A Phenomenological Study of Doctoral Student Attrition in Counselor Education

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Abstract

Approximately half of doctoral students will withdraw from study before completing their doctorates (Bair & Haworth, 1999). The author sought to add to the limited literature pertaining to doctoral student attrition specifically in the field of counselor education. Phenomenology grounded the work of obtaining (a) enrollment experiences of students who withdrew from counselor education doctoral programs, and (b) thoughts/emotions associated with withdrawing from study. Findings included an application of doctoral attrition to Tinto's (1975) Interactionalist model, how doctoral attrition continues to be an invisible problem, and recommendations for both doctoral students struggling to persevere and counselor education programs striving to increase retention rates.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Background

The path to earning a doctorate in the field of counselor education is often a difficult and lonely road. With estimates ranging from 40-60% of doctoral students failing to complete their degrees, not every student who enrolls in a doctoral program will graduate with a doctorate (Bair & Haworth, 1999). Although there is an established body of literature regarding academic withdrawal from undergraduate institutes, there is a paucity of literature surrounding doctoral pursuits (Golde, 2005; Lovitts, 2001). Willis and Carmichael (2011) characterized attrition as the internal change within students that reduces the importance of the doctorate and results in the pursuit of a different professional endeavor. Graduate students' withdrawal from doctoral programs is one of the "best kept secrets" (Lovitts, 2001, p. 1) in the education field. Faculty members are gradually becoming aware that doctoral attrition occurs but are shocked and perplexed when they learn of their own program's high rates (Lovitts, 2001). The root of this invisibility lies in the fact that doctoral students who withdraw are largely tacit; they quietly depart toward another occupation without ever being given an exit interview or follow-up (Golde, 2005; Lovitts, 2001).

To thwart student dropout, academic institutions implemented preventative measures such as intensive student orientation programs and "University 101" classes; however, these actions predominately occur at the undergraduate level rather than in doctoral programs (Dinham & Scott, 1999). Few previous studies collected data on departing doctoral students (Lovitts, 2001; Tinto, 1993). Past studies into doctoral attrition are extremely limited and most report only descriptive findings (Bair & Haworth, 1999; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Tinto, 1993). For

example, Ferrer de Valero (2001) compared time to graduation with factors such as grades, demographics, and departmental culture.

Hughes and Kleist (2005) noted a great demand for counselor educators and the valuable services they provide, yet there are few studies that examine the experiences of these doctoral students that led to their withdrawal. As a result, counselor educators must extrapolate findings from studies such as Bair and Haworth (1999) and Golde (2000; 2005) where doctoral students across all disciplines were studied and their findings were generalized to counselor education programs. Hazler and Carney (1993) stated it is time for the counseling profession to shift its research focus away from the acquisition of counseling skills and toward an evaluation of how educators train counselors; yet there has been little progress toward this goal. Although this article was overtly geared toward master's student training, underlying themes indicate that the information gathered would be applicable to doctoral student preparation as well.

Attrition

In the 1970's, a theoretical shift began from the previous mindset with Cope and Hannah (1975) stating that there is no "departure prone" personality resulting in students dropping out. On the contrary, Sharp and Chason (1978) found that student's behaviors were a direct result of departmental culture. Thus, students did not withdraw due to possessing undesirable qualities; conversely, their behaviors were fostered through departmental norms.

The traditional models accounting for student attrition stem from the school of psychology where they evaluated individual's aptitudes and personal characteristics; particularly intelligence and how these traits related to perseverance and degree completion (Tinto, 1993). Conventional wisdom concluded that students dropped out because they had deficient and flawed

personalities and simply could not adjust to the demanding rigor of academia. The blame has typically been placed on the students as opposed to their institutions.

Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) stated that Tinto's (1975) Interactionalist model on student attrition is the paradigmatic theory in the field. "Paradigmatic status connotes the considerable consensus among scholars of college student departure concerning the potential validity of Tinto's theory" (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004, p.7). Consensus was achieved due to the Interactionalist model being cited over 775 times and continues to be referenced (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997). Tinto's model arose from undergraduates withdrawing from school for numerous reasons; however, universities categorized all of these explanations into the same category (Tinto, 1975). Tinto's goal was to explain and distinguish all the reasons why students were dropping out.

Tinto's Interactionalist model starts with the dispositions that the student enters college with a specific upbringing (i.e., socio-economic status), individual attributes, and pre-college education (Tinto, 1975) that help determine the student's initial commitment level to their university and desire to graduate. Next, the student is influenced by two factors: academic and social Integration. Academic Integration refers to structural factors established by the university (i.e., courses needed to graduate) and the student's beliefs (as known as Normative Integration). Social Integration refers to the social relationships the student has with fellow classmates and faculty members. Academic and Social Integration then influence the student's commitment to both the university and the goal of graduation (Tinto, 1975). Thus, the less academically or socially integrated the student is, the lower the commitment level to the university and graduation, and the more likely they are to dropout. Tinto's model received strong empirical

support when applied to residential universities; however, its validity was questioned when applied to commuter schools (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997).

Doctoral student attrition was best explained as the result of a complex interaction of personalities, interactions, levels of integration, goals, academics, and relationships with faculty and fellow students (Bair & Haworth, 1999). Attrition could be the product of a culmination of all of these factors, or a traumatic experience concerning one specific aspect of the doctoral experience. Lovitts (2001) attributed doctoral student attrition to an interconnected relationship of students not receiving the information required to succeed, lack of community and sense of belonging, disenchantment with the learning experience, and poor advising relationships between students and faculty members. Lovitts (2001) also noted external factors such as marriage, divorce and pregnancy as personal factors that can lead to withdrawal at the doctoral level.

Statement of the Problem

Doctoral student attrition is a problem faced by universities across the country in all departments, including counselor education, and its detrimental effects are widespread. Doctoral student attrition in counselor education negatively influences numerous areas such as:

- The department: because in difficult economic times fewer individuals can afford to pursue a lengthy doctorate (Lovitts, 2001). Thus, when students withdraw they are already reducing a limited number of students who have the ability and desire to complete the degree. As a result, the program has the potential to be eliminated due to lack of enrollment. Additionally, retention rates are employed as key measure by accrediting agencies and as a barometer for institutional effectiveness (Berger & Lyons, 2005). Thus, the department would be at risk for losing certification from accrediting

bodies such as the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP).

- The university: because of reduced enrollment, the university receives less tuition money (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Bean, 2005). It is easier and cheaper to retain students than to pursue new ones. Instead universities are forced to expend resources and expenses (i.e., reviewing applications, purchasing of materials, campus visits, etc.) pursuing new students (Lovitts, 2001). In times of economic downturn, policy makers view universities as a potential cost cutting measure (Nerad & Miller, 1996). As a result, politicians view programs with high attrition rates as a waste of time and money (Nerad & Miller, 1996). Kerlin (1995) added that universities are becoming increasingly more dependent on tuition money from students since they are receiving less in tax dollars. Thus, when students withdraw, the university's revenue stream is negatively impacted as well as their ability to continue offering certain graduate programs.
- The student: because pursuing a doctoral degree is a long and expensive endeavor. Students who withdraw are likely to obtain copious amounts of debt without the tradeoff of a more lucrative career (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Kerlin, 1995). Furthermore, these doctoral students typically experience an emotional toll (Kerlin, 1995; Sternberg, 1981; Willis & Carmichael, 2011) such as depression and shattered senses of self-worth after withdrawal (Lovitts, 2001).
- Society as a whole: because students who obtain their doctorate branch out and provide their services to other disciplines and society, in addition to the traditional path of becoming counselor educators. Even those who complete their degree risk becoming

disenchanted with the process and politics of higher education, and leave the field altogether (Lovitts, 2001).

Ultimately, the transition of doctoral students to professors is the only way that the field of counselor education can sustain itself (Hughes & Kleist 2005); however, there is little research as to the reasons approximately half of doctoral students are choosing to withdraw (Protivnak & Foss, 2009; Willis & Carmichael, 2011). Other studies in this area (Bean, 2005; Tinto, 1993) have examined a multitude of different variables but have been limited primarily to the undergraduate level.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to obtain the essence of the experience of doctoral students withdrawing from counselor education programs across the United States. The purpose of this study sought to add to the research by providing firsthand accounts of the factors that are associated with the process of withdrawing from doctoral study in counselor education and the coinciding experiences related to such decisions. The long-term implications will enhance the literature through a comprehensive understanding based on the rich descriptions of the experiences of doctoral attrition in counselor education students.

For the purposes of this study, the withdrawal from counselor education programs was be defined as any doctoral student who was enrolled in the counselor education department for at least one semester and voluntarily withdrew (Golde, 2000). Students were considered eligible if they transferred to a different department within the university, enrolled in another counselor education program at a different university, or withdrew from higher education entirely. These inclusion criteria mirrored those utilized by Golde (2000; 2005) and Sigafus (1998). In these studies, there was no requirement as to how long the students were out of the program before

participating in their respective studies, nor were the researchers concerned if participants planned to finish their doctorate later on. Other studies such as Hughes and Kliest (2005) chose to delimit their study by focusing solely on first and second year doctoral students whereas Willis and Carmichael (2011) focused solely on the experiences of what Tinto (1993) described as late stage doctoral attrition. This present study was different in two respects: (1) the length of time spent in the doctoral program was not a study parameter, and (2) individuals in doctoral level counselor education programs were the focus, whereas previous studies focused on undergraduate students and/or doctoral programs in other fields.

Phenomenological Question

Phenomenology seeks to gather the essence of an experience and being able to articulate the phenomenon to others through rich description (Giorgi, 1985). Constructing a well-crafted phenomenological question is imperative to obtaining the essence of an experience (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological question must allow for examination of the phenomenon from all angles allowing participants to engage passionately in the subject matter (Moustakas, 1994). This researcher's phenomenological question was:

1. What were student's experiences that led to the withdrawal from their counselor education program?

Definitions

Multiple definitions helped ground this study. Most importantly, the researcher used the words attrition, withdrawal, and dropout interchangeably to refer specifically to exiting a program rather than a specific class. These terms represent students who were enrolled in a counselor education doctoral program for at least a semester and voluntarily chose to leave. They may either have transferred to another program within the university, chosen to pursue a

counselor education degree at another university, became engaged in a different career altogether, or withdrew due to personal reasons such as starting a family. Willis and Carmichael (2011) would have characterized this withdrawal as an internal change within students that reduced the importance of the doctorate and resulted in the pursuit of a different endeavor.

Willis and Carmichael (2011) defined late stage dropouts as those who withdrew during the dissertation process. Colloquially, these students are referred to as "ABD" or "all but dissertation." During the data analysis section, key terms and themes emerged and were defined by the participants themselves. Some of these themes were a *critical incident* that is considered as either a positive or a negative experience that strongly influenced the development of a counselor's identity (Furr & Carroll, 2003). Concerning the current study, the critical incidents were defined as students' experiences that led to the withdrawal from their counselor education program.

Delimitations

The researcher delimited this study by focusing on only former doctoral students in the field of counselor education as opposed to doctoral students as a whole. In this study, it was imperative that the participants voluntarily withdrew from doctoral study on their own accord as opposed to being terminated due to academic factors (i.e. poor grades). They may either have transferred to another program within the university, chosen to pursue a counselor education degree at another university, engaged in a different career altogether, or withdrew due to personal reasons such as starting a family.

Limitations

Lack of generalizability is a myth that has plagued qualitative studies for years (Merriam, 1998). However, Yin (2009) noted that scientific facts are rarely deduced from a single study. On

the contrary, findings are confirmed through multiple studies, in different environments, with the overarching goal of replication. Thus, Yin (2009) would argue that this phenomenological study will strengthen generalizability.

Another criticism toward qualitative research is the role of the researcher, particularly regarding his/her integrity and the rigor of the study (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Unfortunately in the research field, some investigators conduct research haphazardly. This stems from not adhering to a specific set of research protocols. Guba and Lincoln (1981) stated that the researcher has the ability to pick and choose the data, ultimately determining what he/she wishes to present to the reader. To prevent substandard research and researcher bias from occurring, I included a specific reputable methodology for both data collection and data analysis.

Significance of Study

This study was significant because of the glaring need for research focusing solely on doctoral student attrition in the field of counselor education (Hughes & Kleist, 2005; Protivnak & Foss, 2009; Willis & Carmichael, 2011). Hazler and Carney (1993) recommended that the field of counselor education study and examine the training of counselor educators; nevertheless, little research has been conducted. Studies such as Golde (2000; 2005) are helpful in providing a well-rounded picture to the topic of doctoral attrition; however, researchers must extrapolate from broad findings to counselor education. The field of counselor education is a unique entity even though the profession shares similarities to other fields such as psychology and social work. It is long overdue for researchers to focus their efforts on better understanding the phenomenon of doctoral attrition among counselor education students so that this occurrence can be reduced.

Chapter 2 – Review of the Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to review relevant literature pertaining to doctoral student attrition in counselor education. A history of retention literature in higher education along with a review of the literature pertaining to attrition at the doctoral level in counselor education is provided. Finally, the review thoroughly describes Tinto's (1993) Interactionalist model, which provides the theoretical framework for the study is summarized.

Retention Theory History

The issue of student retention in higher education arose from the increase in student enrollment. This enrollment was a result of the GI Bill in which soldiers returned home and enrolled in universities after World War II (Berger & Lyons, 2005). Furthermore, the Russians launching of the satellite Sputnik resulted in the United States government passing the National Defense Education Act of 1958 and the Higher Education Act of 1965; both of which contributed to this increased enrollment (Berger & Lyons, 2005). The United States government enacted these pieces of legislature and encouraged citizens to obtain advanced education necessary to keep pace with Soviet technologies. Due to the government's increased interest in education, the question of why students withdrew from college quickly followed.

Retention Theory in the 1970's

The 1970's marked the first attempt at explaining retention at the collegiate level. Spady (1971) conducted a longitudinal study at the University of Chicago where he surveyed and interviewed first year undergraduates. He concluded that retention and attrition are influenced by a complex interaction of nine variables: family background, normative congruence, academic potential, friendships, intellectual development, academic performance, social integration,

satisfaction, and commitment to the university. Spady's work was influential because not only did he attempt to generate a theory from the literature, his work also provided the groundwork for Vincent Tinto's Interactionalist theory (1975; 1993). Tinto's model arose from undergraduates withdrawing from school due to numerous reasons; however, universities categorized all of these explanations into the same category (Tinto, 1975). Tinto's goal was to explain and distinguish all the reasons why students were dropping out.

Kamens (1971) was another early retention theorist from a sociological perspective who examined how university culture influenced the roles of students. In particular, he was interested in the relationship between the university's prestige, and student persistence combined with occupational achievement. Kamens (1971) examined these factors through the study of data accumulated from multiple universities.

Astin (1977) began studying undergraduate student retention in the late 1960's through national databases gathered from hundreds of higher education institutions. Through his analysis of the data, he concluded that the more students are engaged with their college, the more likely they are to persist and graduate. This involvement occurs at both academic and social levels. Astin (1984) built upon his previous work and developed a theory for undergraduate involvement. Astin's (1984) five postulations for involvement are:

1. Involvement refers to the expenditure of academic and physical energies. These pursuits can be broad (i.e., the undergraduate student experience) or specific (i.e., studying for an exam).
2. Involvement occurs along a spectrum with varying levels of engagement.
3. Involvement is both quantitative and qualitative. For example, students can define how many hours they studied or they can describe the experience of studying.

