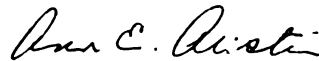This is to certify that the

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BECOMING A SCHOLAR:  THE ROLE OF THE DISSERTATION IN THE
SEARCH FOR ACADEMIC IDENTITY IN GRADUATE SCHOOL

By

J. Greg Merritt

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
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for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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2002

ABSTRACT


BECOMING A SCHOLAR:  THE ROLE OF THE DISSERTATION IN THE
SEARCH FOR ACADEMIC IDENTITY IN GRADUATE SCHOOL


By


J. Greg Merritt


The purpose of this qualitative, interpretive study
was to examine the role the dissertation process plays on
influencing and contributing to a student's academic
identity.  An additional purpose was to add to the body of
research on graduate students and the dissertation process.

Qualitative, biographical, and interpretive methods
were used to explore the lives of four graduate students,
all of whom stated that they were aspiring to be faculty
members.  All were interviewed during the dissertation-
writing stage of their program.

Three major findings are explored.  1) The
dissertation writing process is a major transition period
for students.  2) Students ask important questions of
themselves during the dissertation writing process and the
answers to these questions lead to critical internal
tensions that influence academic identity development. 3)
Most students struggle when left on their own to manage the

above tensions.  The costs can be great for graduate

programs and for higher education as they lose capable

students.

Finally, this study offers implications, suggestions,

and recommendations for students, faculty advisors, and

graduate programs on the role the dissertation plays in

future faculty members "becoming scholars and developing

academic identities".

Dedicated to my partner and best friend, Michele,

and to my Ma.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Projects like this are never completed without the help and support of many people. In the limited space provided, I wish to extend a brief word of thanks to those that helped and supported me along the way. My apologies in advance to those who I fail to mention due to space constraints. Thanks to Mary Hummel, and my colleagues at the University of Michigan for providing support and time away when needed. Cindy Helman and Sheryl Welte provided assistance in our 'dissertation support' group long after they had finished, and Vicki Botek helped to edit the final draft and I thank them. Mike Schechter, my old friend, provided support and encouragement when I wasn't sure I could finish. Special thanks to my advisor, Ann Austin, who exemplifies what it means to be an advisor for graduate students and without her guidance, assistance and support, I am certain I would be ABD for life. I also wish to thank the participants for their time and willingness to share their stories with me. Thanks Mom for always believing in me and supporting my goals. And finally, a special thanks to Jones (my dog) and Michele, my partner and best friend for life, for putting up with me being away and for always letting me know I could do it! You're the best!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

## Statement of the Problem

A number of books and essays have been written on the state of graduate education (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981; Becher, 1996; Berelson, 1960; Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Damrosch, 1995; Katz, 1976; Menand, 1996; Richlin, 1993), the problems of graduate-student attrition (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Golde, 1996; Lovitts, 1996; Nerad, 1991), and ways to succeed in graduate school, particularly in completing the dissertation (Bolker, 1998; Cole & Hunt, 1994; Duff Brown, 1996; Glatthorn, 1998; McKinney, 1996; Meloy, 1994; Sternberg, 1992). However, much less research has been done on how one develops a sense of "academic identity" as a future faculty member or on the lived experiences of graduate students aspiring to the professorate (Anderson, 1998; Austin, 2002; Nyqist et al., 1999; Golde & Dore, 2001). In particular, little research has been done on the role that the dissertation plays in influencing or shaping one's academic identity. In addition, few researchers have investigated the experience from the students' perspective.

## Purpose of the Study

My purpose in conducting this interpretive study was to examine the role the dissertation process plays in influencing and contributing to a student's academic identity. An additional purpose was to add to the body of research on graduate students and the dissertation process.

## Research Question

To achieve these purposes, I posed the following overarching research question to guide the collection of data for the study:

**How does the dissertation-writing process contribute to or influence a student's sense of academic identity?**

To answer this question, I used qualitative, biographical, and interpretive methods to explore the lives of four graduate students, all of whom stated in our initial interviews that they were aspiring to be faculty members. I interviewed all of them during the dissertation-writing stage of their program. I learned about some additional events and life stories from them, but found it particularly revealing to focus on the dissertation. I discovered that the dissertation process was an especially

poignant time in the lives of these aspiring faculty members.

<div align="center">Importance of the Study</div>

Although it is difficult to obtain information on those whose academic progress never goes beyond the all-but-dissertation (ABD) stage (see Sternberg, 1992), it has been estimated that as many as 50% of the students who enter doctoral programs do not complete them (particularly in the humanities). Using data from six institutions, Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) found that 30.1% of graduate-student attrition occurred at the ABD stage, and another 13.3% during the dissertation phase. Thus, discovering more about the role the dissertation plays in the academic and professional development and identity of aspiring faculty members is important both to individuals and to institutions of higher learning.

The findings from this study also can help graduate students understand and predict the kinds of questions and concerns that might arise during the dissertation-writing process, as well as help them comprehend how one derives meaning and a sense of academic identity from the writing process. By the time in their academic careers when students face writing the dissertation, most of them have become adept at "doing schooling," i.e., the ability to

complete specific assignments or examinations for
instructors who hold the student accountable. These habits
often include a built-in support network, especially as
part of the active learning environment that increasingly
typifies undergraduate and graduate education in the United
States.  But then such students are expected to move
swiftly and easily from the schooling phase to become more
self-motivated, independent thinkers who are dedicated to
the solitary activity of researching and writing a
dissertation.

As a result of being successful in schooling, many
students have developed habits of the mind that require
having collaborative input, including such things as
participating in discussions and working in small groups on
projects.  In addition, they have been successful at
writing brief papers in a short period of time.  These
habits are not particularly helpful and, in fact, are often
contrary to the writing of the dissertation.  The
dissertation requires one to develop habits that result in
self-directed, creative, and original work.  Thus, it is
possible that many people find the transition a traumatic
and troublesome life event.  On the other hand, it is
possible that others find the transition much less
difficult due to habits they formed before or during

graduate school.  Thus, how one derives meaning from the dissertation process and how the process contributes to the development of future faculty varies from one person to another.

Additional benefits of describing, exploring, explaining and understanding the role the dissertation plays for aspiring faculty members include the following. First, the study has potential benefits for those aspiring to be faculty members.  By illuminating this period of graduate life, the study findings can help future academics understand many of the conflicting emotions (e.g., angst or elation) and possible developmental stages that relate to this period.  By learning about the meaning of this period through narratives of those who have recently taken part in this process, graduate students who have not yet begun the dissertation may be able to anticipate some of the difficulty or ease surrounding this period.  Second, it is possible that exploring this topic may lead to a modification of existing theories, frameworks, and models of academic transition and careers (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981; Becher, 1996; Boice, 1992; Finkelstein, 1990; Livesey, 1975; Richlin, 1993; Whitt, 1988).  Finally, understanding the nature of this period in graduate students' lives should help career counselors, faculty

mentors, advisors, and others interested in supporting doctoral candidates. With this understanding, career counselors and faculty members should be better suited to assist students in their career choices.

As one of my professors told me, writing a dissertation about those in the process of writing dissertations and developing a sense of identity is like "studying in the hall of mirrors." The project itself has resulted in some of the most intellectually challenging and rewarding times of my life and also some of the lowest lows. This, in part, is why I think it is a problem worth studying. That is, although my story is not the central focus of this study, I do not believe it is an anomaly among future faculty members. As mentioned, it has been estimated that as many as half of those entering graduate school fail to complete their degrees (Sternberg, 1992). In addition, as Golde (1996) stated in her dissertation on doctoral-student attrition, "Little is understood about the process of achieving a doctoral degree. There are few scholarly descriptions of doctoral students and doctoral education" (p. 1).

## Theoretical Framework for the Study

Although this study is not about identity formation in

the traditional psychological or Eriksonian tradition, it does afford a scholarly description of academic identity. Further, I used the notion of images of self to explore the complex lives of aspiring faculty members and to provoke conversation and discussion concerning graduate school experiences, particularly the dissertation process. I used a variation of Denzin's (1989) interpretive interactionism to examine and explore the personal struggles, triumphs, and transitions of aspiring faculty members navigating the graduate school experience and writing dissertations. Interpretive interactionism is a methodology for studying individuals' problems and how they are connected with both public issues and public responses to these problems. I was especially interested in graduate students' concerns as they wrote the dissertation and as they related to the programs, people, and institutions that were part of this experience. In this study I was also interested in how the experiences of writing the dissertation within particular programs influenced students' academic identity.

## Participants and the Case Studies

This dissertation tells, in part, the story of four graduate students (Joanne, Fred, Justine and Lita [all pseudonyms]) who, at the time of the initial interview,

were all planning to become faculty members.  I asked these

students to reflect on their experiences before and during

graduate school, with particular emphasis on the

dissertation experience.  In addition to interviewing these

graduate students four to six times each for 1.5 to 2 hours

each session, I was also able to collect data about the

experiences of other graduate students in four 2-hour focus

groups.

The individual participants in this study allowed me

to be party to what are usually private conversations,

often with themselves.  Thus, I was able to uncover

questions that they asked themselves during the

dissertation process that helped to form what I termed

their academic identity.  The description of their

experiences, the questions they asked themselves, and the

meaning they derived from those experiences and questions

enhanced my understanding of the graduate school

experience.

The stories of these four individuals show that

dissertation writers contribute to their own academic

identity by asking themselves two critical questions during

the dissertation process: "Who am I as an academic?" and

"What does academic 'work' mean to me?"  Within each of

these questions are sets of problems that tend to emerge

during the dissertation process.  The graduate school

experience and dissertation stories of these individuals

exemplify some of the relevant problems.  Comments from

individuals in the focus groups amplified the issues and

questions raised by the four interview participants.

The question "Who am I as an academic?" appears to

result in a number of competing images of self.  One of

these images, the emerging expert versus imposter, occurs

for most novice writers and scholars and has been discussed

by others (see, for example, Brookfield, 1994; Clance &

Ament, 1978; and Harvey's 1985 book entitled The Imposter

Phenomenon).  Dissertation writers often believe that,

having passed comprehensive examinations and entered the

dissertation phase of graduate school, they are emerging as

"experts."  Simultaneously, the same dissertation writers

may feel very much like "imposters."  Joanne's dissertation

story (along with amplifying voices from focus group

members) exemplifies this experience.

A second problem that faces many dissertation writers

is the struggle between becoming a teacher and becoming a

researcher.  This theme is also shared by new faculty

members (Boice, 1992).  Drawing especially on Fred's

experiences during the dissertation phase, I explored how a

student may use teaching as a procrastination method to

avoid writing the dissertation and how this influences the

person's self-perception as a future academic.

A third issue arises as dissertation writers ask

themselves, "What does 'academic work' mean?" They are

challenged to consider their own work habits and the

differing perceptions that friends and family have of

"work." This is particularly critical if one comes from a

working-class background like Justin's, whose dissertation

story pertains to how he understands academic and non-

academic work.

For dissertation writers like Lita, the issue of

understanding what academic work means is exacerbated by

the decision (encouraged by her advisors) to take a piece

of a larger research project to complete her dissertation.

The notions of working collaboratively versus independently

moved to the fore and resulted in her having difficulty

with where ideas come from and who can/should/has the right

to claim them.

In each of the cases explored in this dissertation, I

begin by providing some background on the student's

graduate school experience and exploring the problem in the

story as he or she asks these critical questions. Although

I focus on the four cases, I also draw on data collected

from focus groups to examine the role of the dissertation

process in the formation of academic identity.  The
conceptual approach to the study is shown in Figure 1.1.

## Definition of Terms and Concepts

Although much research has been conducted on the
academic experiences of new faculty members (Boice, 1992;
Gaff, Pruit-Logan, Weible, & Others, 2000; Menges &
Associates, 1999; Rice, Sorcinelli, & Austin, 2000;
Sorcinelli & Austin, 1992), less is known about how
aspiring faculty members' identities develop or are shaped.
Studying this issue requires understanding the following
terms: *Ph.D. student*, *scholar*, *academic identity*,
*transitions* and *the "stages" of graduate school*.

For some, the words *student* and *scholar* are
synonymous.  In fact, a **student** is defined in the Merriam-
Webster Dictionary (http://merriam-webster.com) as a
"scholar or learner, especially one who attends school."
For purposes of this study, I defined a student as one who
was pursuing a Ph.D. and taking courses.  (Although clearly
one is still a student while writing the dissertation, I
chose to define student in a way that differentiated
between student and scholar.)

**CONTEXT**: All individuals in the study intended to become faculty members. Four individual cases came from the field of teacher education, and four focus group discussions were with students in various disciplines.

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┌──────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Academic Identity—CENTRAL FOCUS              │
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┌──────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Big Question: How does the dissertation-writing│
│ process contribute to or influence one's sense │
│ of academic identity?                          │
└──────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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┌──────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ TWO IMPORTANT QUESTIONS EMERGE:               │
└──────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```

| Who am I as an academic? | What does academic "work" mean to me? |
| --- | --- |

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           ⇓                          ⇓
┌──────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Competing Images of Self                      │
└──────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Two cases based on **Who am I as an academic?**    Two cases based on **What does academic "work" mean?**

| Case: Emerging Expert vs. Imposter | Case: Work Habits (Academic vs. Non-academic) |
| --- | --- |
| Case: Teacher vs. Researcher | Case: Collaborative vs. Individual Work on the dissertation |

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┌──────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ EMERGING SENSE OF ACADEMIC IDENTITY           │
└──────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Figure 1: Conceptual map of the dissertation.

A **scholar** as defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (http://merriam-webster.com) is "(a) one who has done advanced study in a special field or (b) a learned person." Again, a scholar certainly can be a student, but the specialization of scholarship (Damrosch, 1995) is heightened for future academics with the writing of the dissertation. Thus, for this study, I defined a scholar or Ph.D. dissertation writer as a person who is focused on a specialized topic, uses newly found intellectual training and methods and typically is in a more solitary pursuit of knowledge that leads to development of an academic identity.

In his work on late and middle career development and identity of faculty members, Weiland (1997) stated, **"Academic identity** can be understood to represent a dynamic 'configuration' of elements: those that are internal, or psychological, maturational and developmental; and those that are external, social and disciplinary" (p. 260). For the purpose of this study, I explored the internal, psychological, maturational, and developmental elements of identity. I viewed the external, social, and disciplinary nature of identity as a context that was occurring for all of the participants. That is, all of the participants were at approximately the same place in their programs (writing

13

chapters of their dissertations), and were studying in the

same discipline. In his book The Courage to Teach, Palmer

(1998) stated, "Identity is a moving intersection of the

inner and outer forces that make me who I am, converging in

the irreducible mystery of being human" (p.13). Thus, I

borrowed from both Weiland and Palmer, and for this study

viewed academic identity as who one is and becomes in the

academy, influenced by the intersection of the multiplicity

of people, things, thoughts, feelings and behaviors that

contribute to one's development. It is the moving

intersection between the inner and the outer forces that

helps one understand oneself in the confines of an academic

institution or discipline. Additionally, this study was

conducted in a research university and the definition

incorporates professional identity, which may occur for

students who choose non-academic work settings but still

develop "academic identities" in their discipline.

Another potentially thorny aspect of this study is the

use of the word **transition** to describe how one navigates

the academic experiences in graduate school, particularly

as one moves into the dissertation-writing phase from the

student course-taking phase. Schlossberg, Waters, and

Goodman (1995) broadly defined a transition as "any event,

or non-event, that results in changed relationships,

routines, assumptions and roles" (p. 27). Further, they

believed a transition is a transition only if it is defined

by the person as being so. They explained:

> To understand the meaning a transition has for a
> particular individual, we need to examine the type of
> transition (anticipated or unanticipated), the context
> of the transition (relationship of person to
> transition, setting in which the transition occurs),
> and the impact of the transition on the individual's
> life (on relationships, routines, assumptions, roles).
> (p. 35)

In the case of navigating the graduate school

experience, a person may go through numerous transitions.

Brammer (1991) defined a transition simply as "a short time

of personal change with a definite beginning and ending"

(p. 4). He proposed that a transition is a process

consisting of fairly predictable stages that flow into one

another, overlapping and recycling through earlier stages.

For the purpose of this dissertation, transition was

defined as the process of an individual (in this case in

graduate school) progressing through distinct,

institutionally mandated stages of an experience, which

results in change and ultimately helps shape the

individual's identity.

Golde (1996) noted that "some researchers have divided

the process of doctoral education into stages" (p. 23),

which she synthesized into a four-stage model: (a) taking

courses, (b) comprehensive examinations or a paper to mark the advancement to candidacy, (c) the dissertation proposal, and (d) the dissertation research and writing stage. Each of these stages is described below.

Following acceptance into graduate school, a student takes classes in what Tinto (1993) called "stages of transition" (p. 235), in order to come to new and more advanced levels of expertise in a field or discipline. As one progresses through graduate school, he or she typically takes a comprehensive examination. All students participating in this study had completed the majority of their course work and had taken a comprehensive exam. For some students, taking the comprehensive exam can be an important part of feeling connected or disconnected to the discipline or field of study. Some described the process as being rewarded for what you now know, whereas others described the experience as finding out all you do not know.

In the third stage, a student decides on a dissertation topic, forms his or her dissertation committee, and writes the dissertation proposal. Time frames often vary greatly (Nerad, 1991), and this stage may intertwine with the second one. The fourth stage, the research and writing of the dissertation, has the most

unpredictable time frame (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Golde, 1996), particularly depending on the field of study. In the natural, physical, and life sciences, students often conduct their research in a laboratory setting that is funded, whereas in the humanities, the research is often individualistic and less likely to be funded (Nerad, 1991). In the hard sciences, the stages have more variance as research typically begins when the student enters a lab in the first two years.

Each of these formal stages provides a window through which to view particular aspects of the shaping of an academic identity. This study was focused on the development of academic identity at the beginning of the fourth formal stage.

## Overview

Chapter 1 was an introduction to the study. The problem was set forth, followed by the research question guiding the study. The need for the study was discussed, as was the theoretical framework. The participants and case studies were described and key terms and concepts were defined according to their use in this study.

Chapter 2 contains a review of literature on graduate school education, the problems of the ABD syndrome,

literature related to new faculty careers, and formation of academic identity. Particular attention is paid to existing frameworks of transition, literature about academic careers, and literature that provides advice to students about navigating through the graduate school experience, particularly in writing the dissertation. This section is intended to help situate this study in the larger discourse of graduate education.

Chapter 3 describes the methods used to come to know, understand, and make sense of the stories heard from the aspiring faculty members. Also in Chapter 3, the university and college (education) culture in which these students studied is discussed.

The core of the dissertation consists of the stories of the four participants mentioned earlier. Although the existing frameworks informed and guided my organization and telling of each case, I stayed as close to the participants' words and interpretations as possible. Given the lack of exploration of graduate students' voices describing the doctoral education experience, it was important to me to allow the students' experiences to guide my understanding of the development of academic identity.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7, tell the participants' individual stories. Responses to the question "Who am I as

an academic?" are the focus of Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 represents the issues of expert versus imposter; in this chapter, Joanne's issues are described. Chapter 5 describes Fred's exploration of the notions of being a teacher versus a researcher. Chapters 6 and 7 contain cases responding to the critical question that arises during the dissertation phase of graduate school: "What does academic 'work' really mean to me?" Justin's story, presented in Chapter 6, is rich with reflection and provides the images of his coming to understand academic and non-academic work and the influence of his working-class background. Chapter 7 discusses how Lita came to understand the work of an academic as she wrote a dissertation from a larger study and struggled to determine who owned the dissertation and how the work was defined. Chapter 8, looks across the four stories and incorporates the discussion from four focus groups to look more deeply into the range of challenges that face graduate students writing their dissertations. Also, the contribution of the dissertation process to students' search for their academic identities is shown.

Chapter 9 describes what was learned from the study. In particular, the study is situated into the broader discussion on graduate education occurring nationally. In

addition, implications, suggestions, and recommendations

for students, faculty advisors, and graduate programs are

provided.  Finally, the benefits of this type of research

are also discussed and suggestions are made for further

research.

CHAPTER 2


REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON THEORIES FOR CONSIDERING THE
SHAPING OF ACADEMIC IDENTITY AND THE TRANSITION
THROUGH GRADUATE SCHOOL


Introduction

Graduate school.  No one in the tiny town of Loami

(population 800) could tell me about his or her experiences

in graduate school.  Among my parents and my friends'

parents, few had even gone to community college.  I did not

consider pursuing a Ph.D. until I arrived in East Lansing

in 1990.  Even then, it was not clear to me what the

experience would be like and how it would influence and

shape who I now am.  As a full-time residence hall

director, I was taking courses and pursuing a degree in

order to advance my career.  It was when I was introduced

to a particular faculty member, known for her commitment to

teaching her students, that I began to realize my love for

teaching and to think about how I, too, could become that

elusive entity called a "scholar."

While I was taking courses, writing comprehensive

exams, and preparing to write a dissertation, I thought

about ways in which graduate school influences students who

are aspiring to the professorate.  I thought about my own

transitions, both big and small, about the ways in which

those around me influenced me, and about what I was becoming. From these reflections on my experience, the idea of studying the lives of those writing dissertations was born.
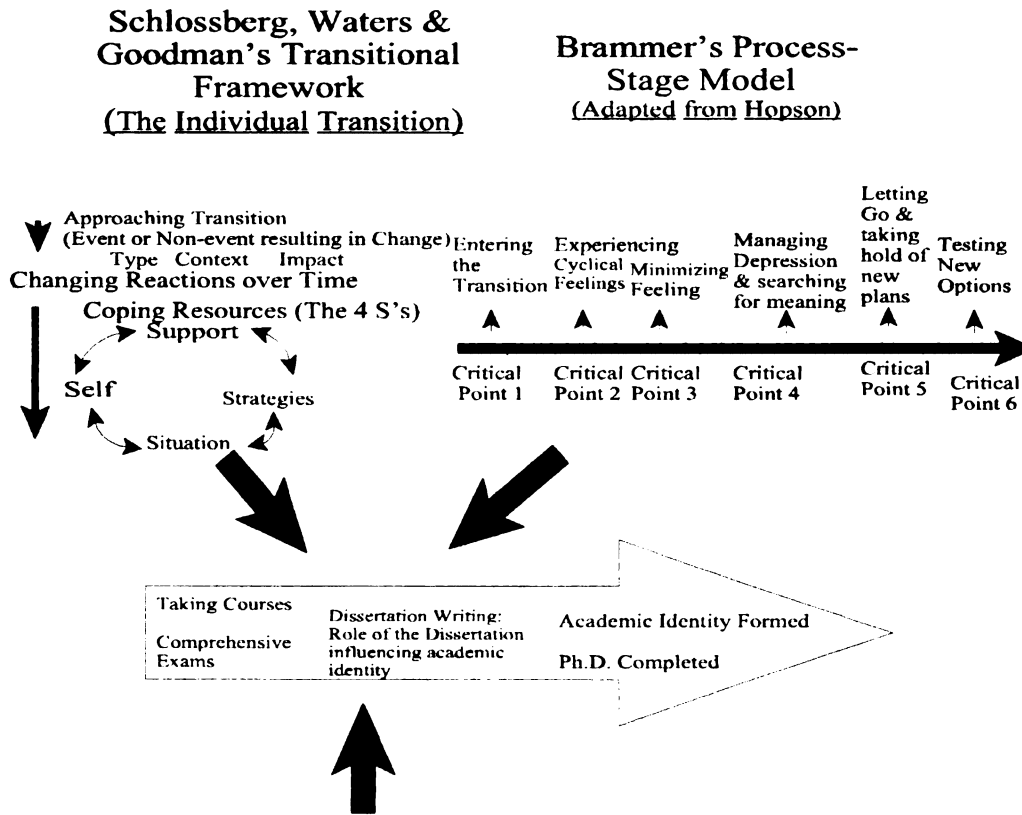
This chapter is intended to situate the present research within a larger context. First, because this is a study about academic transition, I discuss some of the predominant theories about adults in transition, paying particular attention to how the theories might apply in a graduate school setting. Second, because I am interested in students' academic identity before and during the writing of the dissertation, I review literature on the shaping of identity. Third, because this study relates to the concerns of graduate school, I consider literature on the ABD syndrome and on academic careers of graduates.

## Literature on Transitions

> In the ongoing flux of life, one undergoes many changes.... New skills are learned, old abandoned; expectations are fulfilled or hopes dashed—in all these situations the individual is faced with the need to give up one mode of life and accept another. (Parkes, 1972, p. 23)

In the literature on transitions, a number of key concepts appeared to be relevant to the transition that takes place as one navigates through graduate school toward the dissertation process. In Figure 2.1, a concept map of

# EXAMPLES of How Transition Theory Informed This Research

### Schlossberg, Waters & Goodman's Transitional Framework
(The Individual Transition)

### Brammer's Process-Stage Model
(Adapted from Hopson)

Approaching Transition
(Event or Non-event resulting in Change)
Type   Context   Impact
Changing Reactions over Time

Coping Resources (The 4 S's)
Support
Self
Strategies
Situation

Entering the Transition

Experiencing Cyclical Feelings

Minimizing Feeling

Managing Depression & searching for meaning

Letting Go & taking hold of new plans

Testing New Options

Critical Point 1   Critical Point 2   Critical Point 3   Critical Point 4   Critical Point 5   Critical Point 6

Taking Courses

Comprehensive Exams

Dissertation Writing:
Role of the Dissertation influencing academic identity

Academic Identity Formed

Ph.D. Completed

## Nicholson's General Model of the Transition Cycle

Phase V/I
Preparation

Phase IV
Stabilazation

Phase ll
Encounter

Phase III
Adjustment

Figure 2. A description of three transition models that influence the conceptual framework of transitions during graduate school.

Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) transition framework, Brammer's

(1991) process-stage model, and Nicholson's (1990) general

model of a transition cycle illuminates the essential

concepts of transition that informed my thinking for this

study.

<u>Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's Transitional</u>
<u>Framework (The Individual Transition)</u>

The transitional framework or model devised by

Schlossberg et al. (1995) was intended to help professional

counselors (and other help providers) acquire the

knowledge, skills, and attitudes that would enable them to

work more effectively with adults in transition.  In the

transitional framework they developed, these researchers

described the process of going through a transition,

enumerating the major areas that affect how clients cope

with transitions.

According to Schlossberg et al., (1995) going through

a transition consists of three major elements: (a)

approaching transitions: transition identification and

transition process, (b) taking stock of coping resources,

or the 4S system, and (c) taking charge, or strengthening

resources (p. 26).  As mentioned in Chapter 1, these

authors defined transition broadly as "any event, or non-

event, that results in changed relationships, routines,

assumptions and roles" (p. 27). Further, they believed a

transition is a transition only if it is defined by the

person as being so. They explained,

> To understand the meaning a transition has for a
> particular individual, we need to examine the type of
> transition (anticipated or unanticipated), the context
> of the transition (relationship of person to
> transition, setting in which the transition occurs),
> and the impact of the transition on the individual's
> life (on relationships, routines, assumptions, roles).
> (p. 35)

After identifying the transition, Schlossberg et al.

explicated "the 4S system" (situation, self, supports, and

strategies) in their model to show the variables that

influence an individual's ability to cope during a

transition:

> 1. The Situation variable—(What is happening? For
>    example, the transition to retirement differs from
>    the transition of having a first baby.)
> 2. The Self variable—(To whom is it happening? Each
>    individual is different in terms of life issues and
>    personality.)
> 3. The Support variable—(What help is available?
>    Supports and available options vary for each
>    individual.)
> 4. The Strategies variable—(How does the person cope?
>    People navigate transitions in different ways.)
>    (p. 47)

The final part of the transitional process is strengthening

these resources in order to move effectively through and

out of the transition.

In this study, I espoused Schlossberg et al.'s view

that "a transition is not so much a matter of change as of

the individual's own perception of the change" (p. 28).

Thus, I allowed the study participants to define whether

they believed they had experienced a transition and, if so,

whether they viewed it as a positive or negative,

anticipated or unanticipated event. It would appear at

first glance that this type of transition would be

anticipated—that is, it would "predictably occur in the

course of the unfolding life cycle" or, in this context, in

the course of an unfolding academic career (Pearlin &

Lieberman, 1979, p. 220). However, I believe that the

participants in this study did not anticipate some of the

transitions. Many ideas garnered from Schlossberg et al.'s

transitional framework influenced the interview protocol

(Appendix A).

    Summary of influences on research questions from

Schlossberg et al. The important components of Schlossberg

et al.'s work and the implications for this dissertation

are as follows. According to Schlossberg et al., their

transitional model consists of three major parts:

identifying the transition, taking stock of one's coping

resources, and strengthening the resources available to

oneself. In this study, I attempted to discover how the

participants viewed this period in their lives. For

example, were they anticipating a great change from going

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to class as a student, or did they find the experience similar to their previous experiences? Further, I attempted to discover what effect this period had on their lives. For example, how had their relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles changed now that they were making progress on their dissertations, as compared to when they were taking courses?

