Research Project: Photovoice for Doctoral Persistence

Brandon Waggoner

Liberty University

Abstract

The journey of pursuing and completing a doctoral degree is one that only a small percentage of individuals understand and undertake. A doctorate it the culmination of education, being the highest degree that can be conferred. However, it is becoming increasingly evident that some insight must be gained to understand the high drop-out rates for students within a doctoral program. Persistence to completion must be understood by both student and organization if these high rates are going to be corrected. The following study seeks to answer the question of what factors impact persistence to graduation in a doctoral program. The use of a qualitative participatory action research methods allows students to speak into the research process as well as give voice to their own struggles. In particular, Photovoice is used specifically in order to allow each student to express their persistence factors through photographs and a subsequent presentation. The thematic analysis that followed brought into focus three categories and six themes that can be addressed to facilitate success in the doctoral journey.

Keywords: doctoral, persistence, photovoice, participatory action research

Research Project: Photovoice for Doctoral Persistence

The journey to acquire a doctoral degree is marked with much struggle, sacrifice, and accomplishment. Due to these and other factors, attrition rates can be high in many doctoral programs. These rates can be as high as 60-70% across multiple disciplines (Woo, Mulit, & Visalli, 2016). The discipline of counselor education is not immune from these attrition rates. With counselor education falling within social sciences and its 70% attrition rate, there is motivation to understand how to mitigate these high dropout rates (Burkholder, 2012). According to the Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP) Annual report (2017), there were only 379 graduates with 2,561 enrolled. These statistics are similar across the past three years. While these dropouts can occur at any stage of the doctoral journey, most occur during the dissertation stage (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Spaulding, 2016). There is a significant financial and time investment in the pursuit of a doctoral degree from both the individual as well as the institution. Thus, many of the institutions incorporate a rigorous admission and application process to determine candidates that are suited with the skills necessary for completion (Sverdlik, Hall, McAlpine, & Hubbard, 2018). From the numbers, however, it is clear more understanding is needed to determine the factors that contribute to the high attrition rates.

The following study focuses on determining these factors in order to provide a more complete picture of doctoral persistence. The research questions were designed to explore factors through the use of participatory action research, specifically, pictures and stories: What are the categories and themes that impact doctoral persistence to graduation? How do pictures and stories illustrate these categories and themes? What followed was a qualitative study that utilized

theme analysis to answer these questions by evaluating similar patterns and themes. The understanding of these patterns and themes can be applied to a specific counselor education program within a local Christian institution built upon the ongoing discussion of this persisting problem.

Literature Review

There already exists a body of knowledge on this issue currently. Thus, an evaluation of the current literature will help guide the discussion and add to the knowledge. Models for understanding persistence have been well established (Tinto, 1975; Bean, 1980). However, many of these have focused on residential, undergraduate students as well as the external factors that impact the persistence (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Yet these models fell short in describing the unique factors to distance learners or those that have jobs and families that contribute greatly to persistence in higher education today.

The doctoral student is juggling many areas of life at the same time. Unlike many undergraduate students, doctoral students often have families, work outside of academics, and carry a general sense of inadequacy (Virtanen, Taina, & Pyhältö, 2017). All of this balancing can lead to factors that impact persistence within the doctoral program. Stress can ultimately lead to disengagement from the work and thus, failure to complete the program (Virtanen, Taina, & Pyhältö, 2017).

Compounding this balancing act is the tendency of the doctoral student away from seeking any outside help. Student's often adopt the mindset that seeking help would cause them to be perceived as inadequate or incapable (Fogg, 2009). This perception of inadequacy is a running theme throughout much of the literature and discussion on persistence in doctoral

programs regardless of the discipline (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). However, within the counselor education discipline, where attrition rates can be argued to be slightly higher, there has been a push to develop professional identity in students. It is suggested that schools should be intentional in developing the mentorship relationship with students and faculty in order to foster the professional identity in students (Woo, Storlie, & Baltrinic, 2016). The relationship fostered in this can model supervision already implemented in the counseling field (Burkholder, 2012). The importance of this is centered on bringing the struggles out from the shadows so they can be addressed and solutions can be formed. Fostering this type of communication also depends on the stages a student goes through along the doctoral degree path.

Doctoral students enter the program with specific expectations and predetermined motivations. While motivations for a doctoral degree among other disciplines is varied, students entering the counselor education and supervision doctoral degree had their own specific reasons for entering such a journey. These motivators included the desire to become a professor, to advance one's career and have job security, and personal development as a counselor and professional in the field (Hinkle, Iarussi, Schermer, & Yensel, 2014). Knowing these motivators for students at the outset of program entry can be extremely valuable in ensuring program match with educational goals. A mismatch in this area has been shown to be a factor in discontinuation of a doctoral degree (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005).

Another critical stage identified includes the research process and dissertation phase of a doctoral program. Within the research phase, students can become disengaged due to lack of discussion about the difficulties (Virtanen, Taina, & Pyhältö, 2017). Students feel alone often in this phase which can even lead to depression and sometimes thoughts of suicide in a small

percentage (Burkholder, 2012). Peer and cohort support can be critical in these stages as well.

Students who are open and discuss struggles often find support in order to believe in their ability

to persist (Fogg, 2009). Thus, interaction with fellow students can open up the conversation of

struggle to persist. Simply the opportunity to share and begin a conversation of inner turmoil can

be a mitigating factor of persistence (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). Providing the environment

that facilitates an open conversation is a critical factor requiring attention within the discussion

of persistence in doctoral degree programs.