4. When students are involved, there is a direct relationship between learning and cognitive development.
5. There is a direct relationship between public policy and involvement.

In summary, the 1970's provided the foundation for the retention theory literature. Tinto's (1975; 1993) Interactionalist model was particularly effective in inciting an empirical examination of student retention in higher education (Berger & Lyons, 2005). It was through these theorists and the knowledge base they provided that set the groundwork for further study of retention into the 1980's and into the 21st century.

Retention Theory in the 1980's

The 1980's saw a slight shift in the approach toward retention from theoretical concepts toward a more pragmatic approach due to stagnant enrollment figures (Berger & Lyons, 2005). Enrollment management became a popular term that focused on the universities finding the ideal students in an effort to minimize attrition. The work of Bean (1980) proved to be the most influential to emerge during the 1980's. Bean (1980) sought to develop a causal model of undergraduate student attrition. To accomplish this, he distributed a 107 item questionnaire to 1171 freshmen and conducted multiple regressions and path analyses on the data. He concluded that organizational attributes such as the quality of education received, involvement within university organizations, and grade point average help determine student's levels of satisfaction with their respective universities. The more students are satisfied with their universities, the higher their levels of institutional commitment and the more likely they are to persist and graduate.

Toward the end of the 1980's and into the 1990's, research began to emerge examining the importance of finances and its relationship with student retention. Cabera, Nora, and

Castenada (1992) conducted a longitudinal study investigating the role of finances in fulltime undergraduate students. Participants completed a 79-item questionnaire and data was analyzed through PRELIS, which is "a preprocessor for LISREL [a statistical software package used in structural equation modeling]. But it can also be conveniently used to provide a first descriptive look at raw data even when no LISREL analysis is intended or when further analysis will be done by other programs" (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1999, p. i). Cabrera, Nora, and Castenada (1992) concluded that there was an indirect relationship between finances and academic and social integration. This, in turn, influences persistence. Financial aid was found to be a mitigating factor to attrition. At the graduate level, both Abedi and Benkin (1987) and Girves and Wemmerus (1988) noted the importance of financial aid being imperative in negating attrition. Abedi and Benkin (1987) employed multiple regressions on 400 doctorates from 75 different fields. This data was accumulated from the National Research Council's Doctorate Record file whereas Girves and Wemmerus (1988) administered a survey at a Midwestern university to 948 master's and doctoral level students across 12 disciplines.

Currently, retention rates at the university level have become entrenched as a major issue at both the university and legislative levels (Berger & Lyons, 2005). The *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* was devised for the sole purpose of empirically examining the issue of retention. Furthermore, retention rates are employed as key measure by accrediting agencies and as a barometer for institutional effectiveness (Berger & Lyons, 2005). Certain states determine the allocation of resources based upon these numbers and the *U.S. News and World Report* use retention rates as a factor for determining the nation's best universities.

Tinto's Interactionalist Model

Tinto's Interactionalist model starts with the dispositions in which the student enters college, specifically upbringing (i.e., socio-economic status), individual attributes, and pre-college education (Tinto, 1975). These dispositions help determine the student's initial commitment level to his/her university and desire to graduate. Next, the student is influenced by two factors: Academic and Social Integration. Academic Integration refers to structural factors established by the university (i.e., courses needed to graduate) and the student's beliefs (also known as Normative Integration). Social Integration refers to the social relationships the student has with fellow classmates and faculty members. Academic and Social Integration then influence the student's commitment to both the university and the goal of graduation (Tinto, 1975). Thus, the less academically or socially integrated the student is, the lower the commitment level to the university and graduation, and the more likely they are to dropout.

Tinto (1993) hypothesized 13 propositions that are pertinent in explaining why students withdrawal from higher education. These propositions are as follows:

1. Student entry characteristics affect the level of initial commitment to the institution.
2. Student entry characteristics affect the level of initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college.
3. Student entry characteristics directly affect the student's likelihood of persistence in college.
4. Initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the level of academic integration.
5. Initial commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the level of social integration.

6. Initial commitment to the institution affects the level of social integration.
7. Initial commitment to the institution affects the level of academic integration.
8. The greater the degree of academic integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation from college.
9. The greater the degree of social integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution.
10. The initial level of institutional commitment affects the subsequent level of institutional commitment.
11. The initial level of commitment to the goal of graduation from college affects the subsequent level of commitment to the goal of college graduation.
12. The greater the level of subsequent commitment to the goal of graduation from college, the greater the likelihood of student persistence in college.
13. The greater the level of subsequent commitment to the institution, the greater the likelihood of student persistence in college.

In 1997, Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson set out to test the empirical support and limitations of Tinto's propositions through the use of multivariate path analyses such as path analysis with multiple linear regressions, LISREL, and logistic regression. Tinto's model received strong empirical support when applied to residential universities. However, it lacked reliability when applied to commuter schools and minority populations (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997). The researchers concluded that although the model is a good start, there is potential for improvement. Since 1997, Tinto's Interactionalist model has been described as having reached paradigmatic status (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Braxton & Hirschy, 2005). Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon noted that paradigmatic status is achieved through:

> considerable consensus among scholars of college student departure concerning the potential validity of Tinto's theory. Such consensus manifests itself in the vast number of citations (more than 775) to Tinto's foundational expression (1975) of his theory (p. 7).

Tinto's theoretical model has relevance for doctoral student attrition. In the next section, I will review doctoral persistence and attribution literature followed by a discussion of how Tinto's Interactionalist model can be applied to doctoral study.

Doctoral Persistence and Attrition

Due to increasing time to degree completion and beliefs about universities being uneconomical, state legislatures look at universities as opportunities for cost-cutting measures (Nerad & Miller, 1996). In particular, high attrition rates are a shining example of this inefficiency and can be viewed as waste of valuable financial resources (Nerad & Miller, 1996). As a result, Nerad and Miller (1996) investigated how the University of California at Berkley graduate school examined doctoral student attrition in an attempt to increase retention rates. Their research consisted of two parts. First, Nerad and Miller (1996) retrospectively examined the University of California at Berkley's graduate school's database that contained the records of every graduate student (both Master's and PhD) to have attended the university since 1962. The database contained five columns of information: (1) years in program, (2) number of students starting a doctoral program, (3) whether the student registered/reached the candidacy stage, (4) number of degrees awarded, and (5) whether the student left. The second stage of Nerad and Miller's (1996) study was a qualitative component. The investigators employed a snowball sampling method in which the researchers contacted graduate assistants at the University of California at Berkley graduate school and asked for the names of students who were considering withdrawing. Nerad and Miller (1996) then performed semi-structured interviews with willing

participants. The questions focused on participants' progression through the doctoral program, course work, preparation for qualifying exams, the dissertation process, applying for jobs, possible regrets (if any), and what they would do differently. To the researcher's surprise, participants were enthusiastic to share *their side of the story*.

Nerad and Miller (1996) found that graduate students were more likely to withdraw before reaching candidacy. In short, graduate students withdraw sooner rather than later. The investigators found that early leavers typically withdrew because they switched fields, transferred, wanted to get a master's degree instead of their doctorate, had incongruent interests with their respective program, were frustrated with heightened expectations, or chose to focus on their current career. Late leavers withdrew due to lack of focus during the dissertation process, poor student-advisor relationship, lack of finances, or departmental culture. Nerad and Miller (1996) recommended increasing graduate student retention in three steps. The first step involves improved systemic monitoring, annual progress reports, and providing students with more financial assistance. Step two involves providing better support staff (clearer communication, an advocate, and confidant), a clear guide for each step of the dissertation process, and providing both advisors and mentors. Advisors help students with academic guidelines such as degree requirements whereas mentors help protégés set goals, refine skills, meet key figures in the field, and provide a safe environment to take risks.

Abedi and Benkin (1987) sought to examine the role of students' backgrounds, finances, and academics in an attempt to help predict the likelihood of doctoral students' graduating. To accomplish this task, the researchers reviewed the records of 400 completed doctorates from 75 different fields. The data was acquired from the National Research Council's Doctorate Record File and analyzed using multiple regressions with the dependent variable being mean time

toward degree completion. Abedi and Benkin (1987) found financial support to be the biggest predictor in time to degree completion. To oversimplify, the more money doctoral students have (or if money is not an object), the faster these students will complete their degrees. Conversely, if funds are scarce, doctoral students will take longer to complete their degrees. If doctoral students have families to support, they will take longer to complete their degrees although the families have the potential to act as protective factor to withdrawal due to the possibility of them providing moral support.

Girves and Wemmerus (1988) sought to introduce a model to account for time to degree completion at the graduate level. This model included different factors such as students' backgrounds (including finances), departmental characteristics, students' levels of involvement, students' perceptions, and satisfaction levels. Girves and Wemmerus's (1998) model consisted of two stages. The first stage has four variables: students' characteristics, departments' characteristics, financial support, and students' relationships with faculty members. The second stage had four variables as well: grades, level of involvement within the program, satisfaction with the department, and level of integration versus isolation. These two stages influence how quickly graduate students progress through their respective programs.

Girves and Wemmerus (1988) pilot tested and administered their survey to 948 graduate students (both master's and doctoral) at a Midwestern university across 42 different departments. They had 486 respondents for a 59.1% completion rate. Data was analyzed using intercorrelations while Cronbach's alpha was calculated to ensure consistency. Girves and Wemmerus (1988) found students' levels of involvement were the most influential factor in degree completion. Students' levels of involvement were characterized by their relationship with faculty members and financial support. The researchers found ways to increase involvement

included being treated as colleagues in training, experiencing academic success, teaching, having a graduate assistantship, and participating in research with faculty members.

Sigafus (1998) presented a paper at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in which she explored how students handle the rigor of doctoral study and why doctoral students withdraw after passing comprehensive exams. To accomplish this objective, the researcher conducted a phenomenological study that entailed individual and group interviews. The study had 25 participants from a Southeastern university. All of these individuals held master's degrees and withdrew from doctoral study at different points in time. The researcher conducted follow-up interviews with nine participants and a third interview with two participants. The basis for these follow-up interviews was to clarify responses or if participants wished to elaborate on their responses. Sigafus (1998) found four main themes to doctoral student withdrawal: structure, support, pressure, and authority (control). These four themes are all intertwined and affect each other in a very homeostatic relationship. For example, when pressure on doctoral students increases, there is an increased need for them to have support systems. Additionally, having a clearly defined task (i.e. structure) can help alleviate the pressure.

Bair and Haworth (1999) presented a seminal paper at the Association for the Study of Higher Education on a meta-synthesis of the research surrounding doctoral student attrition. The researchers' goal was to integrate findings from both qualitative and quantitative studies to help shed light on why doctoral students persist versus why they drop out. The authors accumulated articles, books, dissertations, presented papers, and unpublished studies from 1970-1998. Out of a possible 430 studies, 118 were used. Bair and Haworth (1999) found six main themes that pervaded the publications: (1) attrition rates varied widely across fields and departments, (2) the

dissertation process was a common cause of attrition, (3) universities and administrators were not good at predicting who will persist (i.e. gpa was not a good predictor), (4) employment and financial variables were also poor predictors of doctoral persistence, (5) departmental culture influenced doctoral persistence, and (6) retention rates varied widely across different universities. Bair and Haworth (1999) also found that there is no single predictor of doctoral attrition; conversely, attrition is the result of a complex set of interactions. The authors recommended that universities recognize that attrition is a serious problem and employ better procedures for data collection on the subject matter. The authors recommend from a departmental perspective that faculty engage in self-reflection on methods to increase retention. Bair and Haworth (1999) established trustworthiness of the data through Lincoln and Guba's (1985) three criterion of confirmability, credibility, and transferability.

In her seminal book, Lovitts (2001) wrote about the causes and consequences of withdrawing from doctoral study. She began by describing how it is an invisible problem because doctoral students who withdraw do so quietly without much attention. The consensus among the academic community is that approximately half of doctoral students will withdraw from their respective programs. Lovitts (2001) then transitioned into the causes of doctoral attrition. She posited that attrition was not the fault of students who in the past were very high achievers, but instead was the result of departmental culture. The departmental culture negatively influenced attrition through poor communication due to a lack of information, absence of a community, poor learning experiences, and negative relationships with advisors. Lovitts (2001) concluded with the consequences of doctoral attrition that included mental, emotional, and financial scarring.

In 2001, Cusworth presented a paper at an American Psychological Association (APA) conference concerning the experiences of first year doctoral students in the field of counseling. To accomplish this objective, the researcher conducted hour long interviews with nine, first year doctoral students in counseling. Cusworth (2001) asked participants to describe their initial impressions, fears, expectations, hopes, and disappointments since they started the fall previous. Four main themes emerged from these interviews: immediate concerns (i.e. obtaining funding, getting acclimated, etc), mentoring, administrative issues (i.e. learning departmental policies), and orientation. The researcher recommended that first year doctoral students needed clear information, a positive relationship with their advisors, information on obtaining funding and support networks, opportunities to meet other students, and freedom from the inundation of long-term challenges related to the trajectory of the professoriate.

Ferrer de Valero (2001) cited that since the 1960's, the time to doctoral degree completion has consistently increased. As a result, she studied departmental factors that influenced time to degree completion in doctoral students. Ferrer de Valero (2001) conducted a qualitative study that employed individual, 45 minute to an hour long semi-structured interviews with 16 faculty members and 24 doctoral students. The questions centered on financial aid, degree requirements, departmental policies, advising, and departmental climate. The data was then analyzed using the constant comparative method. The researcher found that student success and graduation was aided when students had sufficient financial support and positive relationships with their advisor, other faculty members, and their fellow students.

In the first of many important publications on the topic of doctoral attrition, Golde (1998) wrote a book chapter explaining the causes of attrition in first year doctoral students. The author notes that the first year of doctoral study is a very stressful time where students are getting

acclimated to a new community. This acclimation process typically occurs in four stages. First doctoral students will ask themselves "can I do this?' Once they learn the realities and rigors of graduate school, they will ask themselves "is this for me?" The third question blends with the second where doctoral students ask themselves if the profession is the right fit for them, and lastly, doctoral students will question if the department is the right fit and if they truly belong.

To investigate the causes of attrition in first year doctoral students, Golde (1998) utilized data from her dissertation where she conducted interviews with 58 doctoral students. From these 58 participants, 18 of them departed during their first year of doctoral study. Participants were enrolled in four departments: history, English, biology and geology. Golde (1998) found that the most common reason first year doctoral students withdrew was due to the seriousness of doctoral study. They were not ready to commit the time and energy required to be successful at the doctoral level. Participants asked themselves if doctoral study was for them and they answered "no." Golde (1998) then gave individual reasons why doctoral students from the *hard sciences* withdrew compared to those enrolled in the *soft sciences.* First, doctoral students in the *hard sciences* withdrew as a result of either a poor fit with the department, poor job market, or due to a bad working relationship with their advisor. Conversely, doctoral students in the *soft sciences* had difficulty making the transition from learning content to learning theoretical and methodological concepts. They would ask themselves if they could do it and ultimately the answer was "no." Second, they learned that the role of a doctoral student was not for them. In particular, research can be a long and lonely endeavor. Third, doctoral students withdrew from the *soft sciences* because they learned about the true life of being a professor. In particular, they enrolled in doctoral study because professors inspired them earlier in their academic careers only to learn that professors have an increased emphasis to conduct research as opposed to being

valued instructors. Golde (1998) also found that it is possible for doctoral students to withdraw on good terms citing that it answers the *road not taken* question. The investigator recommended that it is best to expose graduate students early to the life of a professor as well as the life of a doctoral student. Furthermore, doctoral programs should provide students with good information about the doctoral process and provide students with frequent opportunities for integration and socialization within the university.

