You Can Only Breathe Because I Let You:

An Autoethnographic Study on the Role of Emotions in Transformative Learning

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. To my grandparents, Dr. Jack (Col., US Army, Retired) & Dorothea J. McClain, John J. (Crappa) & Patricia A. Lehr, my parents Bill W. & Cathy A. McClain, my sister, Darcie, my brother, Casey, I am only here because of your love and support, and the lives that you have built for your families, and I will be forever in debt for all that you have given me. To all of my family, McClain, Schwartz, Lehr, Smith, Wolff, Stephenson, Cox, Comer, I will forever be inspired by your journeys and the love you have shown me. To Kristin, my lighthouse, this journey would have never been completed without you. To Sissy, my little heart, I miss you and Mister every day. To Seven Islands, for all the near dusk runs that gave me peace and awe-inspiring views. To Liz, you are the best and I will never forget you looking after me and taking me around the other offices to load up on good snacks and coffee. To Whitney, Christine, Beverly, Bonnie, and Dr. Cochran, you all run the show and thank you for the kindness, baked goods, leftovers, and allowing me to feel at home on the fifth floor. To the good ones at depot, thank you for the support, flexibility, and understanding, without it I would have never been able to make ends meet, ‘NBT’, ‘That’s just too many b’, ‘This is Preston’ and ‘Go for Spencer’.

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Abstract

Graduate education presents an arduous and complex journey for adult learners as they interact with varied cognitive, sociocultural, and emotional challenges within their educational experiences and personal lives. Transformative Learning Theory has been utilized to help adult learners critically question their previous experiences, beliefs, assumptions, and perspectives to create new meaning and interpretations. This type of questioning can challenge individuals to move beyond their comfort zones of knowing and confront personal and cultural elements within their identities. There is concern for those adult learners who are experiencing a life crisis and/or displaying emotional chaos as they attempt to develop an identity, reflect on how to be successful in the classroom, and mentally manage circumstances surrounding their lives. Scholarly research often neglects the difficulties and contradictions of the transformative learning journey, individuals' decision to engage in the critical reflection process that leads to a transformative experience, and the emotional depth individuals need to make meaning from their disorienting dilemmas. The purpose of this autoethnographic dissertation was to have a better understanding of how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience at an R1 institution in the Southeastern region of the United States. The research questions that guided this study were: 1) How does the cultural context of a doctoral student shape the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience? 2) How does the doctoral student engage emotions resulting from a disorienting dilemma? 3) In what ways does the doctoral student navigate the transformative learning process while attending a doctoral program? From the autoethnographic narrative, four themes emerged: 1) academic discovery and responsibilities, 2) you can only breathe because I let you, 3) traveling through the dark to a transformative emergence, and 4) discovering compassion. The

findings build a new perspective for navigating emotions throughout the transformative learning journey. The study concluded with a discussion of implications for practice and recommendations for future research regarding adult learning, and Transformative Learning Theory.

Table of Contents

Chapter One Introduction **1**

Backgorund of the Study 3

Statement of the Problem 9

Purpose Statement and Research Quesitons 10

Significance of the Study 11

Definition of Terms 14

Study Overview 16

Chapter Two Review of the Literature **18**

Higher Educaiton and Adult Learning 19

Graduate Education and Adult Learning 21

Adult Learning 24

Andragogy 26

Self-Directed Learning 27

Experiential Learning 30

Transformative Learning Theory 33

Transformative Learning in the Context of Graduate Education 34

Section Summary 35

Transformative Learning Theory 36

Historical Background 36

Critical Responses to Original Study 45

Growth of Transformative Learning Theory 48

Emergence of Alternative Perspectives 51

International Influences 55
Integrated Perspective of Transfomative Learning Theory 57
Integrated Practice of Transformative Learning 59
Role of Transformative Learning Theory in Adult Learning 62
Section Summary 63
Emotions and Adult Learning 64
Emotions and Transformative Learning 66
Key Research on Emotions and Transformative Learning 70
Extrarational 70
Edge Emotions, Comfort Zones, and Liminality 71
Suicide Bereavement 75
Shame 75
Trauma 76
Art-Based Transformative Learning 76
Spiritual 76
Emotional Experience 77
Insights from Other Discipline 78
Positive Psychology (First Wave Posititve Psychology) 79
Second Wave Positive Psychology (SWPP) 80
Section Summary 82
Synthesis of Adult Learning, Transformative Learning, and Emotion 83
Doctoral Graduate Education 83
Relationship Between Adult Learning and Transformative Learning 85

Relationship Between Adult Learning and Emotions 86
Relationship Between Transformative Learning and Emotions 87
Intersection of Adult Learning, Transformative Learning, Emotions 87
Chapter Summary 89
Chapter Three Methodology 91
Research Design 92
Epistemology 93
Theoretical Framework 95
Research Methodology: Autoethnography 101
Formation of Autoethnography 101
Purpose of Conducting Autoethnography 104
Process of Conducting Autoethnography 106
Types and Approaches of Autoethnography 109
Evocative 110
Analytical 111
Current Study's Autoethnographic Design 111
Research Context 114
Methods: Data Collection 115
Journal 115
Autoethnographic Self-Interviews 116
Autoethnogrpahic External Interviews 118
Historical Artifacts 120
Data Analysis 120

Promoting Quality Rigor 128
Triangulation 129
Advisor Debriefing 130
Member Checks 130
Thick Description 131
Subjectivity statement 131
Limitations 138
Chapter Summary 138
Chapter Four Findings 139
Summary of Data Collection and Analysis 139
Autoethnographer/Participant of the Study 142
Themes From the Study 143
Theme One: Academic Discovery and Responsibilites 143
Love and Dedication to Adult Learning 146
Professional Development and Engagement 150
Interest in Qualitative Research 152
Theme Two: You Can Only Breathe Because I Let You 156
Exposing Negative Layers of Self 157
Emotional Chaos 159
Contemplation With Suicide 165
Theme Three: Traveling Through the Dark to a Transformative Emergence 173
Embracing the Dark Side of Life 174
Connection to Transformative Learning 178

Theme Four: Discovering Compassion 182
Compassion Through Shared Suffering 184
Aesthetic Appreciation 187
Confirmation from Peers 188
Narrative Introductions of the Study Participants 190
Joe 190
Jay 190
Confirmation of Themes 190
Chapter Summary 194
Chapter Five Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion 196
Summary of the Study 196
Discussion 200
Research Question One 201
Academic Discovery 204
Academic Community 205
Qualitative Research 205
Research Question Two 206
Emotional Chaos 207
Embracing a Perspective With the Dark Side 210
Research Question Three 213
You Can Stay in the Dark, Just Keep Your Eyes on the Light 214
Compassion and Suffering 216
Implications Practice 219

Implications for Future Research 224
Implications for Autoethnographic Research 226
Conclusion of the Study 229
References **233**
Appendices **263**
Appendix A: IRB Approval Form 264
Appendix B: IRB Self-Informed Consent 265
Appendix C: IRB Peer Informed Consent 268
Appendix D: Autoethnographic Self-Interview Semi-Structured Protocal 271
Appendix E: Autoethnographic Self-Interview Unstructured Protocal 274
Appendix F: External Semi-Structured Interview Protocal 276
Appendix G: Autoethnography on Role of Emotions in Transformative Learning – Class Presentation Spring 2018 280
Appendix H: Life in Chaos – Class Interview Paper Fall 2018 281
Appendix I:Transformative Learning Theory & Emotions – Class Presention Fall 2018 282
Appendix J: Dark Side/Emotional Chaos – Class Presentation Spring 2019 283
Appendix K: Creator of Panel Proposal Spring 2019 for AAACE Fall 2019 284
Appendix L: Doctoral Student Discourse in a Life-Event Crisis AAACE Presentation Fall 2020 285
Vita **286**