The particular focus of Schlossberg et al.'s transition model was on those factors influencing one's ability to cope during a transition. In this research, I explored with participants each of the variables listed as important to coping during the graduate school experience (i.e., the situation, self, support, and strategies variables). I accomplished this by listening to and interpreting each participant's description of his or her academic experiences, probing for an understanding of how these variables affected the participants' lives.

Brammer's Process-Stage Model of Transition

Brammer's (1991) model of transition was a result of his more than 40 years of clinical experience with people in transition and his reading and research on coping and change over a lifetime. Brammer defined a transition as "a short time of personal change with a definite beginning and ending" (p. 4) and proposed that transitions consist of

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fairly predictable stages that flow into one another and
that overlap and recycle through earlier stages. Brammer's
process-stage model (shown in Figure 2.1), which he adapted
from Hopson (1981), was derived from literature on dying
popularized by Kubler-Ross (1969) and Parkes (1972). This
process-stage model follows the basic grieving process
model but is adapted to general life transitions. What
follows is an overview of the model and a brief description
of the six critical points in a transition as identified by
Brammer.

Brammer said that the length and severity of responses
to a transition depend on many factors. Specifically,
these include "the *meaning* of the transition for you, the
extent to which you *express your feelings* about the
transition, the use of *previous experiences* with
transitions, and the extent and functioning of your *support
system* and *other coping resources*" (pp. 21-22). These
factors parallel those described by other researchers
(Ebaugh, 1988; Glaser & Strauss, 1971; Hopson, 1981;
Ingelhart, 1991; Mercer, Nichols, & Doyle, 1989;
Schlossberg et al., 1995; Sell, 1991). In describing the
six critical points in a transition, Brammer specified how
these mediating variables affect any transition. He also
briefly described the typical strategies to work through

each point of a transition. Brammer cautioned that there can be individual variations in his model. "Some stages may be skipped, others repeat stages in a circular fashion, and some may remain fixed at a particular stage" (p. 23). I explored the notion of stage-structured transitions for participants in this study. The critical points in Brammer's model are described below.

Critical point 1: Entering the transition. Brammer described the initial entry into a transition as a crisis and noted that its severity depends on the suddenness of the experience. In less critical transitions, presumably including students going through stages or steps in graduate school, "people typically experience confusion, anxiety, momentary inefficiency (such as forgetting), and a sense of being constricted...while others see the entry into a transition as a predictable ending to a previous life style" (Brammer, 1991, p. 24). Brammer suggested that self-help strategies for this critical point would be to "assess the crisis, inventory your resources, decide the best help to obtain, and work toward stabilization and resolution of the emotional impact" (p. 25).

Critical point 2: Experiencing cyclical feelings. Following the brief critical point of entering the transition, an individual experiences cyclical feelings.

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The severity of this second stage depends on the triggering

event and sometimes results in dread, anger, sadness, or

fear in grieving people.  In particular, Brammer noted,

"The second stage is considered critical also because many

fears are experienced as one contemplates the future" (p.

28).  Strategies for self-help include expressing one's

feelings and gaining reassurance from others that these

feelings are perfectly normal.

Critical point 3: Minimizing feelings.  Brammer

reported that typical responses to transitions at this

point include denial, disbelief, hope, anger, and fear.

The individuals Brammer studied seemed to describe a

"grieving process."  This point in the transition includes

feelings of loss.  Strategies recommended to cope with this

critical point include maintaining one's self-esteem,

expressing one's feelings, maintaining physical health, and

stabilizing and assessing coping resources and skills.

Critical point 4: Managing depression and searching

for meaning.  One's self-esteem is the most prominent

component of this critical period in a transition,

according to Brammer's model.  If self-esteem slips, it is

possible that a person may experience deep and possibly

clinical depression.  Strategies to cope with this period

include expressing and reflecting on the experiences

through journals and talking with others. If depression persists, seeking professional help is the best course of action.

Critical point 5: Letting go and taking hold of new plans. Characteristically, at this stage, "you can give yourself permission to release the past relationship, job, or value" (Brammer, 1991, p. 39). Individuals typically view this point as the change that represents a new beginning (Ebaugh, 1988; Glaser & Strauss, 1971). There is a realization that the transition is ending, and that helps the individual let go of former roles and seek new roles. Strategies for coping with this point in the transition include reinforcing one's ability to state that "things are better," being cautious about relapses, and discussing the transition with others, which can result in productive learning.

Critical point 6: Testing new options. The final point in the transition process is typically a time of hope and optimism (Brammer, 1991). At this point, one can shift his or her views of the world and experience transformational change. Again in reference to the present study, one may begin to feel confident about his or her ability to "become an academic" while writing the dissertation. Strategies to help a person at this point

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include making positive, confidence-building statements to oneself, stating goals positively and precisely, and engaging in a support group.

Summary of influences on research questions from Brammer. Brammer described four factors (the meaning of the transition, the extent to which one expresses his or her feelings, the influence of experiencing transitions in the past, and the way one uses coping resources and support systems) that he believed influence the severity of a transition. I explored with the study participants the degree to which these factors influenced how they navigated graduate school.

Brammer believed that general life transitions can be organized in a series of stages and can be used as an explanatory road map to help people put their feelings into words and make sense of their experience (through six critical points in a transition). In this study, as I interviewed participants, I checked to see whether their stories of going through the stages of graduate school could be mapped onto a stage-structured model.

Brammer helped me to see, in the context of this study, how the transition in graduate school may result in feelings of confusion. It was interesting to explore with participants whether the extreme emotions that Brammer

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described occurred in the participants' transition from being students taking courses to now writing their dissertations. In the interviews, I explored whether graduate students experienced loss after their formal classroom experiences were complete and they were now working mostly in isolation on the dissertation.

## Nicholson's General Model of the Transition Cycle

Studies on the challenge of adjusting to job change have provided a wealth of insights into transitions and transition theory (Bridges, 1980, 1988; Van Maanen, 1976, 1977). Nicholson (1990) provided a transition model based on research on job mobility and his work at the University of Sheffield's Social and Applied Psychology Unit. Although this dissertation is not related to job change, the similarities between job change and the change that occurs between taking courses in graduate school and writing the dissertation appear to make this line of research potentially relevant. Nicholson's model of the transition cycle was shown in Figure 2.1. Nicholson believed his model differed from previous models because it

> [aims] to be non-normative—it does not prescribe that certain experiences will or will not occur. It aims to be a systematic general framework, allowing for the full range of extremely different experiences we know people encounter in transition to interpolated and interpreted. It does so with the aid of three guiding

principles: recursion, disjunction, and
interdependence. (p. 87)

What follows is a discussion of the three guiding

principles Nicholson mentioned and their influence on

transition cycles.

*Recursion* is the most important principle in the

transition cycle because movement is continuous. Nicholson

believed that every person is at some point in one or more

transition cycles. Because change is always possible, even

in presently stable environments, one is in varying states

of readiness for the onset of a new cycle. Hence, in

Figure 2.1, Stage I is also Stage V. As Nicholson noted,

"each experience of transitions, in some way, affects one's

future experience of transitions" (p.87).

*Disjunction* is the second guiding principle. From his

research on transitions, Nicholson concluded that

experiences and events can be divided into stages according

to their distinctive qualities. He described the stages of

disjunction as follows:

> Expectations and motives rule the *Preparation* stage
> (the leading up to the point of change); emotions and
> perceptions are pre-eminent in the *Encounter* stage
> (the first days and weeks of familiarization with a
> new job); assimilation and accommodation govern the
> *Adjustment* stage (the period of developing performance
> and psychological change); and relating and performing
> dominate the *Stabilization* stage (the steady state
> achieved after Adjustment). (p. 88)

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The description of each of these stages is helpful in

ascertaining the extent to which they depict the parallel

transition that is possible while going through graduate

school.

Finally, the third principle, *interdependence*, guides

the transition cycle.  Nicholson believed that

> What happens in one stage exerts a powerful influence
> over what happens at the next.  For example, one's
> state of preparation (i.e., readiness for change) can
> soften or sharpen the immediate impact of Encounter.
> Equally, how acute, benign, or demanding is one's
> first Encounter with changed circumstances can set the
> direction for the Adjustment strategies one will be
> predisposed to enact in the longer term.  Whether
> adjustment modes are reactive or proactive (personal
> change vs. role development) establishes the kind of
> Stabilized connection that will be achieved between
> self and situation.  The Stabilized patterns arrived
> at in work and relationships are a form of Preparation
> and springboard for future change. (p. 88)

Nicholson pointed out that individuals in transition

could usefully ask themselves the following kinds of

questions having to do with the transition cycle:

1. Where am I now on the transition cycle?
2. How did I get here?
3. Has there been a pattern to my experience of
   previous cycles?
4. Does this contain any warnings about what is going
   to happen to me next?
5. Can I foresee my next cycle, and if not, why not?
6. Is there something I should do to determine what
   happens next or what the next cycle will be like?
7. What might management systems do to help me through
   my current stage, the next stage and future cycles?
   (p. 91)

Exploring this transition (with this general model in mind)

yielded worthwhile information on the applicability of

Nicholson's model and the degree to which future

transitions might be navigated (e.g., the transition to the

first faculty job).  Further, as I focused on the issue of

how the dissertation process influenced one's sense of

academic identity, the critical questions that dissertation

writers asked themselves could be seen intertwined in a

larger perspective of graduate school transitions.

Summary of influences on research questions from

Nicholson.  Nicholson described a general model of

transition based on work-role transitions.  In his work he

used a general theory regarding adjustment to change.  In

particular, he described four distinct stages of a

transition cycle.  In this dissertation, I explored whether

participants who were experiencing the transition through

graduate school mapped onto this more general cycle.

Nicholson provided three guiding principles

influencing his general transition cycle.  These three

principles—recursion (movement in a cycle is continuous),

disjunction (experiences are divided into stages due to

their distinct qualities), and interdependence (what

happens at one stage influences what happens at another)—

provided a number of assumptions to explore with participants in this study.

Considering Nicholson's views on the transition cycle, if the graduate school experience of moving through program stages parallels this transition cycle, participants could be asked the degree to which each stage influenced the following stage. (Or at least when I interviewed students, I could stay attuned to this phenomenon and note its presence or absence.)

Summary of the Three Transition Models

The three models of transition explored in this section helped provide the initial framework of questions or themes explored in the interview protocol. However, the graduate school experience shared by the participants in this study was too complex to fit within any one of the transitional theories. What proved beneficial was to situate this research within the context of transitions in order to explore further how such experiences shape academic identity.

Research on Academic Identity

As mentioned earlier, identity is a thorny issue both to define and to research. Research on identity was originated and popularized by renowned psychoanalyst Erik

Erikson.  As Weiland (1997) pointed out, the term *identity* is "essential to Erikson's revision of orthodox Freudian methods (i.e., their almost exclusive focus on inner life and on childhood) and his elaboration of the eight stages of the human life cycle, particularly the transition from adolescence to early adulthood when an occupation or vocation is chosen" (p. 256).  A fair amount of research has been conducted on the general notion of "career identity" (Van Maanen, 1976, 1977, 1978; Van Maanen, 1990), but few researchers have explored the concept in academic contexts.

Palmer (1998) spent a good deal of time discussing teacher identity in his book <u>The Courage to Teach</u>.  He asked, "Who is the self that teaches?"  This question is similar to ones I asked in this study.  I was interested, as was Palmer, in discovering the answer to the "who" question because it is a "seldom-taken trail in educational reform, a trail toward the recovery of the inner resources good teaching always requires" (p. 7).  I was interested in learning about the inner resources that dissertation writing requires and its effect on who one becomes in the academy.

Palmer described his understanding of identity in terms of who we are as teachers.  He believed that

"identity and integrity might grow within us and among us, instead of hardening as they do when we defend our fixed positions from the foxholes of the pedagogy roles" (p. 13). He went on to state that by identity he did not mean just the good deeds good teachers do; rather, identity also includes "our shadows and limits, our wounds and fears, and our strengths and potentials" (p. 13). As I was learning from the participants in this study, I listened for both the good things they learned and did as they navigated graduate school, as well as the concerns, fears, and issues they encountered as they wrote their dissertations. Palmer described identity as:

> an evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute
> my life converge in the mystery of self: my genetic
> makeup, the nature of the man and woman who gave me
> life, the culture in which I was raised, people who
> have sustained me and people who have done me harm,
> the good and ill I have done to others and to myself,
> the experience of love and suffering—and much, much
> more. (p. 13)

It was these words that led me to try to put the participants' stories in context. I attempted to provide enough background so that, as I described how these dissertation writers asked themselves critical questions about who they were as academics and what academic work actually meant to them, I conveyed that they were whole

people, not just graduate students who may become faculty members.

In a national survey of graduate students, Anderson and Swazey (1998) found that graduate school had "considerable strength as a change process of the most fundamental kind" (p. 10). In fact, they described the graduate school socialization process as a time when one is "shedding one's previous self conception and taking on a new view of the self that reflects one's role and membership in the new group" (p. 12). It was with this in mind that I wanted to view the specific role the dissertation might play in taking on membership in the academy as an aspiring faculty member.

Other authors have explored issues of identity in the academy, even if this was not their primary focus. Examples include Cooper, Benham, & Collay's (1999) reflections on "finding a home" in the academy during graduate school, Brookfield's (1994) book describing critically reflective teachers, Clark's (1987) book entitled <u>The Academic Life</u>, and a major national project on re-envisioning the Ph.D. headed by Jody Nyquist and funded by the Pew and Spencer foundations (see Nyquist et al., 1999, for an initial discussion of that research).

What one becomes during the dissertation process is related to who one is after successfully navigating the transitions in graduate school and having received the Ph.D.   An extensive body of literature on new faculty members and academic careers has been produced during the last 10 to 15 years   (Becher, 1996; Boice, 1992; Finkelstein, 1990; Goodson, 1992; Menges & Associates, 1999; Murphy, 1993; Rice et al., 2000; Schön, 1987; Shea & Knoedler, 1994; Whitt, 1988).   Some autobiographical research on faculty work and lives also was related to transition issues in faculty's careers.   These issues included changing from a teaching to a research institution (Womble, 1995), geographical moves (Dufresne, 1992), issues facing famous sociologists (Berger, 1990), and issues facing working-class academics (Dews & Law, 1995).   Also, some classic work on graduate and professional students influenced how I thought about this study (Katz, 1976).

Over the past decade, a plethora of studies and reports have been written on the transition from student to faculty member.   One such report was Whitt's (1988) dissertation, in which she described effective and ineffective ways of succeeding as new faculty members in a college of education at a large research university.   Her

work preceded a popular book by Boice (1992) entitled The New Faculty Member. In that book, for which he surveyed and interviewed hundreds of new faculty members over time, Boyce concluded, "What overshadows the experience of many newcomers is the despair of isolation, insecurity, and busyness" (p. 4). Certainly, these are issues that dissertation writers face. Boice further constructed a simple theory to help provide him a "sense of cohesion and direction for the wealth of information at hand" (p. 12). Boice described this theory as follows:

> This four-part theory (involvement, regimen, self-management, and social networks, or IRSS) deals with the most fundamental skills and attitudes so elementary that we may take them for granted.
>     **Involvement** ... is immersion in campus life—in its social networks, in activities that provide supports such as getting to know professors and students, and in an optimistic sense of membership in one's campus.
>     **Regimen** ... is the skill of establishing balance between time expenditures for teaching (usually excessive) versus scholarly writing (typically nonexistent). What this skill comes down to is learning a regimen of moderation and efficiency.
>     **Self-Management** ... is learning to solve the right problem ... and attending to whether one is on task. Another aspect of self-management is learning the skill of emotional expression and learning from one's context.... An example with new faculty is their tendency, when faced with tough problems such as writing for publication, to engage in negative self-talk that can undermine confidence and momentum.
>     **Social Networks** ... is benefiting from the power of social networking. Consider a single example of how new faculty can benefit from sociality: spending as much time at collegial socializing on and off campus as at other professorial activities, such as

writing and teaching, is key to success in areas such as scholarly productivity. (pp. 13-14)

The issues that have been mentioned in the literature as characterizing the experiences of early career faculty may also characterize the experiences of graduate students during the advanced stages of their training. Overall, the literature concerning new faculty made little mention of the influence of graduate school. This gap in the literature was another reason for researching this period.

## Literature on the All But the Dissertation (ABD) Syndrome

The status of ABD (All But the Dissertation) is the critical one in American graduate education. Since the 1960s its poignancy, sometimes permanency, has been growing. We all seem to know someone—a friend, relative, spouse, colleague—who is either filled with apprehension confronting the task fresh after completing course work or bogged down for years in stop-again, start-again efforts to finish. (Sternberg, 1992, p. 1)

The best dissertation is a done dissertation. This advice is often given by advisors, peers, and counselors to those struggling to finish, or those seeking dissertation support. The ABD syndrome, as it has become popularly known, has long been a concern to faculty and administrators but continues to persist in higher education settings (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Menand, 1996). Certainly, whether one is able to finish or does not finish the dissertation has a profound effect on one's sense of

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academic identity.  Although this dissertation is not

intended to shed light directly on methods or strategies to

finish a dissertation, a brief review of the literature in

this area is helpful in highlighting issues I explored with

study participants.  Statistical data also will help

readers understand the extent of the problem.

<u>Why Writing the Dissertation Is Such a Problem</u>

Many psychologists have investigated the main

difficulties that dissertation writers experience (Boice,

1993; Duff Brown, 1996).  As clinical psychologist Mary

McKinney (1996) explained,

> Bright students who have "sailed through" school until
> they hit the dissertation run into trouble for a few
> understandable reasons.  First, there is the
> overwhelming size of the average dissertation.... Many
> students may have gone through their entire career and
> been smart enough to get away with doing everything at
> the last minute.  A dissertation can't be accomplished
> with a few all-nighters.  This strategy no longer
> works. (p. 1)

McKinney went on to discuss how, for many students, the

dissertation marks the end of a particular phase of life

and affects students' identity:

> For many, the dissertation marks the end of a long
> life of "studenthood" and the crossing of the
> threshold to not being a student anymore.  As a
> result, issues of autonomy and separation come up.
> For some students, it's like leaving the fold and
> leaving the family.... Some students do well with
> independence but, for others, the dissertation
> experience uncovers psychological issues that they've
> not dealt with before. (p. 2)

Stern's (1986) research seemed to support this idea. He found that people who had difficulty with separation and loss, perhaps as a result of a trauma in childhood—like the death of a parent, divorce, or moving frequently—took longer to complete their dissertations. I explored the concerns that McKinney and Stern raised as I tried to understand and describe what was happening to the study participants.

The Statistics: Completion Rates and Time-to-Degree

According to Menand (1996), "the key statistic in the profile of the new Ph.D. is the extraordinary amount of time he or she has spent acquiring the thing" (p. 81). One of the three things Menard cited that make graduate education so time consuming is the dissertation process. In their landmark study In Pursuit of the Ph.D., Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) provided data that put into perspective such trends as increased time-to-degree, low completion rates, and the large commitment of time by many who start but do not finish doctoral programs. The median elapsed time between the B.A. and the Ph.D. is now 10.5 years, of which 7.1 years are spent as a registered student. Students in the humanities and social sciences are among those who spend the longest—11.9 years between degrees, and

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8.3 years as registered students. Bowen and Rudenstine

indicated that the extraordinary length of time to complete

graduate school in the humanities is related to the unclear

paradigms of scholarship in those fields. There also may

be other factors that have not been explored.

Citing a study that Nerad and Cerny (1993) conducted

at Berkeley on the issue of low completion rates and

lengthened time-to-degree, Kerlin (1997) listed six major

patterns among students in the humanities and social

sciences who had experienced longer than usual times-to-

degree:

1. These students spent excessive amounts of time polishing their master's theses;
2. The students overprepared for their oral exams, often spending from six months to a year in isolated preparation;
3. They spent excessive time, from one to two years, identifying and focusing on a dissertation topic and developing a proposal and they seemed to lack clarity about the process and expectations;
4. They had difficulty making the transition from being a "class-taking" person to a "book-writing" person and felt lost during this transitional phase;
5. Students who took a longer time to degree had different conceptions of the process: they viewed the stages of course work, orals, and proposal writing more as hurdles to be surmounted and discrete phases rather than as steps leading to the completion of their dissertations;
6. These students felt a lack of support at both the departmental and faculty levels throughout the different phases of their programs. (p. 189)

According to Kerlin, students were more successful when

their graduate programs created support systems for

dissertation writers and faculty carefully mentored students, treating them like junior colleagues. With participants in the present study, I attempted to learn about the transition from class-taking student to book writer, as noted above.

Exploring adults in transition, identity development and issues related to graduate school students provided me a base for exploring the role the dissertation plays in developing an academic identity. In particular, this literature provided a complex lens through which to view graduate student life.

CHAPTER 3

GAINING PERSPECTIVE ON GRADUATE STUDENTS: METHODS

My own academic life has been in a College of Education. The culture that I have come to know parallels (to some degree) what I heard from participants in the study since they had also studied education. I, too, had expected and may still choose to work as a faculty member sometime in the future[1]. As I reflected on my own experiences and recognized how those experiences have influenced me, I thought it important to provide a context to the culture in which these students lived their academic lives as well. The methods I chose to study the phenomenon of navigating graduate school and writing the dissertation helped me to explore and understand the experiences of these graduate students in that context. Below is a discussion of the research methods chosen, the data collection and analysis process, and the background and context of the program in which the participants studied.

## Research Methods

I recall being asked early in my graduate program, "Do you think you are more a qualitative or quantitative

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[1]My present position at the University of Michigan allows me to teach one course in the Psychology Dept.

researcher?" As I had studied in a behaviorist psychology master's degree program, I had been taught that the only "real" science was in the physical or natural sciences, and the only way to be respected was to use experimental or at least quasi-experimental design. With this background, I initially found the question odd and presumed that the only "real" research was quantitative in nature. It was only after I had taken the methods course in my doctoral program in the College of Education that I began to understand the question.

The choice of a "qualitative dissertation" is born out of my belief that to understand an experience one needs to be a part of it. Being the "researcher as human instrument" (see Meloy, 1994) allowed me to do just that.

Phenomenological Interviewing

My first methodological decision was to use a variation of Irving Seidman's (1991) phenomenological interviewing strategies. He describes how in-depth interviewing allows people to "select constitutive details of their experience, reflect on them, give order to them, and thereby make sense of them" (p.1). This was the model of interviewing that I chose to apply in order to accurately tell the story of a graduate student's life and help me make meaning out of that

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each academic year.

story.

The purpose of this type of interviewing is neither hypothesis testing nor evaluation. At the root of in-depth interviewing is "an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of their experience" (Seidman, p. 3). I discovered and learned about the role the dissertation played in the development of academic identity of the respondents by asking about their graduate school experiences.

I found interviewing to be a powerful way to gain insight about dissertation writing, graduate school life, and academic identity. I believe, as Seidman states, that "the use of interviewing as a form of inquiry is most consistent with people's ability to make meaning through language. It affirms the importance of the individual without denigrating the possibility of community and collaboration" (p. 8). My use of in-depth interviewing provided me with a deeper understanding of the issues, questions, structures, and processes that graduate students encounter in pursuit of their Ph.D. Further, it led me to respect the individuals that agreed to share with me their stories.

Interpretive Interactionism

I searched for methodology that would best lead me to my goal of understanding the issues and problems of these future faculty members. I looked at a number of qualitative research books (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Meloy, 1994; Stake, 1995) but found Denzin's (1989) book entitled Interpretive Interactionism most helpful. I used many of his methods to help me to understand the data that is collected and shared here. According to Denzin, "the focus of interpretive research is on those life experiences that radically alter and shape the meanings persons give to themselves and their experiences" (1989, p. 10).

Denzin (1989) also describes three assumptions that organize his work and apply to my study:

> First, in the world of human experience, there is only interpretation. Second, it is a worthy goal to attempt to make these interpretations available to others. By doing so, understandings can be created. With better understandings come better applied programs for addressing the major social issues of our day. Third, all interpretations are unfinished and inconclusive. (p. 9)

Thus, it remains with the reader to form his or her own interpretations of this study.

Applying some of the methodological strategies posited by Denzin (1989), I discovered that the problem that faced

dissertation writers in understanding themselves as academics and future faculty members was both a potentially private problem and a public issue of graduate school attrition.

## Data Collection and Analysis Process

In the following section, I discuss the process I followed to collect and analyze the data. In brief, I piloted the initial interview protocol, chose the institution, learned about the college from which the participants were chosen, conducted the individual interviews, determined the focus group questions and protocol, identified the focus group participants, and analyzed the data.

## Interview Protocol Pilot

Informed by the previously mentioned theories and literatures, I developed a protocol to study the lives of graduate students. Two people agreed to be interviewed and provide suggestions on the effectiveness of the interview protocol. The resulting analysis and suggestions from these two individuals resulted in a final interview protocol (see Appendix A).[2]

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[2] As mentioned in Chapter 1, the interview protocol is broader than the narrower topic of the role of the dissertation process in influencing academic identity that resulted after analysis of the data.

## Choosing the Institution and Understanding the College of Education Culture

I chose to conduct this research in a prominent College of Education at a major research university due to its emphasis on research and development of future faculty members. The Human Subjects Committee at my home institution (Michigan State University) approved the interview protocol and study design. Before selecting and interviewing the final research participants, I also learned about the culture and climate of the College of Education by talking with several "informants." I expand on the College of Education Program at the end of this chapter.

## Conducting the Individual Interviews

In order to identify potential participants for the study, faculty members in the College of Education provided me with the names of students who were both writing their dissertations and had expressed an interest in becoming faculty members upon completion of the program. I then sent each person on this list a letter explaining the project and asking for participation. I spoke with a number of students who responded. Five individuals[3] agreed to participate, and signed consents.

The approach that I used in the interview process was

primarily open-ended questions similar to Seidman's (1991) three-interview series. Due to time constraints, I adapted this method to a four-interview and sometimes five-interview series with each participant. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes and the interview process occurred over approximately a three- to four-week period with each participant. The purposes of the interviews parallel Seidman's suggestions as explained below.

In the first interview, I was attempting to establish the context and life history of the participant. In the second and third interviews, I was asking participants to reconstruct details of their graduate school experience (especially dissertation writing) within the context that it occurred. Finally, in the fourth (or fifth) interview, I asked participants to reflect on the meaning of graduate school, writing a dissertation, and becoming a faculty member.

## Focus Group Interview Protocol and Participant Selection

Focus groups with participants from outside the College of Education were also used to inform the research. In particular, they provided "amplifying voices" to what I was hearing and learning from the individual participants (see Appendix B for resulting protocol). A recruitment flyer and

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[3] Five individuals were interviewed but an audiotape failure made the data unusable for the 5th participant.

letter was sent to Ph.D. students. Twelve participants

agreed to participate in this part of the study. Four focus

groups were formed (three participants in each group) and

each met for approximately two hours. Two of the groups

consisted of students with fields of study generally in the

humanities, while the other two consisted of students

generally in the fields of mathematics and sciences.

## Data Analysis for the Individual Interviews

After the interviews were transcribed, I began the

process of interpreting the data. I studied each

transcript, listened to many of the tapes multiple times,

marked and labeled the text, and organized excerpts into

categories that were formed as I asked myself questions such

as:

- What connects the stories of each of the participants?
- How do I understand and explain these connections?
- What do I understand now about the graduate school experience, the dissertation process, and academic identity that I did not understand before I began the interviews?
- What surprises me about these data?
- How is this consistent or inconsistent with other literature?
- How have these data/has this study gone beyond the literature I have studied?

I organized the data in a way that would help me answer

those questions. First, I listed themes or categories that

emerged from the interviews. At the same time, I extracted quotes from the transcripts that were consistent with those themes, and inserted the quotes into a matrix for each participant, showing the relationship between the quotes and the themes. I worked from not only from the transcripts, but also directly from the tapes, in order to take advantage of voice inflection for meaning. The resulting matrix for each participant was used to create a profile of that person which included a chronology of meaningful graduate school experiences and events. The profiles are the basis of the stories that are shared in Chapters 4-7.

The central issue of "critical questions" that dissertation writers ask themselves to form a sense of academic identity emerged as I looked across all profiles to find common themes. The focus group material, which was collected after the individual interviews, was reviewed to find confirming, disconfirming, "conflicting" and amplifying voices for the critical questions that had emerged during the individual interviews.

