their social networking satisfaction. This partially departs from Sweitzer’s 2009 study citing social networks are more important than ever to doctoral students. While the women mentioned their importance, flexibility and quality of classes far outweighed their need for an in class social network in terms
of their overall satisfaction. It is possible that less emphasis was placed on social networks since participants were non-traditional students who worked fulltime. Participants were older and more established in life and in their careers than their traditional doctoral student peers. Therefore, the participants had preexisting social and professional networks to rely on, thus making the development of a social network less important to participants. Still, many of the women mentioned how indispensable their classmates and professors had been in supporting their education.

Correspondingly, students mentioned that after graduation they had a desire to apply their degrees to bettering the world around them, many were in the process of doing so at the time of interview, which paralleled the literature. Amrein-Beardsley et al. (2012) focused on the more personal effects Ed.D. programs have on graduates via interviews and exit surveys. It was found that students were empowered to address social justice, motivation and achievement challenges not only in their careers but in their personal lives because of their doctoral studies. The students highly valued the sense of community they had built together, hoping to carry on their relationships far past graduation. Many students like Dr. White, leveraged their Ed.D. social network to support new business ventures or in the case of Dr. Silver, to fuel social activism.

**Professional and Financial.** All of the women except for Dr. Rose experienced some sort of financial or professional reward for earning their doctoral degree. Dr. Rose remains the exception as she went out on maternity leave shortly after graduating, she had yet to return to her job at the time of interview. She remained optimistic that upon her return, her contract negotiation and subsequent pay increase would be favorable. Regardless, the other participants received either one or a combination of: monetary increases in pay, a promotion (external or internal) or successfully executed a planned career change. All participants were extremely
pleased with their career prospects and/or improved earning potential post-doctoral journey. Again, the women did not seem particularly surprised by this fact. Referring back to theme two, the women acted as informed customers. Lee and Mueller, (2014) found that students enrolled in all levels of higher education are demanding proof of return on investment. Student loan debt is now more pervasive than ever, often delaying life milestones (Lee and Mueller, 2014). It was found that the women fully expected a positive financial and/or career outcome prior to enrolling in their online Ed.D. programs. It is important to note all women felt fulltime work was a necessity further, none cited extreme financial hardship caused by the doctorate. It can be concluded that first, participant’s necessity to work in white collar positions situated them solidly in the educated middleclass. However, the doctorate compounded with the lack of financial hardship may have boosted the women into the educated upper-middleclass post-graduation.

**Limitations of the Study Size**

The size of the study, though aligned with the interpretive phenomenological analysis parameters is small relative to the population of women working fulltime in education while earning their online Ed.D.s. Though all participants’ perspectives were important and valid this study could not represent all women’s thoughts and feelings. While this study attempted to capture the unique experience of women it is important to note that these findings could easily apply to men. Especially, men who are working fulltime and are the primary caregiver’s in their family or social situation.

As indicated in theme one, this study captured the lived experiences of women who have graduated with their doctorates and whose socio-economic status would be categorized as middle to upper middleclass. Subsequently, it is assumed these women had a roughly equivalent
baseline of basic resources, financial, social and intellectual privilege when enrolling in their online Ed.D. program.

Due to the sample size this study did not actively seek out or discuss women who did not have an established baseline of needs. For example, women who were unemployed, homeless, without family or a support network, women dealing with their own illness, women who were socially stigmatized, or women who felt unsafe or abused during their doctoral experience. Further, this study encouraged diverse participation and did not expressly exclude transgender women, yet none of the participants identified as transgender. Therefore, the unique experiences of transgender women were not included in this study.

Similarly, there was some semblance of diverse (age, race, ethnicity, geography) representation in this study however, sample size significantly lessened the number of diverse participants. It is important to include participant thoughts and feelings about how race impacts their daily lives, goals and accomplishments. Though these perceptions were not excluded from the study, they were not amplified either. This serves as a limitation of the study and something that could be more deeply investigated in future research. Reflecting back on the study’s semi-structured interviews, it may be beneficial to add explicit questions concerning race into future interview protocols. Including the voice of all women is important and extremely valuable, especially as the United States’ population continues to grow and change, becoming ever more diverse and culturally rich.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this research study was to uncover and investigate the learning experiences and sense making processes of women working fulltime while pursuing
their Education Doctorates, especially concerning their perceptions about doctoral worth. Much of the literature aligned well with this study’s findings, however there were several contradictory outliers. This study provided additional viewpoints of the phenomena of women increasingly enrolled in online Education Doctoral programs while also maintaining a fulltime career. It first understood the types of women who are typically successful when they embark on such a challenging doctoral journey. Second, the study pinpointed what the participants wanted in an Ed.D. program via a customer-driven lens. Third, this study rendered working fulltime while pursuing an online Ed.D. satisfactory and worth the participants’ effort.

