Doctoral Students’ Persistence in Counseling Education and Supervision:

A PhotoVoice Study

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Abstract

In the Ph.D. program attrition rates are an on-going issue and Universities are evaluating their programs in order to keep students motivated. The purpose of this research is to evaluate the attrition rates of the Counseling Education and Supervision (CES) program at Liberty University. The research will study what keeps students in this program engaged and motivated. Using a qualitative research method called Participatory Action Research (PAR), the participants will use PhotoVoice in particular. Working in a team the PhotoVoice project and the students’ demographics will be analyzed to locate common themes among the students.

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The Ph.D. program is a difficult program to enter and a difficult program to complete. Hoskins (2005) defines persistence the continuation of the student’s progress in the goal of completing a doctoral degree. Hardre (2019), reports dropout is a critical issue across all university programs. Research is showing that approximately half of the doctoral students do not complete their degree (Breitenbach, 2019). The success of a doctoral student program measured by comparing retention, graduation, persistence, and attrition, the current attrition rates fluctuate from 40%-60% (Brietenbach, 2019; Hardre, 2019). Colleges and universities are accessing the issues as to why there is an issue with keeping students in a program and how to address such issues. Hoskins (2005) speaks toward the careful selection process, and there is still an issue with high attrition.

The question remains, what is causing the attrition problems and how can the universities address the issues, both in their online and residential programs. Some students have a timing issue. The student works full-time or several part-time jobs in addition to family requirements. Hardre (2019) speaks to learning influenced by timing, health, life circumstances, experiences, goals, and expectations.

Liberty University’s Ph.D. program chose to focus on their Counseling Education and Supervision (CES) students to address this issue. The CES program is an online/intensive based program. For many of the courses, the students travel to Lynchburg, Virginia, if they do not already live in the area, to attend a week-long intensive for the course. Depending on the number of courses enrolled, the student can be making the trip more than one time. In my case, I choose to drive from Houston, Tx to Lynchburg, Va for each intensive and I currently take two intensives based courses a semester. The professor for the students who will be participating is Dr. Sosin, she teaches counseling 750, or better known as qualitative studies. Dr. Sosin's approach is hands-on and applicable; for that reason, our March 2019 intensive became participants in a qualitative study regarding attrition rates. More specifically, we focused on the attrition of the Ph.D. students at Liberty University working toward their CES degree that is currently in the March 2019 Counseling 750 course.

**Literature Review**

The literature in studying doctoral students’ persistence is limited. It has not studied systematically (Hardre, 2019). There was however literature that provided ways in which the doctoral program is challenging in general. Two systematic quantitative studies speak to the factors influencing student dropout rates and a third to study the persistence of students (Hardre, 2019). According to Hoskins, most research in this area has been quantitative and a lack of qualitative research (2005).

Alkathiri (2018) completed a qualitative study of ten doctoral students using the ethnographic case study. In this study, the students' responses were either perceived challenges that may face a doctoral student and perceptions of the professoriate (2018). Using thematic analysis, Alkathiri found some similarities to this study, such as the stress of working part time or full time while obtaining their degree or the pursuit of a Ph.D. to become tenure at universities (2018). The challenges faced by these students included balancing work and personal life (Alkathiri, 2018). Some of the participants spoke to the cohort model being difficult (Alkathiri, 2018). This model is similar to Liberty University's with the online/intensive mixed format.

In Breitenbach (2019), a study completed regarding doctoral students attrition rates. The research showed isolation as a cause for attrition and support the use of cohorts (2019). Another possible cause for doctoral students to persist is quality curriculum and instruction, a way in which the students have a sense of structure (2019).

When discussing the non-traditional Ph.D. student, Graham et al. (2019) explain that there are shortcomings with regards to support to doctoral students. This study also evaluated the importance of student socialization; however, stating it is not as easy since the structure is not always available, like Liberty's intensive structure (2019).

Hardre (2019) speaks to the different issues that may affect student attrition rates. The primary factor for success Hardre found is the student's satisfaction with his or her experience and academia (2019). Another factor is satisfaction with the faculty and the student's advisor (2019). Hardre also found the students achieved their goal when they were competing with the value of their education (2019). In a qualitative study, Ph.D. student persistence enhances academic matching and social contexts (Hardre, 2019).

For many students, the financial cost is a significant contributing factor in not obtaining their Ph.D. (Hoskins, 2005). Hoskins further assesses this leaving can lead the student to be depressed and possibly suicidal (2005).

**Method**

The qualitative research method called Participatory Action Research (PAR) was chosen to provide an in-depth and personal view of the participants' perseverance at Liberty University's CES Ph.D. program. The PAR approach empowers the participants to educate others regarding issues they face in a particular arena, using photos and narratives the researcher is provided a view at the participant’s unique perspective (Agarwal et al., 2015). Participatory action research used with education began around the 1940s and 50s. However, it declined in the 1950s and 60s (Jacobs, 2016). Jacobs speaks about the PAR regaining legitimacy in the 1970s (Jacobs, 2016). PAR is based primarily on reflection and data collection to improve a particular area (Baum et al., 2006), for example, attrition in Liberty University's CES program. It is a self-reflective method of inquiry and should lead those participating within it a sense of empowerment with regards to increased control over their lives (Baum et al., 2006).

Using PhotoVoice, in particular, provides a unique opportunity for the participants to share his or her feelings metaphorically. This method also provides the researcher with a unique perspective into the participants' worldview in ascertaining how one perseveres in a difficult program with other demands on his or her plate. Working in a team the PhotoVoice project and the students' demographics will be analyzed to locate common themes among the students.

To begin the participants were asked to journal in depth those items that helped or hindered the persistence of obtaining a Ph.D. at Liberty University in the CES department. The research questions focused on the following questions:

1. What personal factors influence you?
2. What family, the family of origin and present family factors influence you?
3. What factors related to the CES program and institution influence you?
4. What do you need in any of these areas to have a stronger desire to persist?