Golde (2000) sought to answer the question of why doctoral students withdrew from study. Her research question was grounded in Bowen and Rudenstine's (1992) notion that researchers focus on successful students who complete their degrees whereas those who withdraw do so quietly with little attention. Thus, Golde (2000) was interested in "the undisappearing of some" (p. 199). To answer this question, the investigator conducted hour long, semi-structured interviews with 68 doctoral students who withdrew from doctoral study. Her main question centered on participants describing the doctoral process and their decision to leave. Golde (2000) asked follow-up questions pertaining to departmental policies, relationships with faculty members and students, possible regrets, and advice for future students. The investigator found that doctoral students withdraw due to a number of events as opposed to one single factor. In particular, doctoral students withdrew due to an interaction of academic factors and negative relationships with their advisors. High levels of integration with the department, faculty, and fellow students were a protective factor against attrition but noted that students who are successfully integrated still dropout. This is a result of influential outside factors such as physical ailments and divorce. As a result, Golde (2000) supported the findings in Bowen and Rudenstine's (1992) book that doctoral students who withdraw generally do so silently. She noted that exit interviews with the department are important, however, students are guarded due

to the inherent power differential with faculty members. When interviews were conducted with fellow students, however, those who withdrew were more comfortable and felt like they were able to tell their side of the story, resulting in a burden being lifted.

In 2005, Golde explored how the role of the department and the field of study influences doctoral student attrition. The researcher chose to examine the department because at the doctoral level, it is the "locus of control" (Golde, 2005, p. 671) and not the university. For example, the department determines admissions, financial aid, time to degree completion, degree requirements, doctoral student norms, etc. To examine how different departments and fields of study influence doctoral student attrition, the researcher examined four programs of study (geology, history, English, and biology) at a Midwestern university. The researcher immersed herself in the culture by attending social outings, dissertation defenses, and academic meetings. She also studied four years of dropout rates from each department spanning from 1984-1989. Finally, Golde (2005) conducted semi-structured interviews ranging from 60-90 minutes with 58 doctoral students who withdrew from doctoral study. The interview questions focused on why doctoral students chose the particular school/field, why they withdrew from the program, and different aspects of the department (i.e. financial aid, courses offered, relationship with advisor, faculty members and students, and research experiences).

Golde (2005) found six pervading themes across the four departments. First, the stress placed on performing research was an important factor in influencing doctoral student attrition. Students found that conducting quality research requires a different skill set not utilized in prior degrees. These students realized quickly that doctoral study as a whole was not for them. Second, students withdrew due to having differing expectations from those of the department. Third, the lack of integration and poor relationships between the advisor and the student led to attrition.

Fourth, doctoral students realized that the professor lifestyle was incompatible with their preconceived expectations. Fifth, doctoral students realized that the job markets for professors were highly competitive featuring few available openings. Lastly, doctoral students found their lifestyle to be incredibly isolating. Thus, these six factors were found to increase attrition rates.

Ivankova and Stick (2007) sought to examine doctoral persistence in a distance education, educational leadership program. Participants were purposefully selected at a Midwestern university. Out of 278 current and former doctoral students, 207 agreed to participate. The researchers employed a sequential exploratory mixed methods design. In short, the authors employed a *little quantitative, big qualitative* design. For the quantitative portion, the researchers employed a cross-sectional survey design. The quantitative phase yielded five factors that predicted doctoral persistence: (1) program quality, (2) online learning environment, (3) availability of support systems, (4) warm relationships with faculty members, and (5) internally motivated students. For the qualitative aspect of the study, the researchers employed a multiple case study design where the four participants were identified as the "best informant" and were given semi-structured phone interviews. Best informant status was derived through participants having diverse backgrounds in areas such as demographics, sex, age, residency and family status, which results in a well-rounded and differing set of responses (Creswell, 2005). The goal of this protocol is to create a well-rounded perspective stemming from different viewpoints concerning a particular subject matter. The semi-structured interview consisted of five open-ended questions that addressed the online learning environment, the program, faculty members, student support services, and internal motivational levels. The qualitative component yielded four themes for doctoral persistence: (1) the quality of the academic experience, (2) the online learning environment, (3) available support systems, and (4) internal level of self-motivation.

Tinto's Doctoral Theory of Persistence

Even though Tinto's Interactionalist model is the seminal theory in the field, it was designed for undergraduate students. In 1991, Tinto presented a paper at an American Educational Research Association conference proposing a theory for doctoral student attrition. This paper is no longer in circulation however its main tenants are included in appendix B of his book *Leaving College* (1993). First, Tinto (1993) described how there is no universal theory explaining doctoral attrition and there is little research on the subject matter. Next, he explained that perseverance through doctoral programs is similar to undergraduate persistence in the sense that both are determined by academic and social integration. In particular, academic and social integration may be even more imperative for degree completion at the doctoral level compared to the undergraduate level. Tinto (1993) stressed that doctoral students need a sense of belonging to both the university/departmental level as well as a connection to their field of study as a whole (i.e., membership to professional organizations). The latter (connection to their field of study) was not required at the undergraduate level.

Tinto (1993) postulated that there are three stages toward degree completion at the doctoral level. First is the *transitional phase*. This step typically occurs during the first year of doctoral education and includes getting indoctrinated into doctoral student culture, learning what it means to be a doctoral student, and fostering social and academic integration. Doctoral students in the transitional stage will likely perform a cost benefit analysis asking themselves if this career path is the right fit for them.

The second step of doctoral persistence is called *leading to candidacy* and involves the accumulation of knowledge and skills to conduct research (Tinto, 1993). This step is imperative because doctoral students ideally form bonds with professors that continue past degree

completion and results in academic and social integration becoming blurred into a single integration. The leading to candidacy stage culminates with the comprehensive exam.

The final stage of doctoral persistence is the *dissertation stage* (Tinto, 1993). At this juncture, doctoral students have successfully passed comprehensive exams and are exclusively working on their dissertations. The doctoral students' academic and social integration narrows to interaction with their committee. A strong working relationship with the dissertation committee chair is particularly imperative for success in completing the dissertation. Due to the unique relationship doctoral students possess with their respective chairs, it is incredibly difficult to generalize a working model that encompasses every aspect of doctoral persistence (Tinto, 1993). Next, I will discuss relevant literature pertaining to doctoral attrition specifically as it relates to counselor education doctoral programs.

Persistence & Attrition in Counselor Education Doctoral Programs

The literature pertaining to doctoral student attrition in counselor education is limited. Only four studies were encountered that specifically examined this subject matter. This is particularly troublesome because over 15 years ago Hazler and Carney (1993) stated it is time for the counseling profession to shift its research focus away from the acquisition of counseling skills and toward an evaluation of how educators train counselors; yet there has been little progress toward this goal. Although this article was overtly geared toward master's student training, underlying themes indicate that the information gathered would be applicable to doctoral student preparation as well. Unfortunately, not much progress has been made.

Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) were the first researchers to examine doctoral persistence from a counselor education perspective. The goal of their study was to fill an identified gap in the literature that attempted to address why some doctoral students chose to persist whereas

others dropped out. To accomplish their task, Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) sent emails and information packets to 41 CACREP program liaisons describing their study. Their efforts resulted in 33 participants who were obtained through snowball sampling. The participants were predominately female, full-time doctoral who either withdrew in their first or second year of study, or persisted and completed their degree. The researchers conducted face to face interviews, phone interviews, and/or corresponded through emails. The interview format was open ended with the objective of eliciting responses of experiences that the participants believed were imperative to doctoral persistence. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed using analytic induction and a qualitative program called QUALOG. Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) found that student-program match was the primary factor in determining doctoral student persistence. Student-program match is made up of student expectations, student experiences, academic match, and socio-personal match. Student expectations were described as the beliefs in which students enter the program. Some of these expectations come to fruition whereas other beliefs are unfounded. Students are more likely to dropout when unexpected events occur such as changes in faculty members and program requirements. Student experiences were explained as events that occurred and information learned after the students began doctoral study. Academic match refers to whether or not the goal of the student aligns with the objectives of his/her doctoral program. Lastly, socio-personal match refers to the students relationships with faculty members. The stronger the relationship, the less likely students are to withdraw. These findings were consistent with previous studies such as Bair and Haworth (1999), Golde (2000; 2005), and Protivnak and Foss (2009)

Protivnak and Foss (2009) investigated the events that are most influential to the experiences of counselor education doctoral students. In short, they wanted to examine what

aided the doctoral process as well as what hindered it. The authors hypothesized that the experiences of doctoral students was what caused them to either persist or withdraw. Possible influential factors included: departmental culture, relationship with classmates, how closely student's goals aligned with the program's goals, professional involvement, and the dissertation process. Protivnak and Foss (2009) examined this topic due to the limited research on the subject matter and noted that the counselor education field is different from the fields of social work and psychology. Therefore, counselor educators need to specifically examine this phenomena relying on results from similar fields.

Protivnak and Foss (2009) conducted a qualitative study of 141 counselor education doctoral students aged 24 – 67. Participants were obtained through convenience sampling across all five Associations for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) regions. The investigators sent out emails to these potential participants requesting their participation. The email also contained their open ended survey questions. The survey contained two parts: The first section included demographic questions while the second part consisted of questions pertaining to topics such as: the most helpful/difficult aspects of doctoral study, additional information and support needed, benefits ascertaining the degree and sacrifices made in pursuit of the doctorate. These questions were consistent with those utilized by Cusworth (2001). A follow-up email was sent out two weeks later.

Protivnak and Foss (2009) found five main themes that influenced the counselor education doctoral experience. These themes were elicited through constant comparative analysis and are: (a) departmental culture, (b) mentoring, (c) academics, (d) support systems, and (e) personal issues. Departmental culture was found to both positively and negatively influence the doctoral experience. Participants reported positive experiences when they had strong working

relationships with faculty members. Participants reported negative departmental experiences when their needs were not being met, being forced to navigate political obstacles, and compromising their values. Participants reported both positive and negative experiences with the mentoring process. Positive experiences included passionate and supportive mentors whereas negative experiences included feelings of isolation with limited to no mentoring going on. Participants largely reported negative experiences with the theme of academics. Results included aggravation with the dissertation process, poor communication of requirements, feeling unprepared for writing at a high level, and conducting statistical analyses. The results suggested the implementation and/or improvement of the program handbook. Support systems such as family, friends, and classmates were overall positive toward the doctoral experience but participants also reported loss of friends and significant others due to the rigor of doctoral study and limited amounts free time. Lastly, personal issues influencing the doctoral experience consisted of motivation levels, finances, time management, acclimation to doctoral student roles, and personal health.

Willis and Carmichael (2011) investigated the experiences of late stage attrition in counselor education doctoral students. Late stage attrition was classified as students who withdrew during the dissertation phase of doctoral study. This was synonymous with Tinto's (1993) definition found in Appendix B. The investigators used a grounded theory methodology and conducted semi-structured interviews with six late stage counselor education doctoral students who withdrew from study doctoral. Participants were identified through an announcement on CESNET, a national counseling listserv and a state-level counseling listserv. The results portion was classified into two sections: *Dropping Out* and *Leaving*. *Dropping Out* represented students who left due to negative experiences whereas *Leaving* was classified as

students who withdrew with positive experiences. Five out of the six participants were classified as *Dropping Out.* These participants reported problematic relationships with their dissertation chairs, feelings of helplessness, and taking refuge in their careers. One participant discussed the inherent power differential between student and professor like "spittin' in the wind" (Willis & Carmichael, 2011, p. 197) meaning that it was impossible to make any progress toward degree completion. Five participants described taking refuge in their career as a process where they were receiving satisfaction with their current career (i.e. sense of belonging, respect, salary) whereas they were receiving frustration during the dissertation process. Participants who were classified as *Dropping Out* still carry emotional scarring even 25 years later which was likened to a 'ball and chain'. These participants indicated that they are still angry, bitter and irritated from the amount of hard work they put forth without having the degree to show for it. Even family members carried this emotional burden. The wife of a participant was compelled to participate in the interview noting how she is still angry with the events that took place. She elaborated saying she saw firsthand the amount of hard work her husband expended, yet was met with barriers and obstacles. This resulted in a strain on their marriage and him falling into a deep depression. She put it simply as "it was hell…it affects you when you see your soulmate in this condition" (Willis & Carmichael, 2011, p.200).

One participant was classified as *Leaving* who withdrew with positive experiences in the late stage of doctoral attrition. Willis and Carmichael (2011) were surprised by this finding because it was hypothesized that all students who withdrew in the late stage of doctoral study suffer negative consequences. The one participant withdrew from doctoral study because she had a change of personal goals. She entered doctoral study to prove to her father she was an intelligent woman but during the dissertation process, she realized she had nothing left to prove

to him. For her, the act of *Leaving* was a sense of relief because she was no longer forced to pay copious amounts of tuition money, her depression was lifted, and she had ample amounts of free time for leisure activities.

Hughes and Kliest (2005) chose to investigate the experiences of first semester counselor education doctoral students due to the lack of research on the subject matter. The authors noted how counselors and counselor educators provide valuable services yet there is little research at the doctoral level how we prepare these individuals. As a result of the lack of research, the authors conducted a grounded theory study that examined the first semester experiences of four doctoral students at a Midwestern university. The participants were obtained through purposeful sampling. Interviews lasted from 45 – 60 minutes and were conducted three weeks into the fall semester. Follow-up interviews were given at nine weeks and 15 weeks into the fall semester. The results section yielded that counselor education doctoral student's experiences evolved over the course of the fall semester. Three stages emerged during the data analysis section: *Vicissitudes*, *Integration*, and *Confirmation*. Vicissitudes referred to conflicting thoughts and emotions experienced by counselor education doctoral students. For example, students were both excited and nervous about starting their doctorate. They were faced with thoughts of self-doubt and fears of the unknown. These thoughts were countered by levels of excitement and the thrill of a challenge. Doctoral students were very introspective during this stage. The second stage was called Integration. During this stage, students obtained knowledge about doctoral study from both fellow doctoral students and professors. Participants also reported that they learned *on the job* how to act and behave as doctoral students. The third theme of Confirmation occurred toward the end of the first semester. At this stage, participants reported that they gained confidence in their abilities to succeed at the doctoral level and received positive reinforcement. Overall, the

first semester experiences of counselor education doctoral students were largely positive outside of some initial anxiety.

Burkholder (2009) investigated counselor education doctoral students who withdrew and subsequently reenrolled in their program of study. He was primarily concerned with the experiences of these individuals who successfully returned to their initial program. To accomplish this, Burkholder (2009) conducted semi-structured interviews with six female participants obtained through CESNET-L. Once the interviews were transcribed, he analyzed the data using Creswell (2007) recommendations for phenomenological research. Four main themes were elicited during the data analysis section: 1) both withdrawing and returning to doctoral study were significant life events, 2) the importance of faculty responses to students both withdrawing and returning, 3) departure was influenced by personal and/or 4) academic factors.