**Recommendations for Practice**

This study’s overarching theme was to better understand women’s perceptions and outcomes, pinpointing what made women successful in balancing work, rigorous schooling, family and social obligations. However, there was little scholarly research conducted on women’s participation in online Ed.D. programs. Specifically, women outcomes after graduating from an online Doctorate of Education program. This study will assist students looking to pursue an online Ed.D. to assess programmatic outcomes. The study can also be used to understand the degree of social, professional and financial sacrifice students may incur along the doctoral journey. During the literature discovery phase of this study very little reliable student oriented information could be found on those subjects, this study hoped to fill that vacancy. Student success and satisfaction should be built into every Doctor of Education program, beginning with transparent admission information about doctoral program expectations and anticipated lifestyle alterations.

In practice, future Doctor of Education programs, have scholarly support that online non-profit Ed.D. programs are desirable in this quickly changing and demanding educational market.
Additionally, these programs seem to be beneficial for their graduates personally, professionally and financially. Similarly, college admission offices could leverage this study, better understanding the type of student they should be enrolling. Informed and transparent admission practices may ensure future student satisfaction, success and overall programmatic retention.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

It is important to note that without online learning opportunities many of the amazing women participants would never have had the chance of earning a doctorate. Nor would they have had the same chances to incite positive industry spurred by their doctoral education. This finding signified a growing demand for a culture of inclusion versus a traditional doctoral culture of the exclusion. A culture of inclusion strives to admit all academically and professionally qualified students from all ages, races, genders, life situations and physical abilities. Though greater inclusion is being demanded there may be backlash in the future. It could be argued that the backlash has already taken place as evidenced by industry stigma against online education and an increased number of non-traditional students earning a doctoral credential. The Ed.D., has always catered to the non-traditional student while the education industry has always disproportionally employed women. Therefore, it is possible the education industry will apply gender-biased value systems on the Education Doctorate. It can be argued that the more women earning the Ed.D. credential, the more industry perceptions may negatively affect the value and worth of an Education Doctorate.

All of the women in this study rendered their doctoral experiences and degree attainment a success and wholly worth the sacrifices made along the way. However, it would be interesting to see if this satisfaction wans as ever more women Ed.D. holders flood the education market.

Additionally, it could be beneficial to conduct a benchmarking study with the same
participants in 5 to 10 years, to study effects Ed.D. attainment has had on participant careers and perhaps, even their personal lives later in life. Though these women were considered successful in their programs, it may beneficial to study students who were unsuccessful in their online Ed.D. programs as a way to find better support students who may not possess the traits found in the participants.

Lastly, conducting a comparative study using men as participants would create greater context within the original study. It would be interesting to compare and contrast the lived experiences and perceptions of men meeting similar life and professional parameters. This would test whether the phenomenon is exclusive to women or dually shared by men. It may also explain the phenomena of why more women are now earning their Ed.D.s than men compared with doctoral programs in different disciplines.
References


U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, annual. See also http://www.nces.ed.gov/programs/digest


White House Council of Economic Advisers (2014). *Women's Participation in Education and the Workforce*.


Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Email

Dear ________,

I am currently in the dissertation research phase in my online Ed.D. program at Northeastern University. I hope you might be interested in participating in my study on the past experiences of women who worked fulltime while enrolled in an online Ed.D. program. This will be an opportunity for you to voice your opinions and reflect on your past experiences.

If you decide to participate in this study you can anticipate a 30 minute to 1 hour personal interview with me conducted in a way that is most convenient to you such as over the phone, through Skype, Google Hangout, or in person. I will ask you a series of questions concerning your personal insights, reflections, perspectives and experiences while you worked fulltime and studied online. Many of these questions will pertain directly to your gender and how it affected your lived experiences as a Doctoral student. I will also ask you about your time and reflections after graduation. The interview will be recorded and I will take detailed notes during and after your interview. Please note your identity, and actual place of work then and now, and where you obtained your Doctoral degree will remain confidential and not be used in the study. This research hopes to shed light on the capabilities of women and their wonderful accomplishments. It will offer student insights relative to satisfaction levels with online education Doctorate programs and help programs improve their student satisfaction levels.

Participation is voluntary without pay, however, your participation would be truly appreciated. If you are willing to participate in the study please email me at amorosino.s@husky.neu.edu or call me at 203-982-0066. Always know I am more than happy to answer any preliminary questions you might have, please do not hesitate to email or call me at any time.

Sincerely,

Summer C. Amorosino

Doctorate Student (Ed.D.)

Northeastern University
Appendix B: Phone Transcript (optional)

Hello is ______ available?

This is Summer Amorosino, a current education Doctorate student at Northeastern University.

I am calling to see if you would be willing to be interviewed for my dissertation research which has to do with your experience being a woman who worked fulltime while completing an online Ed.D. program.

If you decide to participate in this study you can anticipate a short 30 minute to 1 hour personal interview with me over the phone, through Skype, Google Hangout or in person. I will ask you a series of questions concerning your personal insights, reflections, perspectives and your satisfaction levels after graduating from an online Ed.D. program.