There have been strategies formed to open up the conversation about factors that impact

persistence within a doctoral program. The importance of this is seen even in the American

Counseling Association's (ACA) *Code of Ethics* (2014). The Code specifically speaks to

counselor education programs and the need for a comprehensive orientation for all students. The

wording found within the Code elicits a dynamic process by which the orientation of the student

to the program continues throughout the many stages. This guideline fits with the need for

students to remain engaged and even cared for throughout the doctoral journey. Students who

feel alone and isolated from peers and faculty will have greater propensity for their own thoughts

of inadequacy to grow (Woo, Storlie, & Baltrinic, 2016). Thus, a self-evaluation for each

counselor education program will not only benefit the school, but also the student. Woo, Mulit,

& Visalli (2016) found several categories that need evaluated which determine the possibility of

student drop out. These included demanding workload, high skill and knowledge level,

technological proficiency, student self-disclosure, expectations, and time and energy balance.

However, in an evaluation of these categories, a majority of programs evaluated had only

addressed one or two categories in their actual approach to students (Woo, Mulit, & Visalli,

2016). Thus, there is a need to engage with students, learn their struggles and competencies, and foster open communication regarding obstacles to persistence toward graduation in their doctoral program.

Photovoice is a method that can be used to facilitate the conversation of doctoral persistence for doctoral students. The Photovoice method allows individuals to use pictures to identify, represent, and enhance an individual's expertise and knowledge (Wang, & Burris, 1997). It has been used in many instances to give voice to those who may be marginalized and overlooked (Teti, French, Kabel, & Farnan, 2017). Within this qualitative study, photovoice is used to give voice and foster the conversation of factors impacting doctoral persistence. It is hoped that through the use of photographs, students will be able to share their struggles and themes can be more readily recognized. Bringing a previously hidden struggle out into the light can help break the darkness that breeds attrition within the doctoral journey.

Method

As stated, understanding the factors that impact persistence in a doctoral program is important for student success. Specifically, within the doctoral level of counselor education and supervision, this need is just as applicable. Even though many programs give lip service to addressing student needs and concerns, many are not intentional about giving voice to each student's struggle. By beginning and continuing the conversation on persistence, both the student and the faculty can be better prepare for the doctoral journey and allow for higher graduation rates and fewer dropouts.

This study seeks to address the themes that impact doctoral persistence within a private, Christian university setting in a counselor education and supervision program. This qualitative

research design utilizes thematic analysis and participatory action through photovoice to answer the specific research questions. These questions include: What are the categories and themes that impact doctoral persistence to graduation? How do pictures and stories illustrate these categories and themes?

Participants

The study sample included 14 students currently enrolled in a counselor education and supervision program at a private, Christian university. The sample size is adequate for sufficient analysis and saturation of themes (McCleod, 2011). The majority of the students were female (N=10) with a minority being male (N=4). The majority were in the same stage of completion of their doctoral program with a low of 18 credits completed and a high of 42. All began the journey around the same timeframe with the most recent beginning in fall of 2017 and the earliest being in 2014. The participants all shared the same religion and faith as all identified as being Christian. There were little health issues with the most impactful being chronic back and neck pain. A majority were married (N=9) with several more identifying as being in a committed relationship. Work load and employment varied; however, all students identified to working some in addition to their academic workload. Ethnicities were majority white (N=11) with African American (N=2) and Hispanic (N=1) also represented. Age range for the students ranged from 25 to 58 with a majority falling in the 30-40 year range. Ten students had children currently with only six students having their children live with them at home. When asked about the primary factor that influenced their choice to persist in a doctoral journey, many (N=8) selected "personal determination/ reach a goal" as their primary factor.

There is a variation of students when looking at the demographic information. However, there is a homogenous aspect with all students ascribing to the same faith. With this study being centered within one program at a private, Christian university, this factor is in line with expectations. The counselor education and supervision doctoral program in which these students reside does not have a formal cohort grouping. However, these students have taken several classes together and often find themselves along the same path as they progress through the class schedule.

Researcher Role

The role of myself as the researcher as well as participant created some unique challenges within this study. This is a threat to the validity of the study and understanding of themes that were attempted to be discovered. However, through the use of bracketing, reflective journaling, and member review, validity and trustworthiness can be solidified (McCleod, 2011). Conversely, there can be a positive aspect coming from this dynamic. The power imbalance that can often happen in the researcher-researched role can be reduced through this active participation (Råheim et al, 2016).

First, I had to reflect on my own journey, motivations, and factors that constituted my pursuit of my doctoral degree. Since I am within the grouping being evaluated, my own biases and predispositions must be understood and bracketed. To do this, I had to come to an understanding of my propensity to see the stories and accounts of each individual through my own experiences. Often, I would find myself slipping into the role of comparison. Thoughts of "that's not something I had to struggle with" or "I'm not as strong as them" would come up. However, through the reflective journal, it became more apparent that I am more similar than I

am different to each of the participants. Breaking from the comparison trap enabled me to see each story as unique and had something to teach myself and others. It became clear to me that I was beginning to feel a sense of peace knowing that I am not as different or incapable as I had previously thought. My bias was thinking there was a greater divide between myself and others pursuing this degree. Through this journaling and bracketing, the themes that emerged began to paint the picture that the struggles are more similar than I previously thought.

Member checking was also done in order to enhance the validity and trustworthiness of the themes discovered. Two of the participants were contacted to review the themes and the quotes to support them. Each participant was in agreement with the analysis of the thematic findings. While the categories were predetermined, the themes that were elicited were an outcome of the coding and data analysis. Thus, it was important to check that the theme was an accurate representation of the meaning behind the statement for the participant.

Project Procedures

The research procedures were derived from the qualitative thematic analysis design using photovoice as a method of gathering data. Each of the 14 participants was asked to complete a demographic survey to begin with some quantitative data from which to add another triangulation of themes. The demographic survey also included an option for an open narrative for each participant to write their own reflections and narrative regarding their perceptions of persistence across three categories. The participants were then asked to find 9 online photos (three for each category) to help illustrate one factor affecting their persistence within the doctoral program. The three categories chosen were personal, family, and organizational. These were predetermined, yet are consistent with some of the previous findings in the literature

(Burkholder, 2012; Fogg, 2009). Each photo was gathered into a PowerPoint which was the basis for a 15 minute presentation before the other participants and one faculty member from the institution. Notes were taken during each presentation noting key words, as well as specific statements or factors which elicited the greatest emotion. The reflection journal was again used in order to bracket off my own emotions and check biases. Once sufficient data was gathered, a lengthy process of data analysis could commence.