The researcher's role in this project is also that of a participant. I am a Ph.D. student at Liberty University and currently pursuing my Ph.D. in Counseling Education and Supervision. I am also a current student of Dr. Sosin in Counseling 750 intensive March 2019. The participants are not only classmates but have also grown to become friends from our time during intensive weeks. We do collaborate and support each other during the class time when away from the campus. This experience of not only being a participant and researcher can provide a level of bias as I understand the struggle personally each of the other participants speaks.

**Participants**

The PhotoVoice project included 13 student participants, 3 of these are male. For a qualitative study using photovoice, this is an adequate amount of participants. Participants ages ranged from 25 to 58. Two participants are in their 20s. Four participants are in their 30s. Three participants are in their 40s. Four participants are in their 50s. The majority of the participants identified their ethnicity as Caucasian (n=10), two of the participants identify their ethnicity as African American/Black, and one of the participants identify her ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino. Most of the participants are married (n=8). Participants began the program ranging from 2014 to 2017, the majority of which began in 2016 (n=7). Nine participants identify as Christian. Eight of the participants have children; five of those participants have children living at home. The participants stated that the primary reason for pursuing this degree is a personal goal (n=7).

**Project Procedures**

For this study, participants recruited were from Dr. Sosin's counseling 750 courses, qualitative research at Liberty University during their intensive class March of 2019. The participants are eligible since they are all attending a doctoral level course under the CES program at Liberty University.

Each participant was asked to answer a demographic survey (responses provided in appendix ii) and complete a PowerPoint for class presentation providing three pictures focusing on personal, family, and institution, as well as answering questions regarding how those pictures help or hinder the student in persisting (themes and vignettes provided in appendix i). Each participant had fifteen minutes to complete their presentation.

**Interview Protocols**

Using the semi-structured protocol, each student provided time after the presentation to answer any questions, such as “How do you persist when you are not feeling support from your spouse?" Following all of the presentations, the interviewers discussed each participants' PhotoVoice presentation. If necessary, the interviewers returned to the participants to gather more information. The researchers also discussed their feelings regarding each participants' presentation.

**Coding and Data Analysis**

Each student was uploading their demographic information and PhotoVoice PowerPoint presentation to blackboard where each student had access provided data collection. Once uploaded I downloaded each PowerPoint and demographic page to my laptop. I also wrote notes of relevant information each participant shared during his or her presentation. After obtaining all data, we were divided into teams of two to three to begin the process of reviewing data.

The goal was to locate or identify themes or patterns, using thematic analysis, evaluating the issues of attrition in Ph.D. programs. Andrea Garraway and I worked together in order to complete coding first data set. During the coding process, we focused on categories, preliminary themes, and supported each theme with a verbatim quote. In order to more efficiently handle the data, Andrea began to decipher the demographic form and create a table using Excel. I continued coding the remainder of the data sets in order to find themes and vignettes. The themes discovered as consistent patterns that appeared in multiple PhotoVoice presentations and demographics. The vignettes provide the participants own words and experiences to obtain a more profound meaning concerning attrition.

To ensure trustworthiness, Andrea and I met by phone to review demographics and data sets, checking and member checking the data to ensure the results match the data provided by the participants.

**Results**

After the data and demographics had gone through copious amounts of checking and member checking, we discovered eleven themes that kept the students at Liberty University motivated in the CES Ph.D. program. To keep track of the data results, Andrea and I used Excel and Word documents. I filed and saved all of the information in a particular file on my computer, where each participant has a folder with their PhotoVoice PowerPoint, demographic page. The file for this project holds research and reflective journals explaining the process for collecting data and locating the themes.

**Faith**

All thirteen participants state they are Christian, although their church may differ from others. Faith is a theme in most of the participants' PhotoVoice presentations (n=11). Mrs. Hill explained "My lifestyle for the past forty years is one of seeking God's purpose. I hope to finish, not only this Ph.D. program but also the rest of my life, with this same commitment." Francois expressed "I find solace and peace as I cry out to Christ when experiencing these feelings [of not persevering] and regain a sense of peace." Brandon tells us "my faith guides my ethics, determination, and desire to help others." Mrs. Luz explains "God has provided for our every need," as she speaks about her and her husband's struggles while in this program. Teresa desires to "pursue God's will. [She] prays for guidance as [she] balances work, family and class commitments." Teresa and I shared almost identical thoughts as "I lean on God for strength and provision." Sagen also shared "The Lord is going through this Ph.D. journey with me." Margaret shared she "prays for God's help in doing her best." Cherry told about remembering “that there are also joys along the way and that joy is a gift from God.” Finally, Andrea shared she is “willing to stay on the path and keep growing in Christ.”

**Persistence**

This theme, persistence, showed in many of the participants (n=11). Sagen plans to "continue pressing onward." Andrea explains within her culture, "persistence begins with an intrinsic belief that getting my Ph.D. is not an anomaly nor an aberration, but it is a right that has been indelibly imprinted on my heart." Will runs marathons and likened his view of persistence to a marathon by explaining, "persistence, along with hard work, brings reward." Rebecca is also active with her children and sports. She explains "I observe tenacity in a new way." Margaret spoke of her limitations and personal concerns. Therefore persistence is "the determination and frame of mind I need to complete the assignments." Ken, as we will later see, has his place to do all of his school work and regular work, "I could do my Ph.D. without my office, but it has become very significant in my persistence." Jamie told about her husband comparing her to a kite, for her persistence is similar, "a kite cannot fly on a calm day. Wind is necessary. This mirrors the reality of pursuing a Ph.D. because I cannot expect the journey to be slow and serene." Heyde's persistence is "finding my inner voice, my confidence in my abilities and my motivation has helped me persist in my professional journey." Francois compares persistence to a work ethic "because I recognize that there is a wealth of knowledge needed to learn in my Ph.D. program." In order for Eric to persist, he chose to move closer to the campus, “I knew that if I stayed in the Midwest, I would not have the commitment to traveling for intensive classes, and I knew that I would not budget appropriately for the classes.” My persistence comes from a desire to show my son “how to achieve in adversity.