Many of these questions will pertain directly to your gender and how it affected your lived experience as an employee and an online Doctorate student. The interview will be recorded, and I will take detailed notes during and after your interview. There will also be some questions about what you have done since you graduated and how you feel about it presently.

Do you have any questions so far?

I can assure you your identity, name of your school and place of work will remain confidential and not be used in the actual thesis. This research hopes to shed light on the capabilities of women and the wonderful accomplishments women are achieving while offering insight to their satisfaction levels after graduation. Participation is voluntary without pay, however, your participation would be truly appreciated.

Do you think this might be something you are interested in participating in?

(If the answer is yes) I look forward to hearing about your experiences. Do you have any questions about the study? It is okay if you cannot think of anything right now. You can always call me later once you have had time to think about this a bit more. Do you want to set up a tentative date for an interview?

I will send you a follow up email confirming the date and time of our interview. Please know that you can decide not to participate at any time without penalty.

Great thanks so much ________! If you have any additional questions before our interview session please do not hesitate to email me at or call me at 203-982-0066 or email me at amorosino.s@husky.neu.edu . Please also, let me know how you would like the interview to occur.

(If the answer is no) I appreciate your time and I completely understand why you do not want to participate. I wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors, take care.
Appendix C: Signed Informed Consent Form

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Lynda Beltz, NEU Faculty member & Summer C. Amorosino, NEU Doctoral student
Title of Project: Was it worth it? A Portraiture: Women’s Satisfaction with Earning the Online Education Doctorate

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are asked to participate because you are a woman who graduated from an online Ed.D. program. While enrolled in your Ed.D. program you worked fulltime.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this study is to capture your thoughts and reflections about completing an education Doctoral program and whether you think it was worth the time, money, personal and professional sacrifice. This will help existing online Ed.D. programs understand their students and alumni better.

What will I be asked to do?
As a volunteering participant you will need to think about and answer several questions about your academic, personal, professional and financial life. I will interview you in a location and time of your choosing, this includes in-person interviews, phone interviews and interviews through videoconferencing software (like Skype). All interviews will be recorded, if you would not like to be recorded just let me know and I will only take detailed notes. If I take detailed notes, I may have you read through the notes to see if I accidentally missed something you said. It is also possible I may contact you to clarify something you said in either my notes or on the recording. Before, during and after we finish the interview you will have opportunities to ask questions. In the months following your interview I will give you with a final copy of the research study.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
You can choose the place and time of your interview. The interview can be conducted either in person, over the phone or through video conferencing software (like Skype). The interview should take 30 minutes to an hour to complete. Please know I am aware of your privacy and the amount of time you are taking from your busy day. I will take all necessary precautions to make you comfortable and secure.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
Your risks and discomfort will be minimal if present at all. You will be revealing confidential information to me, but know I will keep all names, places etc. anonymous. The likelihood of risk is low. The impact of risks on your daily life and functioning are miniscule especially as all aspects concerning your identity will be kept anonymous.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help improve experiences for all women aspiring to start and education Doctorate program. It may also encourage current and past education Doctorate students while helping to inform admission and higher education professionals looking to improve Ed.D. policies and programs.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your contributions to this study will be completely anonymous to all people except myself and Dr. Lynda Beltz. A pseudonym will be assigned to you and no reports or publications will use your real name. Additionally, we will assign your Ed.D. program a pseudonym as well to protect both you and your Doctorate program. My records, notes, transcripts and all documentation will be held in a password protected digital file on a thumb-drive, locked in my personal desk. I am the only person with a key to the desk. Once the research ends, your personal information will be destroyed within three years of dissertation defense.

In very rare cases, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

**If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?**

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may quit at any time.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**

No special arrangements will be made for compensation or payment for treatment solely because of your participation in this research. Participation is voluntary and may cease at any time. No personally identifiable information will be shared with anyone other than the researchers and risks are minimal.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

As a participant you have the right to stop participating in the study at any time. This includes, before, during and after the interview. If you decide to stop participation you will not suffer any negative repercussions. If you completed a partial interview your interview recordings and transcripts will be destroyed after a week or less from the time you decline participation.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Summer C. Amorosino, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Lynda Beltz, the Principal Investigator for this research project.
**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**

There will be no compensation for participation in this study as it is completely voluntary.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**

There will be no costs to participate in this study.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**

You must be a consenting adult woman who identifies as a woman (naturally born or non-naturally born) ages 24 to 65, who worked fulltime while enrolled in an online education Doctorate program. You must have graduated from your Ed.D. program no less than 6 months and no longer than 5 years to participate in this study. We may ask for you to verify the above criteria for study qualification.