Coding and Data Analysis

While the data gathered was not exhaustive, there was sufficient saturation of the themes that conclusions could be reached. As stated, the three categories were based on previous work in the literature. Personal, family, and organizational (institutional) factors were used to narrow the themes that developed. Each picture was used to identify a theme which could be associated with other presentations. The desire was to determine the factors which impact the persistence through the doctoral degree. This strategy was appropriate to fulfilling this outcome due to the ability of each participant to speak for themselves. The use of photovoice added another appropriate goal outcome. By giving voice to each participant, the themes (or factors) that impact persistence can begin to be brought into the light of discussion.

Themes were generated through the induced words, stories, examples, and emotions elicited during the presentations. At the outset, preliminary themes were derived and coded for each individual. Each photo element was given its own preliminary theme within each of the three categories. Additionally, the narrative embedded within the demographic survey was also given its own preliminary theme. Thus, for each participant, four themes were developed or induced from each of these four areas. With a total of 56 preliminary themes, the challenge was

to then narrow these themes to a grouping of final themes that would be presented as thematic outcomes that would be valid and trustworthy.

The process of refining the preliminary themes into final themes centered on quotes and the words used directly by the participants. Thus, each preliminary theme was tied to a seminal statement issued by the participant. Emotions that were expressed during the presentations were given significant weight to drive formation of the final themes. In order to ensure validity of the final themes, the majority of the participants needed to have referenced that theme in some manner. All final themes had at least ten participants referring to that theme to ensure consistency across the participant variables. Theme references varied from N=10 to N=14. Saturation of themes began to occur after the seventh participant evaluation. However, all 14 participants were assigned and coded with their own data sets.

Several other themes were seen and coded throughout this process as well. These themes were and can be found in the existing literature. However, they were not referenced in a high enough number of participants to be considered a final theme. Any preliminary theme that was not coded to at least ten participants was not included as a final theme. Additionally, themes were kept to six (two for each category). This was determined due to the number of participants that referenced each of these categories. It also was chosen to focus on the factors within each of the categories of personal, family, and organizational.

Again, validity and trustworthiness were sought out throughout the data gathering and coding process in forming the themes. As stated, member checking was used in two of the data sets. In addition, detailed information of data collection and the process of thematic analysis also gives transparency and validity to the study. Information is provided in the appendices to

facilitate this transparency. It is noted that in qualitative research much of the validity comes

from the openness and trustworthiness of the researcher (McCleod, 2011). Personal reflection of

the following themes and results are included in order to enhance these elements as well as to

give validity to the discussion and process.

Results

The final six themes that were captured paint an accurate picture of the factors that

impact persistence in a doctoral program. From the three categories of personal, family, and

organizational, two themes each were finalized. In the personal category, "intrinsic motivation"

and "success and achievement" were identified. "Support" and "guilt and loss" were the two

themes identified in the family category. Finally, "faculty support" and "cohort" were the last

two themes to come from the organizational category. Each of the three categories and their final

themes will be discussed to highlight their impact on persistence on students within a doctoral

program.

Personal

It would be difficult to put weight to each of the categories or themes. However, the

themes found within the personal category appear to have the greatest impact on the initial

decision to enter a doctoral program. It is fitting to begin with this category due to its positive

impact on students' persistence toward doctoral completion. Both final themes within this

category have a positive impact on persistence.

"Intrinsic motivation" as a theme had a high occurrence (N=11). The students who

ascribed or referenced this theme described something within themselves that pushes them to

"finish what they start." There is no external force that was motivating them such as guilt, or

desire for recognition as may be found in other themes. Students described themselves as possessing the character traits to push through adversity. They referred to their "grit and tenacity" as well as an "intense desire to finish what I start." Often this was brought about through past hardships as they reported having "resilience and strength through many past hardships." There was a strong sense of pride as each student talked about this theme when it was brought up. Often, when a student would describe an obstacle to their persistence in the degree program, this factor of intrinsic motivation would be the one factor that would push them forward. One student described their lack of familial support, but then stated "I had no choice but to push through and continue." This theme was also tied to some higher calling as well. With all students identifying as being Christian, they would refer to a "calling" or "purpose" that could also be encased within this theme. For myself, this theme resonated with me as I often fall back on my determination to finish what I start even when it is difficult. This has come up even as I am attempting to write this paper and complete this assignment.

"Success and achievement" has a similar frequency (N=10) but was the lowest identified final themes. However, it could be argued that some preliminary themes could be grouped into this theme. Concepts such as desire to help others was coded as a separate theme, however, could be considered a type of success. The completion of a doctoral degree was one of status as students described the "(degree) is a treasure that has high value and great beauty" and "graduation means it (the struggle) was worth it." One student had a smile peek behind her words as she described the thought of being called "Dr. Mom." Others described the idea of having "arrived" at the pinnacle of their profession. "Me being associated with importance" was stated by one student in order to show a desire to be recognized. Pictures included graduation

day, and thoughts of being considered equal with their admired professors. Interestingly, the students who did not have this theme coded to them appeared to have self-doubt cloud their image of this future for them. Images of drowning and a climb were depicted. These students described needing to only take one step at a time in order to not be overwhelmed by the process. This self-doubt and wondering if they "have what it takes" appeared to be a direct threat to the first theme of intrinsic motivation. While the themes in the personal category were a majority positive, themes in the family category had the potential to be the biggest threats.