**Loneliness**

To combat loneliness within the program, some of us have connected via social media, zoom, and swapped phone numbers. On the social media platform, FaceBook we have a group specifically for those of us within the program or just graduating out of the program. It is our way to touch base and provide support and combat loneliness. However, some still struggle within this area (n=5) Jamie admits to being "a bit of a loner, a ‘hermit,' by nature." Cherry explains her feelings stem from her childhood, “I was silenced as a child, other experienced have reinforced that feeling to the point that I feel fear when I need to express myself in many situations." Sagen has similar feelings as Cherry, but hers are due to her level of experience compared to others in the class, "There are a lot of times that I don't feel like I ‘fit in." Andrea shares that in her culture, “loneliness on my educational path.” I explained to the other participants, “it is also sometimes a lonely road, and many do not understand unless they have been down the road themselves.”

**Age**

In a doctoral program, age can also affect how one perseveres. While some may consider the more advanced student struggling, sometimes it is the younger students who struggle as well. In this study, two participants shared a theme of age being a hindrance for their program. Margaret, age 56, "feels my age has influenced my ability to progress with speed and accuracy." Cherry, age 58, "I know I have limited time and that I am losing physical and mental capabilities." While neither of these ladies is considered elderly by society standards, they both feel as older members of the class age affecting their progress.

**Financial**

Every student in this study works while attending school. Seven of the students work full time and have other financial obligations. This theme affected six of the participants. Rebecca explained, "if anything were to take me out of the CES program, it would be this convincing myself that it is too great a cost and one I cannot continue to pay." Jamie is "constantly having to carefully balance the many financial demands that come along with the program in addition to life at home." Margaret and Cherry struggle in similar ways with regards to finances, Margaret explains, "my struggles to financially support myself, a home, and pay for each class." While Cherry tells us for her "the struggle to make ends meet financially has been my struggle as I have usually been the only or the primary wage earner in the family." On the other side, Heyde explains she is dependent on "God's provision amid our financial challenges." Eric shares her views in that "having the resources available to me that allows me to complete the degree help me feel like I should keep going while I have the chance to do so."

**Family**

As any Ph.D. student will inform a potential student, having the support of your family is beyond valuable. In this study, the participants all spoke about how vital family has been to their program (n=13). Teresa has her "husband and children that are so supportive and understanding." Rebecca reminds us that "for all the love and support and understanding I receive, there will also be opinions, judgment, criticism, misunderstandings, and frustration." Margaret's "Family helps me through my hard places." While Ken's "entire family supports my Ph.D. journey." Jamie shared about her father, and how she perseveres for him since she "had not seen my father in many weeks and I called to make plans with him, and I heard in his response how much he missed me. I excitedly made plans to see him that Saturday. He died on Thursday." Heyde has the support of her husband as "he walks this journey with me and support me throughout." Francois speaks about our times where we have to say no to the family for papers, "However at times I feel guilty when I feel compelled to type a research paper when my granddaughter wants to play." Eric's family is "a strong family support system has been beneficial to me, and I take advantage of it when I can." Like Eric, my family's response "was, ‘we will support you in any way we can' and they have." Andrea shares she views her "family is a strong pillar in my life." Will's family has "supported me and blessed me." While Cherry explains her family is "not impressed by the effort and commitment, but it feels good to be different in a way I can control" but she is not letting this stop her from persevering. Finally, Sagen's family "helps a lot."

**Friends**

For many of us, our friends are just like family and in some cases more important than family. Four participants spoke of their friendships helping them persevere. For Margaret, “personal friends provide stability.” For myself, “they encourage and pray with me. They keep me awake on my drive.” Andrea shares “my community and feeling like I am apart of a village gives me hope.” Sagen shares "friends are what is getting me through this."

**Liberty University Faculty**

The faculty, in many ways, is what helps Liberty's program be the success it is when eleven out of thirteen participants speak to the faculty support. Teresa explained, "I may not always appreciate their methods at the moment, but when I reflect, I know they have my best interests at heart." Rebecca has "found leadership that inspires and allows me to want to submit to the tutelage." Margaret speaks to the "friendly relationships between the professors and the students promotes academic success." Jamie explains "working with faculty that has high expectations for me while also showing genuine care and support has stretched me and made me a better counselor and human being." Francois has found "the majority of the faculty members within the program provide support for me since beginning my Ph.D. journey." Heyde shared about "faculty, cohort, and family and continuously encouraged me to move forward in my personal and professional development." Eric has not had any issues with the faculty. He felt that if he reaches "out to faculty or staff, they have been able to provide information and support that can make me a better student." Cherry explains that the "professors and staff at Liberty are usually accommodating and responsive, which lessens the feeling of being just ‘out there' in this distance learning environment." Andrea feels like "LU is always here for me." In my case, "Liberty University is one of the best university's I have seen as far as encouraging it is students to be the best they can be." On the dissenting side, Ken had a bad experience returning after taking some time off, he explains, "while faculty were kind and accommodating, the admissions department of Liberty made it extremely difficult to continue with my program.” K. Miller

**Intensive Peers**

Out of the thirteen participants, eleven felt as though the intensive peers helped provide perseverance. Teresa considers her intensive peers as friends, and she is "motivated to come back to each intensive to spend time with my friends." Margaret would also agree with Teresa in that "the friends that I have made in this program are inspirational and push me to move forward." Ken also speaks highly of fast connections, "I believe that connection with other students at intensives has been essential to my persistence." Jamie explains for her "connecting with and forming a community with those in your cohort is something incredibly special." Heyde enjoys the “developing [of] a cohort [and its] essential in finding support.” Francois speaks about her colleagues in this program “provide support for me as well.” Eric reaches out to his intensive peers for support when “I ever hit a hurdle I cannot get over.” Andrea enjoys the "Collaboration with peers," much like she and I collaborated with this project. For me, our "network with each other outside of our intensives is what helps in between our class gatherings." Sagen bashfully admits to taking a "look at the course roster before the intensive and I know how the week is going to go." For Cherry, though, she finds "intensives feel very unsafe for me.”