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Unified (Integrated) Wheel of Transformative Learning Theory 60

Figure 2.2: Intersections of Adult Learning, Emotion, Transformative Learning in Context of Doctoral Graduate Education 84

Figure 3.1: Struggling Man..... 134

Figure 4.1: Struggling Man 145

Figure 4.2: Conceptual Framework 154

Figure 4.3: Varúð..... 158

Figure 4.4: Some Kind of Pain 160

Figure 4.5: Inner Monster 163

Figure 4.6: Ocean and the Sound..... 167

Figure 4.7: You Can Stay in Dark, Just Keep Eyes on Light 170

Figure 4.8: Sissy..... 171

Figure 4.9: More to the Story 175

Figure 4.10: Darkness to Light 183

Figure 4.11: Arch..... 189

Figure 5.1: Spread the Light, Be the Lighthouse..... 232

Chapter One

Introduction

The beauty of life is that as individuals we are each a complex makeup of "muddled, idiosyncratic, florid eccentricities that make us unique as opposed to part of a population" (Muncey, 2010, p. xi). Whether it is through art, music, film, literature, or academic writing, the journey of life can offer some of the most unique, complex, and powerful ways in which we can describe and express our lived experiences (Muncey, 2010). The exploration of lived experiences in depth enables extraordinary and real-life aspects to be illuminated within a larger social context (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Lindeman (1926) believed that adults are motivated to learn from one's lived experiences, and these experiences are the richest source of learning. One's lived experiences do not become isolated learning events but are connected to previous experiences, and within these experiences lie a core of complex emotions that serve as a cognitive guide for daily interaction (Goleman, 2005). "Through the experience of emotions we come to recognize what is cognitively and affectively of value to them, and who and what they are" (Dirkx, 2006, p. 31). For instance, emotions guide humans on how to console a sad family member, show happiness during virtual meetings with colleagues and friends, or ask a difficult question during a meeting. Emotions permeate one's perspective and help individuals make meaning of physical and social surroundings (Dirkx, 2006; Goleman, 2005). Emotions are a part of who we are and are vital to everyday experiences and the learning process (Dirkx, 2006; Kasl & Yorks, 2002; Perry, 2006).

Emotions are also present in academic settings and become important factors for the personal growth and development of both learners and educators (Pekrun et al., 2002; Pekrun & Stephens, 2012). Adults enter learning environments with previous experiences full of emotions

and cognitive beliefs (Kasworm, 2008), and one may view a learning experience as life-changing, while another may make a deep connection with some aspect to their personal lives or other learners, and another might view the experience as boring and useless (Dirkx, 2001). "These observations suggest that emotions and feelings play a critical role in our sense of self and in processes of adult learning" (Dirkx, 2001, p. 64). Adult learning in graduate school in higher education, more specifically at the doctoral level, presents an even more arduous and complex journey for adult learners as they interact with varied cognitive, sociocultural, and emotional challenges within their educational experiences and personal lives (Kasworm, 2008; Kasworm & Bowles, 2012).

Adult educators have looked at several dimensions and theoretical conceptualizations of how adults learn to explain how the learning process is shaped and influenced by individual experiences, social, and cultural factors within the everyday life of adults (Merriam et al., 2007). Due to the various elements and factors of adults learning in higher education, researchers and educators in adult education have explored and utilized transformative learning to examine how adult learners create meaning from their experiences including their emotions (Kasworm & Bowles, 2012; Mezirow, 1997; Nogueiras et al., 2019; Taylor, 2003).

Transformative Learning Theory is one of the major adult learning theories and provides a process for adult learners to examine and question previous experiences, assumptions, and understandings concerning themselves and the world around them as they encounter new learning experiences (Mezirow, 2000). Disorienting dilemmas or experiences are disruptions in an individual's understanding that can push them into the questioning process, which can contain very complex and powerful emotions for individuals as they confront personal and cultural elements within their identities (Cranton, 2016). Exploring these complex and powerful emotions

during the transformative learning process can present a complex and arduous journey that is lacking understanding with no clear direction or end (Daloz, 2012; Mälkki & Green, 2014). This process of examining previous experiences places the emotional experiences of learners as a key issue within the learning process (Dirkx, 2012).

This doctoral dissertation focused on the process of transformation and the role of emotion within the process. The first chapter of this doctoral dissertation provides the background of the study, followed by the problem and purpose statements, research questions, the significance of the study, and the definition of terms. Finally, the chapter concludes with an overview of the study.

Background of the Study

The field of adult education in the United States dates to colonial times and has been an important factor in the development of the nation and its educational systems (Knowles, 1977). Within academic institutions, the focus on educating adults and the higher education classroom has been one of the of the more dominant areas of research and practice in adult education (Kasworm, 2008; Knowles, 1977; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). For adult learning in higher education, the late 1960's and 1970s was a period of significant theoretical and practical development (Taylor & Loras, 2014). Several dimensions and theoretical conceptualizations of learning such as andragogy, self-directed learning, experiential learning, and transformative learning were being used by educators and researchers in the field of adult education to explore the learning process of adults and how learning is shaped by various personal and sociocultural experiences of adults everyday lives (Merriam et al., 2007). During the late 1970s, Transformative Learning Theory emerged from Jack Mezirow and his development of a learning process that focused on the unique and vibrant experiences of adults (Taylor & Loras, 2014).

Mezirow (1985) believed that individuals need to participate and engage freely in critical reflection and dialogue to understand one's learning. Mezirow's positioning of critical reflection and influenced by studies involving life-crisis would help shape the concept of *perspective transformation,* which would become Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991).

Mezirow's original study in 1978, *Education for Perspective Transformation: Women's Re-entry Programs in Community Colleges,* focused on the new and growing re-entry programs in higher education (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). Mezirow's study was to identify the characteristics of the re-entry programs and investigate the learning experiences of those women taking part in the re-entry programs (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978; Taylor, 1998). The "primary thrust of the study was to identify factors that characteristically impede or facilitate the progress of these re-entry programs" (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 1). The programs promoted critical reflection on the culturally determined sexual stereotypes that women internalized and defended. From the original study, Mezirow (1978) outlined a theory of adult development that he introduced as *perspective transformation* to the field of adult education under the claims that there was another kind of learning he believed to be the cardinal goal of adult education. This learning centered around adults being caught in their own histories, reliving them, and the need to better understand and form new interpretations from past experiences (Mezirow, 1978, 1990).

Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory was influenced by a variety of work that included Freire's (1970) concept of conscientization, Gould's (1978) theory of transformation, and Habermas's (1971) work with social philosophy (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow (2003) claimed that "transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (p. 58).

Mezirow (2003) believed Transformative Learning Theory could describe how adults question beliefs, assumptions, values, and consider multiple perspectives to verify one's truth and reality. It is this aspect of transformative learning that considers it uniquely adult, grounded in looking at past experiences to change frames of reference that are more inclusive, differentiating, permeable, critically reflective, and integrative of experience (Mezirow, 1981; Taylor, 2008).