**I agree to take part in this research.**

________________________________________________________________________

Signature of person [parent] agreeing to take part  
Date

________________________________________________________________________

Printed name of person above

Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent  
Date 12/21/16

**Summer C. Amorosino**
Printed name of person above
Appendix D: Interview Protocol/Script

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Participant (Title and Name): _______________________
Interviewer: _____________________________
Date/Time: _____________________________
Interview Format: ___Skype Video Conference/Teleconference/In-Person___

Research questions: How did the demands of pursuing a Doctorate of education degree online while working fulltime affect lived experiences 6-9 women who graduated between May of 2011 and May of 2016? How did earning the Ed.D. affect their personal, financial and professional lives after graduation?

Thank you for participating in this interview. As you may know, I am a Doctorate student in the online Ed.D. program at Northeastern University and this interview will be used as research in my dissertation about women’s lived experiences during their Doctorate work and their perceived outcomes after earning an education Doctorate online. This study hopes to capture your unique experience in an effort to better understand women’s academic and life achievements.

Your responses are the essence of this study, therefore, I would like to take note of everything you say through written notes and digitally recording our interview. Please know your responses are confidential, your name, place of work and personal details will not be released in the study, and a pseudonym will be assigned to your password protected digital file. Once a digital recording has been secured I will take detailed notes to translate your spoken word into written word. These files will also be password protected, only my Doctorate faculty advisor, Dr. Lynda Beltz and I will have access to your digital or written testimonial.

I want to again confirm the receipt of your signed participant consent form, however, for complete transparency I will go over the general guidelines of the form:

- All information provided to me, Summer C. Amorosino remains confidential
- Your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time

Do you have any questions about the form you have signed or the interview process?

The interview should last around 30 minutes and will take no longer than an hour. I have several questions I would like to cover. If a question is unclear to you or if a question makes you uncomfortable please feel free to ask me for clarification or to skip the question entirely. If you
have any additional insights not included in the questions please feel free to comment. Do you have any questions at this time?

**The following is provided as a guide for the type of questions that will be asked of the participants. As a semi-structured interview in a qualitative IPA study, the researcher will ask probing and follow-up questions pertinent to what the participant has shared. The provided interview questions may not be asked of every participant.**

**Context & Background**
First, I would like to get to know you, as a person. For a few minutes I would like you to focus on your background. Please feel free to go in as much depth as you feel comfortable sharing.

- Can you tell me a bit about where you grew up and about your family?
  - Tell me about your current family life.
- Was going to college (undergraduate) something you always thought you would do?
- Did you get a Master’s degree?
  - If so, what was your Master’s degree in?
- Did you have a mentor, or someone who was integral in your pursuing of education?
- Can you briefly describe your professional background (what may be included on your CV or resume)?
- How did you get into the field you’re currently working in?
- What do you like best and least about your employment situation?
- What is your ‘dream job’ or the job you are currently working towards?
- Why did you decide to work fulltime while pursuing your Ed.D.?
  - What was the greatest challenge of working fulltime while in school?
  - Did you tell your employer you were enrolled in an online Ed.D. program?
    - If so, did your supervisor or place of work provide any accommodations or extra support for you while completing your degree?
- Do you think pursuing your Ed.D. affected your fulltime work positively, negatively or not at all?
  - Tell me more about that.

**The Education Doctorate Experience**
Thank you for those thoughtful answers! I would now like to capture your reflections about your experiences while in an online Ed.D. program and your experiences after you graduated. Please include specific examples that will help me understand your experiences.

- Can you describe how you first became aware that an Ed.D. was something you needed to earn?
- Why did you ultimately choose to enroll in your specific online Ed.D. program?
- What about it attracted you?
- Would you recommend your online program to someone looking to pursue their Ed.D.?

- When starting your online Ed.D. did you have a specific reason or goal in mind and how did you feel when you first started a course?
- Describe how important or unimportant it was for you to have the option of taking your Ed.D. courses online.
  - Describe your satisfaction with your online classes?
  - Were there any courses you wished you had taken in a hybrid or face to face format?
  - While earning your online Doctorate, what was a typical day like for you?
- What are your thoughts on the timeframe it took you to complete your degree?
  - Do you think the online format affected the time it took you to complete your degree?
- You have been out of your Doctorate program for ____ months/years can you describe how satisfied you are with finishing your degree?
  - Do you think this satisfaction level has increased or decreased since you graduated?
- After completing your Doctorate, are you pleased with your current life trajectory?
  - Do you think taking Ed.D. coursework effected your quality of life?
- How did you pay for your Doctorate?
  - Can you attribute any increases in pay to the completion of your Doctorate?
- Has your personal life gotten better, worse or stayed the same since you completed your Ed.D.? Please describe in detail.
- Do you think your gender had any impact on how you experienced the completion of your Ed.D.?
- Do you think the online format made your personal life better, worse or had no effect while you were enrolled in classes? Please describe in detail.
- Has the attainment of your Ed.D. helped, hindered or had no effect on your professional life? Please describe in detail.
- What, if anything, would you change about your experience during and/or after earning your Ed.D.?
- Have I missed something you think would be important to include?