**“Happy Place”**

The theme, happy place is placed in parenthesis because the five participants who felt this was a motivating factor coined it. Rebecca speaks of her place and explains "I take time to enjoy what I can when I can. I go to my ‘happy place' - literally and figuratively - as much as I am able." Ken informs us his "home office is one of the best places on planet earth." Jamie views her "my family is my happy place." For Will, this is "the place I go for quiet." For myself,

“my home away from home when I am here for intensives is Lynchburg, Va.”

**Graduation Day**

Seven of the participants spoke of graduation day as a motivation to persevere. Margaret sees this day as "I finally made it." For Ken, "it is more about the intense drive and desire to finish than the regalia and comradely of graduation." Jamie has high expectations for herself as she is "a first-generation college graduate." Eric also has high expectations as he "will be the first to graduate with a doctorate." For Heyde, it is a tide change where her "sweat and tears that will become my pride and joy.” Cherry sees this day as a day of “joy and celebration accompany a completed effort or journey." For Sagen and me, it is about those three letters, Ph.D. For myself, “it will all be worth it." For Sagen, she sees "getting a Ph.D. as an accomplishment, and there is also the desire to have the knowledge that comes with the Ph.D., the ability to continue getting that knowledge, and the prestige as well.”

**Discussion**

In this study, the personal factors of influence came primarily from one's faith and personal motivation to succeed in Liberty's CES Ph.D. program. The family, family of origin and present family factors influence in our family support and intensive peers support. It appeared from the research that many of us view our intensive peer group as our extended family. The most significant contributing factor that influences success in this program comes from the faculty support. According to the data, when the students feel or believe they are receiving support, especially from those they hold in high regard, their work level improves and they are highly motivated to continue. However, as Ken experienced, he had issues with returning to the program. After his presenting, he was pleased to discover the issues in that arena had a correction. The theme many of the students struggled within is financial (n=6). While this number is not even half of the participants, it does show a possible area for Liberty University to evaluate.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations to this study. One such limitation was the amount of time with each of the participants face-to-face. While we can connect with most outside of class, having the face-to-face aspect would help solidify some of the data themes and vignettes. A second limitation is an idea that some students may have placed finances as an issue for the school to look into, with regards to attrition rates, however, because it was not written down in the notes, or the PowerPoint, or demographics. Then it is as if the statement never existed.

**Implications for Research and Practice**

This study involved one class from one university, and while it can be beneficial to other universities, it is the first step of many to correct the attrition problem of Ph.D. programs both online, face-to-face, or a combination. An area of interest can be a view of other colleges CES program and their persistence, using the same process within this paper. If a university has several completed and supported articles that view the same aspect at different campuses, all saying the same results; then the Universities could make adequate changes to build their programs successfully. Without replication, we can make a supportive, strong idea of what helps the attrition problem, but with replication, we can extend it successfully to other programs. When attrition rates improve, there will possibly be more CES Ph.D. students who are impacting the counseling world with their advanced training.

Provided the limitations, what actions can be taken to address this issue? First of all, students need faculty support despite the educational format. Students need to be aware that when they email a professor, they will receive a response within 24-48 hours. Students also need to have a reliable support system at home. If the student applies without such a support system, it may behoove the University to deny the application on those grounds. The exception can be if the student has a secure network and connection with the students in the program. Finally, the university should make counselors available to the students when they face a challenge and are unsure how to proceed. Access to counselors would help eradicate the feelings of loneliness and ageism in the program. These results, evaluated, by those within the Ph.D. CES program, as well as counselors who may work with the students as an advisor or therapist.

For further study, further research would be valuable to provide additional support to these findings. If this study replicated on additional campuses, it could help lower or eliminate the student attrition program. In the additional studies, an evaluation of life circumstances, and life experiences would be an added edition.

As the researcher in the study, it was fascinating to work through the process. For one, the overwhelming data from a total of forty-six slides and a demographic page was overwhelming at times. My preconceived thought included every participant sharing something with regards to faith or family or finances. It was interesting to discover while many did speak to these issues; it was not nearly all of the students. My personal biases come from a place of having a great experience as a Masters level student at Liberty University. Therefore, I made assumptions that many would speak highly to the faculty as providing support, but only eleven students reported. However, what did ring true is that at a conservative Christian school, not everyone spoke of their beliefs or faith moving them toward the goal of graduation.

With the knowledge from previous studies, as provided in the literature review, and our current knowledge as students in the program, the themes mentioned within this paper are those a University should desire to pay close attention to and apply. If these themes are happening at Liberty University, then it could be worse for another University.

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**Reflection of Experience**

During this process I was afforded the opportunity to learn a hands-on approach to complete qualitative research. While the work, coding and completing the data sets became quite overwhelming at times, it allowed me to see how much work is involved when completing a qualitative study.

The other interesting fact is that my middle sister, who just completed her Ph.D., joined me for lunch today where we discussed qualitative research. While her degree is in Speech Pathology, we have enjoyed learning how similar some of our classes have been. She told me of her qualitative class and was fascinated that we were able to complete this project.

After completing this project and completing quantitative research, as well as, speaking with my sister at lunch about dissertation topics and methods; I might be looking at a mixed method approach for my dissertation. It also helped when one of my clients heard about the topic I am seriously considering for my dissertation and she offered to participate. While she may not end of participating, my first thought included, “this is what it would be like for qualitative research, listening to people like my clients and obtaining narratives to discover more.”