## A Final Word about the Stories

As I look at each of the stories that are told in this dissertation, I find it important to share something from one of my faculty members. Anna Neumann, in her (1992)

paper entitled, "On experience, memory, and knowing: A post-holocaust (auto)biography," eloquently addressed the issue of representation and its relation to self. She explained that we can only understand another's intended meaning through our own experience.

> While I reached for his story—accessible to me only in partial form because I cannot (nor do I want to) reenter his world—I have been able to discern that story only on my own terms—only in the image of who I am, where and when I am, what I know, and what I seek out. What I discern of his story, what I remember of it, and what I then retell is not his experience as such. Rather, it is what I, with my inclinations and needs and understandings, imagine his experience to be. What I heard, what I saw, and what I felt, then as I listened, were about him. But they were less of him than of myself. Searching for his story, I created the beginnings of my own. What I tell you here and now is less of him than of me. (p. 10)

My experiences helped shape not only the focus of this work, but also my interpretation of the participants' stories. It is not possible for me to understand all of the participants perfectly, but I tried to understand them by listening intently to what they had to say and putting their behavior as graduate students in context. In order to understand more about the world in which these students studied, I turn now to a brief description and background of their graduate program.

<u>History and Background Information about the Program</u>

To better understand the program and the stories told by the participants, I interviewed two experienced faculty members and a few students (not participating in this study) about the program. What follows provides a context concerning the culture that existed in this college while I was interviewing the participants.

The faculty members I spoke with felt the education program was poor in the 1970s. The program was best described as a mass production model of preparing teachers, 2,500 at a time. The style of teaching was to present mass lectures in large classrooms. The program for graduate students was not research oriented. A new Dean arrived in the late 1970s, and significant changes occurred over the next ten years. Most notably, the culture shifted from a "practitioner-based" faculty (focusing on having a good teacher preparation program) to faculty who were hired to be productive, nationally recognized scholars. By the mid-1980s the culture had completed the change and was described by a faculty member I spoke with as "research is everything" and "other things are nothing."

By the late 1980s, and as a result of another new Dean being appointed, the program shifted back to a more practitioner-based focus. The emphasis on doctoral

students' research faded, while the practice and work in public schools were viewed as essential.

By the time the participants in this study were interviewed in the late 1990s, the college culture was in transition once again, moving from a practitioner-based approach to a more research-based approach. According to the professors I interviewed, this renewed emphasis on research is still in its infancy but it is hoped that it will improve the quality of dissertations.

The effect on the faculty of this historical pendulum swing between practice and research has had an impact on the college culture that was experienced by the students in this study. Their perception of this culture is explored in the next section.

The Departmental Culture from Students' Perspective

The faculty members I spoke with described the student culture at this university more favorably than the culture at other institutions they had attended or where they had worked. One member said, "From seeing other programs, there is more of that sense of 'colleagueship' and people working together here than at other places." He believed that there was more support than just from one's advisor. He described the university as having more student groups and interest

groups, and more students and faculty socializing together, than at other places.

The student culture is influenced by the fact that two-thirds to three-quarters of the students are full-time teachers. Some of the students teaching full-time with whom I spoke wanted to be connected to the classroom as full-time teachers, but also wanted a scholarly life. Generally, even the students who were not full-time teachers wanted both.

However, I encountered a few vocal exceptions to the descriptions that the student culture was filled with people working together and being good colleagues. In particular, there were two respondents who felt like outsiders. They felt that the scholarly and collaborative (vs. competitive) atmosphere of colleagues was "for the chosen few" who were selected as teaching assistants or research assistants. Their feelings may have been exacerbated by the fact that the methods for selection to these important positions were not clear to all students.

Finally, additional issues that may have affected the participants in this study included their belief that graduate student orientation could be improved and could be extended throughout the first year, that the physical structure of the college/university did not provide a public space that would allow even better collaborative

interaction, and that students who had been part of the latest transition from a practitioner-based to a more research-focused program were at a disadvantage.

## Summary

This chapter provided an understanding of the philosophy and rationale for the research methods chosen, the process for how the data was collected and analyzed, and a brief exploration of the program where each of the four individuals studied. This program was the setting of which the four participants were a part as I sat down to interview them. What follows are the participants' stories.

CHAPTER 4


THE FINE LINE BETWEEN EMERGING EXPERT AND IMPOSTOR:
JOANNE'S STORY


*I want to use the word "high" but that's so normative, but
I'm going to say high—high standards for what expertise is—
that I would never claim to have expertise. I mean, I
probably could study my whole life and never claim.... I
could probably read just my advisor's work my whole life
and not call myself an expert in his work. You know what I
mean? So partly I mean that I'm still going. I haven't
achieved expertise. And partly I mean that there's
something very deliberate and studious about it. I mean
something very kind of analytic about it.*

If nothing else, the process of writing a dissertation

and completing a Ph.D. can lead one to feel like an expert

on a very narrow piece of research. No one else has asked

exactly the same question, read exactly the same literature

and produced exactly that same dissertation. However, for

some dissertation writers, a self-image as an emerging

expert never appears. In fact, some dissertation writers

develop feelings of being an impostor and fear being

discovered at any moment as a fake. This experience can be

frightening, humbling, and stifling. The "impostor

phenomenon" was first identified and studied by two

psychologists at Georgia State University, Dr. Pauline

Clance and Dr. Suzanne Imes (1978). Harvey (1985)

describes the "impostor syndrome" as intense feelings of

fraudulence in the face of success and achievement. She

states, "If you suffer from the impostor phenomenon, you believe that you don't deserve your success; you're a phony who has somehow 'gotten away with it.' You aren't the person you appear to be to the rest of the world" (p.2).

For some dissertation writers, many of the criteria for feeling like an impostor described by Harvey are present. Often, graduate students are highly successful in attaining admission into a selective Ph.D. program and can continue to be very successful during the coursework and comprehensive exams, but feelings of being fraudulent can arise at the dissertation stage. Completing a dissertation can be a new kind of writing experience for the student, and in some cases, it is unclear how to go about it. This situation can lead to competing images of self for the writer. Dissertation writers can see themselves simultaneously as emerging experts in their field and as frauds. Despite approval of their work by advisors and peers, those facing feelings of being an imposter fear that each new stage in the writing could reveal their true lack of expertise or "shortcomings."

Brookfield (1994) further identified the issues that future faculty members sometimes face as they navigate graduate school. In particular, he notes that

...the cultural roots framing impostorship are

hard to disentangle, but most who spoke about impostorship viewed it as having been produced by their awareness of the distance between the idealized images of omniscient professionals they attached to anyone holding doctoral degrees in their professions, and their own daily sense of themselves as stumbling and struggling survivors. This contrast between the idealized and the actual was so great that the inference was made that aspiring to describe themselves in these idealized terms was unrealistic and unconvincing. (p. 205-06)

Despite some feelings of being an imposter, like those described above, the majority of the participants in this study stated that they often felt like emerging experts in their field while they were writing their dissertations. They felt very much a part of the "academic club" with their professors.

This dichotomy of emerging as an expert versus feeling like an impostor was one of the main issues that emerged from Joanne's story. This story, in part, is her response to the question: "Who am I as an academic?"

## Joanne's Background

In her 40s at the time of writing her dissertation and participating in this study, Joanne already had a wealth of experience in education. As the daughter of two schoolteachers, education had always been important for Joanne. She was the youngest in her family, and her older siblings had all attended a small liberal arts college in

Michigan.  Later, her nieces and nephews had all attended

Stanford.  She described her family's experience this way:

> I often tell people that everyone in my family—
> all my siblings and I—married up, but not in
> terms of money, in terms of intelligence.  And
> almost all their grandchildren now have gone to
> Stanford on, pretty much, complete academic
> scholarships.  We just have one going this fall
> with 1600s on her SATs.

Joanne was raised in what she described as a "large

working-class town."  By the time she was in high school,

her father had become the superintendent of the school.

Thus, she was a "model student, not even skipping on

'Senior Skip Day.'"  She described high school as simply

"doing her work," but she graduated in the top ten of her

class.

Joanne loved going to college, but said that she never

worked particularly hard.

> I never did any work outside of the class.  I
> mean, I was always a real good discussant, and I
> loved those classes and I worshiped my teachers
> and I'd do what I had to do to get by.  You know,
> we were reading "Fathers and Sons" and I read
> maybe the Cliff Notes.  I just didn't take the
> academic part of it.  I loved school, though.  I
> loved going to college.

Though fairly typical for undergraduates, the

dichotomy of loving having discussions with others in

college but not liking independent work is a component that

returned to Joanne's life as she was writing her

dissertation (i.e., she loved classes and did well, but struggled during the dissertation process when she felt alone). As a doctoral student, she was caught between, on the one hand, emerging as an expert and, on the other, being exposed as an academic impostor. This competing image of expert versus imposter, often felt by graduate students and other academic scholars (Brookfield, 1994; Harvey, 1985), would be experienced by Joanne numerous times during the dissertation process.

When Joanne graduated from college in 1975, she did not want to become a teacher. However, after graduation she found herself pushed toward getting her teaching certificate. She received her teaching certificate in just one semester, and began teaching English in a small high school, where she remained for a little more than three years. She felt she was not a very good teacher and never actually felt a calling to the classroom. Rather, she was a political activist.

So Joanne resigned her teaching position and began to work on a political campaign for a U.S. senator. Following the campaign, she found herself without work again, and wondering what to do next. At 28, she began a master's program in public policy at a research university on the East Coast. She felt very lost and unprepared in the

program, which she described as an applied economics

program.

> And I had no economics background—none. I don't
> think I even had a course in economics as an
> undergrad. I was an English teacher, right? And
> I entered.... My schoolmates were like Dartmouth,
> Stanford, you know, and they had all had
> economics majors. So here I am, you know, like
> lost. I am like lost. I mean—I spent the first
> year—probably the whole first semester—just
> crying more than I did studying. I was just
> lost. I mean, these were advanced level
> statistics and economics courses. But over
> Christmas, I kind of grabbed hold of myself and
> figured out that I was crying more than I was
> studying.

After the first semester, Joanne met her husband-to-be

and, though never having been what she described as a

"star" student, she successfully graduated with her

master's degree. Several job opportunities followed

graduation and she chose to work a two-year stint in a

social welfare office in Washington D.C. After that

enjoyable experience, Joanne was again interviewing and

looking for full-time employment. She found it at the

Urban Institute in Washington, D.C.

> So anyway, this woman who I had worked with there
> said, "You know, have you ever thought of working
> here?" And I said, "No, you only take people
> with Ph.Ds." And she said, "No, that's not true;
> we take other people for large projects and other
> things. Why don't you ...?" And basically I
> didn't even end up interviewing. I just started
> working there. It was like I never even really
> applied. I just kind of started work. Like one
> day after my other job ran out, I just kind of

showed up and worked for a half a day. And then
they paid me for half a week and then they paid
me three-quarters, and then it was just kind of a
... they said why don't you come work on this one
project and then I worked on that, and then
another one, and then another one, and then I was
employed full time within about a month. But
that's where I really learned to write.

Despite her undergraduate degree and subsequent

teaching of English, it was the experience at the Urban

Institute that Joanne believed taught her to write in an

"academic environment." After more than five years in

Washington D.C., Joanne returned to Michigan and was

married in 1988. She then took a position in the

governor's office and had trouble adjusting to a new kind

of writing there:

I've been working in this academic atmosphere for
five and half years where everything has to be
perfect and everything's very rational and
analytic. And now I'm in this highly political
position and I'm thinking I'm supposed to be
giving these analytical reports. And, oh, man,
that was a mess.

The frustration in this position, as well as a sense of not

having fun, persuaded Joanne that it was a good time to

quit work and have a family.

## Applying for the Ph.D.

At 37, Joanne became pregnant for the first time.

While pregnant, she was introduced to a top-level person in

the College of Education (where she eventually enrolled in

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the Ph.D. program).  She obtained a position there writing

grants and working on teacher supply and demand in

Michigan.  It was at this time that the culture of the

College was changing and there was an emphasis on a more

practitioner-based curriculum.  She worked on several

assignments with the Dean of the College, who asked her one

day, "Have you thought about getting your doctorate?"

Considering that she was having a baby and not interested

in a doctorate, Joanne ignored the question.  But, as she

said, some people are persistent.

> So, she works on me and works on me and works on
> me.  She talks to me maybe every two weeks. "Have
> you applied yet?  Have you applied yet?"  And I
> said, "I haven't even decided I want to do it
> yet."  And it works out well, until I leave.  And
> when I leave she says, "Why don't you come back
> half time?" and she raised my salary by $17,000,
> but told me I could work half time if I worked on
> my doctorate.  So I leave and I have my baby and
> I come back and, of course ... and this is mid-
> July of 1990, and of course I apply to be
> accepted that fall.  So here I am with a 4-month-
> old baby and I've got a job and I'm starting a
> doctorate and, did I mention, I've got a 4-month-
> old baby.  What a fool.  But somebody else has
> convinced me that taking the first year of the
> doctoral program in Education will teach me a lot
> about the intellectual history of "the Michigan
> Partnership."  So I decide I'll just do that—I'll
> just take those three courses—they're called
> *prosems*.  I'll just take those three introductory
> prosem courses and then I'm quitting.

Though Joanne still felt ambivalent about continuing

in the program, she was influenced to stay beyond the three

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introductory courses by two professors who taught the
proseminar.  In the final course of the series, a very
prominent figure in the field came to her office.  She
remembered the conversation:

> So about in the middle of the third prosem—this
> is probably the first and last time this
> happened—he came to my office and sat down and
> said, "What do you plan to do with your life?"
> Well, I've got this 4-month-old baby.... And he
> said, "Well, I would like you to pursue your
> doctorate here and I would like you to be a
> student of mine."  And then I said, "Oh, yes,
> those were my plans."

Though it was not, in fact, her plan to pursue her
doctorate, this prominent figure had a great influence on
Joanne's future.  As many writers describe, one of the
difficulties of finishing a Ph.D. program is that one must
be convinced that one wants to finish (Cole & Hunt, 1994;
Duff Brown, 1996; Hawley, 1993; McKinney, 1996; Menand,
1996; Sternberg, 1992).  Though numerous people in the
program had tried to persuade her to get her degree, Joanne
was ambivalent about actually doing it until that prominent
figure spoke to her.

> So I was ambivalent about a degree.  I was also
> ambivalent about my daughter and what kind of
> time I could give to her.  Yeah, it's funny.
> Though my parents value education, my father has
> a specialist degree, and he tried to talk me out
> of starting.  He said, maybe education's highly
> valued, but family's valued even higher.  So he
> tried to talk me out of it.  You know, "You've
> got a 4-month-old daughter, what are you doing

with your life, blah, blah, blah." But at the
same time I was intrigued. I mean I had seen
some of the stars [the professors]. So here I
am. I mean, this might not mean anything to you,
but I'm watching nationally prominent scholars
teach every day. I'm working with [she names the
prominent educators]. Here I am. I'm like
catapulted from nowhere in education up to the
Dean of the College. So it's all very heady.
And so I'm intrigued. I respect and like these
people, and I'm real intrigued.

The ambivalence described above was further
complicated by the fact that nationally prominent scholars
surrounded Joanne. This situation resulted in the
persistent feeling that she should be "living up" to their
standards. This experience appeared to contribute to the
self-image revealed throughout Joanne's recounting of her
time as a doctoral student: Was she an impostor, or an
expert?

### Emerging as an "Expert Writer" in Coursework?

Writing had always been an important part of Joanne's
education. She stated that she had always scored "high
marks" in writing as an English major in college. Her
expertise expanded as she wrote grants and other short
reports as part of her job. But when she compared her
experience and expertise with experienced writers and
scholars on her doctoral committee, she became a bit more

skeptical about her abilities, as she had often been in the past.

> I had always done well in writing, but I had never been asked to write very long things or very difficult things. I think people think I have a fairly good way with words. I mean fairly engaging, easy to listen to. In college, I was decent; I wasn't great. It took me a lot more time.... what was expected of me in high school versus college was this huge jump that I didn't ever make very well. And then even at the Institute early on they said, "Well, this isn't creative writing. Just state your idea and clarify it." And you'll say, "Well, how could she think she became a good writer at the institute then?" because you read somebody like my advisor and it's unbelievable. Because it's more interpretive, etc. But the way it made me a good writer is that it just got crystal clear. It's like being forced to clarify your thoughts over and over and over again for three and a half years.

In general, Joanne believed she had some writing ability, but she did not particularly enjoy the activity. (This was a sentiment I heard from many other dissertation writers in this study.) For example, the College of Education worked very hard to have students reflect on their experiences in journals, yet Joanne did not like the task.

> I just don't like it. I'd rather have an audience. I just don't like things without an audience. Hey, if nobody's listening, I didn't say it. If a tree falls in the woods and no one's there to hear it, forget it. It didn't happen, you know?

While writing her dissertation, Joanne had lost a

great deal of confidence, but she described having built
some writing expertise during her coursework.  For example,
she cited developing a sense of security during a course
she took as a first year doctoral student.  It had been
described to her as a very difficult course, but she
received a grade of A on the first paper she wrote for it.
This experience helped build up her confidence.

On the other hand, Joanne shared many other stories of
her writing experience during coursework, which described
less successful outcomes with professors she admired.  One,
in particular, exemplified her work for her favorite
professor.

> I took an entire week to write.  I mean, it's a
> 10-page paper, right?  And I'm not talking
> about.... Like, I basically switched my time
> around with the Dean and wrote for an entire
> week.  And then she brought it and she had us
> trade papers.  And so she gave everybody another
> week to write it.  And I totally rewrote the
> paper.  I mean, completely.  Like, started over
> from scratch.  And my friend didn't.  She just
> kind of improved it over the week.  So here I had
> spent like 40 hours one week and 40 hours the
> next working on one paper in my favorite
> professor's class.  So 80 hours on a 10-page
> paper!  Come on!  I mean, get over it!

Though less successful in terms of time to complete the
task, this pattern of rewriting and getting A's with her
favorite professors did help Joanne to feel more competent.
Additionally, she was feeling more like an expert in

writing as part of her coursework because a number of her

papers were about public policy, a field in which she had

worked for ten years.

Joanne recounted another case in which she was told

how "brave" she was when, in her introductory course, she

took a major professor's piece of writing and revised it.

> But I didn't know it was brave.  Again, I'm going
> back—I didn't know who these people were.  I mean
> I knew my advisor was a big deal, but I didn't
> know he was as big a deal as he is.  I just kind
> of thought it was fun.  But I guess they really
> were impressed that I would take a major
> professor's work and revise it for an
> introductory course.

These experiences typify Joanne's life as a graduate

student, wavering between feelings of security and feelings

of doubt.  At one point she could begin to feel like an

expert herself, and at the next she could be overwhelmed by

the expertise of others, feeling as though her own

weaknesses, particularly in her writing, would be revealed

at any moment.

### The Dissertation Proposal: Stops and Starts

Like many of the students I interviewed for this

project, Joanne moved efficiently through the Ph.D. program

taking courses and comprehensive exams in a timely fashion.

By 1994, she was "floundering around" with a dissertation

proposal.

I think this was just a basic kind of time of
floundering. And I just kind of kept writing
ideas to my advisor, and he came to talk to me a
couple of times.... He had just gone to another
university. So in the summer of '94, he met with
me a couple of times. And I would really call
this as a time of just floundering around and
trying to figure out ... well, I could do this; I
could do that; I could do this; I could do that.
But it doesn't all seem for naught. I mean, I
was passing this stuff on to committee members.
I remember even saying this to my advisor more
than once, "Well I could be interested in about
anything I had more than one day to work on." So
part of my floundering was an inability to really
have time to get into it.

While trying to determine her dissertation topic,

Joanne continued writing grants for the College. She

applied for one grant to help fund the dissertation, and

although she did not win the award, the exercise resulted

in a formal dissertation proposal in the fall of 1995

because she finally had taken the time to decide on a

topic. As Joanne completed her proposal, she continued to

struggle with her own sense of what she knew and what her

advisor "wanted." Part of the reason she chose the

dissertation topic that she did was that her advisor had an

interest in the same thing.

And I don't even know if my dissertation will be
understood in the milieu [of educational policy],
but I just kept feeling like so many policies
aren't aimed at teaching. I kind of decided to
take Title I only because it was a program I knew
my advisor was interested in. And I was thinking
of taking Title I and then looking at two
teachers. And that's what my 1995 proposal will

> say. It's really looking at how it plays out.
> But I still didn't know what I was doing. So
> anyway, so I wrote this grant and that's kind of
> what it will say—that I'm looking at how Title I
> plays out. And I didn't really know if it was
> two teachers or five teachers or one school or 20
> schools or, you know, I didn't know.

Ambiguity at the dissertation proposal stage is not unusual for graduate students, but in Joanne's case, it was particularly damaging. Her not knowing what she wanted herself, while studying topics only because her advisor was interested in them, would wreak havoc on Joanne's scholarly identity, and would delay her progress. In particular, her sense of authority (or expertise) over her dissertation unraveled after her first grant competition. She was simply not sure what she wanted to study but was going to try and make it this topic because her advisor, for whom she had so much respect, was also interested in the topic.

The significance of pleasing this faculty member became more apparent during another of Joanne's stories. The story showed just how fragile the line between feeling like an expert and feeling like an imposter can be and how powerful the words and actions a faculty member can be for a student. Joanne recounted a very painful memory about her relationship with the same advisor who had invited her to be his student, and another committee member. As she revisited this memory more than two years later, it still

produced a flood of tears.

> I reissued the note kind of in a way to say, "OK,
> what are the three of us doing?" And I got this
> note back from my advisor that was—it was mean!
> It was the first time he'd ever been mean to me
> in like five years or so. But it said something
> like, "I don't know why we're meeting or what
> we're meeting for, but we [the two faculty
> members] are both very busy people and we have a
> lot of students." It was kind of like, "I don't
> know who you think you are taking up all my
> time." And that really put a screeching halt on
> everything I did. Well, the grant [1995] was due
> mid- to late October and I kind of didn't.... in
> fact, now that I'm talking about it I feel like
> I'm going to cry. I kind of just for a month was
> just dazed. And then Christmas came and you know
> I didn't want to deal with it. But although he
> did kind of reach out to me after he'd done that,
> I was just so stunned I didn't write back for two
> or three weeks. And he finally, I guess, called
> the other faculty member and said, "What's going
> on with Joanne now? She hasn't responded to my
> note." She [the other faculty member] could see
> how mean the note was and had talked to me about
> it. I mean he could have said something really
> gentle like, "I'm really busy this semester; is
> it imperative we meet?" And I would have said,
> "No, it's not." I thought that they were
> enjoying it. And he wrote in that note—I still
> remember it—"We have both done a lot of work on
> your proposal." And I was like, "Oh, I didn't
> know that." I mean I was ready to hang up the
> whole thing with a new committee at that point.
> And the other faculty member kept saying, "You
> can take him off your committee." I mean, these
> were her options. It wasn't something I was
> entertaining, out loud at least. It wouldn't be
> the same, because he really is the policy
> practice guy—one of the best in the nation,
> really. So anyway, so that really put a brake on
> things until about February.

Though the advisor remained on her committee, this

experience with him would have a major influence on

Joanne's future communications with him, and on her
confidence.

Joanne decided in the fall of 1996 to rewrite the
grant for dissertation funding that she had started in
1995.  This provided an opportunity to rework the
dissertation proposal.  In addition, Joanne decided to work
half time instead of three-quarter time, in order to finish
the dissertation and the degree more quickly.  Though her
relationship with her advisor still appeared strained,
Joanne felt compelled to keep him informed and let him know
that "she was moving."  Though she did not obtain the
grant, she had written a forty-page document.  Still, she
felt it was not "good enough" to send to him, so she
reduced her thoughts to a two-page document that described
what she planned to do on the dissertation.  She was very
happy when he wrote that he was "very, very pleased" with
the  two-page summary of her plans.

Joanne had begun to collect data for her dissertation.
Because her topic required site visits to area schools, she
became particularly involved in one of them, a small
charter school.  She was offered and accepted an interim
principal position there.  She loved her role as principal
and  described feeling like an expert in this new role.  By
the  time we met one another, Joanne had been in the role

almost a year.  During the interview process, her
satisfaction with acting as principal resulted in a dilemma
about whether she should finish the dissertation and become
a faculty member, which had been her goals at the start of
her Ph.D. program.

> I mean, there's some really tempting things right
> now about just screwing the dissertation.  I
> mean, I don't need it for money ... also, it's a
> neat school [where she is principal] in that—it's
> a tough, tough school because people who tend to
> go to charter schools tend to be disenfranchised
> from a traditional public school for one reason
> or another.  And it isn't like all the dire
> predictions where it was only cream of the crop
> kids.  It's not.  It's a lot of kids who are the
> bubble of special ed.  A lot.  But it's exciting
> because it's still—it's about 100 kids—and it's
> still small enough that you can get your arms
> around it.  And you really feel like you can do
> something there.  So it's kind of like the
> opportunity of a lifetime.  I mean, I'd never be
> made a principal in a traditional school
> district.  I haven't been in a classroom in 20
> years.  But, on the other hand, finishing that
> dissertation is also an opportunity of a lifetime
> to be a faculty member.  I mean I'm kind of at a
> crossroads.  And in fact just the other day my
> boss talked to me about it and I said, "Well I've
> been thinking maybe I'd like to be a principal,
> even after I get my doctorate."  And he said,
> "Well then just quit your doctorate.  You don't
> need a doctorate to be a principal."  And I said,
> "Yeah, but that's not what I do.  I finish the
> things I start."  And he's like, "Well, be
> somebody different."  So that's kind of where I
> am right now.  I mean, if I actually finish this
> dissertation, October will be eight years, which
> is the supposedly the maximum, right?  I mean, I
> know a friend who took 11 years.

Joanne's struggle with what was important to her, what

her faculty members thought of her, and what she could do to please others made the writing process exceptionally difficult. In our last conversation, she talked about her final strategies for completion of the dissertation.

## Decision to Finish or Not

Two years after the perceived dagger was thrown at Joanne by her advisor, the incident was still close in her memory. It slowed her work and made her insecure in her role as a dissertation writer. Her plan to overcome her worries about her advisor and how she felt about herself was just to "take it from him," though it was not exactly clear how she meant this.

> I've just decided I'm going to take it from him—straight on the chin. None of this muddledness. None of this two dissertations. None of this trying to please two people. And it's actually gone much better. It's a lot less fun. It's really not fun. There's no fun in it at all, in fact. But I enjoy my work around being a principal and I do have insights into a principal's life that I, I have more warmth for what I'm going to write than I would have. I feel more secure in myself. So ... and even though it's not fun, I feel OK about it right now. And I feel OK about my relationship with him.

When we talked about her dissertation, she often brought up her principal job, which she enjoyed and where she believed she was developing an "expertise." She metaphorically attempted to explain her graduate school

experiences.

> ... as painful as this experience we've just been talking about has been, from 1990 to 1998—during this period—I've really come into my own professionally. And when I worked for the College Dean I was very much the second string player in an NBA team. I sat on the bench a lot. But I was thrilled to be on the bench because it was the NBA. Whereas now I'm in the minors.... I mean, I'm like in the minor league. Now I'm switching to baseball. But I'm like, you know, Class A baseball. But I'm like the star player.

What was interesting about this comment was that Joanne ended up talking about her professional life outside of the academy, though I had asked about her academic life in graduate school. She began by talking about the work she did while in graduate school (writing grants), but she finished by not talking about graduate school or her dissertation. Instead, she was talking about her job as the principal in a local school, where she was the star. When I followed up specifically asking about her confidence regarding the dissertation, her response related to her committee. "It's kind of like time to give up Mommy and Daddy and Big Brother and Big Sister. I don't need them as much anymore." Though even this comment seemed to contradict earlier statements where she validated her academic work through her committee.

When focused on the specific time that she was writing

her dissertation, Joanne used a metaphor of having a baby to describe it.

> It's kind of like having a baby in a way.  I mean, you'll never know this, but when you have a baby it's at once a very social kind of thing and a very individual.... I mean, when I was actually in labor, it was a very—it wasn't about my husband, it was about me and my body.  But my husband was there and I wouldn't have even have been pregnant without him.  And many people are waiting there for the baby to come.  I mean my parents were literally sitting outside the door for the baby to come out.  And Don would have been there had the answering machine not been off the hook.  But anyway, it's at once a very lonely and personal thing, and also a very social thing.  And that's how I feel about this.  It's like I'm just going to gut it out now.  But at the same time, many people want it.  It's not just me wanting it.  But it doesn't feel fun.  So it's not as fun as coursework was.  Coursework, for me, was fun.  The attention from all of the professors, that was fun!  And all these kudos and my friends were all learning the same new things that I was. And it was fun.  It was very social.  And it was very fun.  And now this part of it—even though people have tried to create support groups for me—feels very lonely.