Family

While much of the literature focused on program, peer, and personal factors that impact doctoral persistence, family appeared to have a major role for students. Many of the themes that came to the surface within the family category had the potential to have a negative impact on persistence through the doctoral program. Perhaps this is a phenomenon that is found uniquely within doctoral counselor educators. Regardless, the two themes that were formed in the final triangulation were "support" and "guilt and loss."

Differing from the support seen in the organizational category, the support from family had deeper roots and thus greater ability to affect students in their persistence than the less intimate relationship with faculty or peers. This theme had the highest representation of the themes (N=14) with all students referring to the need for family support as being critical. Some students described the level of this impact with statements of "without my wife, this would not be possible" and "(my husband) encourages me to be a better person." The support from family was significantly centered on committed romantic relationships such as a husband or wife. One student went so far as to say "my wife is the biggest factor in my persistence, without her support

or desire for this for me, I would not be doing a doctorate." Others stated that their spouse was

not supportive and reported the very negative impacts that had on their persistence. One student

reported the doctorate being "my dream, not my wife's." This elicited a sadness as this student

talked, giving off a sense of loneliness and isolation. Children also played an important role in

this theme as well. Student described how their "children's admiration and pride for my

academic goal" pushed them to persist. This, in turn, provided them a "sense of belonging and

provides security and self-identity." Coupled with this, however, was a second theme of "guilt

and loss."

Upon reviewing the notes from the presentations of each student, it was clear that no

other category or theme elicited more emotion than that of the family. It was clear that the family

was a priority for all the students and that each one had to weigh the cost of the degree process

either before, or now during, the program. The need to count the cost and be prepared for

sacrifice is described in the literature as well (Woo, Mulit, & Visalli, 2016). However, this

sacrifice comes at the cost of the family, not just the student. "Guilt and loss" as a theme was

seen in nearly all presentations (N=13). Photos included personal images of family and children,

but also images of things missed such as family dinners and lack of conversations. This emotion

and thought of guilt was expressed in terms of having to ask family to sacrifice for their own

personal goals. Statements such as "I still feel guilt (even though family tells me they are fine)"

and the potential for displeasure from family "if I don't get my act together" spoke to this

theme's importance.

One account in particular was expressed through tears and strong emotion for one

student. She described "immense grief and sadness" at the loss of her father. She detailed a

conversation with her father in which he expressed a sadness for not being able to spend time with her due to her retreat into schoolwork. A plan was set up to spend time with him on an upcoming Saturday. However, her father passed away unexpectedly a few days before that day. Noticeably emotional retelling that account, the student said, "knowing this sacrifice I would make in this program, I would not have pursued the degree." This story stood out to me as being highly significant and one that has stuck with me even weeks after the presentations. I appreciated the honesty of this student to share what her guilt and loss meant to her persistence. There does come a point at which each individual must decide to what level they are willing to sacrifice. There is time spent on the degree that cannot be recovered. It is something that is in the back of my own mind continually with each class and assignment. While the family category is perhaps the most impactful, there is little action steps beyond an understanding. The final category of the organization is one where perhaps the greatest change can be made.

Organizational

Perceptions of peer and supervisor support, knowing the doctoral path, and seeing the benefit are all elements that have been discovered to impact persistence from the organizational category (Devos et al., 2017). It is within this category that change can happen and support can be tailored to the student. While the themes were more varied, two were identified within this category: "faculty support" and "cohort."

The theme of faculty support was presented in the positive and negative in relation to persistence in the program. However, all student presentations and descriptions referred to this theme in some fashion (N=14). Some described a desire for needing support but have not received it yet. They used statements such as "want to know faculty and leadership care about

me" and "institution leaders need to exhibit values and skills I want to acquire." When these students referred to these desires they were always from a future perspective, as if they had not received the support yet. For two students, this caused much frustration in the beginning of the program as they were wandering in the dark trying to navigate their way alone with all the personal and family factors still weighing on them. Others described this theme as a positive to their continuance. They stated "they tell me I can do it" and "faculty reaching out eliminates the feeling of being out there." Three students, as well, described a word or statement from a faculty member that either spurred them to want to enter the program or, in one instance, discouraged a student greatly. Thus, the faculty of the university or organization has incredible power to speak life into a student. One account in particular stood out to me as one student described a seminal moment when they realized they wanted to be like a professor that had taken the time to show interest and ability in them.

Speaking life and encouraging the ability of a student can also be done through their peers or "cohort." This final theme was seen in a majority of the presentations and descriptions as well (N=11). Within this theme was the desire and need to be connected and avoid the feeling of being alone. This theme appeared to help students with the obstacles to persistence that came up in the personal category. The impact on persistence from this theme was positive with statement such as "(they) help when the desire to give up comes along" and "share(d) encouraging words and clarification." Those students who had not had a connection with their peers seemed to struggle with feeling disconnected and isolated. One student reported "at times I feel alone and disconnected."

Upon reviewing the reflection journal, there was great peace and satisfaction with the thought of being understood. One student described having "understanding experiences (helps with knowing) what I'm doing is possible." This resonated with me because it spoke to my own insecurities and thoughts of inadequacy. To know that others struggle with the same issues, and also are there to understand, gives a great sense of camaraderie and counters the thought that I lack ability to persist. We all want to be understood and valued for the work we do. Perhaps this is the reason our family, faculty, and peers are so critical to persistence. They are arguably the only ones who can understand the struggle and work that goes into the completion of a doctoral degree.

Discussion

This study was conducted in order to explore the factors that impact persistence during a counselor education doctoral degree. The importance of this topic of study is due to the high rates or attrition and drop-out by students pursuing a doctoral degree (Burkholder, 2012). Isolation, lack of communication, and thoughts of inadequacy are common among students in doctoral programs across disciplines (Woo, Mulit, & Visalli, 2016). Thus, this study was conducted through the use of participatory action research in order to give voice and seek connection among students while identifying factors which affect persistence. The use of participatory action research was selected in order to include students in the process as well as find real-world solutions to the problem of doctoral persistence (Hays & Wood, 2011).