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Appendix i

Theme with Vignettes

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Theme** | **Number of Participants** | **Direct Quotes** |
| Faith | n=11 | “I lean on God for strength and provision.” A. Waggoner  “My faith guides my ethics, determination, and desire to help others.” B. Waggoner  “God has provided for our every need.” H. Luz  “I always want to pursue God’s will. I pray for guidance as I try to balance work, family, and class commitments.” T. Harris  “My lifestyle for the past 40 years is one of seeking God’s purpose. I hope to finish, not only this Ph.D. program but also the rest of my life, with this same commitment.” R. Hill  “Praying for God’s help and doing my best.” M. Lee  “God has provided for our every need.” H. Luz  “Fortunately, I find solace and peace as I cry out to Christ when experiencing these feelings and regain a sense of peace.” F. Parr  “I can remember that there are also joys along the way, and that joy is a gift from God.” C. Nelson  “I am willing to stay on the path and keep growing in Christ.” A. Garraway  "The Lord is going through this Ph.D. journey with me." S. Blackwell |
| Persistence | N= 11 | “Continue pressing onward.” S. Blackwell  "Persistence begins with an intrinsic belief that getting my Ph.D. is not an anomaly nor an aberration, but it is a right that has been indelibly imprinted on my heart." A. Garraway "Persistence, along with hard work, brings reward." W. Carroll  “I observe tenacity in a new way.” R. Hill  “The determination and frame of mind I need to complete the assignments.” M. Lee  “I could do my Ph.D. without my office, but it’s become very significant in my persistence.” K Miller  "A kite cannot fly on a calm day. Wind is necessary. This mirrors the reality of pursuing a Ph.D. because I cannot expect the journey to be slow and serene." J. McNally  “Finding my inner voice, my confidence in my abilities, and my motivation has helped me persist in my professional journey.” H. Luz  “Work ethic relates to my persistence because I recognize that there is a wealth of knowledge needed to learn in my Ph.D. program.” F. Parr  “I knew that if I stayed in the Midwest, I would not have the commitment to traveling for intensive classes, and I knew that I would not budget appropriately for the classes.” E. Pustmueller  “I have to remind myself that he is seeing me persist and I am teaching my son how to achieve in adversity or at least I hope that is how he views it.” A. Waggoner  “I do not quit tasks that I have taken on.” W. Carroll |
| Loneliness | N=5 | "I am a bit of a loner, a ‘hermit,' by nature. J. McNally  “I was silenced as a child, other experienced have reinforced that feeling to the point that I feel fear when I need to express myself in many situations.” C. Nelson  "It is also sometimes a lonely road, and many do not understand unless they have been down the road themselves." A. Waggoner  “Loneliness on my educational path.” A. Garraway  "There are a lot of times that I don't feel like I ‘fit in.” S. Blackwell |
| Age | n= 2 | "I also feel my age has influenced my ability to progress with speed and accuracy." M. Lee  “I know I have limited time and that I am losing physical and mental capabilities.” C. Nelson |
| Financial | n=6 | “If anything were to take me out of the CES program, it would be this convincing myself that it is too great a cost and one I cannot continue to pay.” R. Hill  “My struggles to financially support myself, a home, and pay for each class.” M. Lee  “Constantly having to carefully balance the many financial demands that come along with the program in addition to life at home.” J. McNally  "God's provision amid our financial challenges." H. Luz  "Having the resources available to me that allow me to complete the degree help me feel like I should keep going while I have the chance to do so." E. Pustmueller  "The struggle to make ends meet financially has been my struggle as I have usually been the only or the primary wage earner in the family." C. Nelson |
| Family | n=13 | “My husband and children are so supportive and understanding.” T. Harris  "This picture reminds me that for all the love and support and understanding I receive, there will also be opinions, judgment, criticism, misunderstandings, and frustration." R. Hill  “Family helps me through my hard places.” M. Lee  “My entire family supports my Ph.D. journey.” K. Miller  "I hadn't seen my father in many weeks, and I called to make plans with him, and I heard in his response how much he missed me. I excitedly made plans to see him that Saturday. He died on Thursday." J. McNally  “My husband decided he would walk this journey with me and support me throughout.” H. Luz  "However at times, I feel guilty when I feel compelled to type a research paper when my granddaughter wants to play." F. Parr  "Having a strong family support system has been beneficial to me, and I take advantage of it when I can." E. Psutmueller  “They are not impressed by the effort and commitment, but it feels good to be different in a way I can control.” C. Nelson  “My parents’ comment was, ‘we will support you in any way we can’ and they have.” A. Waggoner  "My family is a strong pillar in my life." A. Garraway  “They had supported me and blessed me.” W. Carroll  "Well, my family helps a lot." S. Blackwell |
| Friends | n=4 | “Personal friends provide stability.” M. Lee  “They encourage and pray with me. They keep me awake on my drive.” A. Waggoner  "My community and feeling like I am apart of a village give me hope." A. Garraway  "Friends are what is getting me through this." S. Blackwell |
| Liberty University Faculty | n=11 | "I may not always appreciate their methods at the moment, but when I reflect, I know they have my best interests at heart." T. Harris  “In my time at Liberty, I have found leadership that inspires and allows me to want to submit to the tutelage.” R. Hill  "The friendly relationships between the professors and the students promote academic success." M. Lee  “While faculty were kind and accommodating, the admissions department of Liberty made it extremely difficult to continue with my program.” K. Miller  “Working with faculty that has high expectations for me while also showing genuine care and support has stretched me and made me a better counselor and human being.” J. McNally  “Faculty, cohort, and family and continuously encouraged me to move forward in my personal and professional development.” H. Luz  “The majority of the faculty members within the program provide support for me since beginning my Ph.D. journey.” F. Parr  "If I reach out to faculty or staff, they have been able to provide information and support that can make me a better student." E. Pustmueller  “The professors and staff at Liberty are usually very helpful and responsive, which lessens the feeling of being just ‘out there’ in this distance learning environment.” C. Nelson  "Liberty University is one of the best university's I've seen as far as encouraging its students to be the best they can be." A. Waggoner  “I feel like LU is always here for me.” A. Garraway |
| Intensive Peers | n=11 | “I am motivated to come back to each intensive to spend time with my friends.” T. Harris  “The friends that I have made in this program are inspirational and push me to move forward.” M. Lee  “I believe that connection with other students at intensives has been essential to my persistence.” K. Miller  "Connecting with and forming a community with those in your cohort is something incredibly special." J. McNally  “Developing a cohort is essential in finding support.” H. Luz  “My colleagues in the Ph.D. program provide support for me as well.” F. Parr  "If I ever hit a hurdle I cannot get over; I can reach out to my peers or other students for support." E. Pustmueller  “Intensives feel very unsafe for me.” C. Nelson  “We have built a network with each other outside of our intensives which helps in between our class gatherings.” A. Waggoner  “Collaboration with peers.” A. Garraway  I'll look at the course roster before the intensive, and I'll know how the week is going to go." S. Blackwell |
| Happy Place | n=5 | "I take time to enjoy what I can when I can. I go to my ‘happy place' - literally and figuratively - as much as I am able." R. Hill  "My home office is one of the best places on planet earth." K. Miller  “My family is my happy place.” J. McNally  “My home away from home when I am here for intensives is Lynchburg, Va.” A. Waggoner  “The place I go for quiet.” W. Carroll |
| Graduation Day | n=7 | “I finally made it.” M. Lee  “It is more about the intense drive and desire to finish than the regalia and comradely of graduation.” K. Miller  "I'm a first-generation college graduate." J. McNally  “My sweat and tears that will become my pride and joy.” H. Luz  “I will be the first to graduate with a doctorate.” E. Pustmueller  “Joy and celebration accompany a completed effort or journey.” C. Nelson  "I keep reminding myself that in the end I will have those three little letters Ph.D. and it will all be worth it." A. Waggoner  "I see getting a Ph.D. as an accomplishment, and there's also the desire to have the knowledge that comes with the Ph.D., the ability to continue getting that knowledge, and the prestige as well." S. Blackwell |