You have answered all of the questions I have prepared for today. Thank you so much for taking the time to share your insights with me and for participating in this study. I will be in touch with you in the next few months and will provide you with a copy of the final research analysis. Of course you can always call, text or email me as needed. Before we go, do you have any additional questions or concerns?
Appendix E: Interview Syntheses 1-6

Interview Synthesis 1

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Dr. White is a Caucasian woman in her early 40s currently living in the Northeast with her husband and children. Dr. White is a part time faculty member and has her own practice where she works as an educational consultant and career coach.

Dr. White decided to enroll into an Ed.D. program to broaden her career aspirations. However, a traditional doctoral program would not fit her needs or ambitions. After plenty of research Dr. White enrolled in an Online Education Doctorate program.

Due to her personal and professional life White sought out a program that could be completed online and which stressed practical applications rather than a strictly theoretical research-based curricula. Dr. White said she would not consider a traditional or even a hybrid program (students attend class on weekends etc.) because of work and family obligations. She emphasized the importance of having a flexible online schedule with the option of meeting her classmates in a face-to-face format once a year. Dr. White completed much of her school-work and “attended class” during late evening hours, something a traditional Ed.D. program would not accommodate. Though Dr. White worked full-time while completing her doctoral program she attributes her success in balancing family life, work, and school to having the ability to have a flexible schedule where she could schedule time to complete assignments. Dr. White admits that her personal life aside from family commitments was “not very exciting” but it didn’t seem to bother her at all. Interestingly, Dr. White was pregnant during the dissertation phase of her program, and again she credits the program’s timeline (three years to completion) and online flexibility to the completion of her degree. Aside from being pregnant during the completion of
her degree Dr. White does not attribute her gender as a help or hindrance to her degree attainment.

Dr. White was extremely pleased with her doctoral program and had an excellent experience with most of her professors, particularly bonding with her dissertation advisor. Yet, Dr. White is not certain she would recommend the program to others based on classmate experiences. She cites overwhelmed and disinterested advising as something plaguing her particular online Ed.D. program. Many of her peers had difficulty maintaining feedback or regular communication from their professors and advisors, “Many of my classmates are still in the proposal stage of their dissertation and I have been graduated for over a year; I lucked out with my professors and advisor”. Yet, Dr. White says this is not a problem exclusive to her program. Over the last year White has expanded her practice to include working with doctoral students and coaching and counseling them through their dissertation. She has heard similar complaints from students in other doctoral programs.

The Ed.D. Dr. White earned has paid off professionally and financially despite the student loans she took out to fund the endeavor. Dr. White mentioned that it may be too early to tell how much the degree will pay off, yet she fully acknowledges several opportunities that would otherwise be closed to her without the credential. The degree has helped Dr. White become gain expert credentials in her area of study, this has lead to a number of teaching opportunities, publications and speaking engagements.
InterviewSynthesis2

Dr. Gold is a 60 year old Caucasian woman living with her husband in the Northeast. Dr. Gold has two adult children and a vibrant career as a Vice President of Institutional Advancement for a public University. She is fairly new to her current position and University having started less than a year ago.

Though she has been in the higher education industry for many years, Dr. Gold started her career as television broadcasting professional. However, Dr. Gold decided she did not want to move out of the area and she wanted to start a family, the birth of her first child prompted a change in careers. After fundraising for a local non-profit Dr. Gold secured a part-time public relations position at a local community college which eventually turned into a full-time opportunity. Her combined skills of fundraising and public relations made her a perfect fit for the community college’s advancement department. Dr. Gold gained a mentor at the community college. The mentor was the community college President, he encouraged Dr. Gold to finish her Master’s degree and then encouraged her to go on for her doctorate with the eventual goal of becoming a community college president.

After some hesitation, Dr. Gold started to research a few local programs. One program she considered was a short drive from her place of work however, she ruled the program out quickly since it did not have a completely online option. Dr. Gold mentioned that her job required her to attend events and even travel from time to time so attending class on a regular basis would be very difficult” I didn’t want to drive up there 3 nights a week for several years”. Eventually she enrolled in Coy Fish Pond University’s (CFPU) online Ed.D. program. Aside from CFPU’s fully
online format Dr. Gold mentioned that the school had a quality program which was very important to her.

Dr. Gold mentioned she was nervous and felt “stupid” during her first course “Oh my God, you made the worst mistake of your life, you have bitten off way more than you can chew!” She admits that academic writing was difficult for her, she wrote a paper that was well thought out and factual but the writing style was not academic enough for her professor who “read me the riot act about academic writing told me I needed to get my act together”. However, after plenty of hard work Dr. Gold mastered academic writing and finished her degree in record time, just 2 and a half years.