For the transformative learning process to take place, individuals must face a disorienting dilemma. Disorienting dilemmas are disruptions in an individual's ways of knowing that can push them into the critical questioning process on beliefs, values, assumptions, and understandings with themselves and the world around them (Cranton, 2016; Mezirow, 2001). The death of a loved one, moving from one culture to another, loss of a job, or any major life transition are examples of disorienting dilemmas that can be perceived as positive or negative to an individual (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). Disorienting dilemmas can also include activities such as classroom discussions, viewing art, reading a poem, so long as the experience provides a significant challenge to an established frame of reference (Dirkx et al., 2006). Mezirow initially viewed the dilemma as a single dramatic event; however, over time, he acknowledged that it could be a gradual, cumulative process (Cranton, 2016; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009).

Disorienting dilemmas present challenges that "cause a level of confusion in individuals sufficient enough to bring them to an awareness of there being significant challenge" (Howie & Bagnall, 2015, p. 349). Challenges can vary, and at times, can force one to question deep personal values and question one's sense of self (Mezirow, 1991). This level of questioning can contain very complex and powerful emotions as learners question their belief systems, who they are, how they see the world, and interpret what happens to them (Cranton, 2016). Exploring this level of questioning can result in some complex and powerful emotions during the

transformative learning process that can present a formidable journey that is lacking understanding and has no clear end in sight (Daloz, 2012; Mälkki & Green, 2014). Disorienting dilemmas, whether small or larger, bring an individuals' emotions and emotional experiences to the fore front of the transformative learning process. This process of examining previous experiences places an individual's emotional experience as a key issue within the transformative learning process (Dirkx, 2014; Nogueiras et al., 2019).

Emotions are a part of our everyday experiences and of the learning process (Dirkx, 2006; Yorks & Kasl 2002). The role of experience combined with the variety of contexts with which adult learning takes place demonstrates the critical roles that emotions and feelings have with the sense of self and throughout the processes of adult learning (Dirkx, 2001). The conflict learners have with emotions throughout the transformative learning process can be used to create intense levels of reflection and learning (Cranton, 2016; Dirkx, 2006, 2008). Scholars and researchers have responded by looking at the problem of self-understanding in several ways (Dirkx & Espinoza, 2017), seeing beyond barriers that emotions can cause, and focusing on how "they can instigate the learning process and lead to more holistic ways of knowing and being" (Dirkx, 2008; Lawrence, 2008; Mälkki, 2012, as cited in Hoggan et al., 2017, p. 55).

Studies have explored the influence of emotions throughout the learning process within various perspectives of transformative learning (Hoggan, 2014; Sands & Tennant, 2010; Taylor & Cranton, 2012; Walker, 2017) such as Hoggan (2014) insights from breast cancer survivors to build on the research of disorienting dilemmas bringing on significant life events, to further discuss how resolution occurs in the context of living through and after such events. Dirkx (2000, 2006) explored extrarational and soul work in transformation. Sands and Tennant (2010) examined the experience of suicide bereavement through the lens of transformative learning.

Walker (2017) studied shame and transformative learning looking to bridge the gap between emotions and transformative learning. MacKeracher (2012) discussed the concerns with developing learners' emotional awareness as they engage in the transformative learning process. Mälkki (2010, 2012) researched the concepts of comfort zone and edge-emotions that draws on the challenges to reflection chaotic emotions. Mälkki and Green (2014) looked at navigating the emotional journey of transformative learning.

This study uses the research of Mälkki and Green (2010, 2012, 2014, 2018) and Nogueiras et al (2019) to frame the focus on the emotional experience of the study. Green and Mälkki explored the concepts of comfort zone and edge-emotions that captures the intertwinement of emotion and cognition in a way that offers an understanding of the challenges to reflection (Green, 2012; Mälkki, 2010, 2012, 2019; Mälkki & Green, 2014, 2018). Green (2012) explored trauma theory and praxis to build on the understanding of transformative learning. He believed that Transformative Learning Theory needs to acknowledge the danger of individuals moving in the transitional zone between two ways of being, and that those individuals face those limits in the liminal zone (Green, 2012). An important piece of his study is the concern that individuals within a crisis may not be able to engage in critical reflection (Green, 2012), due to the possibility that an individual facing a crisis or trauma experience comes to realize their foundational assumptions may be broken (Green, 2012).

In 2014, Mälkki and Green discussed the notions of liminality, comfort zone, and edge emotions to explain the transformative process and provide a common frame of reference for educators and learners. All individuals have current sets of beliefs and assumptions that Mälkki and Green (2014) referred to as one's comfort zone and outside of this comfort zone is where one encounters edge emotions. Their value on emotions as a part of our assumptions determines

that to critically reflect on one's assumptions, one must acknowledge and accept edge emotions. Mälkki and Green (2014, 2018) believed that looking beyond current research with Transformative Learning Theory is needed to develop a new way to approach the conflicts between emotional comfort zones and chaos. Similar research regarding this study is seen in the work of Nogueiras et al. (2019). They focused on the emotional experiences of an individual graduate adult learner experiencing transformative learning throughout a semester long counseling masters' course. Nogueiras et al. (2019) moved beyond the common retrospective account as they used "a combination of longitudinal and retrospective accounts" to capture the "emotional experiences" of an individual's transformative learning processes (p. 73). They depict "transformative learning as a process of stability—destabilization—transition—resettlement" and provided an in-depth look at how context shapes and influences an individual's meaning making and emotional processes (Nogueiras et al., 2019, p. 73). This study looks beyond the emotional experience of a master's student single semester focus of Nogueiras et al. (2019) and explores the emotional experiences of a doctoral student during a four-year period.

The before mentioned research has shown that no one adult learner brings with them the same set of circumstances or lived experiences into a learning environment, and adult higher and graduate education can present cognitive, sociocultural, and emotional challenges to adult learners (Kasworm & Bowles, 2012). An even greater concern for adult education in higher and graduate education are those adult students who are experiencing a life crisis and displaying *emotional chaos* as they develop an identity, reflect on how to be successful in the classroom, and mentally manage circumstances surrounding their life (Kasworm, 2008; Nogueiras et al., 2019). Transformative learning research has been used to explore emotional experiences within higher and graduate education environments; however, regarding the amount of transformative

learning research, an overlying critique remains that the difficulty of the transformative journey is often neglected (MacKeracher, 2012; Mälkki, 2012; Mälkki & Green, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Transformative learning experiences have been explored by various researchers and scholars in the field of adult education. They often indicated that adult educators and learners do not fully understand the role of emotions during a transformative learning experience (Cranton, 2016; Dirkx, 2000, 2008; MacKeracher, 2012; Mälkki, 2012, 2019; Mälkki & Green, 2014, 2018; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Various researchers and educators have added to the discussion on emotions and transformative learning that include but not limited to fostering authentic relationships in the transformative classroom (Cranton, 2006); extrarational and soul work (Dirkx, 2000, 2006); trauma theory and praxis (Green, 2012); insights from breast cancer survivors to build on the research of disorienting dilemmas (Hoggan, 2014); promoting transformative learning trough reading fiction (Hoggan & Cranton, 2015); positionality and transformative learning (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006); concerns of developing learners' emotional awareness as they engage in transformative learning (MacKeracher, 2012); research on the concepts of comfort zone and edge-emotions that draws on the challenges with reflection on chaotic emotions (Mälkki, 2010, 2012); navigating the emotional journey of transformative learning (Mälkki & Green, 2014); learning that comes from the negative interpretation of life experiences (Merriam et al., 1996); transformative learning of a masters' student with focus on emotional experience (Nogueiras et al., 2019); transformative learning in the context of suicide bereavement (Sands & Tennant, 2010); inclusion of spirituality in transformative learning (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006); and the focus on shame and transformative learning (Walker, 2017). Literature has also shown a common positive light is often placed on transformative learning

outcomes while neglecting the difficulty of the journey (Daloz, 2012; MacKeracher, 2012; Mälkki, 2012; Mälkki & Green, 2014). The lack of focus on the journey is due to the commonly used retrospective account of individuals' transformative learning experiences, and the inability to capture the raw and dynamic difficulties and contradictions that one can experience during a transformation in an educational setting (DeCapua et al., 2018; Nogueiras et al., 2019; Taylor & Cranton, 2012).