Appendix ii

Demographic Table

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Gender** | **Age** | **Ethnicity** | **Marital Status** | **Religion/Spirituality/Faith** | **Year did you enter the Ph.D. program** | **Credits Completed** | **List any health conditions** | **Do you have children; how many do you have? Please list their age and gender.** | **Do you have a child or children who live in the home with you?** | **If you have children, what was the timing of your first born?** | **Are you pregnant?** | **Have you delayed your doctoral studies due to your role as a parent?** | **Have you delayed parenthood due to your role as a doctoral student?** | **What is your current occupation?** | **What is your type of employment?** | **How many hours do you work per week?** | **What is your primary reason for pursuing the doctorate?** | **What is the primary factor that influenced your choice to persist in the doctoral journey?** |
| Jamie | F | 35 | Caucasian | Married | Non-denominational Christian | 2016 | 30 | Pituitary adenoma, chronic pain from neck injury and degenerative disc disease. | None | No answer | No answer | No | No | No | Group practice owner/Clinic Director, Counselor, Full-time EAP Account Manager, Consultant | Full time | More than 60 hours | Personal goal | Personal determination/ reach a goal |
| Becca | F | 49 | Caucasian | Married | committed to Jesus Christ in a personal belief and in a community that honors the authority of scriptures | 2016 | No answer | menopause/ hormonal | Levi (M) 17, Tucker (M) 16, Stone (M) 14, Olivia (F) 13 | Yes (4) | No | No | No | No | Professional Counselor | Part-time | 1-19 hours | Other (Please specify): Spiritual calling | Personal determination/ reach a goal |
| Andrea Garraway | F | 33 | Black | Married | Christian | 2016 | 24 | No answer | 1 12 months Girl | Yes | Before your doctoral studies | Before your doctoral studies | Yes | Yes | Stay at home mom and online counselor | Part-time | 20-39 hours | Personal goal | Personal determination/ reach a goal |
| Ken Miller | M | 58 | Caucasian | Married | Christian | 2016 | 33 | No existing health conditions | Abby, female, 27yrs old, married | No | Before your doctoral studies | No | No | No | Assessment Coordinator with North American Mission Board | Full time | 40-59 hours | Personal goal | Personal determination/ reach a goal |
| Teresa Harris | F | 42 | Caucasian | Married | Christian | 2014 | 33 | I have scoliosis, which makes it difficult to set or ride in a car for long hours, but I manage this pain through exercise and chiropractic care. | two daughters, Regan and Madison. Regan is 13 and Madison is 11 years old. | Yes | Before your doctoral studies | No | Yes |  | I am an elementary school counselor. | Full time | 40-59 hours | Personal goal | Personal determination/ reach a goal |
| Angela Waggoner | F | 41 | Caucasian | Divorced | Christian | 2017 | 33 | Migraines and Cancer Survivor | 1 son – 16 yrs old | Yes | Before your doctoral studies | No | Yes | No | LPC-S | Full time | More than 60 hours | Personal goal |  |
| Cherry Nelson | F | 58 | Caucasian | Married | Christian (Baptist) | 2017 | 36 | none | 2 boys, ages 35 and 29 | No | Before your doctoral studies | No | No | No | counselor | Part-time | 20-39 hours | I think this is what God wants me to do | Wish to be obedient |
| Elizabeth Parr | F | 55 | Caucasian | In a committed relationship not living with the partner | Christian, Assembly of God | 2015 | 24 | none | 2 children , ages 29 and 27, male and female | no | Before your doctoral studies | No | No | No | LPC | Full time | 40-59 hours | Vocational advancement | Feel God wants me to do this to help counseling students be effective, ethical, and competent |
| Margaret Lee | F | 56 | African American/Black | Never married | Raised Baptist but Pentecostal | 2015 | 18 | none | Yes, I have children, a son 38 and daughter 30. | no | Before your doctoral studies | No | No |  | Tutor in an elementary school | Part-time | 20-39 hours | Personal determination/ reach a goal / to obtain the skill to work others |  |
| William Carroll | M | 38 | Caucasian | Married | Baptist | 2016 | 18 | none | Yes, Male: 14, Female: 11, Female: 8 | Yes | Before your doctoral studies | No | Yes | No | Licensed Professional Counselor, private practice | Part-time | 20-39 hours | Personal goal | Personal This degree is a fulfilment of a foreknowledge I had as a child. At the age of eight, I knew I wanted to be a person who talked to children about the way they feel and know what has caused them to feel that way. I did not have a voice as a child, and regardless of what my family said or did, I still had my view of the incident. No one ever asked how I felt. Sometimes children need to talk to someone without judgment. I persevere because I believe this is my calling and if God called me had given the anointing to do the job. I am determined because I know the end is near. Family Many members of the family believe I am too old to be pursuing this degree. One sister said companies do not hire old people. I told her then I will start my own. The few that support me are wonderful and tell me I have come too far to stop. My son and daughter support me, and that means so much to me.  Institution  I have a wonderful director who prays me through the rough moments and offers as much support as possible. The professors of Liberty University is like having personal cheerleaders and make learning obtainable.The church I attend pray and encourage me. My Pastor has a Doctoral degree and knows the struggle and how hard it seems at times Personal This degree is a fulfilment of a foreknowledge I had as a child. At the age of eight, I knew I wanted to be a person who talked to children about the way they feel and know what has caused them to feel that way. I did not have a voice as a child, and regardless of what my family said or did, I still had my view of the incident. No one ever asked how I felt. Sometimes children need to talk to someone without judgment. 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| Eric Pustmueller | M | 29 | Caucasian | In a committed relationship living with the partner | Christian | 2016 | 21 | None | None | No | N/a | No | No | Yes | Counselor | Full time | 20-39 hours | Vocational advancement | Personal determination/ reach a goal |
| Sagen Blackwell | F | 25 | Caucasian | Never married | Christian | 2016 | 42 | None | None | No | N/a | No | No | Maybe | In-home clinician / Lifeguard | Full-time / student Full time | 20-39 hours | Learning | Personal determination/ reach a goal |
| Heyde Marques Luz | F | 35 | Hispanic/Latino | Married | Christian Protestant | 2014 | 42 | Seasonal allergies | No | No | No | No | No | No | Teaching Assistant | Part-time | 20-39 hours | Vocational advancement |  |