It was clear that the isolating and lonely aspect of dissertation writing was not fun for her and ran contrary to her experiences in her coursework and her experiences as an interim principal where things were much more social and enjoyable.

> I mean, I'm the principal.  You know, like, the teachers come to me sometimes and tell me about their personal lives and how this is having an influence.  And I just think, "Oh if you knew what's going on in my life."  I think ultimately, the dissertation will be more fulfilling,

especially because I've had this opportunity to
be a principal even for a short while.  But the
dissertation process is much more an individual
thing.  It's about me.

What was less apparent in the previous quote, but came

through multiple times as we talked, was that being a

principal was where Joanne found "real work."  Her feelings

of being an imposter were enhanced because she believed the

academy was removed from the "real world."  Her husband,

who had felt the strain the dissertation had placed on

their marriage, had often told her that the "big time

professors" know nothing about running schools.  And she

had agreed in part, but continued to be concerned about

what her professors thought of her writing and whether she

knew who the audience for it was.

> In fact, audience is one thing that's a real
> issue for me in my dissertation.  I mean, when I
> wrote something for the economists, it just
> flowed.  It was because I *knew* that audience.  I
> *know* economists.  And it was like I know what
> they don't know.  But with my advisors, I'm never
> sure who the audience is.  They are my audience,
> but yet they aren't.  Every time I sit down to
> write, audience is real tough for me.  Like, what
> does the person need to know and what don't they
> need to know?  And what do they know already
> .... You know, I'm writing to the committee but
> not really.  It's really a broader audience.
> It's almost their audience.  It's not them, it's
> their audience.

Joanne noted that she was the kind of person who does

not do anything until she is ready to do it, a trait which

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further stymied her progress.

> I tend to hang back until I'm ready. I'm just
> that type of person; it's hard to get me to do
> something I'm not ready to do. In fact, I just
> don't. And I think that's a coping strategy from
> having been the youngest. It's just like four
> people are telling you what to do plus your mom
> and dad. And I'm just not going to do what six
> people want me to do. But I do have the feeling
> that once I get the time to focus now, I'll go
> pretty smoothly around the track. I think I
> will, because that's been my life pattern.

This type of rationale can lead to long periods of
stagnation while working on one's dissertation. Some
writers rarely feel "ready" to write the dissertation, and
in Joanne's case, if she waited for feelings of expertise
like those she felt as a new principal, a long ABD period
was likely to ensue.

I asked Joanne whether she felt she would complete the
dissertation, and what she believed she was becoming from
the writing of the dissertation and from attending graduate
school. The dichotomy of imposter and emerging expert was
clear in her answer. Again, she moved from discussions
about the dissertation to comparisons to her role as
principal.

> I can do this. I think there's a feeling of
> ... I've never not done anything well. And
> there's a feeling now that ... but see this as
> not only in my dissertation but at my school,
> too, because I think this is a challenging school
> and I can do it. I know I can do it. And
> that's.... I really am like torn between this

academic and activist kind of thing.  I can make
this school just shine.  I know I can.  I can
just make it a little diamond in the rough.  And
I go home and I think about the teachers in that
school and I go to bed and I'm dreaming about
them.  It drives me as much as I drive it.  It's
my school and my need to help the teachers and my
need to make the school shine that drives me.

Again, when I followed up specifically about the

dissertation, Joanne saw it as a hurdle.

But I don't think I will not enjoy the hurdle, if
I can ever clear the decks.  I really believe
that.  Now, three months from now I might say,
you know I just can't clear the decks.  I mean,
you might talk to me in three months and say
 ... so that must mean I don't really want to.  I
don't know.  I think I want to.  I think I want
to clear the decks and get done with the hurdle.
But at the same time, if I don't, within six to
nine months, probably I don't really want to.  So
it's like something unanswerable at this point.

### Summary

Did Joanne see herself emerging as an expert as she

went through this program and wrote her dissertation?  Her

explanation for continuing to be a student revealed an

unwillingness to complete something that was very difficult

for her.  In addition, it seemed to point out her struggle

with being, simultaneously, an expert in some circles and

an imposter in others.

Being a student is—and I think I do this
sometimes—an unwillingness to take on
responsibility.  It's easier to be the understudy
than it is to be the actress.  Probably not as
much fun, but it's a lot easier and a lot more
secure.  In this last six years I really have

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flipped from being the understudy to the actress. Yeah, in these last six years, I really have flipped. I think my doctorate has helped ground that and helped me feel like I really do have a lot of expertise. But it's also been in parallel with my professional life. I mean, as easy as it was to be an understudy, how long was I going to stick with that routine, you know? It was just getting old. I mean, at some point in your life you've just got to try some of these ideas out. I still wouldn't call myself an expert on anything, but I know I know a lot. However, as you get close to people like my committee I still don't feel like I know much. But as you go out from those concentric circles, it's like even just one circle out, I know a lot.

Joanne's feeling of being an expert in some circles did not appear to motivate her to write. She believed she was "a crossbreed" between an educational activist/principal (expert feelings) and an academic/dissertation writer (imposter feelings). She found solace in the notion of being an educational activist because she identified with this term and believed she had accomplished enough in her life as an educational activist to feel confident and accomplished. As she tried to persuade herself that she was an academic, she lost confidence and became, in her words, "an understudy" again, searching for direction and having a very difficult time finishing what she described as the last hurdle.

CHAPTER 5

LOVING TEACHING—HATING WRITING: FRED'S STRUGGLE TO DEFINE
WHO HE WAS AS AN ACADEMIC

*When you love your work that much—and many teachers do—the
only way to get out of trouble is to go deeper in.  We must
enter, not evade, the tangles of teaching so we can
understand them better and negotiate them with more grace,
not only to guard our own spirits but also to serve our
students well.*
                                        —*Parker Palmer (1998), p.2.*

Parker Palmer eloquently describes how teachers'

identities are infused with who they are and the work they

do.  He is able to articulate what many students in graduate

school who aspire to the professorate hope to obtain in the

future.  With few exceptions, most of the individuals I

interviewed for this study found great joy in teaching.  The

hidden side of the love of teaching was the pull away from

the dissertation that it caused.  It is this dilemma between

investing in teaching at the expense of writing that I

explore in this chapter.

Future faculty members who struggle to complete the

dissertation in a timely manner often identify strongly with

their role as teaching assistant or teacher.  Indeed, their

passion for the subject, for their students and for the

newfound confidence from learning to teach can result in

tremendous growth.  However, when we search deeper into

their world as teachers, those struggling to complete the dissertation have much in common with new faculty (see Boice, 1992 and others) who have difficulty writing and face problems of procrastination and blocking (Boice, 1996). Though many students believe that they are not able to find time to get to the dissertation because of their investment in teaching, it is likely for some that this is only a convenient method of procrastination.

I met many students during this study who had mastered the "art" of procrastination working on their dissertation. For many, the long process of writing the dissertation was very different from their coursework and the kind of paper they could write "the night before it was due." What makes Fred's story stand out is that it is about the role his classroom identity as a teacher had in his procrastinating on the dissertation and in his understanding of who he was as an academic. Was he a researcher/writer or a teacher? Could he be both? Most assuredly he admitted to procrastination tendencies. To what degree did his newfound involvement with teaching contribute to the procrastination? To what degree had he been shaped by his love for teaching and to what degree by the avoidance of the task that he had never really enjoyed: writing?

I would say that I was good at writing but never

really liked it. I liked being good at it more
than I liked doing it. I think it was only when I
had an assignment that I would write; it wasn't
something that I just thought would be an
interesting exercise. I'm not a very good journal
writer ... a little spotty. But that was the kind
of writing I did when I chose to write. Yeah, I
just very rarely, without the context of an
assignment did I do any investing in writing
something.

## Fred's Background

Fred graduated from his small Christian high school (33

students) as the valedictorian. His father was a teacher

initially at a junior high school, and eventually at a local

community college where he still teaches technical math.

Education was very important in the family and it was

"assumed that all [of the children] would go to college.

There was always an expectation that you would go and you

would do well."

Though in his 30s, Fred's experiences in high school

had remained a strong influence in his life. His transfer

from a large public school to a small private school helped

him value "community." He fondly recounted the numerous and

meaningful discussions he had had with his high school

teachers. He maintained relationships with many of them,

including one who was struggling to complete his own

dissertation while Fred was early in his graduate program.

As Fred described,

>I developed really close friendships with faculty.
>One faculty member was about six years older than
>me. We maintained a relationship.... He has
>recently finished his Ph.D. in theology at
>Princeton about three years ago and through the
>process of him writing the dissertation and
>commiserating with me about the process and the
>psychological hurdles that take place we remained
>close. And I was saying, "Boy, I just can't
>wait!" [said facetiously]

While in high school, Fred considered careers in both

medicine and engineering. After graduation, still unsure of

his career path, he enrolled in the local community college

where his father worked. Fred studied there for three years

and was enticed by a scholarship to attend the local

university. There, he would complete an undergraduate

degree in teaching that he described as follows: "I applied

for the academic learning program which was focused on, as

it says, academic learning with a priority on developing

knowledge in a subject matter field and then implementing

that in particular ways in the classroom."

As he progressed through his undergraduate program,

Fred also worked for a mail service company. This led to

long nights and difficulty in staying focused on his

program. Before finishing his degree, he was offered a

position at an insurance company as an actuary. He took the

position and did not complete his student teaching. He

found his new position "something less than enjoyable." He

felt as though there was "no thinking, no energy, and no work." He remained in the actuary position for two years and then decided that he wanted to finish his undergraduate degree and go to graduate school. But like Jo, Fred did not have a clear understanding of the course he would like to take in graduate school. I suspect most faculty advisors and career counselors would be unlikely to suggest his method of choosing:

> I really wanted to pursue graduate studies so I literally flipped through a graduate catalog and looked to see what I'd be interested in. And I recalled this course that I had taken with a professor, which dealt with social issues, and looked at the Ph.D. program in curriculum, teaching, and educational policy. And I called this professor up and said, "You know I'm interested in pursuing graduate studies and I'm looking at the graduate programs and the master's program really doesn't fit my interests and it seems more practice oriented than I'm personally interested in, so I was really wondering if there is a way to get some extra coursework to allow myself to get into the Ph.D. program." He said, "You are right about the way the master's program is structured, it is more practice oriented for teachers who want to get those credits and that expertise. Why don't you go ahead and apply and I'll go through your materials with you," and I was accepted. This was in the spring of 1989. I was going to start the fall of 1989.

In the summer of 1989, Fred decided to visit a friend who was working in Amsterdam at a Christian youth hostel. Fred believed that the work that his friend was doing with the youth in Amsterdam was important, so he was tempted to

stay. But he returned to the United States, as he explained,

> being a rather cautious person, maybe it was the way I was raised, rather prudential, not making hasty decisions, I decided, "Well, I'll go back and if it feels right to me that I need to come back to Amsterdam, then I will."

After Fred's return, his father persuaded him to begin his graduate degree. In the fall of 1989, Fred went to his first class for a few weeks, but then felt that he should be back in Amsterdam. As someone who for some time had considered the ministry, he believed this feeling was a calling, so he followed it and returned. He stayed in Amsterdam for seven months before he realized that he did not want to go to the seminary. He believed his best option was to try to be readmitted to the graduate program. After a few weeks of waiting to be readmitted, he was again accepted and began his program in the fall of 1990.

### Teaching, Procrastination and the Dissertation

Because Fred had failed to complete his student teaching requirement for K-12 certification, he found himself disadvantaged and wondered about a career as a faculty member in a college of education, instead of being a schoolteacher. His early graduate research had taken him close to practice and he had "sat in on a lot of

classrooms," but was, understandably, concerned about "credibility problems" he would have with some teachers in the future. However, by the second year of his program, he sought out a position and was selected to teach an undergraduate course.

As he matured in the program (he was about to begin his eighth year of study when we first met), Fred stated that he had begun to identify himself first as a teacher. Even at the advanced stages of his dissertation, his teaching identity appeared to be much more important than the role of researcher and writer, even though he no longer was teaching at the time of our interview.

> When people ask me what I do, I say that I teach. And then usually on the heels of that I sometimes say that I am working on my dissertation. And I talk more enthusiastically about the stuff that I teach than I do about my dissertation.

For many of the students I talked with in the College of Education, teaching took more time and held more responsibility for them than their official title, *teaching assistant,* would suggest. Fred echoed the sentiments of other graduate students in his program:

> I think this is a great program to be in as a graduate student because we're not TAs [teaching assistants]. That annoys me, by the way. My butt, I'm a TA. I put in what any full professor has to put in, except I don't have all the resources that they do to pull this class off. You know, I'm a full instructor. I plan the

syllabus; I'm responsible for everything that happens.  I'm not a TA.

The consequence of such "self-talk" for Fred resulted in the costly habit of allowing himself the opportunity to procrastinate on the dissertation because of his increased involvement and engagement in teaching.  As he looked back on his progress over the last few years, he understood that he was prone to procrastination but was unclear about what things were important to him and how he spent his time when he was not writing.

> When I taught [the undergraduate class], I felt
> like I really needed to be on top of it.  So I
> spent an awful lot of time with that.  There were
> some defers [classes he had not finished and for
> which he was taking a deferred grade] hanging over
> my head.  I was thinking about them, but I wasn't
> writing.  It is amazing to me.  What do I do, how
> do I fill my time?  I mean, I'm busy.  How do I
> fill my time? I'm busy with what, exactly?
> [laughter]

Though Fred remained fairly jocular about his procrastination, he understood, on some level, the cost of not finishing (see Boice, 1996 for the costs of procrastination for new faculty careers).

> Procrastination is a matter of fact, I mean, I
> acknowledge that my tendency is delaying turning
> things in and getting deferred grades.  Evidence
> is hard to deny.  However, when things have to be
> done, I just exert some self-discipline.  I don't
> know all of the psychology.  There are times when
> there are other things that just seem to be more
> pressing and not necessarily more attractive.
> It's interesting; when I'm working on the
> dissertation, I actually enjoy it.  But there is

probably some subconscious thing telling me to
wait.  When you are working on the dissertation,
you realize how much more there is to be done.
When you are not working on it, it is much more
manageable.  When you get into the thick of it, it
is engaging.  And yet when I delve into it, there
is a whole lot more to do than I thought and,
really, more than I want to do.  So, I have to
force myself to do it; otherwise I'll never get it
done.  I know if I dropped out, I'd regret it
tremendously, if for no other reason than for the
sake of my maintaining face.  I just will not not
finish.  Imagine all that time.  It matters to
others, and to me, too.

Fred's description of procrastination mirrors the

problems that many dissertation self-help gurus attempt to

solve.  What makes Fred's story worth telling is that, as we

continued to talk, and despite his pep talk that he wanted

to finish, his self-identification as a teacher and not a

writer became more and more a part of him as he "worked" on

the dissertation and made little progress.

One of the surprising things that happened during our

interview sessions was that Fred acknowledged, mostly to

himself, that it was unlikely he would become a faculty

member.  As with all participants in this study, at the

beginning of the interview process he had aspirations to

teach and do research at a university, but this interest had

clearly waned by one of our last interviews.

Obviously one of the paths to take is to become a
faculty member someplace.  And I think that I
could do that.  But since we have been talking,
the question is about availability of positions

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and other practical considerations on what I might
become.  Maybe I don't think about research as
much as someone else.  I think about those things
as I enter into another season of applications for
jobs.  I think I would really enjoy the teaching
and, occasionally, publishing.  I don't know that
I want the pressure to publish.  Simply because I
am not confident that I have....  I don't desire to
write that much.  If I have a set of good ideas,
I'll write, but to write because someone else says
to keep my job I need to do it. [shakes head]
Maybe I'm a bit elitist in that respect that
somehow I can dictate when I write.  Part of me
thinks, maybe I should say that is just part of
the job, like if you work at a factory you need to
go down and do stuff you don't want to do.  Maybe
I'm just too idealistic in that respect.  I want
to do things that matter.  So writing to publish
is problematic.  It makes me question the
enterprise.

And later he continued with this kind of transformation

talk.

Whether I want to be a researcher now, I doubt it.
I think I'd like to do more humanistic studies,
maybe getting involved with the challenges of
change in education.  I would like to be attentive
to the concerns and experiences of teachers and
helping them to express their voices.

What I find difficult to assess is the role that Fred's

teaching identity played in the struggle he had motivating

himself to write.  Like many new faculty members (Boice,

1992), Fred's situation exhibited the classic problem of not

being able to write and finish the dissertation because of

the amount of time and energy he put into his teaching.  (It

should be noted that Fred also had other large commitments

with his church.)  As Fred helped me to trace his progress

since his proposal, which was accepted in 1996, it was clear

that he recognized that teaching became one of the main

impediments to his writing.

> In the beginning of May, I didn't work on it much.
> I probably got the majority of two chapters done
> in the summer of 1996. I worked on them, but
> didn't get them into final shape and didn't get
> them to my advisor that summer. And then the
> semester began. I find, when I'm teaching, even
> just one section, it becomes all consuming. So,
> my work with the dissertation slowed down. But in
> the beginning of October, I gave those two
> chapters to my advisor. I had been promising them
> to him for many weeks saying, "I'll get them to
> you, I'll get them to you." I'm getting tired of
> making such promises, frankly. Unfortunately,
> that's not necessarily motivating me to get
> everything done. I just slow down in making the
> promises. [laughter]

After Fred provided the chapters in October, his

advisor encouraged him to keep writing and not to be slowed

by revisions. He was complimentary of Fred's work. After

receiving the positive comments, Fred took the stance that

"the rest of the stuff will just kind of fall out." He

recognized that when he said such things, he really did not

believe them himself, but as he told me, "it is sufficient

for the moment to allow me not to do the writing." As Fred

had predicted and as the fall progressed, teaching, again,

took precedence.

> Teaching made it easy not to do much with the
> dissertation. And I would say I didn't make much
> more progress over the rest of that fall of 1996.
> Over the Christmas break, I had intended to do a

lot of work.  And I did work; I read a lot.  When
I work, it's really more reading than writing, but
that's not the way to produce text.

But then in the fall of 1997 when I starting
teaching again, I realize that I really do love
teaching and I invested myself a lot in that.  It
was the best community I have ever had.  In the
second semester, it [the community] didn't happen
and I invested myself even more to try to capture
that.  The result of this effort was that I wasn't
investing in the dissertation as much as I would
have.  I think if things would have been going
better in that domain of my academic life, I would
have made more progress.

The trap of such thinking resulted in Fred's making

little progress in the dissertation.  This pattern began to

shape who he believed himself to be as an academic, some of

which he revealed as we progressed through the latter

interviews.

## The Dissertation and Academic Identity

As we continued to discuss his dissertation and future,

Fred revealed more of himself and his struggles.  He

frequently described himself as "jaundiced about the

academic enterprise."  Recognizing that it might be a part

of the dissertation process, he reluctantly admitted that

saying he was jaundiced might also be "a convenient cover

not to write."

Fred's sense of self as a teacher and not a writer led

him to think of himself as a student—as a "lifetime

learner."  His own identification of who he was becoming as

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an academic might have suggested that he was naïve and somewhat immature. His view on teaching allowed him to think of himself as continuously learning and he really enjoyed this life, as he explained:

> Student life is not a bad life, if you can get it and if you can pay the bills [with teaching]. Now, you know, being a student, [lifting his head] a lifetime student, there are worse things. I don't feel a sense of ...   I have to get done. You know, if I had other responsibilities, if I were married, had kids.... Those kinds of material pressures would push me harder. Right now, I feel like I want to get done for my own sake. But, throughout this process, I continue to learn. I kind of like this flexibility that I have. If I don't want to work on the dissertation, I can go out and golf, or go bike riding. If there is a consolation that I have with the struggle [of dissertation writing], it is the flexibility. I could quit and go get a job, but I don't want to for my own sake. At times I think about it. I could make some money doing this or that. Of course, I was making money doing this or that. But I don't want to make those kinds of decisions while I'm working on the dissertation because of the psychological uncertainty that I feel when I'm doing the dissertation work.

Fred described multiple things that led him to work at a slow pace. Like the explanation of many other students I talked with (and from my own experience), his reasons sounded legitimate. For example, like the other students, Fred was prone to read rather than write when he "worked." As he did often to prepare for teaching, he found great comfort in reading. Like others who teach and are working on a dissertation, he felt a sense of "working" without

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actually producing a document.  Only when he realized that a literature review was likely to be endless did he begin to conclude that one must actually write to produce a text.  He did seem to recognize that reading might simply be a way to avoid the writing.  "I understand if I continue to read, I'm working but I'm not writing."

Besides his overarching identification of himself as a teacher, Fred did provide clues to why he had not been productive as a writer/scholar in graduate school.  As with Joanne, completing the dissertation and becoming a scholar had not been his major priority.

> It is a piece of my life, not the centerpiece, and that may have to do with how long it has taken me to complete the process.  The fact that it is a piece of my life, and not the centerpiece, allows me to have more balance in my life.  Having said that, if it were more central, I'd probably have more stuff published.

As with many dissertation writers struggling with completing the project, Fred described attempts to change his work habits in order to help him write.  Despite these attempts, he would, over and over again, come back to identify with his teaching life and its contribution to his inability to write and make substantial progress.

> It was through recognition that I wasn't getting as much done as I'd hoped that I began to shift from working later in the evening to early in the morning.  I started getting up at 5:30 or 6:00, have breakfast, and spend some time reading some

scripture and spend 45 minutes in personal
meditation. Then, usually, I would turn on NPR
and do some stuff [on the dissertation].
Oftentimes, I would read stuff related to the
dissertation. On days I wasn't teaching, I'd work
out after morning reading and come back home. In
the afternoons, I would continue to read or write
and do preparation for teaching. Oftentimes,
Tuesday and Thursday mornings would become all
consuming with teaching and would become non-
productive days for the dissertation. The press
of the number of papers to grade, it just didn't
allow it. I probably could have done 45 minutes a
day on the dissertation, which is what I had
intended to do, but I just didn't. I have also
not been that good on making progress on the
weekend. I would say that kind of pattern has
remained constant since my coursework has ended.

Summary-Where We Left Off at the End of the Study

Fred did yearn to be identified as a writer/researcher

and described having high expectations for his writing. He

wanted to be the "sort of person whose writing people want

to read." He had worked hard to learn certain kinds of

writing and believed that he had made strides, and, indeed,

was a better writer, despite the absence of progress on his

dissertation.

My voice has a place at the table. In things like
critical response papers, book review-type papers,
I feel like I was really good at those kinds of
things. And my professor's response was quite
affirming to that.

Sometimes when I'm looking for support for my
argument, when I'm reading stuff that I'm
teaching, I find myself always asking questions of
the author. I give students in my class a list of
questions or a list of assumptions to ask about the
author. I think that has helped me to be better

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at that as well.  I am more critical of texts, I
think, than some other graduate students.  It is
my faculty members, who are really smart, that I
have sought to emulate in that regard.

As we talked during our interviews, Fred began to

explore his identity and he wondered if our conversations

were helping him to see more clearly who he was becoming in

the academy.  His struggle to want to emulate his "smart

faculty members" on the one hand, but not liking to write

and publish on the other, surely tore his heart and head.

As Parker Palmer (1998) writes, Fred struggled with a

"divided self," conflicted between his want to emulate

professors who were producing texts while he spent most of

his time reading rather than writing.  The following

statements revealed some of this conflict.

> I know that since we have been talking and what I
> want my life to be, I'm not sure I even want to be
> a faculty member.  During this summer I've been
> really saying, "What is this life that I'm talking
> about leading to?"  I don't necessarily like the
> culture.  I don't necessarily like the pressure to
> publish.

> Like I felt last fall when I started teaching
> again, *this* is what I'm all about.  *This* is what I
> want to do.

> Of course, I understand lots of intellectual work
> is solo.  I do have my own set of ideas that I
> want to develop.  So I do have a sense of myself
> as a thinker and, I guess, a scholar, though I've
> never used the word "scholar" to describe myself.
> Though, I do think I do scholarship.  Maybe after
> I get the Ph.D. [laughter] I'll be Dr. Scholar.

By the end of our time together, Fred was still describing his struggle to complete the dissertation. Even when he was not teaching he would think about teaching. As with others I spoke with who identified themselves primarily as teachers, Fred's refrain remained the same: "I didn't get as much done as I'd hoped last summer and again this summer."

As with Joanne, when Fred asked himself, "Who am I becoming as an academic?" it resulted in the recognition that he had competing images of himself in the academy. Jo's and Fred's willingness to reveal and share these competing images of themselves, as they continued to write their dissertations, has important implications for understanding and helping others. In addition to asking "who they are as academics," dissertation writers also ask themselves what the academic work actually means. Justin's and Lita's stories, which follow, exemplify this question.

CHAPTER 6

"JUSTIN'S HOME EVERYDAY.  WHY CAN'T HE MOW HIS LAWN?
DOESN'T HE WORK?"
ACADEMIC WORK HABITS, THE DISSERTATION, AND IDENTITY

*Defend your work time, but having done so, bend a little.
Do not be a workaholic; it is bad for you and for those
around you.  My aim has not been to tell anyone to work
endless hours.  On the contrary, my aim in giving advice has
been to make more productive use of fewer hours.  In order
to accomplish this purpose, however, it is necessary to
protect your work time.  If you do not, who will?*
—*Wildavsky, 1989, p.44*

In one of the rare instances when an eminent scholar

and writer reveals his specific and personal work habits,

Aaron Wildavsky (1989) allows readers into his understanding

of work and the efficient use of time to complete research

while teaching in an American Research University.  His

account of 25 "principles of self-organization" provides a

unique opportunity to understand how prolific scholars write

and do "academic work."

Two principles selected from Wildavsky's list provide a

sense of what he believes about time.  Like faculty members'

time, graduate students' time (especially of those that

teach) can be riddled with interruptions, making it feel

impossible to sustain the effort required to complete a

dissertation.  Wildavsky's list of ideas is intended to

"carve out of most days a sufficient number of consecutive

working hours to make progress on scholarly work." Two

specific recommendations could be applied to the graduate

students I spoke with in this study.

Self-organization. Organize the flow of your work.

Wildavsky suggests that too much time is wasted sitting

around waiting for materials that are needed to do scholarly

work. Further, he notes, "of all the wasted time [telling

yourself you are working when you are only being aimless], I

think, accounts for the most." Interruptions are inevitable

and he does not fight them, but rather attends to them.

Wildavsky devotes himself to his students, committees, class

preparation and other "nonresearch-related" activities until

they are done, at least for the time being.

Self-defense. Like Justin, and others I interviewed,

Wildavsky notes that reading may be the enemy of writing.

In addition, he urges individuals to "stop the hemorrhaging

of one project and not to take on new obligations before

completion of the original project." Unfortunately, many

graduate students in the process of completing their

dissertation take on new responsibilities before they have

conquered the writing.

Wildavsky provides a perspective on answering the

questions graduate students ask themselves regarding what

academic work is and what kind of work habits are required

to complete their dissertation. In the following two chapters, Justin and Lita provide differing understandings of scholarly or academic work habits. Justin could be the envy of many would-be faculty members in defining academic and non-academic work. Lita, with her dissertation being a part of a larger project, struggled to determine what part of academic work is collaborative and what part is individualistic.

Justin's sense of self allowed him to determine the best use of his time during his pursuit of his Ph.D. Unlike all the others I interviewed for this project, Justin was very protective of his time. Though he was cordial during the interviews, he was strict about the use of his time. He understood what Wildavsky (1989) meant when he said

> ...the most important resource by far, "the uses of the self," are available to everyone. If you are your most important resource, your time is your most valuable asset. Do not fritter it away: Use it. (p. 44-45)

Though much of this chapter focuses on Justin's dissertation story, his understanding of academic work, and the use of time for his scholarship, it is important to understand that Justin was more than just a sound organizer of time. He was extremely self-reflective and thoughtful about his life and his graduate school experiences. In addition, interviewing him in his home provided valuable

insights into his disciplined work habits outside of the academy (e.g., showing me what he was able to accomplish in renovating his house over a short period of time). As in all of the stories, I include important background about Justin to make sense of his story, his life, and how his understanding of academic work habits emerged.

## Justin's Background

Growing up in Nevada in the 1970s, Justin was not asked about college. No one in his family ever talked about going to college. He was working construction during high school, but decided after his senior year that maybe he should go to college. He chose a "state" school that was very affordable and where one's ACT scores did not matter. As he stated, "I had scored pretty much brain dead in just about everything. I had to take the lowest level classes going in." In 1979, Justin embarked on the path to develop his academic identity.