Despite the significance of these studies, there still is a lack of research with focus on the difficulty of the transformative learning journey. Research on this area is still needed to have a better understanding on how an adult learner, in a doctoral program facing a disorienting dilemma, navigates the challenging experiences, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors throughout the transformative learning journey. There is a lack of scholarly research concerning the difficulties and contradictions on what makes an individual decide to engage in the critical reflection process that leads to a transformative experience, or the emotional depth individuals need to make meaning with their disorienting dilemmas.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this autoethnographic dissertation was to have a better understanding of how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience at an R1 institution in the southeastern region of the United States. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How does the cultural context of a doctoral student shape the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience?
2. How does the doctoral student engage emotions resulting from a disorienting dilemma?

3. In what ways does the doctoral student navigate the transformative learning process while attending a doctoral program?

This study focused on the lived experiences and culture context of a doctoral student during the period of late Fall 2017 through Spring 2021 of their doctoral studies at an R1 institution using Transformative Learning Theory.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the research and practice of transformative learning in adult education as it continues to build understanding on who adult learners are and the complexities that they bring with them to higher and graduate education. Through this study, higher education stakeholders, adult educators, researchers, and learners can continue to build understanding on how emotions are engaged within a transformative learning process of an adult learner, while navigating a doctoral program at an R1 institution in the southeastern region of the United States.

First, this autoethnographic study produces work of an individual's journey in hopes of offering reflection, insight, and hope to readers and audiences who might have had similar experiences or who might be interested in the mental health of individuals within academia (Jones et al., 2013). The focus on the individual in the study helps to collectively inform a larger society by celebrating experiences and the intimate details within them, focusing on the humanness along with a greater sense of moral and ethical concerns, encourage empathy and compassion, and allow all voices to share life experiences (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Ellis, 1999). The use of transformative learning was needed to allow the researcher to write through painful, confusing, and chaotic experiences, to work through difficult experiences so they may offer support and compassion to others who are having similar experiences (Jones et al., 2014). Jarvis (2006) describes society as being far too complex to fully understand, yet each of the learning

theories adds a little more understanding to life and learning. Illuminating an adult, doctoral student's experiences with the transformative learning process, while facing a life crisis and emotional chaos, highlights the complex interactions of critical reflection and meaning-making that occur during one's lived experiences. This study benefits the continued understanding of who adult learners are and how learning in adulthood is shaped by each learner's unique personal and social factors. Society is always changing (Bauman, 2005) and individuals are compelled to understand their society and the world around them so that they can "intelligently participate in shaping decisions that would affect their day-to-day lives and collectively improve conditions of their lifeworld" (Heaney, 2015, p. 5). This study's use of Transformative Learning Theory continues to bring understanding to how adults can continue to learn throughout life's experiences, even those that are deemed negative (Jarvis, 2007).

Second, this study contributes to adult learning in higher and graduate education, and institutions' student affairs programs by examining an adult learner's interactions with varied cognitive, sociocultural, and emotional challenges within their educational experiences and personal lives that have helped unify or fracture the growth and development of the learner (Kasworm, 2008; Kasworm & Bowles, 2012). As adults continue to return to higher education, it is vital that an institution's faculty and staff of adult higher and graduate academic programs and student affairs programs better understand the needs of adult learners to assist in their academic journeys and success. It is vital that educators and staff working within academic and student affairs programs continue building understanding on adult development and how adults learn, to better understand who adult learners are. A significant concern for adult higher education, are adult learners who are experiencing a life crisis and displaying *emotional chaos* (Kasworm, 2008; Nogueiras et al., 2019). This study offers the emotional journey of an adult doctoral

student so that others may relate to their own experiences or draw inspiration to being part of another's support network and demonstrate the continued need for educators to develop caring, supportive relationships and learning environments that enhance learning and meaning making.

Finally, this study contributes to the research and practice of transformative learning by adding to transformative learning literature to weaken the tension that exists between emotions and rationality by looking beyond current research to develop new ways to approach emotions in transformative learning. Higher education learning environments are designed to increase sophisticated ways of meaning-making (Kegan, 1994), and this study adds to the scholarly literature that Transformative Learning Theory provides a process to reach these goals (Nogueiras et al., 2019). Incorporating second wave *dark side* positive psychology literature into transformative learning literature adds insight and draws connections within the discussion of transformative learning. The interweaving of second wave positive psychology highlights a more nuanced approach to the whole spectrum of emotional experiences, offering concepts to help acknowledge, engage, and embrace emotions to build depth of meaning, and create an openness that is needed when individuals face dilemmas (Ivtzan et al., 2016). These perspectives are needed to better understand that emotions and the meaning of a given reflection is unique to each individual's perception and as an outsider there is no classification or straight forward meaning behind someone else's experience. This study provides ideas on how to develop the relationships, activities, environments, and skills needed to help educators and learners navigate emotions, so they can reach a level of reflection that could not otherwise be fully understood. Given the proper fostering environments and skills needed to understand negative or chaotic emotions, individuals can reach an intense level of reflection that could not otherwise be fully understood (Cranton, 2016).

Definition of Terms

Autoethnography: "is a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text" (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 6). Autoethnography, from a social science perspective, not only tells stories but expands the "understanding of social realities through the lens of researchers" (Chang, 2013, p. 108)

Comfort Zone: Comfort zone is an individual's current sets of beliefs and assumptions. A disorienting dilemma is an event that forces an individual out of their comfort zone. Outside of the comfort zone is where one encounters edge emotions (Mälkki, 2012, 2019; Mälkki & Green, 2014, 2018).

Critical Reflection: "Questioning the integrity of assumptions and beliefs based on prior experiences" (Taylor, 1998, p. 9). Critical reflection "involves both reflection and critique on how we are perceiving, thinking, judging, feeling, and acting" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 106).

Critical Self-reflection: "A critique of a premise upon which the learner has defined a problem" (Mezirow, 1998, p. 186). "Critical self-reflection, that is, questioning and examining assumptions in terms of where they came from, the consequences of holding them, and why they are important" (Cranton, 2002, p. 66). The process of questioning one's own assumptions, presuppositions, and meaning (Cranton, 2016).