Appendix iii

Field Notes

Thursday, February 28, 19

* Presentations
  + Sagen Blackwell
    - From her age, she struggles with her “does she deserve being here…”
    - Feeling not “good enough” and desires to be better
    - faith
  + Heyde Luz
    - Sees the end of the road
    - Struggled with a miscarriage
    - faith
  + Brandon Waggoner
    - Faith is vital
    - Challenging of merging past with the present
  + Ken Miller
    - Some anxiety and worry but transforming…am I good enough
    - The difficulties and struggles he had to endure to readmit after his wife’s struggle with breast cancer
    - faith
  + Francois Parr
    - tenacity…even though struggles and feels overwhelmed
    - faith
  + Teresa Harris
    - faith
    - struggled with the process
    - lack of family support but finds the silver lining…has to support outside of the family
  + Margaret Lee
    - overwhelmed but determined
    - faith
  + Jamie McNally
    - under pressure
    - support and hope
    - grief and loss - forced to say no to things that do matter
    - faith
    - Balance budget
  + Andrea
    - Faith
    - struggle to leave a young baby at home
    - feels pressure from family because she was allowed to attend school for Ph.D. where others did not have the opportunity
  + Will Carroll
    - lack of support from wife
  + Rebecca Hill
    - faith
    - mother guilt
  + Cherry Nelson
    - faith
    - finances
  + Eric Pustmueller
    - made a decision to move in order to help financially had to take time off

**Revised Grading Rubric: (*article can be written in first person)***

1. Everything APA and structurally/mechanically perfect
2. Extremely well written and organized
3. Interesting and creative
4. The literature review is a conceptual framework that provides a strong argument for the need for the study (includes the problem, the theories you draw on and why (should be WELL supported with up to date statistics if applicable, and scholarly literature), the status of research inquiry on the topic, the rationale for the research method) [See, for example, how this is done in the HIV article and others that you read]
5. Includes many (at least 10-15) references to the scholarly articles related to doctoral student persistence, photovoice, etc.
6. Includes ALL the sections from the HIV article
7. Ends with a thoughtful, well-organized reflection on this experience based on your journal reflections and any other additional thought since then. (*experience of learning qualitative research)*
8. Page Count: 20-22, not including title page, abstract, and references. Include your demographic table and theme with vignettes table at the end, including the number of participants who reflected on that theme in some way (N=#).

Please review the rubric on the syllabus. Albeit all of these sections are not required, it gives important details for you to consider if you were going to do a qualitative project and to help you do this assignment well.