Summary

In summary, in this chapter I reviewed the literature surrounding the history of student retention in higher education. Following this discussion, I summarized Tinto's (1993) Interactionalist model which provides the theoretical framework for the current study. From here, I transitioned into reviewing the literature to attrition and retention at the doctoral level and concluded by describing attrition specifically to doctoral students in the field of counselor education. Currently, few studies exist on doctoral student attrition in the field of counselor education. However, the research concerning attrition in counselor education doctoral students was consistent with the literature surrounding doctoral student attrition as a whole. These themes included the need to have a positive working relationship with a faculty advisor, and the need to be integrated at both academic and social levels. Despite numerous reasons for leaving a doctoral program of study, the doctoral process itself and the act of withdrawing can be an emotionally

scarring process, and more information is needed as to how doctoral programs can address this issue.

Chapter 3

Methods

There are five traditional approaches to qualitative research: Narrative, Grounded Theory, Ethnography, Case Study, and Phenomenology (Creswell, 2007). For the purposes of this study, I will be adhering to a Phenomenological methodology. Phenomenology is the school of thought underlying all qualitative research with the subsequent goal of obtaining the essence of an experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from a first person point of view. As a discipline, phenomenology is unique but related to some disciplines in philosophy such as ontology, epistemology, logic, and ethics. The discipline came into its own in the early 20th century under the work of Hiedegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre (Smith, 2011). Using this methodology, the researcher seeks to obtain and describe *what* participants experienced as well as *how* they experienced it (Moutstakas, 1994). Thus, this philosophical foundation corresponds synonymously with the research question "What were the experiences that led to the withdrawal of students from their counselor education program?"

Participants

My original methodological plan for this study was to interview doctoral students who withdrew from a Midwestern university where a counselor education faculty member agreed to serve as a liaison and contact previous doctoral students who withdrew from the program. We decided a greater response rate would result if he initially contacted the students due to his prior relationship with these potential participants, in addition to my offer to provide each participant $20 per interview. Out of nine potential candidates, none of the potential participants agreed to participate in my study. I was told that two individuals declined the invitation because they were

still “too embarrassed and filled with shame” (Professor X, personal communication, June, 18, 2012). The study then transitioned to another Midwestern university where once again, a counselor education faculty member agreed to be a liaison and contact doctoral students who withdrew from that program. I was met with the same result as the previous school where once again, none of the potential candidates agreed to participate in my study. Thus, I was forced to revise my methods section and post my study on CESNET, a counseling listserv for counselor educators and supervisors, to request potential participants that met my criteria to volunteer for the study. This methodological change rewarded me with 11 potential candidates, nine of whom agreed to participate. I conducted nine semi-structured interviews with individuals who were enrolled in a counselor education program and subsequently withdrew.

In qualitative research, data collection is concluded when researchers reach saturation, not when they achieve a predetermined number of participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I employed the data saturation definition as defined by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) where it was reached when information gathered by the researchers becomes redundant and continuing the study would yield “diminished returns” (p.69). For the purposes of my study, data saturation was reached at a total of nine participants.

As stated above, I was able to ascertain nine participants. All of these individuals met the inclusionary criteria for my study (i.e. attended a counselor education doctoral program for at least a semester and voluntarily withdrew on their own accord). My sample included eight females and one male. Their ages ranged from the mid 20’s through the mid 60’s. Six of my participants identified themselves as Caucasian, two identified themselves as African American, and one declined to answer the question. Five of the participants were single whereas four of them were married. This section provides a brief background regarding the participants. Table 1

offers a brief outline of the participants' demographic information. All participants have been given pseudonyms in an attempt to maintain confidentiality.

Table 1. **Participant Demographics**

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Highest Degree	Occupation	Marital Status	Ethnicity	When withdrew	University
Melissa	female	late 20's	Master's - counseling	MH Counselor	Married	Caucasian	end of 1st yr	Southeast
Kelly	female	late 20's	Master's - school counseling	School counselor & Doc student	Single	Caucasian	end of 1st yr	Southeast
Chris	male	mid 20's	Master's - clinical mental health	PhD student- different program	Single	Caucasian	end of 1st yr	Midwest
Nicole	female	late 30's	Master's - counseling	Mental health consultant	Single	African American	halfway 2nd yr	Southwest
Chloe	female	mid 20's	Master's - counseling	Mental health specialist in a school	Married	not given	end of 1st yr	Midwest
Kate	female	mid 40's	Master's- counseling	Counselor & educator	Married	Caucasian	end of 1st yr	Midwest
Natalie	female	mid 60's	EDD & PhD - Counseling	Retired - part time instructor	Single	Caucasian	dissertation stage	East coast
Amanda	female	early 30's	Master's - Counseling	Training manager	Married	African American	end of 1st yr	Southeast
Ashley	female	early 60's	PhD - Counselor Education	Professor	Single	Caucasian	1st year (twice)	Northeast

Melissa. Melissa is a married, Caucasian woman in her late 20's. She holds a master's degree in counseling and currently serves as a mental health counselor. Melissa attended a counselor education program in the Southeastern part of the United States and withdrew at the end of her first year. She withdrew on account of her supervising professor taking a new position elsewhere.

Kelly. Kelly is a single, Caucasian woman in her late 20's. She holds a master's degree in school counseling and currently serves as a school counselor and doctoral student. Kelly withdrew from study at the conclusion of her first year from a Southeastern university due to the cons outweighing the pros of continuing doctoral student and a program-student mismatch.

Chris. Chris is a single, Caucasian male in his mid 20's. He holds a master's degree in clinical mental health and currently is a doctoral student in a program outside the field of counseling education. Chris transferred out of counselor education at the conclusion of his first year of study at a Midwestern university due to a program-student mismatch and believed there was a better fit for him academically in a different department. Chris still enjoys counseling and does it part-time on the side.

Nicole. Nicole is a single, African American woman in her late 30's. She holds a master's degree in counseling and currently serves as a mental health consultant. Nicole withdrew halfway through her second year from a Southwestern university due to the doctoral program being too consuming.

Chloe. Chloe is a female in her mid 20's and declined to give an ethnicity. She is married and holds a master's degree in counseling. Currently she serves as a mental health specialist in a school. Chloe withdrew from study at the conclusion of her first year from a Midwestern university due to a program-student mismatch.

Kate. Kate is a married, Caucasian woman in her mid 40's. She holds a master's degree in counseling and currently serves as a counselor and educator. Kate withdrew from study at the conclusion of her first year from a Midwestern university due to a program-student mismatch.

Natalie. Natalie is a single, Caucasian woman in her mid 60's. She holds both an EdD and PhD, and is retired although teaches leadership part time. Natalie attended a university on the east coast and was technically classified as withdrawing during the dissertation stage due to her program being terminated. She said, "I didn't withdraw. The program withdrew. The program was terminated." Some of her colleagues pursued legal action and were awarded their doctorates. She declined this option on account of moral principles. "I didn't want a doctorate that was awarded on a court decision. I thought, 'Well, I'll go back at another time and finish, because I wanted - I called it, "A legitimate PhD."

Amanda. Amanda is a married, African American woman in her early 30's. She holds a master's degree in counseling and is currently a training manager. Amanda withdrew from study at the conclusion of her first year from a southeastern university due to financial considerations and the doctoral program being too consuming.

Ashley. Ashley is a single, Caucasian woman in her early 60's. She holds a PhD in counselor education and is currently a professor. Ashley withdrew from doctoral study twice from two separate universities located in the northeast. Both times she withdrew during her first year of doctoral study. The first time Ashley withdrew was due to a combination of factors including program-student mismatch, lack of finances, and lost motivation. The second time Ashley withdrew was due to a combination of factors including a difficult statistics course, her supervising professor leaving, and the doctoral program being too consuming.

In summary, my sample included eight females and one male. Their ages ranged from the mid 20's through the mid 60's. Six of my participants identified themselves as Caucasian, two identified themselves as African American, and one declined to answer the question. Five of the participants were single whereas four of them were married. Seven out of the nine participants withdrew during their first year, with one participant withdrawing halfway through her second year, and the last participant withdrawing during her dissertation stage.

Data Collection

I adhered to a semi-structured interview protocol. Castro, Garcia, Cavazos, and Castro, (2011) and Golde (2001; 2005) set the precedent for this style of interviewing in the field of doctoral student attrition. Further studies such as Cusworth (2001) and Hughes and Kleist (2005) employed qualitative interviews but did not specify the type of format utilized. Kvale (1996) noted that semi-structured interviews are effective and popular because this format gives the researcher structure pertaining to the format of the interview protocol as well as the flexibility to ask follow-up questions when interviewees elicit critical responses. The semi-structured interviews lasted an hour, going no longer than 90 minutes. This corresponds with the research methodology followed by both Cusworth (2001) and Golde (2001; 2005). Furthermore, each participant was interviewed once.

Moustakas (1994) stated that there are two primary phenomenological interview questions with the possibility for others. These two primary research questions are:

1. What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?

   For the purposes of this study: "What were your experiences related to withdrawing from the doctoral counselor education program?"
2. What events influenced your experience of this phenomenon?

For the purposes of this study: "What events led you to withdrawal from the counselor education program?"

These two questions are very similar to those posed by Golde (2005). It is possible to ask more than two questions, however, these two provide the basis for textural and structural descriptions. Additional research questions were obtained from Willis and Carmichael (2011) and included:

3. Describe your decision to begin doctoral study.
4. Describe your experience of withdrawing from doctoral study.
5. How far along in the program were you when you withdrew?

See appendix A for the full interview protocol.

Research Protocol

I adhered to the following steps outlined below.

1. I sent an email to the members of CESNET describing my study and asking for participants (Appendix B). Once individuals expressed interest in my study, I sent an informed consent form that explained the rationale of the study, benefits, and potential risks (Appendix C). Through email, we coordinated an interview day and time that worked for both parties.
2. Eight out of the nine interviews took place over the phone in a private office located in the Bailey Education Complex. Ashley agreed to have our interview take place in her office as I was at her northeastern location on unrelated business.
3. A Sony digital recorder was used to record all interviews. I used my cell phone placed on the speaker phone setting to conduct all phone interviews.

4. At the beginning of each interview, I briefly reiterated my study, asked the participants if they were still interested in participating, obtained consent, and reminded them that they could terminate the interview at any time without fear of reprisal.
5. Data was stored in a locked cabinet in 444 Claxton Complex. I then transcribed all audio files. In an attempt to maintain confidentiality, all participants were given pseudonyms and any potentially identifying information was kept private. I even gave participants an opportunity to answer questions off the record if they so desired.

Data Analysis

I employed the six-step process for analyzing data from a phenomenological background as described by Creswell (2007, p.156-157). For this study:

1. I organized and filed all of the data, including transcription.
2. Read the text at least once and made notes in the margins of the transcripts. These notes provided the basis for themes to arise. "Coding is the process of organizing the materials into "chunks" before bringing meaning to those "chunks" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p.171). Through the process of coding, themes emerge from the data. There are different types of themes. They can be small describing a single perception made by participants or they can be larger describing complex phenomena with multiple subsets (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 1998)
3. Described the essence of the experience based on the themes collected as well as personal insight by including what it was like conducting the research while staying impartial to the data. This step includes taking a step back from the data, and examining it from different angles to ensure a rich thick description of the reality gathered (Creswell, 2007;

Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I completed this step in an attempt to describe the essence of the experience of conducting this phenomenological study.

4. I developed significant statements and then grouped similar statements into meaningful themes.
5. I described "what happened" as well as how the phenomenon was experienced by the participants which are generally referred to as textual and structural descriptions. The essence of the experience emerges through this process.
6. I presented the essence of the experience through narration and tables.

In an attempt to prevent researcher bias, I presented my findings to a qualitative expert in a different field who confirmed my findings and concluded that I behaved ethically. Although not explicitly stated as the Creswell method, other researchers such as Willis and Carmichael (2011) have employed similar data analysis procedures that involve the creation of broad codes that get broken down into themes and subcategories with the result being a select few themes followed by specific subgroups that encapsulate all of the data.

Summary

In summary, I conducted a phenomenological study that sought to obtain the essence of the experience of withdrawing from a counselor education doctoral program. These experiences were obtained through semi-structured interviews of counselor education doctoral students who withdrew from study. Participants were obtained from an interview sent through CESNET. Data was analyzed using the six-step method proposed by Creswell (2007) with an emphasis on providing readers with a rich, thick description.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the reasons why counselor education doctoral students withdraw from counselor education programs. My aim in this study was to determine to the themes that are associated with the process of withdrawing from doctoral study in counselor education and the coinciding experiences related to such decisions. I conducted nine semi-structured interviews with individuals who were enrolled in a counselor education program and subsequently withdrew. My sample included eight females and one male. Their ages ranged from the mid 20's through the mid 60's. Six of my participants identified themselves as Caucasian, two identified themselves as African American, and one declined to answer the question.

According to my inclusionary criteria, these individuals may have transferred to a different program within the same university, transferred to a different university, or withdrew from higher education altogether. The semi-structured interviews took place over the phone in a private office, and each interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes. From a logistical standpoint, I employed the speakerphone feature on my cell phone and placed a Sony digital recorder next to my phone, thus allowing me to record the interviews. I would have preferred to have conducted all of the interviews face-to-face because I believed it would have been easier to establish rapport and acknowledge nonverbal cues, however, this was not possible due to financial and travel considerations. However, I was able to interview one participant (Ashley) due to her location being in the same city in which I was located due to unrelated business. Ashley's interview was conducted in her office and lasted approximately an hour and a half. Once all of the interviews were transcribed, I analyzed the data using Creswell's (2007) six-step

approach for phenomenological research. At that time, I also gave my interviewees pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. My main research question focused on the participants' experiences that led to their withdrawal from their counselor education program. Themes began to slowly emerge during the coding process where I grouped similar "chunks" of data. I did my best to maintain the tone and discourse by naming the themes using the language of my participants. Follow-up questions also yielded interesting themes such as physical and mental health problems, internal motivation as the primary factor related to persistence, and being happy they tried doctoral study even if they failed to obtain the degree. The themes and findings elicited from the semi-structured interviews were reviewed by a qualitative expert with no ties to my counselor education program. This was done to strengthen the validity of my results and ensure that I behaved ethically during the data analysis portion of my study.

The first notable finding occurred before any interviews were conducted. My original methodological plan for this study was to interview doctoral students who withdrew from a Midwestern university where a counselor education faculty member agreed to serve as a liaison and contact previous doctoral students who withdrew from the program in which he was affiliated. We decided a greater response rate would result if he initially contacted the students due to his prior relationship with these potential participants, in addition to my offer to provide each participant $20 per interview. Out of nine potential candidates, none of the potential participants agreed to participate in my study. I was told that two individuals declined the invitation because they were still "too embarrassed and filled with shame" (Professor X, personal communication, June, 18, 2012). The study then transitioned to another Midwestern university where once again, a counselor education faculty member agreed to be a liaison and contact doctoral students who withdrew from that program. I was met with the same result as the

previous school where once again, none of the potential candidates agreed to participate in my study. Thus, I was forced to revise my methods section and post my study on CESNET, a counseling listserv for counselor educators and supervisors, to request potential participants that met my criteria to volunteer for the study. This methodological change rewarded me with 11 potential candidates, nine of whom agreed to participate. This finding supported Lovitts' (2001) assertion in her book where she reported how doctoral student attrition is an invisible phenomenon in which these individuals typically withdraw quietly and with little fanfare. Lovitts' (2001) finding was reinforced by the difficulty I encountered attempting to find participants who were eligible for my study. I will discuss this theme further in chapter five, however in the following section I will discuss the themes that emerged related to withdrawing from doctoral study in counselor education and the aforementioned follow-up questions.