Dr. tried to “blow through it as fast as possible or I could end up being the oldest person who ever got a doctorate! That motivated me”. She was able to earn her doctorate by age 59 but not without some challenges. Dr. Gold frequently referenced a metaphor another mentor had told her “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time”. This metaphor helped Dr. Gold through many trials and tribulations throughout her doctoral journey. While pursuing her coursework and writing her dissertation Dr. Gold not only worked fulltime in a high level position but was a wife, mother and primary caretaker for her elderly parents (her mother actually lived with Dr. Gold). “That was an emotionally and draining time… I feel like I short changed everyone in my life during that time including the teachers who I was writing papers for. The first time I went to residency I didn’t know how I could be away from the house and my Mother but surprisingly both residencies served as a respite”.

Dr. Gold also mentioned that gender may impact the completion of doctoral work and the outcomes. “We have more self-doubt than men do, women feel more often that their imposters…I think the doctorate means more to women than men”. She also referenced age
several times throughout the interview and also mentioned that older people experience bias in the workplace and classroom, something that was concerned her when entering into the doctoral journey.

When Dr. Gold first started the program she had the goal in mind of one day becoming a community college president however, as time wore on she decided this may not be the direction she wanted to take after all. She is happy in her current position and pleased with her current life trajectory. Though Dr. Gold did not receive financial support, paying for her tuition out of pocket. However, she did benefit from the attainment of her doctoral degree by gaining the confidence needed to negotiate a significantly higher starting salary at her current job. She mentioned that prior to earning her doctorate she never would have tried to negotiate her pay and she is proud of herself for taking the risk. Overall Dr. Gold is extremely satisfied with the quality of her doctorate and the outcomes it has provided citing an enriched higher education world view, more confidence and being able to problem solve on a macro level.
Dr. Silver is a 41 year old African American woman who grew up in the U.S. Virgin Islands and is currently living in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States with her three children. She is currently divorced. Dr. Silver holds a bachelor’s degree, two masters’ degrees, an MBA and her Ed.D. Dr. Silver has had a 17 year long career as a school psychologist, she has also taught undergraduate psychology courses, and is an independent contractor for an organization specializing in math, science and reading intervention. Dr. Silver describes herself as a special education advocate working tirelessly in her school district to educate and help parents of special needs children. She also plays many roles at her current job as a school psychologist, many of these are not within her traditional job description and involve administrative duties and court/student moderation.

Dr. Silver’s dream job would be an entrepreneur where she specialized advocating for special needs children. She would like to own her own business so she could work from home and set her own schedule. She mentions this would be important as a single mother of 3 children, one of whom is on the autism spectrum. Dr. Silver credits her own special needs child for her passion for helping students and her developed sense of empathy for the parents of special needs children.

Dr. Silver had many obstacles to her success in the Ed.D. program (though gender was not perceived as one of them) yet she thrived, graduating from the program in just three years. When Dr. Silver started her program she had two very young children and had already been enrolled in an online MBA program. While still pursuing her MBA Dr. enrolled in her Ed.D. program, once her coursework was completed she became pregnant with her third child. This motivated her to
complete her dissertation within the year so she could graduate in time. Dr. Silver cites her greatest challenge of working fulltime while in school as “…finding quality time with my kids, being that they were so young it was difficult finding that perfect schedule.” She also mentions that though her schoolwork was challenging and of high quality it was certainly not the hardest part of her doctoral journey. Dr. Silver also credits her success to being “type A, I am very organized and structured”. Her time management skills allowed her adequate time with her children, something extremely important to her, while also thriving in school and her job.

Originally Dr. Silver wanted to attend law school however, she did not want to take the LSAT. Yet she always wanted to have “…some sort of ‘D’ (referring to a Doctorate) behind her name”. When exploring her options Dr. Silver knew she “…wanted a quality program where I could expand my knowledge-base as an educator. The only way I could truly be a revolutionary change agent in education was from within my school, so um it wasn’t even the Ed.D. it was Coy Fish Pond University and what they could offer, it was a more action oriented program. It was Coy Fish Pond University’s Ed.D. not the Ed.D. degree in and of itself (that she was seeking)”. Dr. Silver was also attracted to her program’s online and flexible asynchronous format which enabled her to work fulltime and spend time with her children while still receiving a quality education. Dr. Silver does caution that “…if you are not disciplined (with your online coursework), you will not finish. Many times you are both the student and the teacher. You need to motivate yourself”.

Dr. Silver is satisfied with her degree and current life trajectory. However, she mentions that she wished her degree was more easily parlayed into a career change. She would recommend that her particular online Ed.D. program provide more support to students who are looking to do a career change, suggesting they emphasize the importance of publishing and providing some sort of
career guidance. Though Dr. Silver would like to change careers she has not made that change yet. Though, she credits her program’s courses and professors with helping her take away self-doubt while also creating a vision for her future. Dr. Silver is hopeful she can change careers in the future, armed with her doctoral degree and outlook on life. When asked about her thoughts on a non-traditional action oriented group dissertation Dr. Silver experiences mixed thoughts. “If it was managed right, and if people who were willing to do their fair-share of the work are included, I could see it working”. Though hopeful something like this would work, Dr. Silver was skeptical based on her own experiences with group work during classes. She says strict guidelines would need to be met by students and the program would need enough staff to monitor student progress.