**Grading Rubric for Post-Intensive Paper**

**Place a copy of this Grading Rubric at the end of your paper and fill it out as a self-evaluation.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Section and Quality Indicators** | **Specific Comments and Feedback** | **Comments** |
| **Abstract** | | |
| A. Describes the research problem and why it is important | Yes |  |
| B. States research purpose | Yes |  |
| C. Summarizes research question(s) | Yes |  |
| D. Briefly describes the research design, methods and data analysis procedures | Yes |  |
| **Section I: Introduction** | | |
| 1. Clearly demonstrates the significance of the problem and worthiness of the study. | Yes |  |
| 2. A summary of the problem is well articulated and substantiates the study | Yes |  |
| 3. The problem statement describes the need for increased understanding about the issue to be studied. | Yes |  |
| 4. The nature of the study, specific research questions, and research objectives are briefly and clearly described. | Yes |  |
| 5. The purpose of the study is described in a logical, explicit manner. | Yes |  |
| 6. The conceptual framework shows which ideas from the contemporary scholarship support/justify the research being conducted | Yes |  |
| 7. The Significance of the Study is described in terms of  A. How the study can be applied to the local problem  B. Professional counseling and/or counselor education application | Yes |  |
| 8. Section I ends with a transition statement that contains a summary or key points of the study and an overview of the content of the remaining sections in the study | Yes |  |
| **Section II: Empirical Studies Literature Review** | | |
| 1. There is an introduction that describes:  A. The content of the review  B. The organization of the review  C. The strategy used for searching the literature | Yes |  |
| 2. The review of related research is clearly related to the problem statement as expressed in the research questions and objectives | Yes |  |
| 3. The review of the related research includes  A. Comparisons/contrasts of different points of view of different research outcomes  B. The relationship of the study to the previous empirical research that has come before it | Yes |  |
| 4. There is a literature based description of the potential themes and perceptions explored in the study | Yes |  |
| 5. Literature related to the research ***method*** is reviewed | Yes |  |
| 6. The review is an integrated, critical essay on the most relevant and current published knowledge on the topic | Yes |  |
| **Section III. Research Method** | | |
| 1. Introduction describes how the research design derives logically from the problem or issue statement | Yes |  |
| 2. Design describes which qualitative tradition or research design will be used. | Yes |  |
| 3. Research questions are clearly stated and open-ended. | Yes |  |
| 4. The context for the study is described and justified. | Yes |  |
| 5. Role of the Researcher  A. The role of the researcher is described in terms of past/current professional roles at setting, past/current professional relationships with the participants, and how these past/current roles and relationships are likely to affect data collection.  B. The researcher’s experiences or biases related to the topic are described | Yes |  |
| 6. Criteria for selecting participants are specified and are appropriate to the study. There is a justification for the number of participants, which is balanced with depth of inquiry-the fewer the participants the deeper the inquiry per individual | Yes |  |
| 7. Data collection procedures are explained in detail. Data collection tools such as interview guide, observation guide, etc. are included in the Appendix. Choices about which data to collect are justified. Data collected are appropriate to answer the questions posed in relation to the qualitative tradition chosen. How and when the data was collected and recorded is described. | Yes |  |
| 8. How the data was analyzed is articulated. Procedures for dealing with discrepant cases are described. If a software program is used in the analysis, it is clearly described. Data analysis procedures after coding are described. | Yes |  |
| 9. Methods to address validity/trustworthiness (i.e. member-checking) are appropriate and specific. | Yes |  |
| **Section 4: Findings** | | |
| 1. The process by which the data were generated, gathered, and recorded is clearly described. | Yes |  |
| 2. The systems used for keeping track of data and emerging understandings (research logs, reflective journals, cataloging systems) are clearly described. | Yes |  |
| 3. The findings  A. build logically from the problem and the research design.  B. are presented in a manner that addresses the research questions | Yes |  |
| 4. Patterns, relationships, and themes described as findings are supported by the data. All salient data are accounted for in the findings. | Yes |  |
| 5. A discussion on Evidence of Quality shows how this study followed procedures to assure accuracy of the data (i.e., trustworthiness, member checks, triangulation, etc.). Appropriate evidence occurs in the appendices (sample transcripts, researcher logs, field notes, etc.). (This discussion may appear in section 5 instead of 4). | Yes |  |
| **Section 5: Discussion** | | |
| 1. The section begins with a brief Overview of why and how the study was done, reviewing the questions or issues being addressed and a brief summary of the findings | Yes |  |
| 2. The Interpretation of Findings  A. includes conclusions that address the research questions,  B. contains references to outcomes in Section 4,  C. covers all the data  D. is bounded by the evidence collected, and  E. relates the findings to a larger body of literature on the topic, including the conceptual/theoretical framework,  F. includes a discussion of the practical applications of the findings. | Yes |  |
| 3. The Implications for Social Change are clearly grounded in the significance section of Section 1 and outcomes presented in Section 4. The implications are expressed in terms of tangible improvements to the field of counseling and/or counselor education. | Yes |  |
| 4. Recommendations for Action.  A. should flow logically from the conclusions and  B. state who needs to pay attention to the results, and  C. indicate how the results might be disseminated. | Yes |  |
| 5. Recommendations for Further Study point to topics that need closer examination and may generate a new round of questions. | Yes |  |
| 6. Includes a reflection on the researcher's experience with the research process in which the researcher discusses possible personal biases or preconceived ideas and values, the possible effects of the researcher on the participants or the situation, and her/his changes in thinking as a result of the study. | Yes |  |
| 7. The work closes with a strong concluding statement making the “take-home message” clear to the reader | Yes |  |
| **Writing Style and Composition:**  The research study is written in scholarly language (accurate, balanced, objective, tentative). The writing is clear, precise, and avoids redundancy. Statements are specific and topical sentences are established for paragraphs. The flow of words is smooth and comprehensible. Bridges are established between ideas.  \*Includes references to the Moustakas text and Hays and Wood article | Yes |  |
| **Organization and Form**  The proposal/final research study  A. is logically and comprehensively organized, using subheadings where appropriate.  B. has a professional, scholarly appearance.  C. is written with correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.  D. includes citations for the following: direct quotations, paraphrasing, facts, and references to research studies.  E. in-text citations are found in the reference list. | Yes |  |