There were clear categories and themes that were identified through the photovoice presentations by each student. The discovery of the six themes allow insight into what factors impact persistence to graduation of doctoral students and answers the first research question

posited. The second research question was answered through the quotations and emotions shown by each student during the presentations. Each student was given power to express their own personal, family, and organizational struggles through the use of photographs and a subsequent presentation. The categories and themes discovered allow for a greater understanding as well as some real world solutions.

Within the first category of personal factors, it became clear that there were few solutions for organizations to implement apart from a rigorous application and screening process. While many institutions already incorporate a rigorous admission process, a good orientation to the program can be invaluable for facilitating success (Sverdlik, Hall, McAlpine, & Hubbard, 2018). The students described intrinsic motivators to their persistence which comes from within the student. Thus, fostering this motivation and tapping into it when assignments and sacrifice become difficult would be beneficial. From my own insights and journaling, this internal drive is perhaps the biggest motivator for my own persistence. My faith plays a major role as well. Since the study was conducted at a Christian university, the belief and faith exhibited by each student cannot be ignored as a factor in this intrinsic motivation.

Family factors were shown to have the greatest impact to persistence as well as having the fewest options for real world solutions. Most students stated that the sacrifice of family would be the one factor that would derail persistence to graduation. Here again is where orientation to the program would be beneficial. If students were allowed to count the cost of a doctoral program and know the time sacrifice that it takes, perhaps they would be better prepared for the journey. This orientation could also extend to family as well so they are aware of the sacrifice they are being asked to make as well. There were strong emotions shared during the

presentations during this category as well. Having a young family of my own perhaps made this category of higher importance. My faith speaks to the priority of family before job and career. Therefore, myself and the other students seemed to echo the struggle it is to try to balance the priority of family and the sacrifice of the doctoral degree.

The final category of organizational factors is one that has the potential for the most change. Faculty and institutions should know and be aware of the themes found in the previous two categories in order to facilitate change within this category. This fact is bound in the emerging theme of faculty and peer support. The students within this study addressed the desire and need for faculty within the counselor education field to be supportive, understanding, and encouraging. They needed those they look up to and those that are evaluating them to recognize strengths and ability to persist. There is great power in the knowledge that someone of authority believes in you (Devos et al., 2017). Faculty, especially within the field of counselor education, must model some counseling care and be able to speak into the lives of their students. The power in a single word or statement can either tap into the intrinsic motivation for the positive or add to the thoughts of inadequacy which hinders persistence.

Similarly, peer support through a cohort can be invaluable for persistence. The isolation and fear of inadequacy can be major contributing factors to persistence (Fogg, 2009). However, through this study and listening to the presentations, I can reflect in saying I am more confident in my ability to persist. There was great comfort to me to hear that others have the same struggles and fears. A sense of belonging began to grow within myself through the process of sharing struggles through the photographs. It can be suggested that this type of sharing of

struggles through photovoice could be used in all counselor education programs in order to foster this sense of belonging and camaraderie of students within the same cohort.

Limitations

In addition to the major categories and themes, several limitations to the study must be discussed. First, participation for the study was required for completion of the course. Thus, there was no option to not share as well as the potential for lack of vulnerability due to the grade that could be attached to the presentation. The study was also conducted at a private Christian university within one course of the counselor education doctoral program. Thus generalizability to a broader audience or students in a non-Christian university is suspect. Finally, through the use of photovoice, themes were discovered, not treatments. Therefore treatments of any depression or inadequate thoughts by students cannot be inferred.

Implications for Research and Practice

The implications of this study can be a starting point for further research. Each doctoral counselor education program could implement this type of participatory action research within their own program in order to elicit the themes that impact persistence within their own students. More research could be done in this manner across other disciplines as well. Photovoice has been used to give voice to the marginalized in many cases (Teti, French, Kabel, & Farnan, 2017). However, it could be used to give voice to other non-marginalized populations such as doctoral students. Doctoral students often are assumed to be the best of the best and may not need the additional aid in sharing their struggles. Thus through the use of this method it is hoped that students will bring their struggles into the light and begin to unleash their potential impact for the world they were given by God.

References

American Counseling Association. (2014). ACA code of ethics. Retrieved from

http://www.counseling.org/docs/ethics/2014-aca-code-of-ethics.pdf

Bean, J. P. (1980). Dropouts and turnover: The synthesis and test of a causal model of student

attrition. *Research in higher education*, *12*(2), 155-187.

https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00976194

Bean, J., & Metzner, B. (1985). A Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Student Attrition

Undergraduate. *Review of Educational Research*, *55*(4), 485-540.

Burkholder, D. (2012). Returning counselor education doctoral students: Issues of retention,

attrition, and perceived experiences. *The Journal of Counselor Preparation and

Supervision*, *4*(2), 1. http://dx.doi.org/10.7729/42.0027

Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs. (2017). *Annual report

2017*. Retrieved from hhttp://www.cacrep.org/about-cacrep/publications/

Devos, C., Boudrenghien, G., Van der Linden, N., Azzi, A., Frenay, M., Galand, B., & Klein, O.