Justin was extraordinarily reflective about his academic experiences. Throughout our conversations, he was quite candid about his very difficult childhood and his personal struggles as an adult in graduate school. His story shows how the role of "work" defined by the self and the perceptions of others plays a vital role in the

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development of aspiring faculty members, especially those

who persevere through self-doubt and personal troubles.


Pre-Collegiate Experiences

In other stories, I do not focus on exploring how pre-

collegiate experiences influenced the subjects' academic

identity at the dissertation stage of graduate school.

However, in Justin's case, his vivid recollections and clear

turning points provided ample evidence of the influence of

his pre-collegiate life so I have chosen to include it.  His

descriptions of his own education were revealing:

> Yeah, it's interesting, my own education.... I
> grew up always being looked at as a dumb jock or
> someone who just wasn't going to make it
> academically.  When we moved to Nevada, I was in
> sixth grade.  My father worked for, in upper
> management, Western Union and we moved about every
> three years.  So by the time I was in sixth grade,
> Nevada was our fourth place.  And I remember when
> my sixth grade teacher sent me down to see [names
> person] in the basement of the school.  And I went
> down there, and [names person] gave me all sorts
> of tests and things like that.  The pronouncement
> was that I didn't know how to read.  So here I was
> in sixth grade and the thing was that my sister
> read but my parents had never read to either of
> us.  And like, my mother read, my father read, but
> it wasn't the kind of thing to read to your kids.
> My experience in school up to that point with
> reading had been with these different colored
> books and a lot of things with the headphones and
> listening to work on phonics and things like that.
> And you work your way through different reading
> books and a lot of fill-in stuff.  In this
> situation in sixth grade, being sent down to the
> reading teacher, what ended up happening was that

> I started spending a couple of hours a day in
> reading classes in sixth, seventh, and eighth
> grades. I learned to really love reading books,
> but none of the books in school.

Justin described the experiences of being declared unable to read rather matter-of-factly. In retrospect, like many things that occurred in his life, he saw it as a challenge that produced great results. The theme, woven throughout his story, was, "...the things that I was really, really weak in, were the things that I pursued most vigorously." Clearly, the experience with the reading classes sparked the beginning of a work ethic that became a dominant characteristic of Justin's personality through graduate school.

This pursuit of excellence and working hard was in contrast to a substance abuse problem that nearly ended Justin's opportunities for higher education. This long excerpt described one of the many turning points in Justin's life, where he was transformed from a "loser", "dumb jock," and "stoner" to a star Junior Olympian and record setter in the high jump, though substance abuse maintained a hold over his life.

> Yeah. I don't even know, if it weren't for
> sports, I don't think I would have probably
> finished high school. Actually, when I was in
> sixth grade, we'd been in Nevada about six months,
> and my father came home and sat my mom and my
> sister and me at the kitchen table and told us

that he was terminally ill—had cancer and had
anywhere from a year to a year and a half to live.
So over the next year and a half we watched him
really just whither.  So by the time I was in late
seventh grade, I started smoking a lot of dope,
drinking, and so by the time I was in eighth grade
(my dad died in August before my going into eighth
grade) and I was just heavily into pot and
alcohol.  I was definitely getting high at least
once a day every day.

I was the same height and shoe size in eighth
grade as I am now.  A little uncoordinated—6'2",
size 13.  Real uncoordinated, and I played on the
B basketball team, but it was well known among the
coaches and everything that I was a "stone head"
and I was pretty much labeled like "loser."  So I
decided to run track the spring of eighth grade
because I wanted to do high jump.  My friend
talked me into going to these Junior Olympics in
the area.  So I went.  I don't know what actually
happened, but in the Junior Olympic meet, I
actually won this.  We went to this meet, and I
wound up breaking a national record and that
weekend I was a jock.  I turned into a jock like
that!

And so, all of a sudden in high school I went from
being just a loser in junior high to people
thinking that I was special.  And that changed a
lot of things, but it didn't change the substance
abuse.  So I ended up with a serious problem in
early high school.  As a matter of fact, I barely
passed PE my freshman year the first semester, and
got suspended from the basketball team for, like,
six weeks, but stayed on it and then played the
last three weeks of the season.  I went out for
track and got kicked off the team, I think maybe
after only three or four weeks.  But I continued
to do really well with the high jump.  And even
though I got kicked off the team, I went back to
Junior Olympics and did even better and this
pattern went all through high school.  I never
finished a track team season.  Drugs and alcohol
were always a factor in that.  I had a big problem
with attendance.  I actually got expelled from

school two weeks before my graduation from high
school.

Justin described above his ability to live in two

worlds: one world of substance abuse and escape, and the

other where the work ethic and the effort to overcome

reading problems were paramount.

The role of Justin's family and their influence on his

academic success is also an important component to the

story.  His mother had a drinking problem that she tried to

overcome after his father died, and she was successful after

a few years.  However, his mother's drinking inadvertently

encouraged Justin's drinking.  He was clear that his mother

was extremely supportive and his family was central to his

life.  For example, he stated

> I mean, my father would never let me play
> sports.... But my mother, if she could possibly
> make a basketball game or a track meet, she was
> there. People that I still know that I grew up
> with always remember the fact that my mother was
> there. Like, she'd bake cookies for the
> basketball team or something like that afterwards.
> I mean, we were very close. She and my sister
> were not close. It's kind of interesting because
> my father was a very dominating figure in the
> family. Very silent. My mother basically did
> whatever he said. My sister was the opposite of
> me; she could do no wrong.
>
> And I had a severe stuttering problem until my
> father died. And then my stuttering went away.
> And this is something that I've done a lot of
> writing about myself—about issues of voice, in
> terms of my issue of stuttering and the fact that

my father's cancer was throat cancer and his very
first operation, the week after he told us he was
terminally ill, they removed his voice box.  And
so for a year and a half my father couldn't talk,
but he wrote notes.  Family is very, very
powerful, I think.
Finally, another draining and emotionally disturbing

experience that shaped who Justin would become occurred when

he was in ninth grade.  He described how he had planned to

go to a lake with two friends on Labor Day.  The three were

drunk as they drove through the mountains, one of the

friends at the wheel.  The other, younger friend was a

promising football star, though also a "stoner."  Justin

recalled with agony that as they all were sitting on the

bench front seat in the car, the car went off the side of

the mountain.  The steering wheel ruptured the spleen of the

driver, and the promising football player broke his back,

never to play sports again.  (Justin learned 25 years later

that it was he, himself who had grabbed the wheel and jerked

it to run over a road marker, causing the accident.)  Even

after this horrendous experience, substance abuse continued

through his undergraduate experiences.  He remained in the

paradox of working hard on his weaknesses (academically) and

using substances as a crutch to avoid life's concerns.

## The Undergraduate Years

Justin went to college because he believed it was
important to take courses to prepare himself for a job.  His
high school academic experiences had certainly not prepared
him for college.  He was not at this time thinking about,
and did not understand, what "academic work" meant to him.
As he described it,

> ...my academic career up to that point was so
> dicey that all I knew in general was that I liked
> to read.  I never read any books for school, but I
> loved to read.  I read a lot of trade paperbacks—
> things that my mother and older sister would leave
> on the coffee table—and I knew that I liked social
> studies.  Social studies were the only classes
> that I did well in high school.
>
> To give you an idea, I remember getting my first
> paper back from—I took English 101—and I had a
> graduate student who was teaching the class.  And
> she wrote a note at the top of my first paper and
> just said, "Make an appointment to see me."  So I
> thought, "Well, OK."  And so, you know, this was
> like the first week in September of 1979 and I
> make this appointment to go and see this person,
> and she's like probably in her late twenties or
> something, seemed very old to me.  And she and I
> sit down and she asks me if she can see my paper,
> and she's looking at it and she said, "Why aren't
> there any paragraphs here?"  And I was always,
> like, real sensitive and kind of emotional and
> when she said that I knew that something was wrong
> and I started crying.  I mean, I didn't know.
> What I found out in talking with her is that in
> high school, the only writing, the only time I had
> to do any writing was in a couple of social
> studies classes I had as a junior and senior and I
> took a class as a senior that was a grammar
> composition class, last chance to learn something,

and we had to write papers there. But my mom was a secretary, and my mom typed them for me—well meaning and all that stuff—she edited and fixed these papers. And so I didn't know. I didn't know enough, but I was in college and I was going to do this myself. It was a real shock.

Justin learned from this experience to work hard to overcome his weaknesses. He wanted to become a better writer, and after talking with this graduate instructor, he really wanted to learn. However, he still had not conquered his substance abuse problem. This statement summarized how he was able to control one aspect of his life while battling another:

> By the time I got into the university, I'd been aware of substance abuse problems for a long time—and so I was able to—even though the abusing didn't stop at that point, I was able to make some changes in my life where I knew, "Look, I'm paying for this. I've made sacrifices to be here and I'm going to do well."

Justin joined the track team, but quit after he recognized that the amount of practice time would compete with the valuable time he could be studying. He decided to turn his athletic drive into succeeding in the classroom. In contrast to some of his peers, Justin worked very hard to overcome what he did not know or had not prepared for in high school. He described this change as his pursuit of a "life of the mind."

> So basically when I got into college, every time a professor would allude to a book, I'd write it

down and try and either check it out or buy it or read part of it and be familiar with it. I remember at the beginning of the summer going and visiting an English professor and I said, "If you could recommend ten books that are 'must reads' what would those be?" And he was more than happy to tell me. And I'd go right to the bookstore and I would get the books and that pretty much directed my summer reading.

College seemed *very* much like school. I mean, I was cranking out at least two or three research papers a semester. History and English classes, almost every history class had a research paper and most English classes had a research paper each semester. I was doing those. But it was like a game. And it was so easy because, basically, no one else was doing any of the reading in the textbook. I did the reading they were lecturing on and I knew the answers. One of those salient moments for me was...Russian History class after the first essay test. There were, like, three essays and each one was worth, like, possibly 35 points, whatever it was. And the professor went on this long thing before handing back the test and says, "Every now and then I get a response to an essay that gets a 35 out of 35 and those are like my Pulitzer Prize-winning essays." And, "Justin Leonard wrote one of these." He gave it back to me and it was like, you know, here I was just a year ago not knowing what a paragraph was. So that kind of reinforcement and kind of external reward really fed my motivation. The ironic thing is that by the time I did my student teaching, my teacher would say, you have excellent subject matter background. I still laugh today—people still say that—and I think, I started basically at zero going into college and I worked hard.

This was the beginning of aligning Justin's newfound passion and interest in his own learning and work habits with his idea of the kind of teacher he wanted to be in a classroom.

## Post-BA Experiences: Teacher and Master's Student

After completing his bachelor's degree, Justin taught at an alternative high school for students who had been dismissed from regular high school. In his second year, he worked in a lower socioeconomic area and taught five sections of ninth grade English. Because he felt unprepared to teach English, he worked on a master's degree in English. He taught English and social studies for a total of six years while working on his master's degree. Eight years after receiving his bachelor's degree, he obtained his master's degree, and went to Singapore to teach.

## Getting a Ph.D.: Work Habits of a Scholar

Why go to graduate school for a Ph.D.? Part of Justin's motivation for going to graduate school related to problems he had overseas while teaching. He had gotten married while teaching and working on his master's degree in the United States, and felt that getting married had been a "dumb move." After having taught for a few years in Singapore and getting a divorce, Justin wrote his primary professor in the master's program and told him about his divorce and how unsettled he was by the comprehensive exams he had taken the year before. He was concerned about how they had revealed how little he knew. As he said, "I was

very unsatisfied with the fact that I'd gotten this master's

and I felt like I didn't master anything, and I felt like I

still didn't know anything." The professor wrote back and

suggested that Justin look into a Ph.D. program, but to do

it full time and not while he was teaching.

Justin came back from Singapore and was planning to

stay in Nevada after being divorced. He intended to get a

teaching job and decide what he was going to do with his

life. He then met an "intriguing woman" at a conference and

followed her to the College of Education where this study

was performed. But he had some second thoughts, as he

described:

> So I came here and I'll tell you, if anyone would
> have said to do graduate work in education, I
> would have laughed. Beneath me. One of my
> history professors told me, "Don't ever get a
> degree in education because it isn't worth
> anything." Well, my partner told me (she's my
> partner now), "You should look into education
> anyway." And she brought catalogs home and we
> talked about it. And I was certainly impressed
> with what she was telling me. What she was
> telling was nothing like what I'd heard from
> anyone in education before. I mean, the kinds of
> things that they were doing here were unlike
> anything that I had in the coursework that I did.
> So that intrigued me.
>
> ...then, after meeting with an advisor, who only
> had a half hour at 12:30 p.m. on a Friday, at 4:00
> I walked out of his office knowing that I was
> starting in his class the following Tuesday night
> and that's how I got started here.

Beginnings: Developing an Academic Identity

The meeting with the advisor took place in October

1991, just four weeks after Justin's arrival in the city.

He began taking classes almost immediately.  Although he was

not yet officially admitted into the Ph.D. program, the

advisor helped him to get an assistantship.

Unlike most of the others in this study, Justin *owned*

his program and carefully planned what he would learn.  He

had given up a well-paying job in Singapore with some

attractive fringe benefits, and he wanted to ensure that he

was getting something for what he was giving up.

> I pretty much charted my own course for study here
> and told people on my committee, "This is what I
> want to take and this is why it would be important
> for me."  So I designed a couple of independent
> studies around literature that I thought would
> help me grow in the ways that I thought were
> important.  I wanted to learn more about critical
> theory, feminist theory....  I had to find a way
> to have my own needs and interests nourished and
> expanded, or else I wouldn't have remained in
> here.

Taking Classes and the Development of an Academic Identity

Justin's memory of six years of graduate school was

uncanny, compared to that of the other study participants.

As he described his courses, words like "loved,"

"nourished," or "hated" were often used.  Justin described a

greater passion for learning than others in the study did.

As noted earlier, he took a number of independent study classes and worked hard to make the doctoral experience something that he owned and planned. He was persuasive with his committee due to his clear conviction of what he wanted out of each experience. He often described seeking out faculty members who had something to offer him intellectually. He negotiated with his committee members and endured many conflicts throughout his program.

## Conflict: Comprehensive Exams, Stress, and Work

Justin reached a turning point at the time of his comprehensive exams, due to the stress of taking the exams and the attitude, behavior, and reaction of the supervisor of his assistantship. (As Justin described the more than two weeks of taking exams more than a year later, the level of stress was still evident.) He had hoped to take time off to study for the exams, but the supervisor of his assistantship was not cooperative and would not allow time off. The data Justin had planned to use for his dissertation were housed in the same office with the supervisor. Therefore, Justin felt forced to decide whether to pretend to acquiesce to the supervisor in order to maintain access to the data, or to sever ties with his

supervisor and resign.  In order to study for the exams, he

resigned.

> So with the letter of resignation I gave up all
> the data—access to all that data that I was going
> to use for my dissertation, and all the benefits
> and the power of my supervisor.  I mean, the doors
> that my supervisor could open, the fact that she
> had promised, "We'll literally just finance your
> dissertation the next year."  I wrote the letter
> of resignation with not having any hope.  How was
> I going to get another assistantship?  So, with no
> prospect of work, I did the letter of resignation.
> And it was a very painful, painful experience for
> me.  It was really awful for me.

Although the resignation was a rough point in Justin's

Ph.D. career, it turned out to be a blessing for

establishing his academic identity.  By chance, someone else

in the College had quit teaching a course in Secondary

English, which opened up a spring section for Justin.  This

was the beginning of what he described as the "teacher

education" phase of his academic identity, as he again was

able to do what he had come to love: teach about writing.

While moving into this phase, Justin was also beginning his

work on his dissertation, which resulted in yet another

tremendous personal change for him.

## Work Habits of a typical Graduate Student

The role of work and work ethic had been an

overwhelming theme throughout Justin's life.  It was

particularly clear to me when Justin described his

activities surrounding the research for his dissertation.

> So, fall was, Oh, God! Some of my days—because one
> of my sites are[sic] away—in order to be in that
> classroom I had to be on the road by 6:00 a.m.  I
> would leave and I would spend the *day* in that
> class, but every morning I was in that car by,
> like, 6:00 a.m. and I was driving somewhere....
> And my days were—they were insane.  I ended up—
> Thanksgiving I ended up three days in the hospital
> that week because I'd just pushed my body to the
> limit.  I told you that some weeks that range was
> like 500 to 1,000 miles a week of driving.  I was
> subsisting off of bagels and coffee while I was
> driving in a car.  And that's where I would eat.
> I wasn't taking care of myself.
> Acknowledgment from others that he worked hard was more

important to Justin than to other participants.  Maybe

because of the typical stereotype and media portrayal of

faculty life being easy, it appeared important for his self-

esteem and identity to share how difficult academic work is.

The descriptions he used to describe the work reflected his

working-class background.

> So, I don't want the connotation of easy student
> life to come across.  I don't want that to be
> someone's first impression.  I still make it clear
> to people how hard I'm working.  I mean I try and
> describe the kinds of things that I have to do in
> order to write the dissertation.  To see that it's
> not just sitting down and writing.  To see the
> incredible amount of labor, not only to do the
> interviews and get them transcribed and revise
> those things, the kind of travel that's involved.
> It's important for me that my neighbors don't
> think that I'm this lazy—that's really—it's hard
> for me in the sense when my lawn gets like this
> and people wonder why I'm not mowing it when I'm
> home every day, or that I only started doing the

hedges last night.  I'm *very* conscious of that.
I'm very conscious of—and it's certainly cutting
into my time to do my dissertation.

He further described the importance of understanding work

and how it validated who he was.

> I mean, probably growing up, you can call me a lot
> of things, but just don't call me lazy.  Or, "He
> works at a University and he teaches, so (1) he
> can't do things around the house, or (2) he's
> sitting inside just reading a book," or something
> like that.  I mean, I can't stand people saying,
> "Look he has summers off and he can't even do his
> lawn."  I want people to see that I'm hard-
> working.  That's very important.  These things are
> very important and affect my life and my work.

## Transitions from Graduate School to Scholar:
## The Role of the Dissertation

Justin wrote a dissertation about "teaching for

critical literacy."  He investigated three teachers and how

they described critical literacy.  He used qualitative

research methodology and referenced the voices of the

teachers, while also incorporating his own story.  He

described his typical days while researching and writing.

> Oh, I mean, a light day is about six hours of
> focused work.  Most days, I'm getting in closer to
> ten hours—some days up to 14.  That's not even
> counting when I go walk the dogs or eat or
> anything like....

When Justin began to write the dissertation, he owned

the process, the product and his work time.

> The work changed for me as soon as I started doing
> that proposal.  I mean, it was always for me.  And

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it wasn't about satisfying some requirement.  So I
would spend just hours in the mornings reading,
just sitting in the chair and just reading.  And
it was always a matter of this is for something
that I need to learn more about in order to
understand, or in order to help shape these ideas
and find out what I want to study.  And now it's—
starting in January literally it was, you know—I'm
reading these things to better understand what it
was that I was seeing in these classrooms.  So
certainly for me I have felt, even though I always
felt for several years like I was doing the work
of, like, a professor in terms of teaching load,
the way I was looking at things is because this is
my research, this is my study, this is what I'm
going to be able to share and talk about for many
years to come.  This is an expertise that I'm
developing.  Certainly much different for me than
going through the classes and trying to satisfy
someone else's expectation of competence or to
prove to someone else that I can be part of this
conversation.

And then the radical change came this past year
when I was doing my dissertation.  And essentially
what happened is in the fall when I was doing my
data collection I put my teaching so much in the
back seat.  But essentially, almost everything I
did revolved around collecting that data.  And I
didn't care who I pissed off.

Academic work, the writing of the dissertation, took

priority over teaching.  The struggle to balance teaching

and research was typical of Fred's story, as well, but was

managed quite differently by Justin.  Justin explained how

his understanding of work helped him to know who he was and

who he was becoming.

What Does Academic Work Mean and How Did It Influence Who
Justin Was Becoming?

It was evident early in our interviews how introspective and reflective Justin was. Few people tell a story with such vivid descriptions. Few people express with such clarity the multiple pivotal moments in their life. As I asked Justin about what he said to himself and who he believed he had become in graduate school, the theme of empowerment was at the fore.

As an aspiring faculty member, Justin thought deeply about what and who he had become during his graduate school years. One of the consequences of attending graduate school and developing an academic identity was the loss of connection to the place where he was raised and the people with whom he grew up. As many working-class academics describe (Dews and Law, 1995), the consequences of choosing and becoming an academic result in changing in ways that were not expected.

> I mean, I've changed incredibly since I've been in
> this program. So much so that I have lost the
> ties that I had with people I grew up with; they
> are gone. And they cannot be salvaged. Just
> because of who I've become. And that process was
> starting when I left by going overseas.... I've
> *completely* changed. So you know—this program has
> given me an opportunity to really stretch myself
> as a writer.
>
> So, the things you love the best, the things you
> would want to, that are most precious to you, in
> most cases you need to let go and get rid of them.
> And then what you'll find is something stronger.

I'm actually anticipating that that's what's going to happen.

One important component to Justin's story was his ability to be forthcoming about who he believed he was and what he was fearful of losing as he continued to develop as a new faculty member. He provided a powerful story to help me understand his developing academic identity.

> I'll give you a good story that really captures that. We moved into this house in July of '95. I taught up in Traverse City, but then the rest of my time was immersed in doing this [working on his house]. And then it was after that that I started working on my dissertation proposal. When I moved here, I bought a used Ford Ranger pickup and loaded what I could in the back, what I thought I would need, and drove out here. And that's what I had that was me. My furniture, prints—I collected a lot of really nice prints and some paintings and things. So that was a lot of who I was. Most of my books, I still have a lot of books, but most of my books are really in Nevada. All this stuff in storage. Most of it went into storage before I went to Singapore in '89. And then, after I left Singapore, got divorced, split up the stuff, tucked what I had from Singapore into this storage unit. And so for five years all these things—my stereo, television, things like that—all sat in that storage unit.
>
> So that summer, after doing a lot of work here in July, I flew out the first of August and got a 24-foot U-Haul, loaded it up, and I left. I was having a panic attack in my mom's house, loading stuff up on Thursday, and on Friday about 4:00 p.m.... I was going to leave, like, Sunday. I started thinking, "Oh my God, all these things I have to do!" and went [sound of panting]. In one hour I got everything ready, got in that truck, and I left at 5:00 on Friday and it was really, really hot. And I drove straight through from Reno to here and pulled in 7:30 p.m. on Sunday.

And that was two 15-minute naps.  No meal stops.
I had jugs of water and a big sack of apples and
some bagels, and just drove straight through.  And
the fixing up which still has me, you know, I've
barely even scratched the surface, and the
cleaning and the organizing and stuff like was a
huge amount of work.  And so I got here like the
middle of the second week in August.

It wasn't until the middle of September that I
started unpacking my books.  And it was like 10:00
p.m. one night and I was sitting in the living
room and it was one of the most depressing moments
that I have had in the last five years.  I mean, I
was crying and unpacking these books.  And what I
was crying about and I was depressed about was
that I had worked really hard to create the kind
of life that I wanted for myself by studying
history and English.  I went into teaching because
it was a great opportunity for me to continue
studying history and English for the rest of my
life.  And I'd also developed a library.  And all
these books I wanted to read.  And I'm unpacking
these books and I was thinking I'm 33 years old, I
have all this professional literature on education
that much of it I did not even like.  When am I
going to read these books?  When am I going to do
what it was that I loved?  I felt a lot of
distance between that.

There'd been no pause and the stress had not
ended.  And here I was looking and there was all
this literature that I wished I could read it was
an incredibly depressing moment.  So why I told
the story was in a sense of who I am and who I
tell myself I still am.  It's telling myself that
not losing those parts of myself and those
passions that I have for literature, for writing,
for history.  It is possible to keep alive, but I
have to work at it.  And I have to find ways that
I can mesh it with my work.

Although Justin had understood in some sense what

academic life would be for him, one of the difficulties for

him during the dissertation writing was assessing his growth

and development during that year.

> I think in the last, especially the last year,
> there's been so little opportunity for thinking
> about who I am and what I've become. And more
> thinking in terms of the professional I'm trying
> to shape myself into. I'm thinking both about the
> person that I want to change and preserve in some
> ways. Without a doubt I'm a much different person
> than when I started. I, you know, I've been
> passionate about my own learning since early in my
> undergraduate time. And this has been, I guess, I
> mean, there's no question that the intensity of
> the learning experience from all these aspects—the
> coursework, the work-work, the writing of the
> dissertation—has been incredibly intense. If I
> look back at it, I would have been real happy, I
> think, staying as a teacher and doing lots of
> things. It would have been very, very satisfying.
> But I think I like the person that I've become
> much better as a result of this whole process.
> The demands of working nine months a year don't
> allow for the kinds of experiences that I've had,
> you know, with conversation, with *writing*. I
> mean, writing has been, I mean, just the writing
> that I have done, particularly the stuff that I've
> chosen to do. That could be as important as any
> other factor in how I've become who I am. If the
> situation were one of just doing the coursework
> and writing the dissertation, it wouldn't be worth
> it. It's been the work. I mean the work has been
> incredible! I mean, for the most part, the
> classes that I've taught, I've chosen and written
> the entire curriculum, the assignments. I mean
> for every class. That experience has been
> incredibly rich. I mean, that's been
> irreplaceable. So if you were to allow me to turn
> the clock back and be in that situation and I'd
> know the debt that I was in, I'd know the money
> that would have been lost over these six years, I
> would still do what I've done and gone through,
> including working with the people that I had
> problems with and I still deal with those same
> problems.

As a dissertation writer, Justin was ambivalent about the notion of being a "scholar." When he described who he was and who he wanted to become he emphasized being both a teacher and a serious student. Here is what he meant:

And I think, for me, the kinds of qualities that I have aspired to and wanted to become for many years, I would call more like being a serious student. And to me that reveals something that is more ongoing. It reveals more to me that there is no arrival point. The more you learn, the more you realize you don't know. And so a serious student is someone that I would say I am. I would say, "I'm a serious student." And that's someone that I want to continue being. I would also say that in this process I have certainly come to see myself more as a writer. Even, and I think because I've become a better writer in this student process, but also I'm envisioning a life ahead of me where I am going to write both fiction, nonfiction, and educational literature. So certainly those two words (writer and serious student) describe me. You know, I'll tell you the one that I don't want to lose: teacher. I don't want to be a professor. Even though I will want that title, I want a community. I want to continue belonging. I don't want to lose that. And I don't want to lose the respect of those people in the teaching profession because I'm working almost exclusively in college or university classrooms.

[A teacher] is someone who does the work of teachers whether the kids are in kindergarten or in a doctoral seminar. Somebody who just doesn't come in there and profess. Someone that doesn't come in there and say, "I am the expert in this area and I'm going to share that expertise." But someone who really looks at whoever that group of students are and tries to understand what it is that these people need, what it is that they're bringing, and what it is that I can do to make the learning experience the best. Which is certainly more learner centered.

I think "serious student" for me is more than just books. It's like, I mean, even as a high school teacher I had on my wall Socrates' thing, "The unexamined life is not worth living." That's the kind of thing that someone who's a serious student really examines and questions everything in terms of what is there to be known. It's really studying, examining, exploring, trying to always stretch yourself, whether it's in discipline, whether in terms of being a better mate or colleague. It goes not only for subjects but for life.

## Summary-Where We Left Off

Justin's understanding of himself was unique. He not only understood what academic work means, he also shared his reflective personality and described his love for reading and writing with me. He showed how students should own their graduate program and provided a model for empowering oneself.

CHAPTER 7

THE STRUGGLE TO WRITE FROM A LARGER RESEARCH PROJECT:
UNDERSTANDING ACADEMIC WORK IN LITA's DISSERTATION STORY

*One thing that was really hard about doing this kind of
dissertation work that was kind of housed within the larger
project, is defining yourself in your work.*
        —Advice from a faculty member given to Lita, 1995

The dissertation plays an important role in a graduate

student's response to the question, "What does academic work

really mean to me?"  Decisions about a thesis topic

occasionally result from work on a project that students may

"fall into" early on in their graduate programs.  In the

physical and natural sciences, it is common practice to

write one's dissertation from the laboratory research group

that one joins in the first few years of the program.

Though the social science and education students do not

usually work in laboratories, they occasionally find and

take advantage of opportunities to join research groups, for

financial reasons, or because the topic is of interest, or

because they want the research experience.  For many

students, this opportunity provides convenient access to

dissertation data.  However, the decision to use this data,

though seemingly straightforward, can cause great

ambivalence for some students.  This is Lita's story about

her conflict with collaborative versus solo work, and the

role of academic work in the development of her identity.