Disorienting Dilemma: "In adulthood…developmental challenges, referred to in the popular literature as life crisis" (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 7). "Type of problem that causes a level of confusion in individuals sufficient to bring them to an awareness of there being significant and legitimate challenges to the manner in which they view and understand how their world works" (Howie & Bagnall, 2015, p. 349).

Emotional Chaos: Kasworm (2008) suggests that 'emotional chaos' can occur as adult students begin to develop an identity, reflect on how to be successful in the classroom, and mentally manage circumstances surrounding their life.

Extrarational: Extrarational approach of transformative learning involves a very personal and imaginative way of knowing (Dirkx, 2001; Dirkx et al., 2006). View of transformative learning as soul work or inner work, which suggests "a more integrated and holistic understanding of subjectivity, one that reflects the intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions of our being in the world" (Dirkx et al., 2006, p. 125).

Liminality: "A term used to describe the psychological process of transitioning across boundaries and borders" (Larson, 2014. p. 1032). In transformative learning, Mälkki and Green (2014) describe the liminal zone when on one is "faced with the challenge to give up one's preconceived destination, and reliance on one's present meaning perspective" (p. 12).

Negative Emotions/Chaotic Emotions: Emotions that can result in the feeling of shame, fear, guilt, hate, anger, jealousy, and sadness. "When one is facing particular crisis for the first time, one is taken on to an emotional rollercoaster *without knowing when it is going to end and where it takes one*. One feels estranged from one's familiar sense of self" (Mälkki & Green, 2014, p. 16).

Positive Psychology (First Wave Positive Psychology, FWPP): The orientation of positive psychology is the science that focuses on the positive aspects of human life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). "In the most general terms, positive psychology is concerned with the use of psychological theory, research, and intervention techniques to understand the positive, adaptive, creative, and emotionally fulling aspects of human behavior" (Compton & Hoffman, 2013, p. 1).

Research 1: Doctoral University (R1DU): A category designated by the Carnegie Commission. R1: Doctoral Universities are defined as having very high research activity, meaning that the institution has awarded at least 20 research/scholarship doctoral degrees in 2016–2017 and had at a minimum $5 million in research expenditures (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2019).

Second Wave Dark Side Positive Psychology (SWPP): Explores a variety of topics consider to be part of the *dark* side of life while emphasizing their role in our positive functioning and transformation as human beings. SWPP was a step away from the early positive focus to a more nuanced approach to the challenging experiences, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors which trigger discomfort in us (Ivtzan et al., 2016).

Study Overview

Chapter One presented an introduction to this study focusing on how a doctoral student's cultural context shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience. The background of the study provided an overview of the landscape of adult learning in higher and graduate education, adult learning theories focused on the use of experience in learning, development of Transformative Learning Theory, importance of emotions and the gaps remaining with emotions in transformative learning research. The statement of the problem and purpose of the study sections explained the specific need for this study and what the study aims to accomplish, specifically focused on how one adult doctoral student's cultural context shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience at an R1 institution in the southeastern region of the United States. The chapter concluded with a section on the potential significance of the study as related to discussions on the use of an individual focus to collectively inform a larger society about the conversations needed concerning mental health in academia,

adult learning in higher and graduate education, the research and practice of transformative learning, and a definition of terms.

In Chapter Two I provide a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to this study to aid the reader in understanding the complexities of Transformative Learning Theory. This review begins with brief introductions on higher education, graduate education, adult higher and graduate education, and adult learning to frame the importance of transformative learning as a theory of adult learning in higher education. The evolution of transformative learning is explored beginning with its historical origins, critical responses, theoretical growth, and alternative perspectives that have emerged within the field. As emotions cross many fields, the review focuses on the role of emotions in transformative learning and narrowed the focus with key research on transformative learning that involves emotions. A review of second wave positive psychology is introduced to create and develop connections from the discipline to further the discussion on emotions in transformative learning. Finally, the chapter concludes with a synthesis of adult learning, transformative learning, and emotions to help frame how all the elements of the study come together for the research focus. Next, Chapter Three, I address how a qualitative, autoethnographic approach was used as a form of personal narrative to place the researcher/doctoral student within their specific social context. Autoethnography was utilized as both the method and data collection for this study. Then, Chapter Four, I present the findings from the analysis on the autoethnographic personal narrative and include a section from the external participant interviews with two peers of the researcher to provide confirmation to the aspects of the personal narrative. Finally, Chapter Five, I provide a discussion of the study, as well as implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion of the study.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Learning is a part of being alive and a defining condition as humans is that we need to understand the meaning of our experiences, and learning that occurs through one's lived experiences can often lead to some aspect of self-change (Baumgartner & Merriam, 2000). As people learn through their experiences, they begin to see the world around them and determine how they want to interact with this world. The interaction and interpretation process require individuals to develop "accompanying values, beliefs, and assumptions that determine their behavior" (Cranton, 2016, p. 15). Jack Mezirow developed Transformative Learning Theory in the late 1970's to help adults "learn to make their own interpretations rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgments, and feelings of others" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). Mezirow (1997) believed that this development of autonomous thinking was a cardinal goal and method of adult education. Mezirow (2000) believed "achieving greater autonomy in thinking is a product of transformative learning" (p. 29). Mezirow (2012) believed that autonomy is not a fixed goal, "but movement in the process of transformative learning toward greater understanding of the assumptions supporting one's concepts, beliefs, and feelings and those of others" (p. 91). The previous chapter presented an overview on the background information and set the context for this dissertation through an introduction on the gap in literature, the research problem, and the research questions. In addition, the previous chapter indicated that there have been several studies investigating emotionally chaotic experiences and how these emotions can influence transformative learning, despite the significance of these studies, the problem is that there has been a lack of research with focus on the difficulty of the transformative learning journey. There is a lack of scholarly research concerning the difficulties and contradictions that makes an

individual decide to engage in the critical reflection process that leads to a transformative experience, or the emotional depth individuals need to make meaning with their disorienting dilemmas. Therefore, a deeper examination is needed to better understand how an adult learner, in a doctoral program facing a disorienting dilemma, navigates the challenging experiences, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors throughout the transformative learning journey.

The current chapter provides a comprehensive review on the literature relevant to this study to aid the reader in understanding the complexities of Transformative Learning Theory and practice. There are four major sections in this chapter. First, brief introductions on higher education, graduate education, adult learning in higher education, and adult learning theories are done to frame the importance of transformative learning as a theory of adult learning in higher education. Second, I review the historical background of Transformative Learning Theory beginning with the historical origins, critical responses, theoretical growth, and alternative perspectives that have emerged. Third, the discussions on emotions are exhaustive, this review focuses on the role of emotions within educational psychology, adult education, and then transformative learning to narrow the focus on transformative learning literature with emotions as a core element. A review of second wave positive psychology provides a discussion to create and develop connections from the discipline to further the discussion on emotions in transformative learning. Fourth, the chapter concludes with a synthesis of adult learning, transformative learning, and emotions to help frame how all the elements of the study come together for the research focus.

Higher Education and Adult Learning

Higher education offers various types of education given within institutions of learning that end in a named degree, diploma, or certificate of higher studies (Thelin, 2011). The

institutions of higher education include universities, colleges, professional schools, teacher-training schools, junior colleges, and institutes of technology (Merriam et al., 2007; Thelin, 2011). Higher education includes significant theoretical and abstract elements to place "emphasis on the transmission of knowledge to support students in the transition towards increasingly sophisticated ways of meaning-making" (Kegan, 1994; Perry, 1970; as cited in Nogueiras et al., 2019, p. 72). Higher education continues to be a growth industry as total enrollment reached 17 million in the early twenty-first century (Thelin, 2011). As enrollment keeps increasing, so have the demographics of the student populations.