(2017). Doctoral students' experiences leading to completion or attrition: a matter of

sense, progress and distress. *European journal of psychology of education*, *32*(1), 61-77.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-016-0290-0

Fogg, P. (2009). Grad-school blues. *Chronicle of higher education*, *55*(24), B12-B16. Retrieved

from http://chronicle.com/weekly/v55/i24/24b01201.htm

Hays, D. G., & Wood, C. (2011). Infusing qualitative traditions in counseling

research designs. *Journal of Counseling and Development: JCD*, *89*(3),

288-295. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6678.2011.tb00091.x Retrieved from

http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/873032464?pq-origsite=summon&accountid=12085

Hinkle, M., Iarussi, M. M., Schermer, T. W., & Yensel, J. F. (2014). Motivations to pursue the doctoral degree in counselor education and supervision. *The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, *6*(1), 1. http://dx.doi.org/10.7729/61.1069

Hoskins, C., & Goldberg, A. (2005). Doctoral Student Persistence in Counselor Education Programs: Student Program Match. *Counselor Education and Supervision.*, *44*(3), 175–188. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6978.2005.tb01745.x

McCleod, J. (2011). *Qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Råheim, M., Magnussen, L. H., Sekse, R. J. T., Lunde, Å., Jacobsen, T., & Blystad, A. (2016). Researcher–researched relationship in qualitative research: Shifts in positions and researcher vulnerability. *International journal of qualitative studies on health and well-being*, *11*(1), 30996. https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v11.30996

Rockinson-Szapkiw, A. J., Spaulding, L. S., & Spaulding, M. T. (2016). Identifying significant integration and institutional factors that predict online doctoral persistence. *The internet and higher education*, *31*, 101-112. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2016.07.003

Sverdlik, A., Hall, N. C., McAlpine, L., & Hubbard, K. (2018). The PhD experience: A review of the factors influencing doctoral students' completion, achievement, and well-

being. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *13*, 361-388.

https://doi.org/10.28945/4113

Teti, M., French, B., Kabel, A., & Farnan, R. (2017). Portraits of well-being: Photography as a

mental health support for women with HIV. *Journal of creativity in mental health*, *12*(1),

48-61. https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2016.1206493

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent

research. *Review of educational research*, *45*(1), 89-125.

https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543045001089

Virtanen, V., Taina, J., & Pyhältö, K. (2017). What disengages doctoral students in the biological

and environmental sciences from their doctoral studies?. *Studies in Continuing

Education*, *39*(1), 71-86. https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2016.1250737

Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory

needs assessment. *Health education & behavior*, *24*(3), 369-387.

https://doi.org/10.1177/109019819702400309

Woo, H., Mulit, C. J., & Visalli, K. M. (2016). An Examination of Doctoral Preparation

Information in the United States: A Content Analysis of Counselor Education Doctoral

Program Websites. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, *38*(2), 97-

114. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-016-9259-6

Woo, H., Storlie, C. A., & Baltrinic, E. R. (2016). Perceptions of professional identity

development from counselor educators in leadership positions. *Counselor Education and

Supervision*, *55*(4), 278-293. DOI: 10.1002/ceas.12054

Appendix I

Final Themes

Final Themes	Verbatim Quotes				N=#
Personal: Intrinsic Motivation	"I finish what I start"	"Grit and tenacity"	"Resilience and strength through many past hardships"	"Intense drive and desire to finish"	N=11
Personal: Success and Achievement	"Graduation means it was worth it"	"The more difficult the task, the more sense of accomplishment"	"(Degree) is a treasure that has high value and great beauty"	"Me being associated with importance"	N=10
Family: Support	"Without my wife, this would not be possible"	"(husband) encourages me to be a better person"	"children's admiration and pride for my academic goal"	"(Gives me a) Sense of belonging and provide security and self-identity"	N=14
Family: Guilt and Loss	"decreased time with family"	"I still feel guilt (even though family tells me they are fine)"	"immense grief and sadness (from father dying)"	"if I don't get my act together"	N=13
Institutional: Faculty Support	"they tell me I can do it"	"institution leaders need to exhibit values and skills I want to acquire"	"want to know faculty and leadership care about me"	"faculty reaching out eliminates the feeling of being out there"	N=14
Institutional: Cohort	"helps when the desire to give up comes along"	"at times I feel alone and disconnected"	"share encouraging words and clarification"	"understand experiences… what I'm doing is possible"	N=11

Appendix II

Individual Data Sets

Andrea

Personal		Family		Institutional	
Title	"doctor-mom"	Emotional split	"supportive but alone"	Supportive	"supported"

Unique	"A right"	Loss	"decreased time with family"	Academic credibility	"competent in my own abilities"
Spiritual Growth	"God's grace"	Support	"pillars of my family"	Community	"a part of a village gives me hope"
Refinement	"Transforming by the wind"	Ancestry	"belonging and importance"	Institutional credibility	"feel secure standing on a solid rock"

Heyde

Personal		Family		Institutional	
Intrinsic Motivation	"finish what I start"	Spousal Support	"husband encourages me"	Mentors	"they tell me I can do it"
One step	"just keep swimming"	Loss	"significant loss" (baby)	Financial hurdle	"TA position allowed me to continue"
Confidence in self	"trust that I was enough"	Support	"you can do it!"	Cohort	"friends who understand are key"
Part of a group	"less alone in my challenges"	Safe place	"love provides healing and transformative"		

Angela

Personal		Family		Institutional	
Intrinsic Motivation	"not quit on myself"	Parent Support	"keep my son when I am away"	Faculty that cares	"contacted and prayed for me"
Sacrifice	"did I make the right decision"	Guilt	"I still feel guilt (even though family tells me they are fine)"	Stress	"workload would overtake my life"
Constant struggle	"an uphill battle that feels alone"	Friend Support	"constant encouragement and prayers"	Financial hurdle	"it is hard to pay for classes" (without work
Success and achievement	"graduation means it was worth it"	Family Support	"supportive and encouraging and put me at ease"	Cohort	"helps when the desire to give up comes along"