## Lita's Background

Growing up in Hawaii, Lita was the youngest of three children and the only daughter of her Japanese-American parents. Her father was a civil engineer at the University of Hawaii and Lita was raised to value the importance of education. She described homework as always being important. She saw her brothers, eight and nine years older than she, become a lawyer and a doctor. Her brothers were excellent academic role models, but created some pressure for Lita to succeed, as well. She described having a wonderful experience and achieving great high school grades at the University of Hawaii lab school.

Lita chose to attend a research university in the Midwest as an undergraduate, despite the skepticism of her friends. Part of the reason for her decision was her wish to stay close to her older brother. When Lita arrived on campus at the age of 17, her brother was in the area finishing his medical residency at a local hospital. Lita began her program in the sciences in a residential college. She described her experiences in undergraduate school as very successful, and made particular mention of outperforming her brothers academically.

You know how most people, they do good [sic] in

high school and then they come to college and
they're just another number?  You know, washed
among the millions.  But by and large, I did *very*
well in college.  I did good [*sic*] in high school,
but I did great in college.  I pretty much—I had
very close to a 4.0 average graduating.  I pretty
much almost always got a 4.0 in every class I
took.  My brothers, you know, they had done well
in high school and things, but they struggled in
college.  But I actually did the opposite—I did
much better in college.  So, things like calculus
that my oldest brother had to take twice and my
other brother just squeaked by on, I actually
smashed it.  I just did great in it.

Lita described working quite hard as an undergraduate

and explained that her Christianity and belief in God

transformed her during undergraduate school.  She also

described being interested in many things, which resulted in

feeling a lack of focus.

By and large, I had to work really hard.  I didn't
go to a single bar the whole time I was an
undergrad.  Partly that was being a Christian,
partly that was studying so much.  It was just
really hard for me, but I got a lot of
satisfaction out of just doing well.  I think that
probably was kind of unusual for—I mean, as far as
the academic history of the way students go—that
was a bit strange.  Then I guess the other thing
is I continued pretty eclectic in choosing mediums
to use in things I was interested in.  I always
thought, like, oh, math and science—I tried to be
like, this is what I'm about.  You know, you're
trying to declare a major and trying to say like
I'm about this.  But that never would hold because
I would just get really interested in other stuff.
I just found things interesting.

Lita described receiving a teaching assistantship just

before leaving for Japan for an overseas studies experience.

On the final calculus exam, her professor had written, "You should be a TA."  After coming back from Japan, Lita was a teaching assistant for her final two undergraduate years. Oddly, while in Japan, Lita had felt like a member of a minority in a country where all the people around her looked like her.  Because she was learning the language while there, and because she was not raised in the culture, many of the native Japanese looked down upon her for not knowing basic things in the culture.

As a senior, Lita was known by the faculty to be a hard-working and excellent student.  She graduated in 1989 with a B.A. degree in secondary education and math. Following graduation, while she was still trying to decide what she was going to do next, she was asked to join a research project in math education.  With six other graduate students and two faculty members, she spent four days a week in a classroom watching one of the faculty members teach, while she "learned math for the first time."  She was not yet admitted to the Ph.D. program in education, but took graduate courses throughout the academic year.  She described being ambivalent towards entering the Ph.D. program, as she really was not sure what she wanted in life. Her strongest motivation to apply was to "get into the good classes."

> ...the deadline was like February or something to
> apply for the Ph.D. program, so I did end up
> applying in February, still ambivalent about it.
> But I thought if I don't apply then I don't even
> have a decision to make. So I made a default
> decision. My main motivation for applying to the
> Ph.D. program was to get into the good classes.

In the fall of 1990, Lita officially became a Ph.D. student in the College of Education. The research project that she had joined continued for the next six years and became a critical part of her dissertation story. Her official entrance into the program helped her to feel more accepted as she described the importance of "having a cohort." Lita made quick work of taking courses in the program and sailed through them in three years. By the end of 1993, she had completed all of her coursework.

Lita had a committee meeting to present her "plan of study" almost immediately after she had completed all of her coursework. As she stated, "I was pretty much done. We talked about trying to figure out how to fit the plan to what I had taken." Unlike Justin, Lita had not learned to own her program and this decision would result in many difficulties at the dissertation stage as well. I interviewed Lita while she was still writing her dissertation more than four years after she had completed her coursework.

## Preparing to Write the Dissertation

> I hated writing. We had to do it every day—at
> least in seventh and eighth grade. We had to do
> these little 5-10-minute papers as a part of our
> English class every day. And they said we could
> write anything. So I usually wrote stupid things
> like, "My name is Lita. My name is Lita. My name
> is Lita. This is boring. This is boring. This
> is boring." And you could just fill up pages with
> stuff like that. Or I'd write notes to friends,
> things like that.

Lita often described her struggle with writing, from

middle school through undergraduate school. In spite of her

dislike for the process, she was successful at it. She

would be rewarded with high grades for her writing, even

though she had completed it at the last minute.

> I mean, I remember at the end of the semester,
> like, I just would have put the period on, my
> friends would pack my bag, I'd hop in a cab that
> was waiting for me already. Another friend would
> spell check, print it off, and turn it in for me,
> and I was off to Hawaii, never having seen the
> printed copy of my paper, ever. I mean I would
> just, I would do it, I'd do it! And I'd do it
> well. But I never enjoyed it. You know, if I had
> a free moment, I would never sit down and write
> something.

But in the middle of her graduate programs Lita noted a

change, an apparent transformation in her feeling about and

approach to writing.

> I started working with this computer project and I
> started keeping a journal. My major advisor would
> always carry a teaching journal that we were
> reading in and working on with the computer
> project. And when I was actually designing

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computer things, I started keeping a journal about what I was doing because I would be working until two in the morning and be totally fried and go to sleep and I wouldn't remember what I was doing. So I started just keeping a journal to say what I'm starting out, what I was trying to do. Then, before I totally went unconscious I would scribble down where I had left off and where I was thinking of going next. It started with that. And then it started to be more elaborate. I started trying to keep a record of what I did. So I used to print out stuff and paste it in and write in the margins and highlight this and that. Then I started to actually do the designing, not on the computer but by writing things. Just the way I used to write things down when I was in math. I started actually thinking by writing in this journal. And it started off just being the computer thing I was writing. But then eventually all kinds of stuff started relating to it. So stuff I was reading for class started relating, so I'd write about that in there. And it started getting more theoretical, more philosophical, more incorporating all kinds of different ideas and conversations. I started writing. Just writing more and more. And eventually it started being that I would just write to think. And it would actually be in the writing that I'd do some of my best thinking and explore problems and things like that. Not just science and math kinds of problems, but problems about issues of race or education.

Although "writing to think" became routine for Lita, she did not enjoy creating scholarship on her own. The dissertation writing process was still a struggle for this otherwise very successful student and she had made little progress by the time I had interviewed her. Lita's dissertation did not evolve in the traditional order. She began by thinking of a question to take to her committee to

explore that related to teacher education, her own interests and the things in her background that she valued. She decided she would document, study and describe her own practice teaching of an undergraduate course in math education in the fall of 1994. Her thought when she was teaching that course was to engage her students in learning through investigation.

This idea was part of the larger research project (known as the Project from this point forward) that she had been working on, and that had funded her graduate school since the fall of 1989.

> It was kind of a double-pronged thing because as their teacher educator I was using a pedagogy of investigation with my students—trying to get them to engage in investigating what's going on with these kids, what's going on with the subject matter, and things like that. But also I had the aim of helping them become teachers who utilize a kind of pedagogy of investigation themselves in teaching kids. And so, that's the general idea I had for what my dissertation was going to be about.

Lita had difficulties with the idea of using the data from the Project. Though she began collecting data in the fall of 1994 and was funded from the Project for two research assistants and equipment for audio and video taping, she never felt as though she had a question that her dissertation was supposed to answer. In addition, she had not actually written a proposal prior to starting her

dissertation data collection.  Her only writing at the time

was the human subjects review process and the protocols.

Because she was using her own class as a basis for the

dissertation, Lita had additional questions related to

understanding the work required as a teacher versus her work

as a researcher.  But, through the process of completing the

human subjects form, Lita was able to combine and understand

the roles of teaching and research.

> So it kind of made everything that happened during
> the class was documentation of the class for
> pedagogical purposes; I was a teacher.  And then
> later on, after they weren't my students any more,
> then it was research.  And I had them sign this
> thing that said, "I understand that none of this
> documentation will be used for research, but only
> be used for teaching unless I give my consent for
> it being used for research."  And then I told them
> I would ask them after the class was over, with no
> penalty to them, if it can be used for research or
> not.

The forms for the university's committee on research

using human subjects was the only thing Lita had written

prior to starting data collection for her dissertation.  The

ease of collecting data for her dissertation, because it was

part of the larger Project, was both a blessing and a curse.

She struggled to determine what exactly her dissertation

question was.

> And I really struggled with that.  I didn't know
> what was wrong with me.  I didn't know why I
> couldn't figure out, you know, it just seemed like
> people would tell me to just say what your

question is.  You know, you've got it in your
head.  You know what it is.  You've thought about
this a lot.  Just say what it is.  And I just
couldn't figure it out.  They really wanted me to
be spending my thoughts on just saying what the
question was.  Just saying what my central issues
were.  But I probably spent more time thinking
about why is this so hard.

At the end of the course in December 1994, Lita found

herself trying to put together a formal dissertation

proposal from data that had already been collected.

It was really hard to do the proposal.  In part
... there's a lot of ways in which I felt like I
didn't know what I was doing or supposed to be
doing.  And you know, lots of the stuff just
didn't fit into what I had learned in my classes
about doing qualitative research.  You know, you
look for a general theme, and you put
interpretation and you give your evidence.  And I
just couldn't for the life of me figure out what
the *theme* was.  And then trying to interpret it.
Who knows, you know?  It just seemed so much
bigger and messier than anything we had talked
about in my research courses.

From January to May, Lita continued to struggle to put

together a proposal.  She met with her committee in May and

learned that her proposal was not complete.  She described

her frustration as she simply did not understand what a

"solid lit review" was and had "no clue" what was meant by

"methodology."  She described herself during this period of

time in the dissertation process as having "no idea what

they were talking about when they wanted to know about my

analysis strategy.  I didn't know what they were talking

about." Her earlier experiences of "doing school well" and writing successful papers in a very short period of time, gave her hope that she would hit upon what the committee wanted. However, not until the year after her data collection could she say that she had "fully integrated and focused questions."

Themes that occurred repeatedly in Lita's story included not owning the dissertation, trying to satisfy all committee members, and trying to find ways to include every idea generated from faculty members and other students. In addition, using data that had been collected under the umbrella of a larger project became particularly problematic. Lita had great difficulty distinguishing which work was her own, and this confusion would continue to plague her throughout her writing.

The reason some students stall while writing the dissertation is because their question changes. In Lita's case, the question she was trying to answer in her study changed "quite a bit." She fretted as we talked, and stated, "I said I would do all these things that I never did."

By the fall of 1995, with all of the data collected for her study, Lita's proposal was accepted. But when we talked more than two years later, Lita was still "writing." What

had happened?  Like many good students, Lita had continued to work on the project that had financed her education and she could not find time to write her own material.  She recalled an important, prophetic conversation with an influential person in her field at a conference, just before her proposal was accepted.

> She said to me something that made no sense at the time.  She said that one thing that was really hard about doing this kind of dissertation work that was kind of housed within the larger Project, is defining yourself in your work.  And I had no idea what she was talking about.  I just kind of smiled and nodded, "Oh, yeah."  And actually that was sort of, in retrospect, it was sort of this omen, because that was the very thing I ended up struggling so much with that year.  I really stepped on a lot of toes and did a lot of bad, evil things, I guess, unwittingly, because I just never thought about things that way.  And it was part of trying to figure out what my work was ... and what the Project's work was.

The internal and external struggle caused by trying to find what work was hers within the larger collaborative Project became extraordinarily difficult for Lita.  The Project was the most significant part of her education (well beyond coursework) and it upset her greatly to have conflicts with her faculty mentors over her dissertation. Determining who owns the ideas can be a thorny, difficult issue for dissertation writers who write from a larger project.  Lita's words help us to understand this issue of defining intellectual property when working collaboratively

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in the social sciences.

> But I just never bothered to pay attention to
> things like, was that *my* idea, or was that Julie's
> idea, or was that Pam's idea, or whose idea was
> that? And, you know when I tried to trace it
> back, I think like ... I mean so much of it is
> what sense I make of what somebody else had said.
> And I don't even know if that's what they meant
> when they said it. So much of our work was
> ephemeral—it was gone. Or even if I read
> something they had written, I don't know
> necessarily that my idea is what they meant when
> they said it, because I'm thinking about it in a
> different context. So when I actually started
> doing my own work or my own writing, or whatever,
> I'd write and talk and I was totally unconscious
> to where these ideas came from. Who owned them?
> And I guess in the process of that I had said
> ideas were mine that somebody else had thought was
> their ideas. I mean, if I'm quoting them
> directly, it's clear to me. But any other case
> outside of that, I'm fuzzy. I don't know. I
> think I really stepped on a lot of toes, or some
> toes, or something. I don't actually know whose.
> But my advisors warned me about these habits I
> have of not attributing ideas to people. And I
> was just really puzzled. I mean, I just never had
> that idea, that concept of people personally
> having ideas that were theirs.

This kind of thinking sent Lita into a tailspin and

made it difficult to find momentum to write *her*

dissertation. Big questions emerged for her repeatedly,

"eternally and perpetually" confusing her: "What's my

dissertation about?" "Is it my dissertation or is it really

only a reiteration of something small that Julie or Connie

had said?" This questioning stymied Lita's progress as she

tried to figure out when and how to talk with colleagues,

and how to write and think on her own. What part of the academic work was hers?

After two years of writing, and for the first time since beginning her dissertation process, Lita was forced to try to forge her own path. She felt isolated and alone, and purposely read things and explored ideas very different from the Project. She cleared her head about what she was doing and felt empowered. The costs of empowerment, however, were not small. In many ways, Lita had lost the collaborative nature of her former relationships. She described the situation, "I don't know what they're working on. I don't know what they're thinking. I don't really get to read what they write any more. Whereas before, they used to share stuff with me all the time."

The difficulty of taking a significant amount of time to "find one's own ideas" or to "let an idea gel—or ferment—or spoil," is that it can lead dissertation writers to procrastinate and "spin their wheels," pretending to themselves to be making progress. Lita both "spun her wheels" and lost the value of her collaborative research relationships.

> I think for the past couple of years I feel like
> I've just sort of gone off on my own about
> thinking things. One thing that's hard about
> that, though, is that it's hard to talk to people
> now. I've been in my own head for a little bit

too long, I think.

As Lita continued toward the actual writing of her dissertation, she experienced periods of change and growth. Though she continued to struggle, she described thinking that she was beginning to understand the dissertation as she wrote it.  She worked on ideas that she believed were on the "fringe" of education and less about how A influenced B. What mattered was that she had found a way to own her ideas and separate herself from the larger Project.  She was then able to see the data she had collected in a new light and learned to understand what it meant to work independently. "I have, like, language and values now that I didn't have earlier.  And now it fits into a part of the bigger whole that I could not see before."

## Writing the Dissertation

In some ways, it was unexpected that Lita did not complete her dissertation quickly.  The project that she had worked on for almost eight years produced a number of articles; however, she never mentioned the actual process of writing up the research, though she had presented at a number of conferences.  She did not discuss doing the work of academics (i.e., publishing articles, presenting at conferences, etc.).  The work she enjoyed was teaching and

being a part of the group, talking and reflecting on her practice. Her lack of enjoyment from the writing caused her to question whether she wanted to be a faculty member.

When asked what it meant to actually be working on the dissertation, Lita responded in what could best be described as "dissertation speak" (i.e., the tendency of graduate students to supposedly be working hard on finishing the dissertation once coursework is completed).

> The process of trying to persuade those around you that you are working on something huge, when in reality you are simply trying to convince yourself that if at any time you are thinking about your dissertation, that counts as "work on your dissertation." I guess it's sort of the main thing that I do in that ... maybe it doesn't take up the most time in a day, but I think about it all the time and ... and in some ways that's how I define this time for myself. *This is the time* to be working on your dissertation. So it's kind of what I've labeled it, largely in hopes that by labeling it as such, it will become such.

Making slow progress, Lita needed a way to define "dissertation work" much more tangibly.

The writing was hard for Lita. Even for conference papers it was hard for her "to try to find language and things to put new ideas down." Lita considered this struggle normal for anyone, though the amount of time thinking, worrying, and delaying in getting it done was taking its toll on her. Even when she wasn't writing, the dissertation process as she defined it felt "all consuming."

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>...even when I don't work on it I feel like I
should be working on it.  Or, you watch movies and
they relate to it.  I mean, that's when I start—
you know it's taking up a lot of your brain when
you have dreams and you think, "It's because I
feel this way about my dissertation."  Or I know
the summer's ending and I didn't get as much done
as I'd hoped.  I don't know if you want to call it
all consuming, as it doesn't take up all of my
time, but in other ways it does seem to consume
all.

When the writing is not fulfilling, and when a

student's work habit has always been to complete things at

the last moment, finishing the dissertation can become

formidable.  Lita described how advice from Nike, the

athletic shoe manufacturer, of, "Just do it," was a really a

myth for her.

>I mean there's a part of me that believes that
myth as well.  I mean, I remember times—heck, not
even that long ago—when I have to pump out
something, and I do.  I mean, you just sit down
and you do it.  And there's not ... there's a lot
of good reasons to believe that myth that if you
just sit down, roll up your sleeves, get your cup
of coffee and lock your door and turn of the phone
or whatever, you can do it.  And so, partly buying
into that myth because I've seen it, I've done it,
I live it.  That's how I got my AERA [American
Educational Research Association] proposal out a
few weeks ago.  So there's that.  But then on the
other hand it feels like that's stupid.  I mean,
this isn't something you can just whip out.  It's
not like a 10-page paper where you basically can
see all the pieces of it and hold it in your head
at once and finish it up.  It's not like that at
all.  I mean, there are so many pieces I can't
ever hold all of them in my head at once.

The contrast between ease of writing short papers for

graduate school or for conferences and the size and complexity of writing the dissertation is what stymies many writers.

Further hampering Lita (and Fred and Jo) was the inability to find ways to answer the questions from all those interested in progress reports. Lita's self-esteem had suffered along the way and forced her to question her motivation for being in the program. "Some days you just feel crummy. Some days you just think, 'Why would anybody want to read this anyway, much less write the stupid thing?'"

Lita sounded like a struggling writer when she described the days when the writing just simply would not flow.

> It's more just a feeling. It's just more frustration, or something. I don't know what it is, but it seems so real that it's hard to actually sit down and actually do anything about when I'm in that state. I don't know what contributes to days when it seems like, oh, this is exciting and this is important, and I think I'm saying something that nobody's said before and there's clarity, versus days when it just seems pointless and useless and I don't know what I'm saying and this is all gibberish anyway. I'm just making this stuff up. I don't know what makes the difference on those days. It's not like it's what I ate and it's not the weather per se. And it's not necessarily how much progress I made the day before or anything like that. I don't know quite what it is.

What Lita lacked compared to highly productive writers

(Boice, 1996; Elbow, 2000; Wildavsky, 1989) are the work

habits of writing and an understanding of what it means to

do scholarly work.  As Wildavasky (1989) describes in his

revealing essay, it is critical for most writers to write in

the same place, during the same time of the day, and every

day.  Lita described her writing habits:

> I'll have a couple of weeks stretch when I've been
> consistently working at certain times, breaking at
> certain times.  But it's hard because it just
> seems like all this other stuff comes up that it's
> hard to keep anything going for very long.
> Routines get interrupted and then it's hard to get
> back into them.  It's starting to change.  I'm
> trying to find day-by-day ways to maintain some
> kind of flow.

This same lack of "flow" contributes to some students

resigning themselves to being ABDs for life.

Lita changed as she was writing in the last year prior

to being interviewed.  She was moving into a stage of

"wanting to be done."  She looked around to see that her

cohort had graduated and most of her committee members had

changed jobs.  It was this realization that made her think

about the amount of time she had been in the program.  But

she had a rationale for why it was taking so long: She was

still not sure what she wanted to do when she was done.

> I think until this past year, it hasn't been that
> big of a deal.  I mean there were a lot of people
> in my cohort who were pretty much in the same
> place and we were all kind of putzing along and
> struggling with this or that.  But I think just

the screws have been turning this past year on
everybody.  Just, you know, I feel really ready to
be done.  I really want to be done and get out and
all that, which I didn't used to really feel at
all.  In fact, I couldn't even conceive of feeling
that way earlier.  I just was really content with
doing whatever and I had no desire to rush things,
or whatever.  But just recently, I think in the
past year, it's felt really like I don't want to
be here and I want to be done, and I'm ready to go
on to something else.  But I started feeling like
I'm a little afraid to be done because I don't
know what I want to do after I'm done, so why rush
into something when I don't know what I want to
do?  I was shying away, I think, from a headlong
plunge to being done because I didn't know what to
do after, and that seemed kind of scary.

Lita's experience is fairly typical of graduate
students who extend their Ph.D. programs for many years.  At
some point, a student looks up to see that the culture has
changed, friendships have changed, and it is time to move on
to the next stage of life.  For many, this move does not
happen without causing fear.  Lita described her fear of
abandonment, and fear of success.  Like Fred, though she
started our interviews telling me she was planning on being
a faculty member, as Lita got closer to being finished, she
was no longer certain.

... in some ways I feel like, gosh, everybody's
leaving, and I want to leave, too.  I don't want
to be left behind.  Others left the Project, but
last year Julie, my advisor, left.  So that was
kind of a big thing.  And then this year another
person is leaving who's also on my committee.  You
know I'm slowly not having a committee here—all of
my committee is leaving.  And then, not to mention
friends, graduate student friends, who have taken

jobs and are done.  And, you know, there are
getting to be fewer and fewer people in my cohort
around, and it sort of feels like I just want to
go, too.  So I've kind of had strong motivation to
go, but still don't know what I want to do after,
although certainly the default mode is to go work
at a university and be a good academic.  But I
keep trying to think about what else I could do
besides that.

Without having defined what academic work would mean,
Lita struggled to understand what a good academic would be.
She believed it would be similar to the life she was leading
as she wrote her dissertation, taught in her assistantship,
and was involved in the research project.

## Academic Identity, Assistantships, and the Dissertation

While Lita was writing her dissertation, she described
trying to juggle a social life, take care of her health, and
respond to emergency deadlines.  She believed this would be
the life of an academic, and before the interviews, she
believed she was ready for such a position.  During the
interviews, she was trying to understand what it was she was
becoming and what role graduate school and the dissertation
had played in shaping who she was.  Without clear direction,
and while finishing her dissertation, Lita did not seem to
fit well anywhere in the academy.  Our last conversation
summed up the influence of the dissertation on her academic
identity.

It's like with my dissertation, I feel like I'm
broken for language in that. And some of that is
a matter of making up language for it. But I feel
like that's exactly what I'm doing-trying to
figure out who am I, and what am I doing, and what
am I going to be, and what am I right now. It's
trying to grope for language. Because I don't
really feel like I fit well with any ... I don't
have a clear image of what I want to be doing.

Not knowing what she wanted to be made for increased

difficulty in working on the dissertation. Though Lita

stated as we started the interviews in the beginning of the

summer that she wanted to be done writing at the end of the

summer, in our last interview, she planned on taking another

assistantship to support herself in the fall and continue

her student status.

> ... it's hard to say I'm a student because then
> when I say that people expect that I'm taking
> classes or that I live by the university schedule
> or something like that. And none of that's true.
> So that's a really misleading thing to say to
> somebody—to say I'm a student. Although, you
> know, I think most of my family thinks that's what
> I'm doing. So I don't really bother to try to
> contradict that or anything. I just let that
> persist. And I think, too, with my family like if
> you don't have a real job then you should be a
> student. That's an OK, and noble, and an all
> right thing to do if you don't have a *real* job,
> and assistantships and things really aren't real
> jobs.

> And my assistantships don't really mean as much to
> me now as they did earlier. Like what I have
> lined up for this coming fall are things like—one
> is managing this room, and I've been doing that
> for years and years, so that's nothing new for me.
> It's just doing stuff to make money, and I can do
> it pretty well without pouring my life into it or

anything like that. Which is good when you're
working on a dissertation. But you know my
assistantships really don't—they're not the center
of what I do or what I'm about. You know, I'm
somebody trying to figure out what's next, so a
big thing on my mind is applying for jobs and
trying to figure that out. I'm somebody who's
trying to figure out what next and what the
options are and what I want to do next.

Though she said her assistantship in the fall was not the

center of her experiences, clearly her academic identity was

wrapped up in the assistantships she had received throughout

her graduate student career. She hoped to again have an

experience that consumed her time and energy, as was the

case early on in the Project.

I mean even as I write my dissertation, I'm
looking to try to recapture something I had often
in the Project, where the work consumes you. The
thing that just sweeps you away when you look up
from your computer and realize it's been ten hours
and you haven't eaten today and, God, what day is
it anyway? It's dark outside! My God! I'm
always kind of looking for that sort of ride that
I've had in my assistantship work.

In my assistantship—it never quite felt as big as
this dissertation feels. But it always felt big—
it was always too big to see the other side. I
didn't quite know how it was going to come out.
The dissertation certainly has that potential for
providing that kind of all-consuming work. And
there are times when I had it for a short while,
and I'd think, "Oh, this is it!" And then it,
like, goes away. And I never quite had something
that just lasted as long as the Project. I feel
like I'm kind of always looking for that thing.

### What Would Lita Do Next? Would She Finish?

Lita was fortunate to be attached to a funded project

that lasted her entire graduate career.  But having been part of a project that she could use to produce a dissertation was a double-edged sword.  Lita had enjoyed having colleagues with whom to discuss the work, but she was also left not knowing exactly what part of the dissertation was hers.  Trying to take a piece of such a project and create a dissertation had many drawbacks, particularly because Lita's personality and work habits tended to include waiting for things to happen and hoping to become inspired rather than taking advantage of the situation and running with the data that she had.

Understanding boundaries of intellectual property remained a struggle for her throughout the dissertation writing process and resulted in her continued questioning of a career in the academy.

> It's hard.  Sometimes I think I can't stand academe.  Whose stuff is whose?  Oh, gosh, I can't imagine myself doing this.  And then other times I think, well, you're going to find the things you hate about it pretty much everywhere, and it's better than some other things.  I think it's sort of like a childhood fantasy, but I really wish that there was somebody I could look at and look at their life and think, "Oh, that's what I want to do.  That's what I want to be."  But somewhere along the line I was just the person in front of me.  I look at him and I think well, that's *not* me.

In addition, Lita could not get comfortable with working as an individual when the process had been so

collaborative until her dissertation project.

> ...and some of it is, you know, reading a lot and
> listening to what other people say and trying to
> figure out if I can I use it.  And that's really
> hard.  I just never kept tabs on whose idea it
> was.  I didn't understand what my work was
> anymore.

For Lita, the struggle to understand the role of
collaborative versus individual work in the academy resulted
in difficult times and may in fact result in her choosing a
different career path.

CHAPTER 8

EIGHT THEMES: ISSUES AND DILEMMAS THAT INFLUENCE
ACADEMIC IDENTITY

The central question I have tried to answer in this study is how the dissertation process influences and leads to the development of an academic identity. In addition to studying the lives of the four graduate students, I conducted four focus groups. Two of those focus groups consisted of Ph.D. students in Literature, Arts and the Humanities, and two of the focus groups consisted of students in science, math, and engineering fields. The additional twelve students amplified the voices of the four students discussed in the previous chapters, regarding the critical questions dissertation writers ask themselves (i.e., "Who am I as an academic?" and "What does academic work mean?") Further, these respondents provided additional information regarding the impact that the answers to those questions have on academic identity formation (see Appendix C for list of participants). What follows are eight themes that emerged in the focus groups, which illustrate that the four stories told in depth were not idiosyncratic. The emergence of the eight themes in the focus groups extends and amplifies the issues and dilemmas faced by the subjects

of each of the individual stories.  The purpose of this

section is not to generalize across the student population.

Instead, my purpose is to remind the reader that there are

more stories to be told of challenges that face graduate

students searching for academic identities.

In this chapter, I first describe how the four central

themes in Joanne's, Fred's, Justin's and Lita's stories

(e.g., emerging expert vs. imposter in Joanne's story) are

extended by the focus group participants.  Next, I describe

four additional themes and complementary issues that emerged

across each of the four stories, and that arose in the focus

groups, as well.  Finally, I provide what was gained overall

from looking at both the focus groups and the individual

participants.