Financially, Dr. Silver is doing well, in just a short 3 years she was able to command an additional $9,000 in raises associated with her doctoral degree attainment. This will help her pay down some of the student loans she had to take out to finance her Ed.D. Dr. Silver’s school district did fund a few doctoral courses a year for her however, no other support was provided to her.
Interview Synthesis 4

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Dr. Blue is a Caucasian woman in her late 40s living in the Northeast. She has never been married or had children. Dr. Blue has had a diverse and long career in the education field. She was a school teacher, assistant principal, principal, school leader and now works for a company which evaluates education programs. Dr. Blue is the type of person who needs a change and/or challenge in her professional life every 5-7 years. This drive to improve and challenge herself led her to seek out a doctoral program.

Dr. Blue had a friend who was also looking to pursue her doctorate, the friend convinced Dr. Blue to attend an open house for the University’s Ed.D. program. The friend and Dr. Blue decided to start their doctoral journey together. Dr. Blue was not sure what she wanted to do with the doctorate but knew she would use it to change careers. She was tired of K-12 administration and figured she could leverage a doctoral degree to change career paths.

Dr. Blue did not have a mentor encouraging her throughout her doctoral work, though her friend was certainly of help. However, Dr. Blue did receive financial support from her place of employment. She was able to negotiate tuition remission with her employer as long as she stayed a certain amount of time at the school after the completion of her doctorate. Dr. Blue stayed at the school for 1.5 years then left for her current job.

Dr. Blue finished her doctorate very quickly; she started in 2009 and graduated in 2011. She stated that the program was “pretty grueling and life changing, it had great impact on my personal and professional life”. Dr. Blue mentioned how she had been in a 20 year relationship and by the end of her doctoral journey that relationship had ended. She cited many reasons for
the separation but acknowledged that she was not able to pay attention to her significant other
due to work and coursework and they drifted apart. She also mentioned that her professional
work suffered while she was in school. She mentioned that sometimes she needed to take
“shortcuts” in her work because there was only so much time in a day; she couldn’t “keep adding
to her plate without taking away”. Dr. Blue freely admits that sometimes her doctorate took
precedence over all other aspects in her life.

Dr. Blue is extremely satisfied with her degree attainment, life trajectory and professional
opportunities the doctorate has presented to her. She mentions the online program most likely
helped her expedite her degree quickly while also instilling quality education. “It (earning your
doctorate) should be a lot of hard work and perseverance, you don’t want it (the doctoral
program) to turn into a program where everyone person can become a doctor…It is ultimately
worth it, pursuing work and a doctorate is hard work. I think the program is a career changer or
expander”.

She especially likes her job and thinks she would not have been able to secure this job without
the doctorate. Though she financially took a pay cut to switch jobs she mentions that her work
life balance has been greatly improved. “I don’t think I need to go crazy anymore (related to her
professional goals). I am a notch on the belt kind of person meaning I had to check off every
time I got promoted, got that second home, the cars the boat”. Dr. Blue thinks the job she has
now as well as experience has taught her to relax a little and do work that is interesting to her.
Reflecting on her doctoral experience, she mentions the only thing she would change (or advice
she would give) would be to slow down and not go through the doctoral coursework so quickly.
Lastly, Dr. Blue believes an alternative dissertation is a great idea citing the dissertation itself “as a form of hazing”.
Interview Synthesis 5

Dr. Rose is a Caucasian woman in her late 30s living in the Northeast with her husband of 5 years and two young children (a 4 year old and an infant). She is currently an assistant principal, however, she began her career as a biology teacher.

Her parents served as both mentors and supporters of her educational pursuits. They say Dr. Rose had wanted to be a teacher for as long as they can remember. Dr. Rose mirrors this notion by saying she never wanted to be an administrator in her early years yet, as time wore on she found herself becoming bored with teaching. She described the moment she knew she needed a change. She was teaching her high school biology class as usual and said told a biology related joke. As the students laughed she felt an immense sense of déjà vu, recalling she had told this exact joke in this exact lesson a year ago. Though she loved teaching she knew she had to move on. Dr. Rose had many classmates from her Master’s degree that were now becoming administrators. One of her classmates contacted her and said there was a job opening in a school for an assistant principal position, Dr. Rose applied for the job and got it. Dr. Rose says “She loves her job and it’s a perfect fit” though she is not sure she could do this same job elsewhere.