Decision to Begin Doctoral Study

To help ground the study and understand the participants' mindset prior to enrolling in doctoral study, I began each interview by asking the participants to expound on their rationale for pursuing the doctoral degree. Their responses can best be categorized by two themes: 1) possessing an internal desire to obtain the esteemed degree, and 2) job requisites/opportunities.

Internal Desire

Possessing an internal drive to pursue a time intensive doctoral degree was common factor in enrolling doctoral study.

> Well, I always knew I wanted to get my doctorate. After I finished my first year of my masters program, I decided that I wanted to continue on. I finished practicum as a school counselor, but I wanted to continue on while I didn't have anything holding me back and

> so I pursued a doctorate. My older brother has a doctorate as well, so that kind of pushed me to keep working on my next step of education (Kelly).
>
> It was this goal that I always wanted to do, so that was part of fulfilling the goal (Natalie).
>
> I actually wanted to go back and pursue my doctorate (Nicole).

Conversely, two participants expressed hesitation toward starting the degree.

> My decision to – it wasn't mine as I said initially, it came from the outside (professor encouragement) (Ashley).

Chloe was a blend of hesitation, but also acknowledged the potential employment benefits.

> Initially I was pretty hesitant about it because I didn't know if getting a PhD was really right for me. It just kind of came as, 'Hey, why not?' kind of thing. What's three more years of education? And hey, maybe it will help my job prospects a little bit.

Potential Work Opportunities

The potential for job opportunities was the overwhelming reason as to why participants enrolled in doctoral study. Seven out of nine participants mentioned it as either a primary or secondary reason for their pursuit of the doctoral degree.

> It became very evident to me that the PhD became a union card; that I needed this if I was going to stay in higher ed, even if I wasn't planning on teaching (Ashley).
>
> Well, the reason was - I wanted to continue my education and teach in the field of counseling (Amanda).
>
> I fell in love with counseling as a profession. I never thought that would happen and I knew that the positions that I wanted go for in university settings, I couldn't do it with just a master's degree and I wasn't through learning, so I decided to continue on… I want

> to be the president of a university, so I have to do five to seven years of some academic field. I figured I could make a valuable contribution to this one (Chris).

For a few individuals, there were undercurrents of seeking something more, with the benefit of having improved job prospects.

> In terms of what it could mean for potential career options and placements, as well as pushing to that next level intellectually…So kind of a dual, both personally for me and for my career (Melissa).
>
> I wanted to continue with the counseling but my goal wasn't to be full-time faculty or, tenured faculty. I wanted to go back for a lot more study for the clinical part of it. My drive was to really be a better clinician (Kate).

In summary, the aspirations of participants beginning doctoral study were similar. They enrolled largely because they had an internal motivation or valued the potential job opportunities the degree would provide. Only two participants were uncertain about their decision to begin doctoral study, the other seven either explicitly or subliminally discussed how they were firm in their decision to pursue this degree.

Experiences While Enrolled

My next interview question entailed gathering the participant's experiences while enrolled in doctoral study. This question was included to gain a comprehensive understanding of why these individuals withdrew for the purpose of ascertaining their experiences while they were enrolled. About half of the participants interviewed shared good experiences while they were enrolled in counselor education doctoral study, particularly concerning opportunities, exposure, and curriculum. Conversely, common negative themes were a program-student mismatch, program intensity, program politics, and program initiation and hazing rituals.

> They were positive experiences. My instructors were helpful, the curriculum was demanding but I really enjoyed my courses (Amanda).
>
> [It was] Wonderful for the majority of it actually…it taught me new things, exposed me to different people. I got heavily involved in research projects and enjoyed my time with that (Melissa).
>
> They were good. I was exposed to unique opportunities to work with faculty. I had the opportunity to work on research projects and co-teach classes. I co-taught for both, the individual skill class and the group skill class. I was a doctoral supervisor… They were positive in the sense that, 'Hey wow, it's neat to be exposed to these things' (Chloe).

Program-Student Mismatch

Program-student mismatch was the most widely reported negative experience while enrolled in doctoral study; specifically two-thirds of the participants reported this phenomenon. Program mismatch can loosely be defined as a mismatch between the student and the program. It can span an array of topics from divergence in opinion regarding a class or research agenda, to the program's focus and what it deems as important (i.e. researcher vs. practitioner based).

> There was some [*sic*] philosophy of education class…having been a classroom teacher in K-12, this did not fit. I had a hard time wrapping my head around the philosophy piece without comprehending the tangible application of the philosophies that the professor was talking about. I remember one night saying, 'How does this help anybody with a second-grader getting their boots back on?' And the professor dismissed me with, 'It doesn't.' And then just continued on; didn't take that as a learning opportunity or even get that I was asking for application - practitioner versus scholar (Ashley).

> I was kind of hoping for more clinical aspects to it, but recognized early on – because it was kind of shoved down our throat more or less that this is not a clinical degree (Melissa).
>
> It was frustrating because I felt like there was a talk in the brochures and the information like, 'Oh yes, you can be a better clinician and run a clinic,' But I just didn't see that…In the residency class, which to me was the foundation for the program - they're introducing you to everything that you're going to be doing and that was frustrating. I felt like I enrolled to be a counselor educator and they - some of the faculty just weren't supportive (Kate).

Program Intensity

Two of the nine participants reported the intensity and competitiveness of the program as a serious issue that negatively impacted their doctoral experiences.

> It was very competitive and that was definitely set up that way…I feel like I made friends but it got to the point where it came down to push and shove, everyone was kind of out for themselves…During midterm evaluations the feedback we would receive resulted in people leaving crying and sobbing. It's almost like they are trying to scare you to not continue, where I don't want to say it broke you down and built you back up later, but it was pretty intense (Kelly).

Program Politics

Two of the nine participants reported program politics as a serious issue that negatively impacted their doctoral experiences.

> There were significant political divisions and I don't mean like republican, democrat… Which created a very strong faction. It was really unfortunate for everyone to see,

> because it just played out in front of all of us and carried into the classroom. To see that people worked in an environment like that - it made it appear that everybody was dysfunctional (Melissa).
>
> I got caught between the politics of professors. I know that now. Two professors who were on their way out towards retirement who typically locked horns, happened to both be in my court. The new up and coming 'hotshot' didn't like me and so I got caught in the crosshairs of the politics, unbeknownst to me (Ashley).

Program Initiation

Four out of the nine participants reported that they experienced or were exposed to situations for the sole purpose of initiating and hazing doctoral students.

> It is kind of like an initiation and I just don't understand that. You know, I think we prove ourselves by getting into the program, so why beat up on us when we're there? It just doesn't make sense to me…It's such a contradiction to what we teach to clinicians (Kate).
>
> We've talked with the second and third years in the program and that was the experience they had as well (hazing). That made me very nervous the next couple of years (Kelly).
>
> I really get angry at the 'gotcha,' 'set them up to fail' mentality. I honestly believe that we're co-learners in this life. And while I may be a little bit ahead of you with a degree, I have a lot to learn from you, as well as you might have [a lot] to learn from me (Ashley).

In summary, about half of the participants reported positive experiences while they were enrolled in doctoral study. In particular, they enjoyed the coursework, being exposed to higher levels of thinking, and participating in opportunities that they would not have received elsewhere. Conversely, participants who experienced negative events spoke extensively on topics related to

having a mismatch in philosophies compared to the program, doctoral study as an initiation process, and to a slightly lesser extent being faced with politics with an overemphasis on program competitiveness between students.

Experiences That Led to Withdrawal

My primary focus and question was the experiences that led counselor education doctoral students to withdrawal from study. These experiences and motives yielded diverse and eclectic responses. The biggest theme to emerge was that doctoral students withdrew from study for a wide array of reasons including professors leaving, finances, and program termination. Some individuals had a specific reason that led to their program withdrawal whereas others mentioned several factors. Kate and Chris were in agreement that program mismatch was the sole reason for their withdrawal or transfer, while Ashley added that program mismatch was a partial reason for her withdrawal.

> It wasn't a supportive program for folks that really were looking at it from the clinical perspective. I just didn't get that vibe at all (Kate).
>
> My professor is very esteemed in suicide and depression but those aren't my research focuses. I'm really more interested in resilience and especially how resilience applies to educational decisions…So I went over and met with the faculty in the other department and found a researcher that was interested in what I was interested… I still do counseling on the side (Chris).

Three participants (Nicole, Kelly, and Chloe) reported that they withdrew due to lessened internal motivation. Amanda and Ashley also cited diminished drive as an additional factor in why they withdrew as a result of the program being too demanding and consuming every aspect of their life.

> I guess a lack of motivation. I felt so pulled away from every other aspect of my life that it was, 'Choose school and give up everything else,' or go back to living and put school off for a little while longer (Nicole).
>
> I kind of realized that, you know, 'I don't have to be here' (Kelly).
>
> My husband was also getting a PhD. It was this interesting thing of, like, 'He loves what he's doing and he enjoys it. He seems happy and fulfilled in his program' and I started to notice this growing disparity between the two of us in that [regard] (Chloe).

Professors Leaving Their Program

Melissa withdrew because her supervisor professor left.

> I started working with a professor early on in the year and this professor decided to leave at the very end of the year. I was really tied to this professor and have worked intrinsically with her; she probably would have served as my chair. She asked me to come with her, which was awesome, but I'm married and my husband has a job here and that is a big deterrent. My family is here and this was a substantial move away from them, not to mention the program that this professor was going to wasn't near the university level that I was at, so it just wasn't an ideal move for me.

Natalie endured her dissertation chair leaving, however that was not a factor in her withdrawal. Ashley added that her dissertation committee leaving was one of the factors that influenced her decision to withdraw.

> It was a perfect storm in a lot of ways. The dissertation - my original committee left the university. So, I had three chapters written and thought I was ready to defend my proposal when my entire committee took jobs elsewhere.

Financial Reasons

Amanda primarily withdrew due to finances, whereas finances factored into Ashley's decision to withdraw from doctoral study.

> I noticed that I would have run out of money prior to the completion of my program. So I wanted to make sure that this was going to be something that I could actually finish. That was a major contributor… the financial aid really wasn't enough. It was a really expensive program (Amanda).

Program Termination

Natalie was in a unique position in that the program in which she was enrolled was terminated. Her fellow students sued the university and were awarded doctorates; however she declined hers on the basis of wanting the degree to be granted because of her academic intellect, not because of a court order.

> I didn't withdraw. The program withdrew. The program was terminated...The dean of the school changed and they were questioning their certification because they didn't have the faculty hired yet. So instead of them getting uncertified – they just closed us. They then reopened it later when they got everything back in place again. The people that had gone as far as I did sued the university and got their PhDs. I chose not to do that. I decided that I didn't want a doctorate that was awarded on a court decision. I called it, [wanting to be awarded] 'A legitimate PhD.'

In summary, participants withdrew from doctoral study for a variety of reasons. Program mismatch with the participants' goals and interests, and being overwhelmed and losing interest were the two most widely reported themes. Some individuals withdrew due to a single reason, whereas others withdrew due to a culmination of factors.

The Experience of Withdrawing

Asking my participants to describe their experiences of withdrawing from doctoral study was a natural follow-up question once I had obtained their responses concerning why they withdrew from study. Anxiety, whether the doctoral experience was positive or negative, was the major theme to emerge from this question. After experiencing this affect, the participants expressed this feeling to be unwarranted once made their decision to leave.

> Honestly, it wasn't a big deal. It wasn't a tearful process. I didn't feel like the faculty beat up on me. I did it all through email and through phone calls. I mean really, it's easy (Kate).

> Oh my gosh, I had so much anxiety about this. I'm about to tell someone something that I know they don't want to hear… I thought about 'When is the right time?' I felt so bad when I told her. She was like, "Did you think I was going to scream at you?"… I thought, 'Okay, that wasn't so bad' and I felt like the weight of the world was lifted off of my shoulders after that meeting. I thought, 'Okay, I didn't have to be in that much anxiety for that long' (Chloe).

> Once I made the decision, it was easier to be there. There was a lot leading up to it...It was hard to tell my cohorts but I think a lot of them understood and were okay with it. Faculty were - some were supportive, some stopped communication with me…No one did an exit interview or anything like that, or asked me why I withdrew (Kelly).

Melissa and Nicole were very analytical about the process weighing the pros and cons, and concluded that this was not the right time for them to pursue this degree.

> It was definitely a lot of decisions. I made a lot of decisions in that time period about not going with this professor to the other school. But – still a lot of pros and cons. I am really

> satisfied in my job currently as well…I just recognized that at this point in time and where we're at, that it was not ideal (Melissa).
>
> I guess painfully slow. After I took the leave of absence, it was time for me to return. I just let them know I would not be returning. I took a whole year off and I still couldn't make the decision to go back. I felt like, you know, this is not my time. Not right now (Nicole).

Natalie was disappointed to have to withdraw due to her program being terminated and Ashley felt like a failure. These last findings were not reported by any of the other participants.

In summary, the majority of participants either had good experiences withdrawing or were initially filled with anxiety which subsided anticlimactically, once they withdrew. Melissa and Nicole were very analytical about the process and recognized that this was not the right time in their lives to pursue a doctorate, whereas Natalie and Ashley were the only participants to disclose feelings of disappointment with higher education, or feeling like a failure.

Biggest Obstacle While Enrolled

My next follow-up question concerned the biggest obstacle my participants encountered while they were enrolled in doctoral study. There was little consensus among the participants regarding their biggest obstacle. Most participants had their own unique set of difficulties. These hindrances included: professor leaving, declining self-care, lack of time, lost passion/leaving close cohort, technical writing, lack of coordination and planning by the program, program mismatch with identity, online classes, and lack of money. Only Melissa and Ashley were in agreement that their advisor leaving was the biggest obstacle they faced during their enrollment.

> When it was first announced, we were actually at ACA. It was shock. Everybody was running to each other, we were at a luncheon and she's [the professor] like, 'Stay calm. We'll talk. It's okay.' I'm like, 'oh really? It might be okay for you'(Melissa).

Another theme to emerge was that the biggest obstacle faced was not the primary reason that the majority of the participants withdrew. Only three participants (Melissa, Chris, and Amanda) withdrew because of their respective obstacles: professor leaving, program mismatch with identity, and financial constraints. Ashley and Kate added that their respective obstacles of her professor leaving and technical writing factored into their decisions but was not the sole reason for their withdrawal. Ultimately Ashley withdrew due to a "perfect storm" of factors and Kate withdrew due to program-student mismatch.

In summary, there was little unison among the participants regarding their biggest obstacle during doctoral study. These difficulties ranged from lack of funding to technical writing skills. Only Melissa and Ashley shared a biggest obstacle of their professor leaving. However, the biggest obstacle that participants encountered was not necessarily the reason why participants withdrew.

Impact on Significant Others

All of my participants expressed strong relationships with either friends or family members. Additionally, four out of my nine participants were married. Thus, I was interested in how the participants' withdrawal impacted these important individuals. My participants received overwhelming support from their significant others regarding their decision to withdraw. No one reported any malicious or disappointed reactions. Conversely, most friends and family members were happy to see them more often, with less stress.

> All of my friends, of course, were just very supportive (Chris).

> I think mostly they were just really excited for me to have that weight off my shoulder (Chloe).
>
> I think my husband – he's been really supportive. He just wants me to pursue my passion and what makes me happy (Kate).