<u>Building Expertise while Feeling like an Imposter</u>
<u>Theme 1</u>
<u>Amplifying Joanne's Story</u>

*And when you talk about what you are doing to other people,*
*there's a whole range of descriptors.  There's*
*"dissertating" which is kind of overarching.  That's like*
*the paradigm I'm in now.  Um, you know, I'm writing.*

*I'm stupid or I'm a fraud; they're going to catch on.  These*
*conversations you have alone.  What would make me think I*
*could do this?  I'm just a wood tick.  Those conversations*
*you have alone.*
*—Nancy, ABD in English*

Like Joanne, many participants shared their private

thoughts of feeling like an expert and gaining great skill

and competency as they worked on their dissertations.  In
addition, for many, the academic identities they were
establishing resulted in nagging feelings of being an
imposter.  For example, Nancy, who was close to completing
her dissertation, was quite confident about her work.  She
described her dissertation articulately and felt her
committee members were colleagues.  She had developed a
sense of expertise that made her feel like a member of the
"academic club."  However, she was still filled with worries
that she was a fraud and doubts that she would complete her
program.  Private, fearful thoughts like these have a
tremendous influence on the academic identity of graduate
students.

Similarly, Paul, a zoology/ecology ABD, described
developing expertise in his field, while suspecting that
failure was looming.  However, he used this fear to motivate
and push himself along.  He described his feelings in
graduate school:

> Over my shoulder, floating in the air is a monster
> of some sort depicting the sense that I always
> have that there's something hanging over me—
> disaster waiting to happen if I don't follow
> through on something or that I don't know what I'm
> doing.  It's not particularly anyone.  It's, I
> suppose, a combination of my advisor, my
> committee, the department, my own expectations,
> basically everything, that I feel is riding on
> this.  So I kind of feel like there's something

over my shoulder kind of pushing me on because
it's kind of scary if I don't get going.

Kent, an economics student, having completed his

comprehensive exams and begun his proposal, described his

struggle to find the way to make a contribution to the field

and share his developing expertise.

> You finally find an area you think you can make a
> contribution to, like, you know, you start doing
> this preliminary literature and find, oh, God,
> someone's already doing this.

Finally, Jay, a microbiologist, simply stated that

doing research did not necessarily mean you were

knowledgeable or becoming an expert.  He described his

research as follows:

> ...my research is what's ended up being a pain in
> the ass, because it never works.  I start to feel
> I'll never be an expert on this stuff.  That's why
> they call it *re*-search, because you end up *re*-
> doing it and *re*-doing it and *re*-doing it, until
> you get lucky.  I think successful research is
> about 50% luck and 25% intuition and 25%
> knowledge.

The stories of these four focus group participants

suggest that the academic identity of graduate students is

greatly influenced by the ability to fight off the feelings

of impostership that often come during the writing of the

dissertation (Clance & Imes, 1978; Harvey, 1985).

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<u>Balancing Teaching and Research</u>
<u>Theme 2</u>
<u>Amplifying Fred's Story</u>

*I find, when I'm teaching, even just one section, it becomes
all-consuming.  So, my work with the dissertation slowed
down.*

*—Fred*

Many other dissertation writers that I spoke with

identified themselves as teachers first.  Nancy, the ABD

student in English, articulated the way she tried to balance

teaching and research as she described the impact of

simultaneously being a teaching assistant, aspiring faculty

member, and dissertation writer.

> It [teaching] makes it sometimes really difficult
> to write.  Which is why I have carved my life out
> and am sticking to it.  Sometimes, you know, I'm
> busy, but Sunday, Monday and Tuesday are
> dissertation days.  And once Thursday and Friday
> come, the University can have me, and then
> Saturday as well.  When I grade papers I'll be up
> all day Saturday grading papers.  But I have to do
> laundry and I have to buy groceries and I can't
> stand to think if my apartment's a mess so...
>
> The advice I got was to cut your week in half if
> you can.  I mean, I can't do like a Tuesday/
> Thursday writing thing.  I've got to have
> uninterrupted time.  But when you hear students
> say things like, "The University can have me the
> rest of the week."  I mean, I think that that's
> kind of a powerful statement, I guess, about how
> you think about your teaching position here or
> your role here.  Maybe it's that separation thing
> we all have to do to get into the dissertation
> anyway.  So, it's always cooking in the back of my
> head.  But I put it on the shelf for a while to
> teach, you know, for these next couple of days.
> So, like, when I teach it has to have my full
> attention, and then I switch.

Many of the individuals I interviewed who "loved teaching" but struggled to write the dissertation had trouble finding someone who understood their thinking about this matter. Many of the participants could not talk with their advisors about this issue, as they thought that their advisors expected them to understand the love and joy of writing, as the advisors themselves did.

Doyle, a statistics ABD, understood the need to balance teaching and research/writing, despite the fact that what he really enjoyed and was skilled at was teaching.

> Well, I would have to say I think I am a good
> teacher. I'm not arrogant enough to say I'm a
> great teacher. I did have a chance to teach one of
> our courses last spring and got better marks than
> the professor before me. And I think I'm becoming
> an adequate researcher in our profession—as our
> profession defines it. And I'm much more
> comfortable and see the need for it. And that came
> with a lot of soul searching as I was preparing for
> job interviews because I assumed that would be one
> of the questions that would come up—you know, what
> are your strengths? When I first came to the
> program I would have put little emphasis on
> research. I put more emphasis on it now because I
> think I can fit it into an entire package that you
> develop throughout your career.

Despite this emphasis on research, Doyle went on to say that he simply could not see a way to write while he was teaching.

> The level of focus required on the writing is
> really intense and is really draining. So I don't
> think a person can do it for a long period of

time.  And you cannot just pop in, pop out.  If I
were teaching a class, there's no way I can teach
a class and actually do the dissertation.  There
are some activities that are incompatible.

For those students aspiring to do faculty work,

balancing research and teaching is an essential skill to

learn.  Many of the participants in this study had

difficulty establishing an identity that accommodated this

skill.

What It Means to Be "Working" on the Dissertation (What is
  Academic vs. Non-academic Work?): Effective Work Habits
Theme 3
Amplifying Justin's Story

*I was very conscious about explaining what I was doing in
terms of emphasizing the work that I was doing rather than
the studies, and making sure that someone understood that
this was very professorial type work that I was involved in.
So that it wasn't like I had left [full-time teaching] and I
had an easy life to gain as a student.  I mean, that would
be a big concern because I've always worked really hard.
And I wanted people to understand I was still working.*
                                                    —Justin

New faculty careers are often stopped before they get

started due to procrastination.  Boice (1996) showed the

individual and collective costs of procrastination to the

academy.  Many young academics, who have developed poor work

habits—through as much as 20 years of taking courses and

writing short papers—have gotten away with procrastinating,

and often been quite successful in spite of it.  Due to the

complexity and length of the dissertation, a graduate

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student who continues this ineffective work habit, is likely
to experience great difficulties.

Contributing to their ineffective work habits and
procrastination is that many graduate students have
difficulty defining what it actually means to work in the
academy.  As a faculty friend of mine explained to me, "Lots
of graduate students put in a lot of time on their
dissertations; many are not really working."  Lita further
explained this issue:

> *This is the time* to be working on your
> dissertation.  So it's kind of what I've labeled
> it, largely in hopes that by labeling it as such,
> it will become such.

Justin, who was much more self-disciplined than the
other graduate students I interviewed, saw work on his
dissertation as similar to work on his house, where he was
breaking the big project of renovating his house into small
chunks.  He was able to extend habits of working hard as a
youngster (in blue-collar type work) to habits that are
required to write an effective dissertation.  Fred, on the
other hand, seemed not to learn from his past practices and
had difficulty seeing the cost of his habits.

> Procrastination is a matter of fact...it's
> interesting; when I'm working on the dissertation
> I actually enjoy it.  But there is probably some
> subconscious thing telling me to wait.  When you
> are working on the dissertation, you realize how

much more there is to be done.  When you are not working on it, it is much more manageable.

One of the frequent cries from students working on their dissertations is how much work they are doing.  Most of the students in this study described themselves as hard-working and many stated that they had "workaholic" tendencies.  Working in the sciences, Jay, a microbiology Ph.D. student, considered himself a workaholic as he spent so much time in the lab.  However, he, unlike others, found procrastination to be healthy when he was working on experiments.

> I think procrastination is healthy in the sense that if I did research 100% of the time when I was at the lab, I might get more accomplished, but I probably couldn't because I'd go insane, because my brain would just explode or something.

Like others, Jay stated that it was difficult to wind down after spending time on his research.

> Let me give you an example of that, exactly.  When I go home at night, before I go to sleep, I'll sit and I'll take something that's not related and just read it.  I typically read knights-and-dragons and beat-'em-up type novels.  But the reason why I read something so simplistic is just for basic entertainment value—to shut my mind off.  Otherwise I'll sit there for an hour or two trying to fall asleep thinking about what I was working on that day, or what I need to work on the next day, or what I need to work on that week.  I have to shut my brain down.

For many writers, finding a routine and a flow was an important component in making progress.  Doyle, whose

defense in economics had been scheduled when we talked, described his day as a family man and dissertation writer.

> But in terms of the day itself, I'll usually get up when the kids go off to school. And then I'll work on the computer if I'm not doing something the rest of the day. And then I'm involved in Cub Scouts—I'm a leader there so I do stuff with that. But generally speaking, I'll work till about 11:30 and then I watch Star Trek. I can motivate myself to at least do something on the computer.

When unable to get into a flow or routine of writing, most of the students in the focus group did what Fred did: They retreated to reading rather than writing. Sarah described it simply, "It used to be the graduate guilt was 'I'm not reading.' And now it's 'I'm not writing.' And then, I just *retreat* to reading! If nothing else, I'll read something." Likely, if students were provided help in defining what academic work entails, they would be much more likely to develop a positive and fulfilling academic identity. In addition, avoiding procrastination would help to sustain an academic identity that could lead to a more productive academic future.

<u>Working Collaboratively to Working Independently</u>
Theme 4
<u>Amplifying Lita's Story</u>

*I find it fairly isolating. When you go through a transition, I mean, I know hardly any of the grad students anymore than when I first came. When I was taking courses with them, I knew everybody. Now I have my own computer at*

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*home; I work at home a lot. I'm writing. There's a lot of new faces I don't know.*

*—Doyle, economics ABD*

Like Doyle's experience, Lita's experience of working for many years on a larger project while not being able to complete her dissertation led to her seeing a great deal of transition as people got jobs and left her behind. She described her reaction, "I feel like, gosh, everybody's leaving, and I want to leave, too. I don't want to be left behind."

However, the sense of loneliness does not come only from taking too much time to complete the dissertation. Most graduate programs are quite good at developing environments that are very collaborative and highly social for students taking courses. However, for students at the dissertation stage, programs tend to be much less successful in maintaining this environment. (A few exceptions are beginning to emerge. See Promising Practices regarding the Dissertation in Re-envisioning the Ph.D.—http://www.grad. Washington.edu/envision.) For students whose personality and learning styles have been established in highly social environments, the solitary nature of the dissertation process can be an extremely lonely experience.

Paula, a French literature ABD, described the struggle

many graduate students experience during the dissertation-

writing process.

> My dilemma is trying to maintain the bonds between
> social life and academic work, and the lack of
> satisfaction to do both at the same time.  I tend
> to be happy with either the work at school or with
> my personal life, and then I feel guilty for that.

Tom, an engineering ABD, had a historical perspective

since he had been in graduate school since 1986, when there

was little technology available.  He believed that the

personal computer and e-mail had resulted in the feelings of

isolation that he and other dissertation writers experience.

> One thing I noticed in our department in the pre-
> PC days, or before people had their own PC at
> home, was that our level of camaraderie was much
> higher.  And now that people tend to have their
> own computer or even if they're using a
> departmental computer, people are cloistered more
> with their machine and not really collaborating as
> much with other grad students as a group.  The
> people who are doing lab work, they're still with
> their cadre of people who tend to be fairly
> constant.  But the level of camaraderie from when
> I started to now is much diminished.  However, I
> think the camaraderie among the faculty has also
> diminished.  I've heard that in terms of just
> being tied to that PC and e-mail, so I see a real
> loss in the late '90s versus the late '80s.

A graduate student who is not progressing in the

dissertation and is feeling isolated and alone may begin to

think others have it easier.  Sarah (another ABD student in

English), who longed for more social interactions, believed
that others must have it easier.

> There's the real world and these people have a
> life and they're happy and they can go to the
> movies when they want and they can enjoy nature
> and they have families and they have a house. I'm
> sure they have problems too, but they didn't kill
> themselves for years and condemn themselves to a
> life of grief and poverty for nothing. That's
> just the way it seems now as I'm mired in the
> dissertation.

Paul (the zoology ABD) had a similar description:

> I'm not really sure how to evaluate it. I don't
> know that they really have had it any easier or
> not, but it seems like they've come to their
> conclusion more readily. So I suppose call it a
> little bit of sour grapes, but it does appear to
> me that there are some people who've managed to
> pull all this together. Their research and their
> degree work came easier and they have had to
> struggle less.

> Finally, Doyle (the economics ABD), whose dissertation

defense had been scheduled, discussed his experience of

having no one to really talk with as he became more

specialized in his research.

> You get to a point where when I was running the
> simulations, and especially the computer
> programming, the best people I knew couldn't help
> me. I was running into glitches in the actual
> programming language that people hadn't found.
> And so you get out there and you're on a frontier
> and you can talk to your colleagues about what
> you're doing, but after a while they get kind of
> sick of it. It's like grandparents showing
> pictures of their grandchildren all the time.
> You're just sort of boring them to death. But you
> do get out there where you're the one who actually
> knows best about the theory. You're not finding

anybody else who's of much benefit, even from the
committee.  So when you're out there, sort of on
the edge, almost by definition that isolates you.
And then the writing, you can cycle it through
with the major professor and occasionally you
maybe find another grad student who'll look over
some stuff.  But they're usually involved in their
coursework and can't afford the time to help.
Since I finished up, I've been in on the editing
of, what, about three masters theses and two
dissertations for other people, just because I
understand what they're going through.

Doyle's willingness to help his future colleagues suggested

a promising possibility, as many of the participants in this

study did not have individuals to turn to when they felt

lonely and isolated writing the dissertation.  All of the

individuals I interviewed experienced some difficulty

concerning writing in isolation.

<u>Owning the Process and the Product vs.</u>
<u>Pleasing Others In the Dissertation Process</u>
<u>Theme 5</u>

*...at no point, though, would I ever let someone take over*
*this project—that I'm certain of.  But I've been very open*
*to the wisdom and suggestions that people have made.*
—*Justin*

Justin epitomized the graduate student who takes

ownership of the program and the dissertation.  Justin's

ability to persevere even after resigning from his

assistantship and losing his data exemplified his will to

succeed and his ability to not let anyone or anything stand

in the way of his goal.  In contrast, Lita and Joanne, both

worked very hard to figure out how to please their advisors, and thus, languished in their writing. Though Justin did not worry about pleasing others with his skill in writing, he did worry about the ability to show others that he was working hard at it.

Much of school for many students was about figuring out a way to please professors in order to get the best grade. Early on, children change from intrinsic to extrinsic learners in school, seeking ways to please and get rewarded externally for learning. These habits can be particularly difficult for graduate students, who, in general, have been in school their entire lives. A doctoral student in English, Donna, having completing her preliminary exams and in the process of writing her dissertation explained:

> I can never figure out what they want. I mean, the same thing happened in prelims and I spent *so* much time studying that it put me way back in terms of my own timeline to finish, and since they aren't clear about things, the students lose. I lost. I'm worried I'll never figure out what is needed and end up like [names her friend] whose been doing this [dissertation] for three years.

Joanne, in particular, struggled with pleasing others. She spent a great deal of time discussing what eminent scholars her mentors and advisors were and how important it was for her to study with them. If her writing was not

adequate in their eyes, it stymied her progress, sometimes for many months.

In order to establish an academic identity that results in progress on the dissertation and ultimately completion of the product, one has to tackle the demon of wanting to please others and learn to own the dissertation process. The student of French literature, Paula, who was very close to completion, said it succinctly when another member of the focus group asked for a tip about advisors. She responded bluntly, "You can't please everyone, so I'd suggest you just work hard to please yourself."

Jay was a microbiologist who had not yet officially started his dissertation, but was doing research in the lab. He explained how he planned to complete his writing:

> You've just kind of got to be diligent enough or stubborn enough or persistent enough. I don't know what it is, but you just have to somehow convince yourself that it is worthwhile, and I am going to eventually accomplish this goal. And you're going to really, really have to convince yourself that it's worth it. Because if you can't convince yourself it's worth it, you feel like you're wasting your time, and wasting a lot of it. I mean, five or six years is a big chunk of my life.

## Ambivalence: Not Knowing What One Wants for the Future
### Theme 6

*And I would say that my life has been defined by a lot of ambivalence. I mean, I didn't get married until I was 34. I didn't have children until I was 37. And I have a lot of*

*ambivalence about finishing. I mean, what for?  And I had*
*ambivalence about going in.  But I loved being there.*

*—Joanne*

*I have a very clear image of the next three years, the kind*
*of work that I'm going to be doing to make myself as*
*marketable as possible.  I will contact several publishers*
*to see if I can meet with them and share pieces of my*
*dissertation and see if I can get a book contract by*
*December.  It would mean trying to get a book done within*
*that three-year time frame.*

*—Justin*

One of the most prevalent factors in progressing on the

dissertation and establishing a positive academic identity

was whether a student knew what his or her future entailed.

Many of the graduate students that I interviewed came into

the program with ambivalence, were unclear about whether

their dissertation topic was the right one, or were unsure

of the question in the study.  Repeatedly students

experiencing these uncertainties found themselves in an

academic identity crisis and faced slowed progress.  Joanne,

Lita and Fred had each been planning on completing their

dissertations and seeking professorships.  But, as mentioned

previously, by the end of our interview time together, none

of them was certain whether faculty life was the proper

goal.  Each of them had experienced ambivalence in entering

the program.  Joanne had been persuaded to apply, Lita had

applied as a default, and Fred had deferred admission his

first year.

However, ambivalence at entry was not necessarily predictive of success, as Justin had also "fallen" into the program (as a result of meeting his life partner, who attended the school, and his subsequent four-hour meeting with a professor). The difference between Justin and the rest was that once he was in the program, he set a clear path to completion.

The focus group participants who were having the most difficulty writing shared similar stories regarding not being certain what they wanted. Kent was an economics Ph.D. candidate who was blocked in his proposal writing. When he described graduate school, he stated that one reason for his struggle was his ambivalence toward being there and how this had changed since he was admitted.

> I think I went in for all the wrong reasons. I
> mean, I don't get excited by research. I don't
> get excited with learning tons of new knowledge.
> I know that sounds crazy being in graduate school.
> But I found out it's not really me. And so when I
> go...when I might go to a social event and people
> are talking about what they do, I'm thinking,
> "Gosh, I can't stand this. I can't stand being in
> graduate school."

Similarly, Sarah, a Ph.D. student in French, had become ambivalent about her future since she had heard that the job market was tight. She wondered aloud to the group about what else she could do and why she had even gone into graduate school in the first place.

This led her to say simply, "I'm so stuck in dissertation mode, the only aspiration I have for the future is to be alive."

In contrast, the students in math and sciences believed they had more opportunities for jobs in the private sector, and thus, they appeared to be less slowed by not knowing what they wanted to do next. John, a statistics Ph.D. student who was progressing well on his degree, stated,

> I do feel a little bit of drift in a sense that I don't know where I'm going. I mean, yeah, I feel quite confident that I'm going to finish the Ph.D.—maybe in as quick as a year. When I came here I was more convinced that I wanted to teach, but I guess I've always flown by the seat of my pants, so to speak. I decided to get a Ph.D. and it was probably about a month before I applied. And I decided to study statistics because it was what my advisor did and I liked the guy. Now I'm thinking about working in an investment bank.

Joe, the only participant in the study who had completed his dissertation (in English), offered this helpful advice to those uncertain about the future and/or their dissertation.

> I had waited until literally the last day to turn in my dissertation. I mean, I was the one who slid into the graduate school with my dissertation just before the doors closed. I did it [finished the dissertation] because I didn't want to have to pay for another credit the next semester. I don't think you have to know where this [the degree] will take you. I sure didn't, but you do have to *want* to be finished.

*I would say that I was good at writing.  I liked being good
at it more than I liked doing it.  I think it was only when
I had an assignment that I would write.  I wouldn't say that
writing was ever enjoyable to me.*

—Fred

Though each interview participant had done well

academically in writing, particularly on short papers, only

Justin appeared to really love and have a passion for

writing.  Focus group participants, particularly those in

English, loved writing but had similar difficulties to those

of the individual interview participants in writing the

dissertation.  Stating that she felt "perpetually blocked"

on her dissertation, Sarah, the ABD in French, described her

progress.

> When I started out I could see things very far
> away and what I could see was good—sun, flowers,
> something good.  But then I got to the bottom of
> the hill in my program and started my
> dissertation.  Things started to get in my way and
> people, menacing people saying things, like, "You
> can't do it," or "Don't do it."  And then, there
> are just so many obstacles that I can't see the
> good things anymore.

Sarah went on to say that she had lost the love of writing

that she had brought to the program.

Success in writing papers in graduate school did not

seem to correlate with ease in writing the dissertation.

For example, Paula, the French literature ABD, shared a

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story of a dissertation support group member who once had a

passion for writing, but now was stifled.

> A very close friend of mine is in a really
> horrible position and can't get out of it.  I
> mean, I even said to her, "If I could knock you on
> the head and give you amnesia about this whatever
> these barriers are."  I mean, she's in quicksand.
> And just is, like, holding there.  Can't get up.
> We won't let her go any lower, but she can't get
> out of it.  She's just in this quicksand.  I have
> no idea how to help her.  And it's like it's
> compounding interest every day.  Every day she
> doesn't finish just adds to the reason why she
> can't write.  And she doesn't know how to get out
> of it.  I don't know how to help her get out of
> it.  She seems to no longer love writing.  And
> it's constant.  But I don't feel that.  I mean, I
> do feel that some days I have jumped the Empire
> State Building in progress and really loved
> writing, and other days it's like I couldn't make
> it up the first step.  I know I can make it up
> just one step.  I only have to write an inch.  I
> tell myself those things.

In contrast, Justin described that even after his

inability to write in undergraduate school, he came to love

reading and writing.  He described his ability to think

through writing.  This was something that Lita started to do

while she was teaching, but could not seem to sustain in her

dissertation writing.

> Eventually it started being that I would just
> write to think.  And it would actually be in the
> writing that I'd do some of my best thinking and
> explore problems and things like that.

For some, their identity as someone who enjoyed writing

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prior to starting the long, complex dissertation process was

lost once they started the project.

The Words and Advice of Advisors,
and Their Powerful Consequences
Theme 8

*I kind of decided to take Title I only because it was a
program I knew my advisor was interested in.*

*And I got this note back from my advisor that was—it was
mean!  It was the first time he'd ever been mean to me in
like, five years or so.  But it said something like, "I
don't know why we're meeting or what we're meeting for, but
we [the two faculty members] are both very busy people and
we have a lot of students."  It was kind of like, "I don't
know who you think you are taking up all my time."  And that
really put a screeching halt on everything I did.*

                                                    *—Joanne*

The dissertation-writing process and the role of

advisors were intertwined for most of these participants.  I

learned from Joanne, in particular, the power that advisors'

words and advice could have on a student's ability to

sustain writing, and the influence they could have on a

student's developing a sustaining and positive academic

identity.  Others also described the power and influence

their advisors had on their confidence and their abilities

to make sustained progress.  Theresa, an ABD in French,

described the role of her chair.

> There's so much personal risk to this work that I
> don't think you ever realize until you're into it.
> There's so much personal risk.  I just will be
> mortified to go to my chair with nothing.  It's

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such a face-threatening place to be. There's so
much personal risk to this.

However, some participants interacted with their

advisors with very different results from Joanne's or

Theresa's. When he discussed what happened when he sought

advice and assistance from his advisors on his dissertation,

Kent, the economics ABD, described it this way:

> I find that when you get too high you're knocked
> down. And when you're at your lowest a lot of
> times you get knocked up again. You do something
> you think is bad, and then it turns out that the
> work paid off. So I think it's always kind of
> balancing out your ego in a way. That's been a
> recurring theme for me.

Tom, the engineering ABD, having been in graduate

school for more than 10 years, described his relationship

with his committee in ways that explained why he had taken

such a long time to complete his program. His philosophy

included not worrying about timelines.

> I worked a bit differently with my committee. I
> mean, it's very hard to put time limits on these
> things [dissertations], and if you really keep the
> time limits, I think you end up losing in the
> quality. There is a real trade-off there. I've
> seen people who did come in and do their Ph.D. in
> three and a half years, and I looked at the
> quality of that work, and by and large, I'm not
> impressed with what they did. I mean, everyone
> signed off on it, but I looked at what they really
> achieved and there's really not a whole a lot
> there. That probably goes a great way to explain
> why so many dissertations just sit on the shelf.

Some students described their relationship with their

committee and advisors as very positive.  These

relationships resulted in the students feeling very much

like colleagues with their advisors while in graduate

school.  Nancy explained what it was like for her.

> I feel like I've been treated like a colleague
> almost from the day I got here.  I don't feel like
> I'm just a grad student—a glorified grad student.
> Of course, I'm the type of person that if somebody
> has a plan, that's great.  I'm more of a detail
> person so I don't mind.  I don't have to be the
> one who comes up with the plan.  So a lot of times
> I rely on my committee to help guide the
> framework, or what it should look like. I don't
> mind them helping me build a fence, in some sense
> that way.  So I really have enjoyed the
> relationship there.  And that's what has really
> made it worthwhile for me.

## Summary: What Was Gained?

Analyzing the data from the focus group participants

across the individual cases provided a rich set of data that

produced a better understanding about the role the

dissertation plays in academic identity development.

Specifically, the first four themes identified confirmed

that the individual stories were not idiosyncratic to those

individuals.  The amplification of the individual stories by

the members of the focus groups helped to confirm the

importance of issues and dilemmas such as becoming an expert

versus feeling like an imposter, or balancing research and

teaching during the dissertation process.  In addition,

through the analysis of the data across all participants, the final four themes emerged and broadened the understanding and complexity of these issues.

Taken collectively, these eight themes generally can be categorized very broadly into factors that are predominantly external, predominantly internal, or both external and internal. External factors are those that are beyond the control of the student, and internal factors are those that the student can control and change. The list below shows this broad categorization:

Theme 1: Expert vs. imposter
Predominantly internal

Theme 2: Balancing teaching and research
Both

Theme 3: Work habits and procrastination
Predominantly internal

Theme 4: Working collaboratively vs. in isolation
Both

Theme 5: Owning the process vs. pleasing others
Predominantly internal

Theme 6: Ambivalence
Predominantly internal

Theme 7: Passion for writing
Predominantly internal

Theme 8: The words and advice of advisors
Predominantly external

I use this categorization for the purpose of showing the complexity of the issues that emerged from this data.

The delineation of the external and internal factors that shape academic identity development during the dissertation process points towards implications for change, which I will explore in the final chapter.

Though not all encompassing, the eight themes that emerged across the stories of all the participants exemplify the variety of issues that face dissertation writers, and thus, the role these issues have in influencing the development of a sustaining academic identity.

CHAPTER 9

WHAT WAS LEARNED: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE
RESEARCH

What role does the dissertation play in future faculty

members "becoming scholars and developing effective and

sustaining academic identities"?  In this chapter, I discuss

the three major findings of the study; the recommendations

from the stories that point towards policy implications for

graduate programs, faculty members, and students; and,

finally, the benefits of this type of research as well as

ideas for future research in this area.

## What was Learned: Three Major Findings

I began this study to determine how the dissertation-

writing process contributes to or influences a student's

sense of academic identity.  I studied four aspiring faculty

members individually and also conducted focus groups in

order to provide insight into the above over-arching

question.  What follows are three major findings.

**1) The dissertation writing process is a major
transition period for students.**

I began this study suspecting that the dissertation

writing process would be a critical transition in the lives

of graduate students and would influence the development of

an academic identity.  Using definitions from theories of

transition, which were discussed in chapter 2, the cases

meet the criteria for defining this time in students' life

as a transition.  Each of the participants articulated

changes that took place in post-coursework and comprehensive

exams, and noted how they had changed as they either

successfully progressed or were stymied while writing the

dissertation.  Transition theories helped me make sense of

the interviews and enabled me to develop insights into how

students might manage the dissertation process by

understanding and acknowledging the critical points of the

transition of moving from coursework to dissertation

writing.  In addition, because the dissertation process is

an important transition for students, this time in their

lives deserves serious attention by advisors, students, and

graduate school departments.