Rebecca

Personal		Family		Institutional	

Calling	"desire to follow God"	Push from others	"husband's desire for this"	Fear of rejection	"anxiety of acceptance / rejection by leadership is constant"
Guilt	"no rest or time for family"	Parental support	"(my father) valued education above all things"	Role models	"institution leaders need to exhibit values and skills I want to acquire"
Intrinsic motivation	"grit and tenacity"	Continued learning	"for effective use…in the next generation"	Seeking help	"sometimes people do not want to help or are not able"
Constant struggle	"it's just gonna be a fight everyday"	Criticism	"with support, there is also criticism and judgement"	Lack of choice	"ideal circumstances do not always present"

Brandon

Personal		Family		Institutional	
Intrinsic motivation	"personal determination"	Spousal support	"wife is extremely supportive"	Shared convictions	"mirrored beliefs is incredible support"
One step	"there is faith only for the next step"	Ancestry	"two generations: encouragement and guilt"	Faculty that care	"want to know faculty and leadership care about me"
Help for others	"better meet the needs of hurting people"	Modeling persistence	"desire to be a model my sons can follow"	Financial hurdle	"I need to work full-time"
Constant struggle	"breath of uncertainty waiting to swallow me"	Spousal support	"biggest influence on persistence; without her continuing would be impossible"	Need for understanding	"I work in two fields that do not understand each other"

Cherry

Personal		Family		Institutional	
Finding voice	"I feel silenced"	Criticism	"Family rejects education"	Seeking help	"problems with practicum"

Confidence in self	"aversion to putting myself out there"	Being different	"family is not impressed with efforts"	Fear of rejection	"I feel I am not able to do what I need to"
Guilt	"how am I using the time I have left"	Financial hurdle	"responsibility of being the main wage earner"	Seeking help	"faculty reaching out eliminates the feeling of being out there"
Success and achievement	"the more difficult the task, the more sense of accomplishment"	Spousal support	"he encourages me to be a better person"	Cohort	"at times I feel alone and disconnected"

Eric

Personal		Family		Institutional	
Intrinsic motivation	"personal drive"	Family support	"were my biggest support"	Faculty encouragement	"push me when I have struggles"
Sacrifice	"move from family"	Prove others wrong	"excel in my studies despite of him"	Cohort	"I know I am not alone"
Help for others	"passionate about teaching others"	Modeling persistence	"I'm doing this for them as well"	Financial hurdle	"without financial assistance, I could not persist"
Confidence in self	"there is a fear of failing"	Significant other support	"encourage and assist me through the program"		

Francoise

Personal		Family		Institutional	
Intrinsic motivation	"tenacity and disciplined nature"	Fiancé support	"allows me time to study"	Faculty support	"supportive and positive faculty"
Help for others	"knowledge to serve clients with competency"	Modeling persistence	"modeling the value of education"	Cohort	"share encouraging words and clarification"
Spiritual calling	"His dependability has yet to fail me"	Family support	"children's admiration and pride for my academic goal"	Employment support	"use of sick days, colleagues

Jamie

Personal		Family		Institutional	
Intrinsic motivation	"resilience and strength through many past hardships"	Spousal Support	"husband has been my greatest support"	Faculty that care	"shown support in various ways"
Constant struggle	"I cannot expect the journey to be slow and serene"	Loss / Guilt	"immense grief and sadness"	Financial hurdles	"choosing between tuition and other necessities"
Confidence in self	"challenging and scary to come out of my shell"	Safe place	"where I am energized"	Professional development	"my identity as a counselor has been established"
Success and achievement	"a treasure that has high value and great beauty"	Ancestry	"honor my father's legacy"	Cohort	"understand experiences… what I'm doing is possible"

Ken

Personal		Family		Institutional	
Confidence in self	"lack of confidence negatively affected persistence"	Spousal support	"she gains satisfaction in being married to Dr. Miller someday"	Disconnection	"distance students are at a disadvantage"
Safe place	"a cozy spot where I can read and create"	Guilt	"sometimes being late for dinner, not being home"	Faculty support	"lack of professor involvement affected my lack of confidence"
Intrinsic motivation	"intense drive and desire to finish"	Sacrifice	"take care of my wife"	Cohort	"Hearing stories that are far more stressful than mine"
				Employment support	"someone who completely understands"

Margret

Personal	Family	Institutional

Help for others	"be able to talk to children about how they feel"	Being different	"I am too old to be pursuing this degree"	Faculty support	"professors who are cheerleaders"
Confidence in self	"I am not going to give the instructor what they want"	Family support	"sense of belonging and provide security and self-identity"	Shared convictions	"learning how to incorporate spirituality into the counseling field"
Constant struggle	"struggle to pay and to continue"	Safe place	"love and support provide a sense of security"	Cohort	"I am not alone in this program"
Intrinsic motivation	"I will not accept the idea of not completing my degree"	Spiritual dependence	"my foundation in everything I do starts with my faith"	Financial hurdles	"I have been homeless, but still made every payment"

Sagen

Personal		Family		Institutional	
Confidence in self	"fear of being a failure"	Family support	"financially, yet pressured"	Faculty that care	"seem to care"
Success and achievement	"earning that Tam"	Something to prove	"if I don't get my act together"	Cohort	"the best things about being in this program has been the people"
One step	"I can see what's right in front of me, but I don't know what's beyond"	Friend support	"My friend group provides love and acceptance"	Mentors / Faculty that care	"when you have professors that care… it makes it easier to continue."
Spiritual dependence	"If the Lord is with me, who can be against me?"			Constant struggle	"When there's a lot of balls in the air, it gets harder to juggle"

Teresa

Personal		Family		Institutional	
Spiritual calling	"My faith has been a huge factor in my	Spousal support	"My husband reads all of my work"	Faculty support	"I feel loved and supported here."

	pursuit of this degree"				
One step	"One step at a time and trusting God to help balance"	Safe place	"I limit coursework to make time for them, they are supportive"	Cohort	"I love the friendships I have made"
Intrinsic motivation	"Once I set a goal, I accomplish it."	Criticism/ lack of understanding	"My parents don't encourage me"	Professional development	"My peers and I can grow together and share our knowledge."
		Employment support	"Seen, loved, and supported"		