Factors Related to Perseverance

The decision to withdraw was not one that was taken lightly by participants. Conversely, it was typically the result of weeks or months of contemplation. When I asked participants what caused them to persevere for as long as they did, eight of the nine participants overwhelming reported that they possessed an internal drive to persist.

> Because once you start something, you finish it. If you can't finish it, you do the best you can, until you can't anymore (Chris).
>
> I wasn't okay with just giving up. I knew that I needed to give this a respectable chance. I didn't want to make a quick decision. I wanted to fulfill my decision (Chloe).
>
> I wanted it so bad. I was in the program, I don't really back down from a challenge. I did this because I wanted to (Kelly)

Amanda was the lone participant who didn't mention possessing an intrinsic motivation. Instead, she discussed how she was able to view her progression in the program which helped motivate her.

> I actually saw an end to it. It was only a three and half-year program, including dissertation, So I felt like, 'This could be done.' There was an end in sight. That if I could get through these nine semesters, then I would be okay. So that was the motivation to continue on.

Two participants mentioned persevering as a matter of principle because they paid for the coursework which served as a secondary factor for persisting.

> Money. I paid for the class and by the time I realized what the class was all about, I stuck it out because I had to. I paid for it, and I'm cheap (Kate).
>
> I did not want a $50,000 student loan with no degree (Ashley).

In summary, practically all of the participants persevered in the program as long as they did due to possessing an internal drive. These individuals did not withdraw on a whim nor did they take the decision lightly. Eventually, the cons outweighed the pros and possessing a strong internal motivation was not enough to offset their decision to withdraw. Lastly, seeing one's progression and monetary incentive were other factors that caused doctoral students to persist in study.

The "What If" Question

Golde (1998) was one of the few researchers who found it was possible for doctoral students to withdraw on good terms. She stated that this phenomenon occurred when doctoral students were exposed to the professor lifestyle and learned that they were not suited for it. She called it the *road not taken* question because students learned that they would not be happy if they continued down the path toward becoming a professor. My study took this concept a step further by asking participants if they were happy they tried, even though they failed to obtain the doctoral degree. I called this the "what if" question. In this study, eight out of the nine participants were satisfied they tried doctoral study, even if they didn't graduate. Natalie was the lone individual who expressed anger; however this feeling did not stop her from eventually completing her degree.

> I was very angry, but I knew I would continue. But I was very angry. It wasn't going to stop me from finishing. It was just for them…

The main theme for the "what if" question was that participants were happy they tried and were exposed to the professor lifestyle even if they did not complete their ultimate goal of being awarded a doctorate. Only Natalie expressed anger. Particular classes and peer relationships were among the reasons they were satisfied while they were enrolled in doctoral study

> The Multicultural class was a class where there was a lot of discussion and that's what I get energized from, just sharing the experiences, stories, and backgrounds. I really enjoyed that, so yes, being able to interact with fellow doc students and feel like I was smart enough to be there. So yes (Kate).
>
> I'm happy that I did it, because it let me know - because I didn't do bad. That's the other thing. Because I did get A's in my courses and I did develop relationships with some of my classmates. So I don't regret that. It's kind of bittersweet (Amanda).
>
> I think I would have regretted not going…I definitely enjoyed the experience, you know being away from home and doing all that. So I wouldn't take that back. It helped me grow up a little bit too and make big decisions like that…I don't feel like I was a failure. I felt more like it was the brave thing to do (Kelly).

In summary, the majority of the participants were satisfied that they tried doctoral study even if they didn't complete it. In particular, they enjoyed the exposure to doctoral life and this endeavor proved to their selves that they could contend with their fellow classmates. Natalie was the only participant who expressed anger. Both her and Ashley eventually persevered and completed their degrees at a different institution.

Health Issues

Previous researchers (Golde, 2000; Kerlin, 1995; Protivnak & Foss, 2009) reported that doctoral study negatively impacted their health. I was interested to what extent (if any) that

doctoral study impacted these participants. Seven out of nine stated that they incurred health impairments while enrolled in doctoral study. Nicole added that although she didn't encounter any health problems but knew of individuals who did; in particular one of her peers was diagnosed with a tumor and postponed surgery until after the semester had ended. The health challenges that participants faced were grouped into two themes: 1) physical and 2) mental.

Physical

Seven out of nine participants stated that they incurred physical ailments while enrolled in doctoral study. These medical issues ranged in levels of serious from moderate weight gain to severe medical conditions that required hospitalization.

> My health care had gone out the window, health, wellness and nutrition is very important to me and that kind of had gone by the wayside (Chloe).
>
> My first six weeks of my starting here, I had mono (Chris).
>
> There was weight gain, you know, from stress just to manage it…My sleeping habits changed a lot because I did my studying in the evenings, very late in the evenings to the early morning, which affects your health. Previous to enrollment, I was exercising more, walking in the afternoon then having time with the family (Amanda).

Ashley and Natalie expressed more serious medical conditions.

> I started hemorrhaging because of fibroid tumors that would get aggravated with all of the moving…I never was thinking about physical limitations and needed to think twice because the consequences of doing some of those things were very damaging to my health (Ashley).
>
> My friend [was at a meeting in the dean's office regarding her professor], she went into a seizure and went unconscious in the dean's office. It was serious enough for them to call

> the emergency squad. My friend was hospitalized in the ICU as a result. The meeting continued in my friend's absence to her detriment (Ashley).
>
> In the first program, I developed asthma. In the second program, I persevered with the problem I had. While meeting with my new chair, I had an asthma attack that they thought was a heart attack. I was hospitalized and had some heart damage (Natalie).

Mental

Five out of the nine participants stated that they dealt with mental issues while enrolled in doctoral study. Ashley and Natalie even had to enroll in counseling sessions to cope with their issues. When I asked Kelly about any health issues, she reported nothing, however later in the interview she expounded on struggling to be happy while enrolled in doctoral study.

> One thing that's very important to me is creative expression and allowing my creative side to come out. So I have more time for that [now that I withdrew] (Chloe).
>
> There was something in me that said, 'You could intellectually do this, but there is no way you're emotionally sound enough to get through that program without really taking a beating (Chris).
>
> I suffer from post-traumatic stress from it. I didn't go back for a year and a half because I couldn't even walk into the university until I got some counseling about what happened at that meeting with my chair (Natalie).
>
> When you're down here and you are trying to reach self-actualization and you don't really have a roof over your head, I went into counseling two to three weeks after the move (Ashley).

In summary, the majority of the participants incurred physical and/or mental health problems while they were enrolled in doctoral study. The severity ranged from moderate weight gain, mild depression to hospitalization for medical purposes and long term counseling.

Advice to Fellow Students

My next two questions focused on what counselor educators can learn from these individuals' experiences and alleged failures. First, I asked the participants to give advice to fellow doctoral students who may be struggling with continuing doctoral study, then I asked my participants to give recommendations for increasing retention and lowering doctoral student attrition. Approximately half of the participants in this study recommended that current doctoral students find support systems and have open communication with faculty members, fellow students, and individuals outside the program. Other elicited themes had less consistency. Two individuals recommended working smarter, knowing your limits, and seeking counseling when necessary.

Locate Support and Engage in Open Communication

In my first analysis, I categorized support and open communication as two separate themes, however during the data analysis section, it became increasingly clear that the two categories were isomorphic. Specifically, in order to have to have open communication, you need the support of individuals whom you can trust and vice versa. Participants clarified that these support systems could be both in the program serving as faculty or fellow classmates or as individuals outside of the counselor education program with no affiliations to counselor education or doctoral work in general.

> I would recommend - you need plenty of support. You can't do it on your own. I will tell you that you need to connect yourself with a mentor through the program; someone at the

> school as well as someone who already has a doctoral degree so they can balance those things (Amanda).
>
> Learn the art of finding mentors…So that when we encounter difficulties, they can be our wisdom figures and perspective providers and pull us back and say 'Let's look at the big picture here' (Ashley).
>
> I would recommend having open conversations with both advisors and other people whose opinions they respect…introspection for themselves about if their goals are aligning well with the program…so you're not living with it and feeling like you have to feel terrible. Be open and having conversations about that (Chloe).

Work Smarter

Natalie and Amanda both recommended to fellow counselor education doctoral students to work smarter, not harder. This theme could also be called "don't recreate the wheel."

> When they start the program, have clear in your mind your dissertation topic, because I think by the time you get into the first few program courses, you should have an idea of what your interests are so that you can start lining them up in your mind and coursework, especially the final courses and the dissertation, you can do literature review on most courses so that you are not starting from scratch (Natalie).
>
> Keep everything. Keep all syllabi. Keep all papers that you've written, because you never know when you'll need that stuff again. One of the papers that I wrote for orientation class I used while presenting in a meeting for work…So you know, I didn't have to go back and recreate the wheel (Amanda).

Know Your Limits

Natalie and Chris both spoke about knowing personal limits, and acknowledging the things that can be compromised and those that cannot be compromised.

> Are you willing to pay the price to get this degree and what is the price? You have to know what the price is going to be and are you willing to pay it?... not only how much are you willing to pay, but how much - in terms of your health and in terms of people around you (Natalie).

> If I have to choose this to the point where it is forcing me to abandon or significantly diminish these really important areas of my life that I won't be able to repair past this relationship, then get out (of the program) (Chris).

Counseling

Natalie and Ashley both received counseling during their doctoral study and recommended the experience. Natalie reported that she developed post traumatic stress disorder from her asthma attack during a meeting with the dean that led to heart damage and hospitalization. It took her over a year and a half before she overcame these feelings before she could set foot on campus. Natalie said the counseling was extremely helpful and allowed for her to return to school.

> Get some counseling help, either on campus or off campus, but get into some therapy (Ashley).

In summary, the most prevalent advice given to current counselor education doctoral students was to find support and have open communication with these individuals. Other suggestions included working smarter - not harder, knowing your limits, and getting counseling if necessary.

Advice to Faculty and Counselor Education Programs

Advice to faculty and counselor education programs was the second part of my question concerned with the reduction of attrition rates for future doctoral students. Two thirds of the participants recommended avoiding traditional ivory tower behaviors. Four out of the nine participants recommended to faculty members to improve and strengthen their relationships with students. Two participants recommended increased program flexibility and more financial assistance.

Avoiding "Ivory Tower" Behaviors

Participants gave no formal definition regarding what makes a stereotypical ivory tower behavior. Conversely, they knew one when they saw one. From the responses, I would classify it as a behavior occurring in an academic setting, typically from an administrator or faculty member, where the student is on the receiving end of an action that elicits a negative reaction. Ivory tower stereotypes cover a range of actions and include (but are not limited to) acting in an unusual manner, acting in an unprofessional manner toward students, and not practicing within the American Counseling Association's code of ethics.

> Don't be so weird and isolating….be more normal (Melissa).
>
> My biggest beef is beating people down and saying 'You're never going to have a life outside of grad school.' It's such a contradiction to what we preach as clinicians. I would suggest working out a way so that these people can have some balance (Kate).
>
> You can't say, 'Do as I say, not as I do.' We do have colleagues like that. We have colleagues who have dual professional identities, who speak out of two sides of their mouth about counseling psychology and counselor education; tell their counselor

> education people that they are really counseling psych 'wannabes,' and yet are leaders in ACA. That just drives me to distraction (Ashley).

Faculty Relationship With Students

Almost half of the participants recommended engaging in better interactions with faculty members. These interactions were classified into two subcategories: 1) being open and upfront, and 2) having better working relationships between faculty and students.

> Explain that an EdD is not a bad thing. You're still a doctor, you're still considered an expert in the field. However, if you're using an EdD, make sure that people understand some perceptions of that, versus the PhD. That's something that really should be disclosed a little bit more clearly (Amanda).

In addition, participants suggested that counselor education faculty need to be more explicit about the differences in degrees within the mental health field.

> It's something that, until you have transitioned into the identity, you have no (bleeping) clue. You're like, 'Oh, I'm going to be a counselor with advanced skills, right?' Absolutely not. I mean, if you wanted to do that, you'd go into clinical psychology or counseling psychology…being open to your students pursuing different passions (Chris).

Melissa and Kelly elaborated on better working relationships with faculty members.

> Cohesiveness - I know that as a professor you are busy. I know that they are writing and researching, doing a lot of things and teaching, so that students can actually become a burden sometimes… I wish they would be more, open to students working with them than they are (Melissa).

> I think communicating with their students more; having more communication and more, openness to really hearing students out …not feeling like it's a nuisance. You know you don't ask for help, but they give you the impression that you're bothering them (Kelly).

Program Flexibility

Chloe and Natalie both recommended that faculty in counselor education programs provide more flexibility to their students. In particular, acknowledge that some students are there to further their clinical skills with no aspirations of teaching in higher education, while other students do not mind a heavy emphasis on research.

> Having some flexibility in terms of how doc students are approaching this program. It seems like for a while in counselor in education, there has been a lot of fluctuation in the model of how programs approach it. Sometimes they are practitioner-focused. Sometimes they're research-focused. I think it's got to be about having a little bit of both, because not everyone who gets a PhD is going to want to be a practitioner. But also, not everyone who gets a PhD is going to want to be a faculty member (Chloe).

Natalie's approach to flexibility was slightly different by recommending a reduction of red tape; in particular not making students complete new requirements when they already completed the old program requirements. Natalie's theme could also be classified as adhering to a grandfather clause.

> They need a contract that expresses what they are expected under terms of the catalog requirements. That's what they graduate under. If the catalog or the requirements change over the years that they are there, their requirements don't change. What they go in with is what they go out as.

Natalie continued to elaborate on the bureaucratic flexibility theme. In this instance, it was the inflexibility and rigidity of how arbitrary requirements can negatively impact doctoral students.

> The time between the final review of the dissertation and graduation - they had an eight-week requirement when I graduated. So here you're working in the last semester and it could take your advisor two or three weeks to get back with the revisions, you know after you've defended the dissertation. You might miss the day for graduation...you paid for it (financially) to defend it to wait (resulting in having to enroll for another semester even though you completed it).

Financial Assistance

Amanda and Natalie responded that counselor education programs needed to offer more financial assistance to students. As stated by Amanda below:

> Offer more graduate assistance programs…Be very clear up front about the financial obligations and what they are going to need in order to complete, because for me, finding out on my own was more hurtful than if they had explained it in the beginning - I could have done some things differently, or planned differently.

Amanda's response also reinforced the theme above regarding programs being open and upfront to students, whereas Natalie's response for financial assistance was directed toward the dissertation process and constantly having to pay for dissertation hours.

> I know you have to pay enrollment the whole time you are working on your dissertation, but I think that they should make it more affordable, I mean, I essentially had a three course load payment to be working on my dissertation. That's a lot of money to be paying to get advice on a dissertation, which you don't get that often.

In summary, participants had diverse recommendations regarding advice toward counselor education doctoral programs. The most frequent response involved the reduction of stereotypical ivory tower behaviors from professors and administrators. This response was followed by the suggestion to foster stronger relationships with faculty members. Finally, two participants recommended increased financial assistance through all stages of the program in addition to limiting bureaucratic red tape.