**2) Students ask important questions of themselves during the dissertation writing process and the answers to these questions lead to critical internal tensions that influence academic identity development.**

The participants I interviewed asked themselves two

critical questions ("Who am I becoming as an academic?" and

"What does academic work mean?") during the dissertation

stage of their graduate programs.  The answers to these

questions created deeper tensions for the participants to

try to resolve, and resulted in what might be called

competing images of the self. These competing images

influenced the development of the participants' academic

identities.

The question, "Who am I becoming?" resulted in the
following tensions:

1. expert feelings vs. imposter feelings;
2. teacher vs. researcher.

The question, "What does academic work mean to me?"
resulted in the following tensions:

3. academic work habits vs. non-academic work habits;
4. collaborative (social) work vs. individual (lonely)
   work.

Additional images, issues, and dilemmas emerged from

the focus group participants, as well as from the key

respondents. By highlighting the role the dissertation

played in developing an academic identity, the stories point

toward answers for those struggling to write dissertations,

and for faculty and programs that are trying to help them.

Throughout this study I have explored the internal,

psychological, maturational, and developmental elements of

academic identity. I defined "academic identity" as

*the multiplicity of people, things, thoughts, feelings, and
behaviors that contribute to the development of who one is
and becomes in the academy. It is the moving intersection
between the inner and the outer forces that help one
understand oneself in the confines of an academic
institution and/or discipline.*

I explored what Anderson and Swazey (1998) called "shedding

one's previous self conception and taking on a new view of the self that reflects one's role and membership in the new group" (p.12). While working on the dissertation, the participants defined their academic identity through their own internal thoughts and personal histories, as well as through influences of advisors, friends, family, academic cultures, and roles in graduate school (e.g., teacher, researcher, student). All participants viewed their experiences as progressing and developing from graduate student to dissertation writer. Some struggled to gain a sense of developing as a scholar and, in turn, had difficulty writing. Others, like Justin, made the transition with much more ease.

Specifically, we can make connections in the four individual stories to the tensions regarding academic identity and the dissertation:

*Joanne's connection to the Imposter Syndrome.* For Joanne (and others) the dissertation process reinforced or created the impostor syndrome, or an intense feeling of fraudulence in the face of success and achievement.

Joanne's story exposed in great deal this internal sense of lack of preparation and how it played out via the imposter phenomenon. It highlighted an obstacle that can influence and stifle many young academics who appear

confident on the outside but are frightened on the inside.
Joanne reminds faculty to be careful about assumptions based
solely on public performance, and that faculty should
remember to ask and explore private fears that may be
slowing an individual's progress.

*Fred's connection to Classroom Identity and
Procrastination.* Fred helped us to see a common problem
that plagues many dissertation writers and frustrates many
graduate school administrators and faculty advisors. That
is, while successfully learning to teach, many dissertation
writers struggle to balance teaching and research/writing.
In Fred's case, the issue was further complicated by his
tendency to procrastinate, even to the point of using his
teaching as a method of procrastination. To be a successful
academic, it is vital to become an effective classroom
teacher, but it is equally important to develop research and
writing skills. Fred's story revealed the difficulties of
balancing these skills that face many would-be academics.

*Justin's connection to Scholarly Work Habits.* Justin
illuminated the requisite skills to successfully manage the
multiple roles of a faculty member, and showed how important
it was to truly understand the difference between academic
and non-academic work during his dissertation. Justin
applied effective work habits and learned to manage his

time.  He worked to discipline himself and overcame multiple obstacles in his life, some of which were revealed during the dissertation writing process.  These traits, skills, and lessons learned during his dissertation provided important insights into how the dissertation process affects academic identity and how one becomes a scholar.

*Lita's connection to Collaborative Research*.  Lita demonstrated the obstacles and difficulties one encounters by using data from a larger research project for the dissertation.  Lita's vivid descriptions of her struggles to determine who owned the data and how it would be used in a dissertation showed specific dilemmas often encountered by students.  For example, in hindsight Lita had become much more aware of how important it was to think more carefully about what ideas were hers and what ideas were shared with the research group, and to write down to whom each idea belonged.  In addition, Lita's learning about the complexity of moving from a more social, collegial research project to a lonelier, solitary dissertation process provided important clues to the kinds of support systems needed to help graduate students develop a productive academic identity.  For example, Lita would have benefited from a faculty mentor to help her navigate and learn how to use data from a larger research project for a single project.

By exploring fully the influence the dissertation has on developing an academic identity, we can begin to uncover new understandings about this period of time for graduate students. For example, we can learn what is required to fully prepare students to move from coursework to dissertation writing. Advisors can learn and pay attention to signs that students are ready to write and identify issues for those who are not.

**3) Most students struggle when left on their own to manage the above tensions. The costs can be great for graduate programs and for higher education as they lose capable students.**

This study extended the research and literature on the ABD problem in graduate school. In particular, the dilemmas, issues, struggles, successes, and obstacles expressed by the participants brought specificity to the findings from larger studies reputed in the literature regarding the difficulty, particularly in the social sciences, for students to finish degrees. This study provided specific examples (e.g., Joanne not owning the dissertation process, Lita not knowing which part of the dissertation was hers, Fred procrastinating by teaching more than writing) of how the nature of dissertation process itself can exacerbate the time-to-degree problem pointed out by Bowen and Rudenstine (1992), Menand (1996), Kerlin (1997)

and Golde & Dore (2001).

Though this study is predominantly about the lives of only four students, this research is consistent with other national data that exposes the need for reforming graduate schools (Austin, 2002; Golde & Dore, 2001; Anderson & Swazey, 1998, Association of American Universities, 1998). In particular, this study provided an in-depth analysis of what is happening during the dissertation writing stage of a graduate student's program and the influence of this critical transition period on the formation of a sustaining and positive academic identity.

The "Re-envisioning the Ph.D. Project," directed by Jody Nyquist, Associate Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Washington and sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts provides reports, strategies, and a literature base pertaining to reforming the Ph.D. process (see www.grad.washington.edu/envision). Based on these reports and extending some of the recommendations made by Austin (2002), I provide several recommendations and implications for graduate departments and schools, for faculty advisors, and for graduate students themselves. Understanding of the role the dissertation plays in developing sustaining academic identities should help faculty members and students ensure the success of the dissertation writing process.

## Recommendations and Implications from this Research

In a time when there is great need to replace retiring faculty members, universities need to find ways for graduate students to develop coherent, sustaining academic identities. Graduate programs should be concerned about the critical transition that occurs during the dissertation writing process and the subsequent formation of academic identity. Based on the findings from this study, which parallel other research findings. I offer implications and recommendations for Deans, Department Chairs, and Graduate programs, for faculty advisors, and, finally, for graduate students.

The dissertation clearly influences how graduate students see themselves (their identity) as academics. What one becomes, what one says to oneself, and what sorts of support systems are in place during graduate school influence and contribute to the ability to complete a program and a dissertation. The respondents in this study provided insights into how programs, advisors, and other students (the environment) might be structured to ensure that the dissertation process positively influences a sense of who the student is becoming in the process.

<u>Recommendations for Deans and Department Chairs who lead</u>
<u>Programs</u>

Though this dissertation was primarily based on student
experiences in a college of education, many parallel themes
were evident in the comments of the focus group participants
who studied in other disciplines. I now consider what
graduate schools, departments, and programs might do to
address some of the issues raised in this study in order to
help dissertation writers develop sustaining academic
identities.

*Provide clear and detailed expectations to dissertation*
*writers.* In order to help students effectively write a
dissertation that results in the development of a positive
academic identity, graduate program faculty need to provide
detailed verbal and written expectations about the process.
An example might be to provide forums and panels to help
early graduate students understand what is to come at the
end of their programs. These forums would help students
begin to prepare for this transition. Showing students the
end of the process as they begin that process might prove
promising. Deans and department chairs should provide new
faculty with specific training on how to advise students
throughout their program, particularly at the dissertation
stage. Deans, program directors, and faculty can also work

to create collaborative and supportive environments for dissertation writers which could include structured and formalized peer groups and mentor programs (see "Promising Practices in Doctoral Education on the Topic of The Dissertation in Re-Envisioning the Ph.D." for other innovative programs—http://www.grad.washington.edu /envision).

*Work habits seminars.* Few productive and successful scholars describe their work habits in detail; however, department chairs and deans could ask faculty members to create seminars where they share the work habits that help them to flourish while balancing multiple roles in the academy. In addition, students who have successfully defended their dissertations could be asked to discuss their work habits with those in the proposal stage. It may be helpful for faculty to require frequent and periodic "check-ins" during which students discuss with advisors and peers the work and work habits that the students are developing as they engage in this solitary activity.

*Provide alternative forms of the dissertation.* Many in the academy (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Damrosch, 1995; Menand, 1996; Golde & Dore, 2001; Austin, 2002) are offering a range of suggestions for changing, shortening, or removing the dissertation process (Berelson, 1960). Two such

suggestions are promising responses to some of the issues faced by the participants in this study.

First, programs could adopt what one individual in this study called the "three-paper" dissertation. The goal is to create three short publishable papers that are related in some way. This model prepares the dissertation writer for the kind of practice that is common for new faculty members. Secondly, programs could explore the possibility of co-authored, collaborative dissertations where students research and study together. This idea could assist students who feel isolated and lonely during dissertation writing. This model also mimics the common experience of many faculty members in working and publishing research with colleagues. Exploring and providing alternative forms to the dissertation may well help to influence the academic identity of aspiring faculty members positively.

These ideas are not all new and some have already been instituted (e.g., the three-paper model has some precedence in the sciences but very little in the humanities and social sciences). Barriers to these approaches include the resistance of the academy to change. The "I did it that way when I went to graduate school, so you should too" mentality exists. In addition, some institutions and faculty members will resist change because they do not have standards

against which to measure the new approaches. Questions such as "Are the new approaches rigorous enough?" or "Do they really train students effectively?" will be asked. These barriers have influenced potential change for at least 40 years (Berelson, 1960), and bringing new ideas to reality will require innovative and nationally powerful graduate programs to lead the way.

Recommendations for Faculty Advisors

Faculty mentors and advisors have a tremendous role in and responsibility for helping graduate students successfully complete the dissertation, and develop and form a successful academic identity. I offer the following suggestions to faculty advisors and mentors interested in helping advisees avoid some of the issues that faced the respondents in the study.

*Listen carefully to students in order to understand how they are developing their academic identity.* In order to effectively advise students, faculty members must take an active role in the lives of students and carefully listen to what students are saying. As was described by most of the participants in this study, students can be intimidated and find it difficult to discuss dissertation writing struggles with faculty members. Faculty members need to get to know their advisees well enough to recognize subtle differences

in their lives that may occur during the dissertation

process.  Setting up frequent meetings with advisees during

the writing process to discuss both their dissertation

product and their academic identity would be particularly

beneficial.  Most faculty members have experience helping

students to complete the dissertation product, but few think

about how the dissertation is influencing the students'

identity.  I suggest the following questions to ask

advisees.

1. How have you changed since beginning to research and
   write the dissertation?

2. What kinds of things have you been telling yourself
   as you work on the dissertation?

3. Describe a typical day as you "work" on your
   dissertation.  Particularly, I am curious about how
   you are balancing your research, your teaching, and
   other aspects of your life.

4. Are you struggling with procrastination?  [If yes,]
   in what ways?  Can you talk with me about that?

5. What do you see yourself "becoming" as you write?

*Understanding the differences between advisors and*

*their students.*  By the time students reach the dissertation

stage of the Ph.D. process, many have developed good

relationships with faculty members.  Students choose

advisors to chair their dissertations with whom they have

research interests in common.  For faculty members, it is

important to recognize the difference between one's own

academic identity and that of the students. As was true for Joanne, Lita, and Fred, a student's research interests, choice of career, or life circumstances may change or be influenced by the dissertation process itself. It is important for faculty not to relive their own early career (and dissertation process) through the lives of their advisees. It is important for advisors to understand the differences between a "star" student's life and the faculty member's own academic life.

*Help dissertation writers with their academic work habits.* New research findings about preparing graduate students for faculty roles in the academy suggest that programs are not doing particularly well. In fact, this research showed that the preparation learned in graduate school often is at odds with what new faculty members really need to know to be successful (Anderson & Swazey, 1998; Austin, 2002; Golde & Dore 2001; Nyquist, 1999). Aspiring faculty members need to understand the work habits that are required to be successful, particularly in research universities where there is a premium on balancing teaching, research, and service. How to create support systems and structures to overcome tendencies towards perfectionism and procrastination are important abilities to teach. As Boice (1996) states, procrastination by new faculty members in the

academy has dire consequences for individuals and for departments and programs. Helping students with these issues at the dissertation stage can be essential for success in the future.

*Develop collegial relationships.* Successful faculty-student relationships described by participants in this study showed that if students were treated as junior colleagues, they felt more confident. The culture that is created by the faculty is an important step in this process. The department should be very clear at admission about what it means to be a junior colleague and what students can expect from faculty and what will be expected of the students. It is important that faculty members balance their critique of students' work with both kindness and encouragement. Further, faculty members must remember the power of their words and advice, even with very successful and talented students. As was experienced by Joanne, faculty members, particularly busy ones, can unwittingly and unintentionally derail students' progress and sense of self by not taking the time to explain their own hectic circumstances or schedules. It is important to communicate effectively to positively influence both a student's progress and his or her academic identity.

*Learn and be an expert on the dissertation process.* It

is essential that each advisor become an expert about the intricacies of the dissertation milieu at his or her university. It is important for students to have a single, reliable resource to help navigate issues that may arise during the dissertation process. Advisors should minimally know what office can provide information regarding dates, expectations, rules, and resources for dissertation writers.

*Support students who choose non-academic careers or are unsure of a career choice.* Students aspiring to be future faculty members may change their minds during the dissertation process. It is important for faculty to work just as closely with those students who are considering non-academic careers or who are unsure of their career directions as with those who are committed to academic lives. In addition, effective career guidance by faculty members can help students develop into "academics" or "scholars" who happen to work outside the academy.

## Recommendations for Graduate Students Writing Their Dissertations

I offer these suggestions to assist students in seeing how the dissertation process can influence their academic identities.

*Learn what kind of work and what work habits are required to be an effective academic.* Learning what work is

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required to be an effective academic is difficult for students (Anderson, 1998; Austin, 2002; Golde, 1996; Golde & Dore, 2001; Nyquist, et al., 1999). One lesson provided by the cases in this study is that students must be willing to ask questions of advisors, mentors, and peers regarding what is required to complete the dissertation, and must be assertive about asking. In addition, students need to be willing to listen, learn, and adapt to the new environment that is created when they move from coursework to dissertation writing. Also, learning to work collaboratively with faculty members is an essential skill for future dissertation writers developing effective academic identities.

*Own the dissertation process.* The dissertation is unique to the individual. No one else looks at exactly the same literature, asks the exact same questions, and comes up with the exact same solutions or conclusions. In order to create a product and a process where doctoral students find their footing, academically speaking, they must own the dissertation. Taking responsibility for and fighting for ideas are important steps to successful academic identity development.

*Self-reflection: Keep a journal for progress, thoughts, and feelings.* Taking time to reflect on one's progress,

emotions, and future is time well spent (Schön, 1987). Many of the participants said that they benefited from the interview process because it gave them an opportunity to think and to reflect. Keeping and frequently updating (minimally, once per month) a journal would help a student to think more carefully about how he or she is changing during the dissertation process (Austin, 2002). Thinking carefully about some of the following questions might provide a start for new dissertation writers in determining what it means to "become a scholar."

1. How have I changed from a person who is taking courses to a person who is writing a dissertation?

2. What progress have I made on the dissertation? What obstacles are in the way? What can I do to remove, alleviate, or cope with these obstacles?

3. What is on the agenda, specifically, for the next time I talk with my dissertation chair? [Include details about the dissertation process, current personal issues while writing or teaching, and future issues or concerns. Create an agenda for each meeting to organize yourself.]

4. What kinds of things am I saying to myself as I write the dissertation? How do I increase positive self-talk and decrease the negative?

5. What are my goals for the future? What have I learned about what is required to be a faculty member? With whom do I talk if my goals have changed?

*Ask for help and develop coping skills to deal with the solitary activity of writing a complex product.* Successful

graduate students are often wary of seeking assistance;

after all, they have navigated many years of schooling,

achieving very high marks in the process. This tendency to

avoid assistance, whether from peers, faculty members, or

campus counseling centers can stall many dissertation

writers for life. Learning appropriate coping skills as one

moves from the more social nature of academic coursework to

the more solitary life of a dissertation writer can lead to

success (Austin, 2002). Asking for help does not mean that

a student is not "smart." In fact, asking for help may be

the "smartest" thing a person can do to develop an effective

academic identity for the future.

## What Benefits are Gained from This Type of Research?

The goals of this study were to shed light on the

student experience and the role of the dissertation in

developing sustaining identities. Unlike survey research

(see Golde & Dore, 2001), this research was not intended and

did not produce findings that can be generalized across a

large population. However, the advantage of this research

is that it provides the reader with a detailed and powerful

picture of the actual experience lived by graduate students.

The hope was to invite the reader into the lives of these

people and provide a different kind of understanding—an

understanding in which the reader tries to comprehend how the individuals studied think and feel.

This research uncovered new insights and provided a more thorough understanding of complex problems and issues that dissertation writers face. More stories are needed to examine the complicated lives of aspiring faculty members and to uncover more issues, obstacles, and concerns that face graduate students.

## What Future Research is Needed?

As has been discussed, close examination of the lives of four aspiring faculty members offered a unique and special understanding of graduate students (e.g., uncovering their private thoughts and fears). To that end, one potential line of research is to extend what was begun in this study. A study comparing academic identity formation from those who have finished the dissertation to those who ran out of time or chose not to complete the program might be one possibility. In addition, research could be undertaken to study all aspects of graduate students' lives (graduate school admission, coursework, comprehensive exams, each year of programs) in addition to the dissertation process. Furthermore, a more comprehensive look at the lives of graduate students, including childhood and previous

education, would provide more information about the influences on academic identity development in graduate school, in a way similar to the four-year longitudinal national study on graduate student socialization conducted by Nyquist, et al. (1996). Finally, because discipline-specific experiences can create significant differences among graduate students, it would be helpful to study students from a variety of disciplines. The purpose of continuing this kind of case-based research would be to provide a deeper and richer understanding of students that may well promote the much called for changes in the graduate school education process (Anderson, 1998; Association, 1998; Austin, 2002; Nyquist, 1999).

Chris Golde and Tim Dore have recently completed a survey of over 4,100 students exploring how graduate schools prepare their graduate students for careers. Continuing to identify and follow up on the experiences of a subset of these students through individual cases could provide powerful stories to help us better understand graduate students and the role the dissertation plays in developing academic identities.

Faculty advisors could also be studied to see how they view student academic identity development. Finally, graduate programs that currently have services for

dissertation writers could be studied, and data could be collected to determine which services work for which kind of student.

## Final Thought

Understanding the role the dissertation plays in establishing academic identity is a complex and difficult process. However, these stories provide hints about the factors, dilemmas, and issues that contribute to sustaining an effective and productive academic identity for future faculty members. This study contributes to research addressing the question of what it means to "become a scholar." There is much left to do.

# Appendix A

## Working/Semi-Structured INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
## Working title: "Becoming a Scholar: The Search for Academic Identity in Graduate School"

| OPENING REMARKS |
|---|
| Introduction of self, explanation of interview and explanation of project. The project concerns you sharing information on your academic experiences from coursework to comprehensive exams to dissertation writing. Explanation of informed consent and leaving project at any time, Sign off on agreement form to be taped and anonymity protected to the best of my ability. |

**Primary Question:** How do aspiring faculty members derive meaning and identity from the period of time between formal coursework/comprehensive exams to writing the dissertation? What are the particular characteristics of this experience? That is, how do participants describe, explain, feel, understand, share, and interpret this experience?

**Interview 1 Purpose: To obtain information about one's life history in order to put Ph. D. experiences into context.**

### THEME A: Establishing rapport/obtaining academic biographical information

| Item | Possible OBJECTIVES for Establishing Rapport | QUESTIONS | PROBES |
|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | Help interviewee feel comfortable in the interview. (start with questions able to answer with some ease) Obtain relevant information to place in context of their academic experiences to date. | I would like to begin by asking you some essential information about your educational and academic background and general life history to help me get to know you (better) and to put your Ph. D. experiences in context. This will include information up to but not including your entrance into your Ph. D. program. | |
| A2 | | Tell me about yourself including your academic background prior to starting graduate school. Where are you from? Describe your family environment please. What was it liking growing up in? Where did you go to undergraduate school? What was your major? | Did you like writing as an undergrad? What experiences did you have? |

A3

TH

1

| A3 | | When did you start your graduate program? Did you have other experiences between your undergraduate and graduate degree programs?<br><br>Was there elapsed time between your undergraduate and graduate school enrollment? | Why did you choose or want to go to graduate school?<br><br>Why did you choose to study TE/English for your Ph.D.? Why MSU?<br><br>Would you make the same choice if you had it to do over again? How do you feel about your choice? |
| | | What would be the most significant life events for you prior to entering your Ph. D. program? | Follow up on issues (e.g. class, race, crises) that might influence one's identity in graduate school. |
| | | | |

**THEME B:** What are the key characteristics/issues in this period of time and how are they confronted?

<u>Interview 2-3 (4) Purpose: To understand the specifics of the experiences in graduate school</u>

| Item | Possible **OBJECTIVES** for Challenges | QUESTIONS | PROBES |
|------|------|------|------|
| B1 | Overview question used to frame the rest of the interview | This question may take some time but I want to try and make a chronology of your academic experiences in graduate school to date. Beginning with your first year, please provide an overview of your experiences in graduate school. Beginning with your courses, please walk me through your academic experiences and/or your program requirements to date. Describe what you were thinking and feeling. Feel free to use your vita or academic record to help you to remember. If you could note any times that you felt were particularly significant to you in your own mind, that would also be helpful.<br><br>Have there been any gaps in your program (that is, have you been enrolled each semester/term?) | Probe for specific thoughts during post classroom experiences and beginning the dissertation<br><br>How do you think you've changed since enrolling in graduate school? If have, what have been the source of change?<br><br>Do you believe you have changed at all since you've started writing your dissertation? Why? How? Or Why don't you think so?<br><br>What were you thinking and feeling as you completed all of your coursework and began writing your dissertation? How would you describe your emotions during this time?<br><br>Fear? Lonely? Excited?<br><br>Did your habits change during this time? If so, how?<br><br>Describe the process of going from taking classes to now writing your dissertation? |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| B2 | | Tell me about a typical day/week relative to when you were taking courses | |
| B3 | | Tell me about a typical day/week now that you are in the process of writing your dissertation | |
| B4 | | What kinds of things do you remember telling yourself during this time? | |

**Theme C:** What role do personal contextual factors such as family, friends, advisors and support networks have on this period of time in aspiring academics' lives? Are these factors useful or problematic?

| Item | Possible **OBJECTIVES** for Personal Contexts Counseling | QUESTIONS | PROBES |
|---|---|---|---|
| C1 | Overview Question-- Framing Question | As I've begun writing my dissertation, a number of individuals have influenced how I do and think about my work? Could you describe the people who have most influenced your work during the period of time we've been discussing? (Both those who influenced you positively and maybe not so positively?) | |
| C2 | Follow-up questions | What role have others played in your work in classes? Comprehensive exams? Dissertation writing? | Probe for all possible important influences of people? Advisors, friends, family, mentors, support groups<br><br>**What is the relationship to you?** |
| C3 | | Please describe your dissertation to me.<br><br>What kind of things have influenced what you've chosen to study in your dissertation topic? | Has it influenced how you write, that is the process, time, etc. that you write? |
| | | | |

**Theme D:** How do professional contextual factors such as one's field of study, the institution, and the labor market influence this period of time? Are these factors useful or problematic?

| Item | Possible OBJECTIVES for Professional Contexts Labor Market Departmental Culture | QUESTIONS | PROBES |
|------|------|------|------|
| D1 | Overview Question-- | When writing the dissertation, a number of factors have influenced the way I think about writing it. Are there other factors (i.e. not specific people or groups of people) that have influenced your writing of the dissertation?<br><br>Are there factors that influenced your choice of topic, the process of completing it, etc.? | |
| D2 | Follow-up questions | How has the job market influenced what you've chosen to study in your dissertation, if at all? | Has it influenced how you write, that is the process, time, etc. that you write? |
| D3 | | How would you describe your departmental "culture?" | |
| D4 | | How have you been influenced by the way you have been taught in graduate school? | |
| | | | |

**THEME E:** How do graduate students aspiring to be faculty members understand the role of scholar? What does it mean to take on the identity of a dissertation writer? How do students make sense of their academic experiences over time?

Interview 4-5 Purpose- Determine how participant makes sense or derives meaning from experiences they have described in other interviews

| Item | Possible **OBJECTIVES** for Scholar or Dissertation writer | QUESTIONS | PROBES |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------|
| E1 | Overview Question-- Understanding what one believes they are "becoming" | When you were taking classes, how did you describe yourself to others? What kinds of words did you use to describe yourself in the privacy of your own mind? What did you call yourself? What did you mean by (whatever term they use)<br><br>How about now that you are writing your dissertation?<br><br>I've been trying to think of what I'm becoming as I move along in my dissertation process. A scholar? A writer? A discoverer of new knowledge? A synthesizer of other's work? In the privacy of your own mind or in a journal if you keep one, what do you find yourself calling yourself? | |
| E2 | | Have you presented papers at conferences? What types? Describe how you felt? How did this influence you? | |
| E3 | | Have you published articles/essays already? What types? Describe how you felt? How did this influence you? | |
| E4 | | How would you describe your departmental "culture?" | |
| E5 | | How have you been influenced by the way you have been taught in graduate school? | |
| E6 | | Is there an incident or an example that has occurred since you've begun writing your dissertation where you are asked "what you do?" How do you respond? How do you identify yourself to others? Does it matter who asks the questions (e.g. does it change depending on how well you know person, whether it's your parents/family, etc.)<br><br>What do you see yourself becoming? | |

| E7 | | Are there any other questions or things I haven't asked that you think would be important for me to know to understand what this period of time has meant to you? | |
|---|---|---|---|

Thank them for participating. Schedule follow-up interviews, ask for journals electronically, provide resources for dissertation completion and how to stay in touch with me.

**Appendix B**
**Focus Group Protocol**

Overview of project given (15 minutes)
Consent forms signed
Demographic Data sheet completed and vitae/resume collected

## Question 1: (30 Minutes)

What have been the most significant life events, turning points or transitions in your graduate school career to date?

        Possible Probes:        Advisor and Committee members role
                                          Study groups
                                          Significant others

## Question 2: (20 minutes)

After participating in your Ph. D. program for several years now, what is it that you believe you are "becoming?"

        Possible Probes:    Career plans/identity different
                                      How related to initial expectations

## Question 3: (20 minutes)

Is there a metaphor or analogy that would best describe your graduate student experiences and particularly with the process of writing the dissertation? (You might separate before and during dissertation)

        Possible probes:    Work habits on dissertation (how much time?)

## Question 4: (20 min)

I have learned from other research a set of categories that describe the graduate student experiences of others. Do any of the following descriptors resonate with you and if so could you explain:
        A. The procrastinator/avoider
        B. The perfectionist
        C. The workaholic
        D. The Imposter/Fraud syndrome
        E. The which part of the larger research project is mine
        F. The why finish - I already have a career

Question 5: (Poster board and markers- 20 to 30 minutes)

Please take some markers and posterboard/paper and draw a picture of your graduate school experiences to date. Take about 10-15 minutes to draw the picture and then take the tape recorder and explain your picture to me noting all important aspects. Have fun with this...
Provide resources on dissertation writing at the end.

# APPENDIX C

Demographic Data of
Focus Group Participants in 1998

| Program | Year Started | Where in Program | Pseudonym ˙ |
|---|---|---|---|
| English | 1991 | Writing Dissertation | Donna |
| English | 1991 | Writing Dissertation | Nancy |
| English | 1991 | Finished Degree | Joe |
| French | 1992 | Writing Dissertation | Sarah |
| French Literature | 1993 | Writing Dissertation | Paula |
| French Literature | 1994 | Writing Dissertation | Theresa |
| Ag. Economics | 1992 | Defense Scheduled | Doyle |
| Ag. Economics | 1993 | Proposal Writing | Kent |
| Microbiology | 1993 | Research in Lab | Jay |
| Zoology/Ecology | 1994 | Writing Dissertation | Paul |
| Statistics | 1994 | Writing Dissertation | John |
| Engineering | 1986 | Defended Dissertation | Tom |

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