Will

Personal		Family		Institutional	
Intrinsic motivation	"I want to finish things I consider important"	Family support	"I persist not because of them"	Professional development	"I want to be called doctor by my peers"
Success and achievement	"Me being associated with importance"	Ancestry	"My father is trusting in me"	Help for others	"To provide better services"
Confidence in self	"I want to do what others have not done"	Want to be understood	"Their questions about school are conforting"	Employment support	"They ask about me"

Appendix III

Demographics

	Andrea	Heyde	Angela	Rebecca	Brandon	Cherry	Eric
Gender	F	F	F	F	M	F	M
Age	33	35	41	49	33	58	29
Ethnicity	A	D	C	C	C	C	C
Marital Status	B	B	F	B	B	B	C
Religion/ Faith	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian
Year Entered	Sp. 2016	Fall 2014	Fall 2017	2016	Spring 2017	2017	2016
Credits	24	42	33	-	27	36	21
Health		Allergies	Migraines / Cancer	Menopause / hormonal	None	None	None

Children /How Many/ Age/ Gender	Yes/ 1/ 12mo./ girl	N/A	Yes/ 1/ 16 / boy	Yes/ 4/ 17, 16, 14, 13 / all boys	Yes/ 3/ 4, 3, 7 mo. / boy, boy, girl	Yes/ 2/ 35, 29/ both boys	N/A
Children	a	b	a	a	a	b	b
Timing	b	N/A	a	a	a	a	N/A
Pregnant	b	b	b	b	b	b	b
Delayed Studies	a	b	a	b	b	b	b
Delayed Parenting	a	b	b	b	b	b	a
Occupation	Online counselor / mom	TA	LPC-S	Professional counselor	College instructor	Counselor	Counselor
Employment	a	b	a	b	a	b	a
Work Hours	c	c	a	d	b	c	c
Reasons	a	c	a	g. (spiritual calling)	a	g. (spiritual calling)	c
Primary Factor	a	a	a	a	a	h (obedience)	a

	Jamie	**Ken**	**Margret**	**Sagen**	**Teresa**	**Will**	**Francoise**
Gender	F	M	F	F	F	M	F
Age	35	58	56	25	42	38	55
Ethnicity	C	C	A	C	C	C	C
Marital Status	B	B	A	A	B	B	D
Religion/ Faith	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian
Year Entered	2016	2016	2015	2016	2014	2016	2015
Credits	30	33	18	42	33	18	24
Health	Chronic pain	None	None	None	Scoliosis	None	None
Children /How Many/ Age/ Gender	N/A	Yes/ 2/ 27, 22/ girl, girl	Yes/ 2/ 38, 30/ boy, girl	N/A	Yes/ 2/ 13, 11/ both girls	Yes/ 3/ 14, 11, 8/ boy, girl, girl	Yes/ 2/ 29, 27/ boy and girl
Children	b	b	b	b	a	a	b
Timing	N/A	a	a	N/A	a	a	a
Pregnant	b	b	b	b	b	b	b
Delayed Studies	b	b	b	b	a	a	b

Delayed Parenting	b	b	N/A	a	b	b	b
Occupation	Clinic Director	Counselor	Tutor	Clinician	School Counselor	LPC	School psychologist
Employment	a	a	b	a	a	b	a
Work Hours	a	b	c	c	b	c	b
Reasons	a	a	a	b	a	a	c
Primary Factor	a	a	a	a	a	a	h (spiritual calling)

Rubric

Section and Quality Indicators	Specific Comments and Feedback	Comments
Abstract		
A. Describes the research problem and why it is important		
B. States research purpose		
C. Summarizes research question(s)		
D. Briefly describes the research design, methods and data analysis procedures		
Section I: Introduction		
1. Clearly demonstrates the significance of the problem and worthiness of the study.		
2. A summary of the problem is well articulated and substantiates the study		
3. The problem statement describes the need for increased understanding about the issue to be studied.		
4. The nature of the study, specific research questions, and research objectives are briefly and clearly described.		
5. The purpose of the study is described in a logical, explicit manner.		
6. The conceptual framework shows which ideas from the		

contemporary scholarship support/justify the research being conducted		
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		
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		
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		
2. The review of related research is clearly related to the problem statement as expressed in the research questions and objectives		
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		
4. There is a literature based description of the potential themes and perceptions explored in the study		

5. Literature related to the research ***method*** is reviewed		
6. The review is an integrated, critical essay on the most relevant and current published knowledge on the topic		
Section III. Research Method		
1. Introduction describes how the research design derives logically from the problem or issue statement		
2. Design describes which qualitative tradition or research design will be used.		
3. Research questions are clearly stated and open-ended.		
4. The context for the study is described and justified.		
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		
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		
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.		
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.		
9. Methods to address validity/trustworthiness (i.e. member-checking) are appropriate and specific.		
Section 4: Findings		
1. The process by which the data were generated, gathered, and recorded is clearly described.		
2. The systems used for keeping track of data and emerging understandings (research logs, reflective journals, cataloging systems) are clearly described.		
3. The findings A. build logically from the problem and the research design. B. are presented in a manner that addresses the research questions		
4. Patterns, relationships, and themes described as findings		

are supported by the data. All salient data are accounted for in the findings.		
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).		
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		
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.		
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.		
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.		
5. Recommendations for Further Study point to topics that need closer examination and may generate a new round of questions.		
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.		
7. The work closes with a strong concluding statement making the "take-home message" clear to the reader		
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. *<mark>Includes references to the Moustakas text and Hays and Wood article</mark>		
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.		

I really struggled with this assignment, more work needs to be done on research method and grounding within a theory. However, I hope to improve with your feedback.

Grade: 320/350