Dr. Rose’s doctoral journey was a long and sometimes complicated journey taking her over the full 7 years mandated to completion. When she first started the program it was without a specific goal in mind. She attributes a bit of peer pressure from friends who were enrolling in doctoral programs, plenty of free time and some extra money as the reasons for enrolling. At first the online component of the program was not as important because she was single, without children and making a decent salary, so she did not have the time constraints. Dr. Rose completed her coursework quickly (within two and a half years), however, after this point her personal life
circumstances changed. She got married and then had her first child. At this point she had mentally given up on the Ed.D. program, withdrawing and focusing on how to be a wife, mother and fulltime employee for around 2 years. After this time period the University gave Dr. Rose a choice of continuing her Doctoral work or receiving a certificate for the completed coursework. Dr. Rose’s attributes her continuance to several people. First, her husband and parents encouraged her to continue, helping her carve out the time she needed to focus on writing a dissertation. Second, Dr. Rose’s dissertation advisor ensured her she could “do it” and was her “perpetual cheerleader”. The advisor was a “cheerleader most of the time and also was tough on me when I needed it, she told me the things I didn’t want to hear but needed to hear”.

Though Dr. Rose’s doctoral program changed significantly throughout her time in it, she would still recommend it to others. She was highly satisfied with both the coursework and the University administration, citing their support throughout the process. Though Dr. Rose has not seen any financial benefits from the degree just yet, she is hopeful. At this time she is on maternity leave and unable to renew her contract with salary until her return this spring. If Dr. Rose could have changed anything about her doctoral experience it would have been to jump into the dissertation right away as she could not have anticipated life happening and the process “getting away from her” as it had.

Lastly, Dr. Rose recommends her program offer an alternative dissertation or a departure from the typical 5 chapter dissertation. She even mentioned how the program originally was supposed to offer a group dissertation, however, by the time her coursework was complete that option morphed into a traditional dissertation. Many of her classmates were upset with this change, though she chalks this up to being in the first cohort of a brand new program. She mentioned that the University was “…so out there initially, the pendulum swung from innovative back to what
they knew. From super liberal to super traditional”. She thinks this may have made the
University administration uncomfortable (not the students), because it moved too quickly and
they weren’t prepared.
**Interview Synthesis 6**

Dr. Red is a Caucasian Latina in her early 30s currently living in the Northeast. She is not married and does not have children, yet maintains a close relationship with her sister and mother. Dr. Red works full-time as an assistant principal at a high school, however, she started her career as an English and literacy teacher.

Dr. Red has been graduated from her online Ed.D. program for nearly 4 years. As a 27 year old woman, she had a very aggressive timeline when pursuing her doctorate with a goal to complete it by age 30. Before discovering her degree granting Ed.D. program Dr. Red took a course at a competing local State University. Dr. Red found the course was not interactive nor was it challenging. Dissatisfied with the course, Dr. Red started looking for other programs with an online or hybrid format. After attending an Open House for her degree granting program she decided to enroll. Dr. Red believes the online format helped her graduate quickly as she was able to expertly plan ahead and organize. She believes the traditional doctoral format would have slowed her down and her goals would not have been realized. Though the program was completed quickly, Dr. Red insists it was a challenging program. Though she would recommend her program to others she cautions “…If you’re not driven and don’t have a direction for your education, it can be very easy to take a few courses and drift away from it. You need to know what you want to get out of it (the Education Doctorate). Doing courses online is harder, you need to be self-reliant since there is less accountability than going to class every day”.

Though Dr. Red finished her program quickly, it was not without adversity. She received little support from her place of work, paid for the program entirely out of pocket and most devastatingly lost her father to cancer. Additionally, Dr. Red helped care for her ailing
grandparents throughout the doctoral journey. Dr. Red’s grandfather served as her mentor and champion during the doctoral process so his waning health was particularly difficult for Dr. Red. Dr. Red thought that gender had more of an effect on her doctoral attainment when she was in the face-to-face portion of her online program (i.e. residency or a class offered in the hybrid format). She said the women in the classroom would “…size her and the other women in the class up”. She felt she was “…dinged three times because she was young, a woman and working in an inner-city school”. However, the online courses took all that competition away and made her classmates and professors focus on the actual course goals.

Dr. Red attributes her success to organization/time management and her mentor/family support system. Dr. Red is extremely proud of her accomplishments, however, she admits her social life “took a hit”. Since she completed her coursework in her 20s she implies she may have missed out on some key socializing years. She mentioned many of her friends have since gotten married and started having children. Though she is not interested in having children, she mentions feeling social pressure to be socially “caught up” with her peers. When asked about her everyday life during the doctoral process she mentions frequenting a coffee shop after work each day. Here she would put on headphones and work on school assignments for at least 2 hours. She mentions that because she had headphones on and was deeply entrenched in her work, it signaled to those around her she was unapproachable, also thwarting a social element in her life.

Overall Dr. Red was thrilled with her program and degree attainment. The only thing she would change would be to remain more connected to her University’s community. Lastly, Dr. Red would promote the use of a non-traditional dissertation.