With the ever-growing number of adults entering and returning to higher education, it is vital that institutions and educators better understand how adults learn throughout a lifespan and who adult learners are (Smith & Reio, 2006). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) listed college enrollment for 2018 at a total of 19.64 million students and 7.86 million of those students being 25 years old and over. Of those 7.86 million students, 3.11 million of them were 35 years of age and older (NCES, 2018). This growth has seen adult students return to higher education through various public and private institutions, community colleges, distance learning institutions, specialized and accelerated programs (Coulter & Mandell, 2012).

The higher education classroom is one of the of the more dominant areas of research and practice in adult education (Kasworm, 2008; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). For Kasworm and Bowles (2012), higher education serves a naturalistic landscape for adult learners as it offers "an invitation to think, to be, and to act in new and enhanced ways" (p. 389). The landscape of adult higher education offers adult learners various learning environments and experiences to explore and engage in learning and meaning making. The continued study of how adults learn and development has created "important connections between research and theory in the study of

adult development and aging, educational psychology research, and the principles and practices of adult education" (Smith & Reio, 2006, p. 117). The study of development in relation to adult learning has enhanced knowledge of developmental theories, creation of learning tasks and curricula, instructional methods, and administration of adult education programs (Pourchot & Smith, 2004; Smith & Reio, 2006). Several dimensions and theoretical conceptualizations of learning educators and researchers have used such as self-directed learning, andragogy, experiential learning, and transformative learning to explain how learning is shaped by the personal experiences and social factors that make up the everyday life of adults (Merriam et al., 2007).

Kasworm (2008) explored the challenges adult students returning to higher education face from multiple worlds when developing successful student identities. For adults, the entry to college is to succeed but does not always separate from past worlds and there is constant renegotiation. Kasworm (2008) talks about the adult student's engagement of learning new knowledge between new knowledge and their past experiences, and how adults "face unique challenges to their identity through the varied supportive and negative sociocultural contexts of higher education" (Kasworm, 2008, p. 33). Adult learning in higher education happens throughout one's entire multi-faceted life, and the direct connection between the social context of learning and an individual's acquisition of it, can help them become more creative, flexible, adaptive to changes and transitions in various social institutions (Illeris, 2004; Jarvis, 1992).

Graduate Education and Adult Learning

Graduate education offers programs for individuals seeking advanced degrees beyond higher education. Graduate education includes master's and Ph.D. programs that are designed to help individuals looking to make contributions within a desired field whether it be by research,

practice, or leadership (Thelin, 2011). Graduate degree programs are major steps in the professionalization process based on that when an individual completes a program, they will have learned a body of knowledge, possess certain skills, and be qualified to practice a chosen profession (Zeph, 1991). Graduate education offers individuals a means of in-depth analysis and exploration of their desired field.

As a recognized field of study, according to the Commission for the Professors of Adult Education (CPAE), adult education has a "distinctive body of knowledge that embraces theory, research, and practice relation to adult learners, adult educators, Adult Education and learning process, programs and organizations" (CPAE, 2014, p. 3). Graduate studies in adult education/learning are defined as masters and doctoral diploma seeking degrees in adult education/learning programs within university departments and programs (Brookfield, 1988). Brookfield described these departments and programs based in adult education; however, adult education graduate programs have closed or merged with other programs within higher education (Milton et al., 2003). The changing landscape of graduate adult education has created factors that have influenced continuing changes in adult education graduate programs, yet the goal of graduate programs remains constant. According to Merriam and Brockett (2007), graduate studies in adult education are an important component to the professionalizing process for the field, and although a formal study in adult education is not needed to work in the field, graduate level adult education remains an important step for those looking to enter the academic and professional world of adult education. Core areas of knowledge and skill at the master's level:

- Introduction the nature, function, and scope of Adult Education
- Adult learning and development
- Teaching adult learners

- Curriculum and Program Planning
- Introduction to the study of technology and online Adult Education
- Historical, philosophical, and sociological foundations of Adult Education
- Overview of educational research (CPAE, 2014, p. 9)

The doctoral level includes areas above, as well as the following:

- Advanced study of adult learning and development (theory and research)
- Historical and philosophical foundations of adult education
- Study of leadership, including theories or organizational leadership, administration, and change
- Changing role of technology in Adult Education
- Policy issues in relation to Adult Education
- Globalization and international issues or perspectives in Adult Education
- Social, political, and economic forces that have shaped the foundations and discourse of Adult Education
- Advanced specialty courses relevant to unique program and faculty strengths (e.g., continuing professional education, workplace learning, social movement learning, etc.)
- Qualitative and quantitative research methodology coursework to support dissertation research and ability to utilize existing literature (CPAE, 2014, pp. 9–10)

Adult education programs set out with the expectations and hopes to help adult learners develop a greater understanding of the field and how adults learn and develop a deeper appreciation for theory and how it influences their own practice (Taylor, 2003). Adult graduate education, more specifically at the doctoral level, presents an arduous and complex journey

between academic and personal responsibilities (Roberts, 2010). Hegarty (2011) discusses personal motivation as an important element for adult learner graduate student success and highlights the lack of research and measurement concerning motivation for adult learners as graduate students. Calling attention to further develop an understanding on the motivations of adult learners, according to Hegarty (2011), will strengthen higher education programs and add longevity to the programs that service adult learners.

The study of adult learning in graduate education, specifically the advanced study of adult learning in a doctoral program, is important to the understanding and continued exploration of learning that take place in unique and diverse settings (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). The advanced study and understanding of adult learning will help individuals within the field of adult education position themselves with values and assumptions when developing guidelines for decision making, curriculum, instruction, facilitation of interpersonal communication, contributing to the field, and advance the professional field of practice (Merriam & Brockett, 2007).

At this point in the literature review, literature on adult higher and graduate education was explored to help locate adult learning and adult learners in the context of higher and graduate education. The next section examines adult learning and significant theoretical developments learning beginning with the fundamental works of Lindeman and Dewey, move to significant theoretical developments that include andragogy, self-directed learning, experiential learning, and transformative learning that are used by educators and researchers to explore how adults learn.

Adult Learning. In his book, *The Meaning of Adult Education,* Lindeman (1926) believed that adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests, adults' learning

is life-centered, and experience is the richest source for learning. Lindeman (1926) believed that learning should be continuous, and learning should start with the lives of learners. Lindeman's placement of the lives and experience of the learners at the center of the learning process carries with it all the emotions that one can encounter throughout life. In his book, *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938) argued that two principles of continuity and interaction must be met for learning to happen through experience (Merriam et al., 2007). This meant that experiences that provide learning are not isolated events but learners are able to link current learning experiences with those from the past, to omit future implications; and the interaction principle was based on the idea that learning must account for the environment it is taking place (Dewey, 1938). It is important to understand the role of experience is not "merely that the accumulation of experience makes a difference but how learners attach meanings to or make sense of their experience that matters" (Merriam & Brockett, 2007, p. 153). This type of learning is referred to as developmental for adults, learning that can often lead to some aspect of self-change when learning is focused through one's lived experiences (Baumgartner & Merriam, 2000).