Summary

In chapter four I reported the results and themes elicited through my semi-structured interviews with counselor education doctoral students who withdrew from study. I first reported the themes associated with beginning in doctoral study which provided insights into the mindset of each participant which is helpful when determining participants' initial commitment levels to Tinto's (1975) Interactionalist model. I then reported the experiences incurred while enrolled in doctoral study and the events that led to participants' withdrawal. I concluded chapter four by reporting the themes elicited from follow-up questions pertaining to topics such as biggest obstacle faced, "what if," health issues, factors related to perseverance, and advice to doctoral students, and faculty members.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this research study was to ascertain the essence of the experiences of counselor education doctoral students who withdrew from their programs of study. This study yielded interesting findings that were consistent with doctoral attrition as a whole. I applied the findings of this study to the few studies that were specifically geared to the field counselor education. Application of these themes to previous research strengthens the validity of the current study (Merriam, 1998). These themes are presented from a broad to narrow perspective. For example, I began with the introductory notion that doctoral student attrition is an invisible problem (Lovitts, 2001), then I transitioned into the reasons doctoral students are withdrawing, the relationship between my participants' rationale for withdrawing and their application to Tinto's (1975) Interactionalist Model concerning undergraduate/doctoral student persistence. I ended with Golde's (1998) finding that doctoral students can withdraw on positive terms which she coined as the *road not taken* question. From here, I transitioned into a "lessons learned" segment that serves as implications for the profession. I applied the advice given to fellow doctoral students, counselor education programs, and counselor educators to provide an awareness of themes to reduce doctoral student attrition.

Invisible Problem

Lovitts (2001, p.1) reported that doctoral student attrition is one of the "best kept secrets" in the field of education. The heart of this invisibility lies in the notion that doctoral students who withdraw, do so quietly with little fanfare (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Golde, 2000; Lovitts, 2001). This assertion was replicated in my study twofold. First, counselor education doctoral students who withdrew were difficult to identify. It took me three attempts before I was able to

locate individuals who met my criteria for participation. I was only successful once I posted my study on CESNET, a national counseling listserv. I was left wondering how many individuals are without a voice if they do not subscribe to CESNET and have severed ties with their old program. Secondly, while not the focal point of my study, some participants voluntarily reinforced the conclusion that doctoral students who withdraw do so tacitly. Specifically, Kelly mentioned how she was not given an exit interview when she withdrew and that no one asked about her reasons for leaving. Kate added that program withdrawal was an easy process that she was able to do through email. Her advisor never followed up with her and Kate does not know whether or not he was upset that she left.

Why Students Withdrew

In their meta-synthesis of the literature concerning doctoral student attrition, Bair and Haworth (1999) concluded that there is no single predictor toward attrition; conversely the phenomenon occurs due to a variety of factors such as departmental culture, relationship with faculty members, student involvement, and the dissertation process. Lovitts (2001) added that doctoral students withdraw as a result of interconnected relationships such as not receiving the information required to succeed, lack of community and sense of belonging, disenchantment with the learning experience, and poor advising relationships between students and faculty members. External factors such as health and relationships with significant others can also play a vital role. I believe the participants' experiences and events that led to their withdrawal were consistent with the findings above. For example, Nicole, Chloe and Kelly became disenchanted with the learning process. Ashley added that disenchantment was a factor in her decision. Chris, Kate, and Melissa spoke about program-student mismatch. This stemmed from not receiving the correct information concerning the program (i.e. clinical v. research focus). Furthermore, for

Melissa and Ashley, their professors left which led to their attrition. These once positive working relationships resulted in a void that was not successfully filled by other faculty members. For Amanda and Ashley, financial matters played an important factor in their withdrawal. The role of finances in influencing persistence was reported by other researchers (Abedi & Benkin, 1987; Cabera, Nora, & Castenada 1992; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Lovitts, 2001). My final participant, Natalie, technically withdrew because her program was terminated and she wanted her doctorate to be awarded on merit, not by a court order. Her decision to "withdraw" was not reported in previous literature most likely due to her unique set of circumstances. However, at a basic level as counselors we are bound to adhere by the American Counseling Association's (2005) Code of Ethics. Article A.11.a explicitly states that abandonment of clients is strictly prohibited during times of absence. Furthermore, article A.11.d articulates the need for an appropriate transfer of services between practitioners and clients. It is possible that counselor education programs need to engage in introspection to ensure that their behaviors are aligned with the guidelines that govern our profession.

Role of Resiliency

The role of student resiliency emerged as a vital factor over the course of my research in perseverance. Traditionally research on resiliency has stemmed from three areas of concentration: high risk populations, temperament, and human development (Kemp, 2001). What makes resiliency so fascinating is its unpredictable nature in determining success versus failure. Cohler (1987) stated:

> Little is known of the manner in which persons create a narrative that renders adversity coherent in terms of experienced life events, or of the manner in which presently constructed meanings of life changes may be altered in order to maintain a sense of

> personal integration. For some persons, at particular points in the life course, the fact of such misfortunes as poverty or the untimely death of a parent during early childhood is used as an explanation for the failure to realize personal goals; for other persons, this misfortune becomes the impetus for increased effort in order to attain these goals. (p. 365)

The same concept was present in my study pertaining to factors that led to doctoral student's withdrawal. Specifically, an event occurring such as a supervising professor leaving does not guarantee universal dropout. For example, Melissa's professor leaving was the sole justification for her withdrawal whereas Natalie was able to overcome this significant event. Furthermore, Ashley's professor leaving was "merely" a factor in her withdrawal.

In her review of the literature, Polk (1997) found four key factors pertaining to resiliency: (1) dispositional pattern, (2) relational pattern, (3) situational pattern, and (4) philosophical pattern. Dispositional pattern concerned individuals' physical and psychosocial attributes such as physical and mental health, self-efficacy, and confidence. Relational pattern concerned individuals' internal and external relationships such as positive role models, mentors, and extracurricular activities. Situational pattern concerned individuals' abilities to adapt and overcome when presented with varying, stressful situations. Lastly, philosophical pattern concerned individuals' beliefs, self-awareness, reflection, and positive life outlooks.

All of my participants either implicitly or explicitly reported all four of Polk's resiliency patterns throughout the study. For example, participants such as Natalie were confident in their intellectual abilities whereas Chris and others overtly described the importance of relationships. I believe that all of my participants possessed the situational pattern because it is highly unlikely they could have succeeded in academia and been admitted into doctoral study without being able

to problem solve and overcome obstacles. When I directly asked the participants' about perseverance, the overwhelming response was that they possessed an internal motivation. Moreover, Kate and Ashley discussed perseverance as a matter of principle. Although not explicitly stated by Polk (1997), I believe both of these responses would fall under her philosophical pattern because it embodies a mindset that entails resiliency stemming from personal beliefs.

In summary, the notion of resiliency emerged over the course of my research as an important factor concerning attrition. Cohler (1987) discussed the unpredictable nature of resiliency pertaining to success versus failure. Polk (1997) found four patterns that influenced resiliency. My participants' responses supported these theories.

Tinto's Interactionalist Model

Relationship with Tinto's Interactionalist Model

Tinto's Interactionalist model posits that students enter higher education with certain dispositions and attributes (i.e. socio-economic status, precollege education, etc) which help determine their initial commitment level to the university and the desire to graduate (Tinto, 1975). Once enrolled, individuals are then influenced by academic and social factors that may strengthen or weaken the individuals' desire to preserve and graduate. Tinto's (1975) model was originally intended to determine persistence at the undergraduate level but has been applied to doctoral students. Tinto (1993) included an appendix applying his model to doctoral study. In particular, his model was very similar to his seminal theory for undergraduates but placed an increased emphasis on academic and social integration, as well as possessing a connection to their field (in this case counseling) as a whole. Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) declared

that Tinto's model had reached paradigmatic status due to its consensus among scholars and the reception of over 775 citations in the literature.

Each interview began by asking the participants to describe their decision to begin doctoral study in an attempt to gain insight as to their mindsets when they entered doctoral study. Seven of the nine participants reported possessing an internal desire as their motivation to enroll and obtain the doctoral degree. One third of the individuals reported the potential job opportunities in which possessing a doctoral degree would provide them. I believe that the majority of my participants would have been classified as possessing high levels of motivation and a strong desire to graduate. This initial commitment level would have likely been reinforced by their academic successes at the undergraduate and master's levels.

Next I transitioned into my participants' experiences while they were enrolled in doctoral study and the events (or event) that led to their withdrawal. Tinto's (1975) model posits that while enrolled, events take place that either strengthen or weaken students' levels of academic and social integration, which in turn, influence their levels of commitment to the degree, university, and the likelihood that they will persist. I believe this to be the strength of Tinto's model because of the flexibility that is provided. In my study, the biggest theme to emerge pertaining to why my participants withdrew from doctoral study was that they did it for their own unique reasons. These themes included their supervising professor leaving, program-student mismatch, financial constraints, program termination, and lessened internal motivation levels due to the program being too consuming. For some, there was a single event that led to their withdrawal (i.e. program termination or supervising professor leaving) or a culmination of factors which Ashley referred to as a "perfect storm." These findings were consistent with previous studies that reported doctoral students withdrew as a result of multiple factors (Bair &

Haworth, 1999; Lovitts, 2001). Tinto's (1975) Interactionalist model accounted for all of these themes associated with withdrawal. For example, academic integration accounted for program-student mismatch (normative integration) and finances (structural integration) whereas a supervising professor leaving qualified as social integration. Furthermore, participants' diminished commitment levels were the result of being less academically integrated on a normative level due to feeling overwhelmed with the doctoral program.

Initially, I thought Natalie's unique situation of withdrawing due to her program's abrupt termination may not be relevant or applicable to Tinto's (1975) Interactionalist model. However, when I considered Natalie's academic career, Tinto's model was indeed appropriate. For example, Natalie entered the program with a very high level of motivation and commitment. She enjoyed the coursework (academic integration) which would have strengthened her commitment level, however the lack of coordination by the program, suffering an asthma attack during a meeting with the dean regarding her supervising professor, her subsequent hospitalization, post traumatic stress, seeking counseling for over a year and a half, and finally the program being terminated abruptly would have lessened her academic and social integration. This in turn would have lowered her commitment level to the degree and the university. Ultimately, she was able to persevere and was awarded her doctorate. Thus, Natalie's initial commitment level to the doctoral degree was very high and was strengthened by an increase in her academic integration due to liking the coursework. Her commitment level was then reduced both academically and socially but was still strong enough to persevere and eventually obtain her doctorate.

In summary, Tinto's (1975) Interactionalist model was applicable and served as a guide explaining doctoral student withdrawal when applied to my participants. The participants in my study withdrew due to reasons that were classified under academic and social integration. Tinto's

(1975) model was even helpful explaining why Natalie was able to persevere despite unique and difficult circumstances.

Road Not Taken

As mentioned earlier, Golde (1998) was one of the few researchers who found that it was possible for doctoral students to withdraw on good terms. She stated that this phenomenon occurred when doctoral students were exposed to the professor lifestyle and learned that they were not suited for it. Thus, the *road not taken* question was answered because students learned that they would not be happy if they continued down the path toward becoming a professor. My study took this concept a step further by asking participants if they were happy they tried, even though they failed to obtain the doctoral degree. I called this the "what if" question in my interview protocol. Eight of the nine participants in my study were happy they tried doctoral study even though they withdrew because it proved to themselves that they were PhD material. As Amanda stated in her interview, she had all A's at the time she withdrew. This statement supports Golde's (1998) study that it is possible to withdraw on good terms. Traditionally the research has focused on the negative aspects of doctoral attrition.

Advice to Students

The next three sections concern advice elicited from participants during the semi-structured interviews, the first of which is focused toward fellow counselor education doctoral students who may be struggling to persist. Burkholder (2009) was the first researcher to report findings pertaining to this subject matter. In short, his study recommended taking time off if necessary, finding support, and knowing your limits. My findings were partially consistent with his study. About half of my participants echoed internal and external support from the program. Two (Natalie and Chris) recommended knowing personal limits, specifically what you are

willing to compromise and what you are not. The discrepancy lies in the benefits of taking time off. No one in my study gave this advice. I believe this incongruity can be accounted for by taking into consideration Burkholder's (2009) purpose and population; his study sought to obtain the experiences of counselor education doctoral students who withdrew and subsequently returned. By Burkholder (2009) studying individuals who withdrew and then returned, it is reasonable to assume that at least one of them found their time off as helpful if they successfully reenrolled in doctoral study. It is of note that in my study, Nicole did take time off from the program which ultimately confirmed her decision to withdraw permanently.

Two themes are apparent in this study that were not accounted for in Burkholder (2009): 1) working smarter, not harder, and 2) not being afraid to seek professional counseling when necessary. The former had not been reported in the literature which surprised me because this concept was emphasized in my own program, and I naturally saved papers and syllabi, and tailored assignments that aligned with my research interests and past experiences. Secondly, on the surface, seeking counseling as a recommendation for doctoral students has not been explicitly reported. This seemed counterintuitive because I assumed that researchers with counseling backgrounds would be quick to write about the benefits of counseling to all populations. With that said, the emotional toll doctoral students experience such as depression and shattered sense of self-worth has been well documented (Kerlin, 1995; Lovitts, 2001; Sternberg, 1981; Willis & Carmichael, 2011). Thus, it is rational to conclude that doctoral students would benefit from counseling while still enrolled in study as a wellness measure.

Advice to Faculty Members

After obtaining the participants' recommendations to fellow doctoral students struggling to persevere, I sought their advice pertaining to counselor education faculty members.

Burkholder (2009) also followed this format. His recommendations can be summarized as faculty members being available to the needs of doctoral students, encouraging balance between school and life, being upfront about program expectations, and reducing the isolating nature of the dissertation process. My participants echoed all of these recommendations with the exception of the dissertation suggestion, which I believe was a result of my sample. Only Natalie and Ashley made it to the dissertation stage, which they eventually completed. For Natalie, she was met with frustration when her program was terminated, whereas Ashley's difficulties occurred during her first year(s) in doctoral study, not the dissertation process. Thus, only two of my participants would even be qualified to comment on the dissertation process. Burkholder's (2009) recommendation of reducing the isolating nature of the dissertation process may be valid; however, it is unrealistic to expect confirmation through my study when the majority of my participants withdrew by the end of their first year.

While not the focus of my study or interview protocol, the need for counselor educators to revisit their withdrawal policy (if any) was a byproduct of my interviews. For example, Chloe and Kelly both reported a great deal of anxiety leading up to this event, even though afterwards they acknowledged that it was unwarranted. Furthermore, Kelly and Kate were not given exit interviews. To this day, Kate has no idea whether or not her advisor was disappointed that she left. This reinforces Golde (2000; 2005) and Lovitts (2001) notion that doctoral student attrition is an invisible problem because doctoral students who withdraw do so quietly without an exit interview or follow-up. This finding may also support Bowen and Rudenstine (1992) and Lovitts' (2001) notion that faculty members sometimes view doctoral student attrition as failure on behalf of students, and thus there is no need to further explore or remedy the problem. By recognizing that doctoral students' withdrawal from the program produces copious amounts of

anxiety, and having a withdrawal policy in place consisting of exit interviews, it is possible that counselor education faculty members may be able to reduce attrition at their university.

My study did yield three recommendations not found by Burkholder (2009), which were: 1) the need for more financial assistance (Amanda & Natalie), 2) avoiding/reducing "ivory tower" behaviors by faculty members (Melissa, Kate, & Ashley), and 3) providing more program/administrative flexibility (Chloe & Natalie). The importance of financial aid acting as a mitigating factor to attrition has been discussed at length (Abedi & Benkin, 1987; Cabera, Nora, & Castenada 1992; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Lovitts, 2001). Lovitts (2001) wrote a book on *Leaving the Ivory Tower* which included themes of poor to no faculty interactions and relationships which were consistent with those reported by participants. Finally, program flexibility was not widely reported in the literature, however Golde (2005) reported that the more "hoops" students needed to jump through, the higher the attrition rate. Natalie reinforced this theme by expressing her frustration with the constant changing of requirements and perceived trivial administrative deadlines that could delay graduation and result in paying more tuition.