Merriam et al. (2007) described that "adult learning does not occur in a vacuum" (p. 25), nor do the various disciplines, theories, and concepts used within adult education. Learning happens throughout one's entire multi-faceted life, and the direct connection between the social context of learning and an individual's acquisition of it, can help them become more creative, flexible, adaptive to changes and transitions in various social institutions (Illeris, 2004; Jarvis, 1992). Adult learning occurs in various settings such as community workshops, college, and university classrooms, online and distance learning programs, health and human service agencies, business and workplace settings, military, churches, prisons, and museums (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Adults are uniquely diverse and the reasons for which they become involved in

learning can include but not limited to work-related learning and training, basic education, literacy, social or civic education, or for personal growth and enjoyment. Based on the various settings and complexities of adult learning, it should come to no surprise that no single theory or model of learning can fully explain how adults learn. Several dimensions and theoretical conceptualizations of how adults learn have been developed to explain learning and how it is shaped by personal experiences, along with social and cultural factors that make up the everyday life of adults and make the educational process meaningful (Merriam & Brockett, 2007; Merriam et al., 2007). With the literature on these theories and models of how adults learn being so vast, four predominant approaches are briefly discussed to help begin framing transformative learning as a theory of adult learning.

Andragogy. Malcolm Knowles introduced andragogy to help explain the education of adults. Knowles used his positioning of self-directed learning to develop and introduce andragogy. His perspective of andragogy was a student-centered theory of teaching and learning from the perspective of the individual learner, and he leaned heavily on experiential learning during his continued development of andragogy (Jarvis, 2006). The andragogical model is based on six assumptions that can be related to the learning of adults: (1) adults need to know the reason for learning; (2) adults need to be responsible and self-directed for their decisions on education; (3) a learner's experiences can provide a basis for determining learning activities; (4) adults are interested in learning subjects that will have immediate relevance with real-life situations; (5) adult learning is problem-centered learning that can be used in real-life situations; (6) adults respond better to internal motivation rather than external motivators (Knowles et al., 2005). Along with his assumptions, Knowles describes a climate based on humanistic values that allows adults to feel respected, accepted, and supported. The climate should allow for a mutual

engagement between educators and learners (Knowles et al., 2005). The self-directedness within andragogy allows for the learners to participate in diagnosing, planning, implementing, and evaluating learning needs and experiences (Merriam et al., 2007).

Knowles himself provides retrospect on the use of andragogy "as a system of elements that can be adopted or adapted in whole or in part. It is not an ideology that must be applied totally without any modification. In fact, an essential feature of andragogy is flexibility" (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 204). Andragogy also faced heavy critiques based on the lack of focus on outcomes concerning social change and critical theory. Knowles' acknowledged this tension but argues:

> he never intended for andragogy to be a theory of the discipline of adult education as it is defined by the critical theorists. Adult learning occurs in many settings for many different reasons. Andragogy is a transactional model of adult learning that is designed to transcend specific applications and situations. Adult education is but one field of application in which adult learning occurs. (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 143)

Andragogy has been used to help adults better understand who they are as learners and the type of learning experiences that are valuable to their learning advancements. Andragogy highlights the importance of adults needing to know why they are learning, learner experiences being an important part of the learning, and the use of self-directed learning projects.

Self-Directed Learning. One of the main elements to andragogy is that adults are self-directed, which was also mentioned by Lindeman (1926) as one of the key assumptions concerning adult learners. The philosophical orientation of humanistic adult education and ideas addressed were vital to self-directed learning becoming one of the most prominent developments and central concepts to the study and practice of adult education (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991;

Garrison, 1997; Merriam & Brockett, 2007). The early work of Knowles (1975) and Tough (1971), built on the work of Houle (1961/1988), were key to positioning the importance of self-directed learning in adult education. Tough's (1971) focus on learning projects was based on his interest with the motivations of adults. He found that individuals make deliberate efforts to learn, learning can take place all around us, and adults are highly self-directed when they go about learning something naturally.

Important turning points grew with new research defining different conceptual and philosophical orientations of self-directed learning and focusing on self-directed learning as a process (Garrison, 1997; Mezirow, 1985). Candy (1991) used a constructivist sociological lens to define what he saw as the four characteristics of self-directed learning in adult education: independent pursuit of learning, self-management, personal autonomy, and learner-control of instruction. Grow (1991) developed an instructional model, Staged Self-Directed Learning (SSDL), to describe a process to help educators assist learners with becoming more self-directed. Long's (1990) quest to understand what makes a learner become one's own change agent led him to what he suggested as the three conceptual aspects of self-directed learning: the sociological, the learner is socially independent; pedagogical, the learner utilizes methods for goals and learning; and psychological, places emphasis on learners' cognitive abilities. Long's (1990) three dimensions were important because he argued that the psychological dimension was needed to focus self-directed learning in adult education that shifted away from the focus of teaching and towards the focus of learning.

Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) defined self-directed learning as learning that involves the learner “taking primary responsibility for planning, implementing, evaluating learning, and internal factors that predispose one accepting responsibility for one' s thoughts and actions as a

learner" (p. 29). Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) introduced a highly important framework of self-directed learning that expanded self-directed learning to include a personality disposition. Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) synthesized Long's (1990) analysis of the sociological, pedagogical, and psychological aspects of self-directed learning framework. From their synthesis, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) developed the *Self-direction in Adult Learning* framework termed the Personal Responsibility Orientation (PRO) model. They used the term *self-direction in learning* to highlight the "two distinct but related dimensions" of *self-directed learning,* generally used process of self-directed learning, and *learner self-direction,* which centers on a "learner's desire or preference for assuming responsibility for learning" (p. 24). Their use of *self-direction in learning* refers to both the instructional process and the internal characteristics of the learner (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991).

Hiemstra and Brockett (2012) introduced an updated model called the Person Process Context (PPC) model that was slightly reconfigured and updated version of the PRO model with the person/learner, teaching-learning transaction or process, and the social context remaining as the key elements. They suggested that a revised model was appropriate due to developments in self-directed learning literature and their personal academic experiences. With the advancement of their model, Hiemstra and Brockett (2012) placed all three elements (person, process, context) with equal importance, and included context elements that highlight its vital role in SDL.

Garrison (1997) explored the links between self-directed learning and critical thinking and would later develop a comprehensive model with "three overlapping dimensions: self-management (task-control), self-monitoring (cognitive responsibility), and motivation (entering and task)" (p. 21). Garrison proposed a multidimensional model that saw the integration of contextual, cognitive, and motivational dimensions (Merriam et al., 2007) and that used a

"collaborative constructivist perspective that has the individual taking responsibility for constructing meaning while including the participation of others in confirming worthwhile knowledge" (Garrison, 1997, p. 19). Garrison's (1997) argument for self-directed learning from a collaborative constructivist perspective saw the potential to improve the quality of learning, and encourage learners to approach learning in a deep and meaningful manner.

Experiential Learning. According to Lindeman (1926), experience is an essential and vast resource for adult learners. Influenced by John Dewey's work, Lindeman developed his ideas of adult education borrowing from the pragmatic philosophy that "ideas are true if they can be experienced as being true. Moreover, it is *experience* from which learning is chiefly derived by adults" (Stewart, 1987, p. 4). It was this influence that placed experience as a common element within adult learning.