Advice to the Field of Counselor Education

Although I did not overtly ask the participants for advice to counselor educators as a whole, two of my participants reported the need for more advanced clinical training with less of an emphasis on conducting research. These individuals were told that their aspirations were possible within the program; however the program's actions were inconsistent with their words. Kate and Melissa described how clinical opportunities were discouraged in favor of research opportunities. The participants suggested the need for counselor education faculty members to provide more formal opportunities to further counselors' development in addition to being clear about the program's focus up front. For example, Kate was interested in furthering her clinical

skills particularly in the field of eating disorders and how to run a better mental health clinic. This training had previously been achieved through seminars and professional development sessions. However, these study participants enrolled in PhD programs sought more official and intensive training. Kate and Melissa were both very receptive when I asked them about considering a potential doctoral degree similar to a PsyD found in the field of psychology that places an emphasis on clinical training and psychology rather than counselor education. The distinction between the programs is worth exploring if this mindset is prevalent among incoming doctoral students or held by a rare few because this need does not appear to be met at this time. Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) supported this recommendation by citing that student-program match is a key factor in persistence. Specifically, when students' beliefs and expectations align with that of the program, they are more likely to persist. Furthermore, Lovitts (2001) noted that when doctoral students' experiences are incongruent with their expectations, the likelihood of them withdrawing is high.

Implications for Future Research

By studying a topic at a deeper level, themes emerge that otherwise would have remained hidden. Future research can also include methodological recommendations and lessons that I learned. My study yielded three themes that bear monitoring and further exploration: 1) internal motivations relationship within Tinto's Interactionalist model, 2) obtaining faculty member's perspectives on doctoral student attrition, and 3) speculation that we may have slightly transitioned away from doctoral students withdrawing due to negative experiences resulting in an emotional toll as reported by Kerlin (1995), Lovitts (2001), Sternberg (1981), and more towards a program-student mismatch as reported by Hoskins and Goldberg (2005) and Nerad and Miller

(1996). Willis and Carmichael (2011) acknowledged that both the negative emotional toll and program-student mismatch were significant factors in why doctoral students withdrew.

Tinto's Interactionalist Model

My first potential avenue for future research concerned Tinto (1993) Interactionalist Model. As discussed in the findings section of chapter five, Tinto's Interactioanlist model served as a guide and explained the reasons doctoral students in counselor education withdrew even though his model was originally intended for undergraduates. Eight of my nine participants stated that internal motivation was the primary factor for why they persisted in their program of study as long as they did. Participants were consistent holding the belief that when you start something, you finish it, particularly for something as significant as the doctorate. It is possible that we may be underestimating the role internal motivation plays in doctoral student persistence. It is possible that Tinto's seminal theory, specifically internal motivation, may need a larger focus in the model for doctoral student attrition. Furthermore, if we could find a way to effectively quantify and evaluate internal motivation levels for current and perspective doctoral students, we could theoretically reduce doctoral student attrition through targeted interventions. These evaluations of intrinsic motivation could also play an important role in the application/interview process for prospective students. The caveat to this recommendation for future research is that although my participants expressed the importance of internal motivation, they ultimately still withdrew. I equate this to Golde (2000) finding that just because students are integrated academically and/or socially, it does not ensure that they will persist and graduate, it merely increases the likelihood. Similarly, just because doctoral students possess high levels of internal motivation, it does not ensure that they will graduate. What it may mean is that if they

are struggling and contemplating withdrawing, possessing high levels of internal motivation may be the mitigating factor that causes them to persevere.

Faculty Input

My next avenue for future research is to ascertain counselor education faculty members' views on doctoral student attrition. The bulk of the studies on this topic matter sought to understand the insights of doctoral students who withdrew. An alternative approach to this subject matter would be to obtain the attitudes and mindsets of professors and faculty members. Lovitts (2001) reported that faculty members are gradually becoming aware of the significance of student attrition, but are often shocked and perplexed at their program's high dropout rates. Furthermore, faculty members often view students who dropped out as failures who were lacking in a certain area (Lovitts, 2001). As a result, some faculty members believe that attrition is the fault of the student, not the program or university, and therefore do not need to consider how their programs may contribute to attrition. Further research could illustrate the prevalence of this mindset as well as its ramifications. Burkholder (2009) supported the idea that faculty member perspectives could positively impact doctoral student attrition and increase retention rates.

Transitional Phase?

There is no shortage of research on the negative impact doctoral attrition can have on students. Students who withdraw are likely to obtain copious amounts of debt without the tradeoff of a more lucrative career (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Kerlin, 1995). Furthermore, these doctoral students typically experience an emotional toll (Kerlin, 1995; Sternberg, 1981; Willis & Carmichael, 2011) such as depression and shattered senses of self-worth after withdrawal (Lovitts, 2001). My study was no different in the sense that participants disclosed distressing stories such as politics, hazing, and financial burdens, however these participants also

reported more positive experiences than previously reported in the literature. It is possible that the field of counselor education has taken a small step forward away from negative emotional experiences such as depression and shattered senses of self-worth to a slightly broader theme of program-student mismatch as the main reason for withdrawal.

In summary, this study elicited three major avenues for future research. First was the theme of internal motivation being a crucial component in persevering to obtain the doctoral degree although this was mitigated by the fact that although these participants' stated that they possessed high levels of motivation, they still withdrew. This may be similar to Golde's (2000) finding that just because students are academically and/or socially integrated, it does not guarantee that they will persist and graduate; it merely increases the likelihood that they will. While Tinto's Interactionalist model acknowledges internal motivation as a factor in persisting, it may play a larger role than we initially thought. Furthermore, by being able to quantify internal motivation, counselor education faculty members can identify at risk students and implement appropriate interventions increasing retention rates. Internal motivation could even factor into the application process by helping faculty members select students with the highest likelihood of persevering and successfully obtaining the doctoral degree. Secondly, the literature surrounding doctoral attrition has always focused on the students. The research community could be furthered by investigating the insights of counselor educators. Lastly, it is possible, albeit unlikely, that the field of counselor education has taken a small step away from negative experiences such as depression and shattered senses of self-worth due to withdrawal based on a program-student mismatch.

Limitations

This study had multiple limitations. First, there was only one male participant. This was unavoidable because only two males responding to my study request on CESNET, and only one met the study's criteria for participation. Secondly, six out of nine participants were Caucasian, two were African American (one declined to answer the question) which raised the question: Are the results of this study applicable to other ethnicities as only two African Americans were represented in this study? Thirdly, although I posted my study on a national level through the CESNET listserv, eight of the nine participants attended universities in either the eastern or central time zones. This leads to the question: Were the experiences of counselor education doctoral students different at universities located in other time zones? Fourthly, it took me three attempts before I was able to identify participants for my study. This experience led me to question: Why did all of the individuals at the original two schools decline to participate in my study? Did a response bias occur in that they experienced something different that was not reported by my participants? Or, did they feel uncomfortable being contacted by a faculty member they knew?

Another limitation of my study was that eight out of my nine interviews were conducted over the phone. Conducting person to person interviews was not a viable option because of logistical and financial considerations. Therefore, it is possible that I may have missed nonverbal cues over the phone, did not establish rapport as well as I could have in person, or missed a follow-up question that I would have recognized in person. *Skype* and other programs that would have allowed me to use technology interview individuals were considered, but dismissed because participants may not have wanted to go through the additional step of downloading this software, which may have even more negatively impacted my response rate. Furthermore, using *Skype* or

similar programs added another element where there was the potential for technical difficulties.

My last limitation was due to the use of a speakerphone with a digital recorder. Speaking and recording quality were affected by the moderate capabilities of my cell phone and my interviewees' phones. This resulted in difficulty hearing some of the participants, the need for repetitious questions and answers, and a more challenging transcription process.

In summary, there were several limitations to this study. It is possible that a response bias occurred due to my missing nonverbal communications. In addition, since the majority of my interviews took place over the phone, I was forced to use the speakerphone setting with the digital recorder next to it. As a result, my participants and I were forced to repeat questions and answers that were inaudible and made the transcription process more difficult.

Researcher's Background

The researcher's background and experiences are an important part of qualitative research because it provides readers with a window into the mindset of the researcher. From the moment I started doctoral study, I was interested in why some doctoral students persisted in their doctoral study whereas others withdrew. I would see fellow classmates who withdrew and wonder why they left whereas I persisted. It was never a matter of intelligence. I believe every doctoral student faces hardship while enrolled, otherwise more individuals would hold the degree. I was no different. I enrolled at a university over 700 miles away from my friends, family, and now wife. Maintaining long distance relationships were both rewarding and stressful. I, too, had academic learning and growing "opportunities" like most students. I even transferred universities at the undergraduate level because I correctly thought that there was a better fit for me elsewhere. When I encountered politics of my own and was forced to change dissertation topics three years into doctoral study, the transition to pursue this topic was something in which I

was strongly interested. With that said, I approached this topic not with malicious intent, but more with a curiosity. I felt that I was someone who could relate, share these individuals' pain/experiences, and held optimism that my topic could positively impact at least one person's life. In closing, the dissertation process is an arduous, tedious, monotonous, and monumental task. Like most, there were days that I did not feel like writing, however my interest in the subject matter never waned, which made me think that I was on to findings that could positively influence others who were having difficulty in a doctoral program, or counselor education faculty to consider in evaluating their programs.

In summary, based on this research there are several findings that support previous research. I also discussed other themes that can add new implications to the body of literature that exists on this topic. These findings make the study more comprehensive, and strengthen the validity of the available research. I started chapter five by discussing how doctoral student attrition is still an invisible problem by citing the difficulty to obtain qualified participants due to how doctoral students typically withdrawing quietly with little fanfare. Next, I discussed why the reasons these participants withdrew and the vital role internal motivations and resiliency play as discussed in Tinto's (1975) Interactionalist model. I included participants' advice to fellow doctoral students, faculty members and those involved with the field of counselor education as a whole. I concluded with the study's limitations as well as provided my background and experiences while conducting the study.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Demographics

1. Gender:
2. Age (ish):
3. Education:
4. Current Occupation
5. Marital Status:
6. Ethnicity:
7. How far along in the program were you when you withdrew?

Primary Questions

1. "What were your experiences in the counselor education program?"
2. "What were the experiences that led to your withdrawal from the counselor education program?"

Additional Questions used in similar studies

3. Describe your decision to begin doctoral study.
4. Describe your experience of withdrawing from doctoral study.
5. What was the biggest obstacle you faced in doctoral study?
6. How did your withdrawal impact significant others?
7. What factors caused you to persevere for as long as you did?
8. Are you happy you tried the doctoral study even though at this time you failed to complete your degree? Did it answer the "what if" question?
9. Did you encounter any significant health problems while enrolled in doctoral study?
10. What would you recommend to someone who was also struggling to persevere to doctoral study?
11. What would you recommend to the program to help individuals persevere?
12. Is there anything you feel compelled to mention that we have not already discussed?

Interview questions were generated from the works of Burkholder (2009), Golde (1998; 2005), Moustakas (1994), and Willis and Carmichael (2011).

APPENDIX B

CESNET Email

Hello & belated 4th of July!

My name is John Breckner and I am a counselor education doctoral student at The University of Tennessee. I am in the process of conducting a phenomenological study for my dissertation. This present study seeks to examine the experiences of counselor education students that led to the withdrawal from the program. If you were a doctoral student in counselor education who withdrew from study entirely/transferred to a different university or switched programs at the same university, I would like to interview you!

The interview would likely be conducted over the phone and would last no more than an hour. At the completion of the interview, you will receive $20 compensation for your time. If you are interested, please email me and we can set up a time to conduct the interview as well as I can send you my informed consent containing more information regarding the study.
Thank you for your help!

Sincerely,

John

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

Introduction

As a doctoral student in counselor education at The University of Tennessee, I am currently collecting data for my dissertation. The purpose of this study is to obtain and illustrate the experiences that led to the withdrawal from the counselor education program. Doctoral student attrition has been described as one of education's "best kept secrets." Students who do withdrawal generally do so quietly without being given the opportunity to debrief and give their side of the story. As a former doctoral student in the field of counselor education, you have been randomly selected to provide valuable insight on your experiences that lead to your withdrawal which will not only add to the research community, but hopefully increase retention rates as well.

Information About Participant's Involvement

Participants who voluntarily consent to participate in this survey will individually take part in a recorded interview that will last approximately one hour. The interview will take place in the Bailey Education Complex or a place that is more convenient. If you no longer reside in Northeastern Ohio area or are unable to come to campus the interview will be conducted over the phone. Participation in this study is totally voluntary. You may terminate the interview at any time without fear of reprisal. Furthermore, there are no repercussions if you choose to decline participation in this study.

Risks

The risks of participation in this study are minimal.

1. It is possible that the negative thoughts, emotions, and experiences of withdrawing from doctoral study in counselor education will resurface during the interview process.
2. A breach in participant's confidentiality.

To prevent against the first risk, the primary goal of researcher is for the participants to exit the interview at the same emotional level or better. This will be achieved by debriefing with each participant for as long as necessary.

To prevent against the second risk, participants will be given pseudonyms to hide their identify. Other potentially identifiable information will not be disclosed. Furthermore, data will be stored in locked cabinet in 444 Claxton Complex and will be deleted after three years time. The digital audio files will be deleted once transcription has been completed.

Benefits

Doctoral student attrition negatively affects the student, the department, the university, and society as a whole. This phenomenological study seeks to add to the research community by providing firsthand accounts of the factors that are associated with the process of withdrawing from doctoral study in counselor education and the coinciding experiences related to such decisions. The long-term implications will enhance the existing literature on counselor education student attrition through a comprehensive understanding based on the rich descriptions of former counselor education doctoral students' experiences. Another benefit of this study is that most students who withdrew from doctoral study did so quietly. Participants will finally be given a chance to share their side of the story confidentially, which has the potential to be very cathartic

(Nerad & Miller, 1996). Lastly, results gained have the potential for counselor education departments to review their protocols with the goal of increasing retention rates.

Confidentiality
As noted above, all participants will be given pseudonyms and the researcher will make every attempt to conceal potentially identifiable information. Data will be stored in a password protected computer and deleted after three years time. It is possible that results gained from this study will be published or presented at a conference.

If you have any questions at this point in time or at a later point in this study, please do not hesitate to ask them.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher, John Breckner at 302 Bailey Education Complex, 1122 Volunteer Blvd, Knoxville, TN 37916 and (716) 807-6112. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.
You will be compensated $20 at the conclusion of the interview. If the interview is conducted face to face, the researcher will write a check on site. If the interview takes place over the phone, the researcher will obtain the mailing address of the participant, and mail him/her a check. Participants who wish to terminate the interview will not be eligible for compensation.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

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Vita

John was born and raised in Buffalo, NY. He holds a bachelor's of arts degree from Syracuse University in Psychology where he graduated Magna Cum Laude. John holds a master's degree in counseling with an emphasis in schools from Canisius College. He has counseling experience in both clinical and school settings. In his free time, he is an avid hockey and football fan, in addition to spending time with his family and friends.