Kolb's (2014) introduction of his experiential learning theory (ELT) in the 1970's was created from the influential works of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget. This list quickly grew to include William James, Mary Parker Follett, Carl Jung, Lev Vygotsky, Carl Rogers, and Paulo Freire. Kolb's (2014) definition of experiential learning within ELT was intended to use the "term 'experiential' to describe a theoretical perspective on the individual learning process that applied in all situations and arenas of life, a holistic process of learning that can aid in overcoming the difficulties of learning from experience" (p. xx). Inspired by the work of Dewey, Kolb recognized that ordinary experiences do not necessarily produce learning, but to initiate reflection and learning, the ordinary must be interrupted by deep experiencing. This type of deep experiencing happens when someone struggles with a problem or gets 'stuck' with something strange or unusual from normal experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Kolb (2014) developed a holistic experiential learning process and a multilinear model of adult development. His ELT

offers a very different perspective regarding the conduct of education and is called experiential for two reasons. “The first is to tie it clearly to its intellectual origins in the work of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget. The second reason is to emphasize the central role that experience plays in the learning process,” thus offering a “holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior” (Kolb, 2014, p. 31). His theory of experiential learning was built on the six propositions that all experiential learning scholars share:

> (1) learning is best conceived as a process not in outcomes, (2) all learning is relearning, (3) learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world, (4) learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world, (5) learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment, and (6) learning is the process of creating knowledge. (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 194)

From Kolb’s (2014) ELT model, the learning cycle and the concept of learning style are the most known and used. Kolb’s ELT model portrays concrete experience (CE) and abstract conceptualization (AC) as two dialectically related modes of grasping experience; and reflective observation (RO) and active experimentation (AE) as two dialectically related modes of transforming experience. Kolb (2014) believed that learning occurs when individuals resolve tension created from the four learning modes. He saw the process as an “idealized learning cycle or spiral where the learner ‘touches all the bases’—experiencing (CE), reflecting (RO), thinking (AC), and acting (AE)—in a recursive process that is responsive to the learning situation and what is being learned” (Kolb, 2014, p. 51). The experiential learning cycle is grounded because it begins with concrete experience and thus serves as a basis for new understanding and reflections that one can use in the future and serves as a guide for creating new experiences (Kolb, 2014; Kolb & Kolb, 2018). He recognized that the learning cycle was a simplistic tool to organize

learning events, and later developed the concept of learning styles inventory to better describe the unique ways individuals process possibilities by spiraling through the learning cycle (Kolb, 2014). The original four learning style types of accommodating, assimilating, converging, and diverging were created, and through continued research the typology was expanded to nine learning styles that include initiating, experiencing, imagining, reflecting, analyzing, thinking, deciding, acting, and balancing to better define individuals unique learning styles and enhance learning flexibility (Kolb, 2014).

Jarvis's (2006) definition of learning has always evolved around the transformation of experience. It reads as follows:

> All learning, then—not merely experiential learning—begins with experience, both primary and secondary. But this is not experienced for with the learners already have a solution or response, even though such solutions may exist in their society. Learning begins with experiences for which they have no preset responses. (Jarvis, 1992, pp. 15–16.)

Jarvis (2006) used adult education workshops to record individuals learning incidents from life, compare and contrast between learners, and use Kolb's learning cycle to reconstruct it to fit their learning stories. Although the study was situated in adult learning, Jarvis found what he felt were fundamental weaknesses with Kolb's model and that it was too simple. Attempting to rectify his early concentration of the transformation of the person, his focus shifted to the "transformation of the content of the experience" (Jarvis, 2006, p. 17). Jarvis took a step towards a more general, and holistic orientation that he began to see as a person being in the world (body/mind/self) with others. He used the five senses—hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, and feeling—that one might have during an experience as a way of learning. "Their

transformation can occur through thought, action or emotion, or any combination, learning occurs after the experience" (Jarvis, 2006, p. 17). From this design there can be many different outcomes that he summarized as non-learning, non-reflective learning, and reflective learning (Jarvis, 2006).

Transformative Learning Theory. Mezirow's *perspective transformation* was created on the belief that as adults we are caught in our own histories, reliving them, and one needs to make meaning and form new interpretations from past experiences (Mezirow, 1978, 1990). Mezirow developed *perspective transformation* as a type of learning that incorporates the unique and vibrant experiences of each individual adult (Taylor & Loras, 2014). Mezirow (1985) believed that individuals need to participate and engage freely in critical reflection and dialogue to understand one's own learning and "become critically aware of what has been taken for granted" (p. 17). Mezirow's (1990) positioning of critical reflection and influenced by studies concerning life-crisis that included Freire's (1970) concept of conscientization and Habermas's (1971) work with social philosophy, along with Gould's (1978) theory of transformation helped shape Mezirow's (1991) levels of understanding with the process of discourse and critical reflection that was needed for *perspective transformation* that would become Transformative Learning Theory. Mezirow (2003) claimed that "transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (p. 58). It is this aspect of transformative learning that considers it uniquely adult, grounded in looking at past experiences to change frames of reference that are more inclusive, differentiating, permeable, critically reflective, and integrative of experience (Mezirow, 1981; Taylor, 2008).

Transformative Learning in the Context of Graduate Education. Higher education serves as a naturalistic landscape for transformative learning to occur and graduate level adult learning environments sometimes can "challenge individuals to move beyond their comfort zone of the known, of self and others" (Kasworm & Bowles, 2012, p. 389). Kasworm and Bowles (2012) describe the higher education setting as the most studied classroom setting for transformative learning. Graduate education is a complex and multi-layered landscape where both educators and learners bring their own unique and complex backgrounds (Hubball et al., 2010). Adult graduate education offers various learning environments and experiences that adult learners may view as a life-changing, make a deep connection with some aspect with their personal lives or other learners, or view the experience as boring and useless (Dirkx, 2001). In the context of higher education, emphasis is placed on the transmission of knowledge to support adult learners' autonomy and increase way of meaning-making (Kegan, 1994; Nogueiras et al., 2019; Perry, 1970), they bring with them previous experiences full emotions and cognitive beliefs (Kasworm, 2008). Due to all these elements and factors, the theory of transformative learning "offers a unifying and expansive framework for higher education" (Kasworm & Bowles, 2012, p. 399). Researchers and adult educators (Nogueiras et al., 2019; Taylor, 2003) have used transformative learning to examine adult learners in graduate education.

> Transformative learning represented a learner or environmental process focused on learner change in perspective, worldview, and/or sense of self. This change or transformation was most often based in a self-reported shift from previously held beliefs and assumptions about self and world. For some of these studies, the predominant focus was on the learner experience of openness and engagement toward change; other studies considered the role of specific intervention through educational programs, instructors,

> and facilitators, or of specific instructional experiences supporting or triggering aspects of a transformative learning process. (Kasworm & Bowles, 2012, p. 389)

Although the goal and intent of graduate programs in adult education is clear, questions remain concerning graduate students' conceptualization as a teacher of adults (Taylor, 2003). Taylor (2003) used Mezirow's theory of transformative learning to focus on his concerns on the level of appreciation a graduate student has for the life experience that adult learners bring into the classroom, how context shapes learning, if their practice is being critically informed, and how their own graduate school experiences have influenced their beliefs about teaching (Taylor, 2003). Nogueiras et al. (2019) investigated a master's student's emotional experience during a semester long training course intended to promote transformative learning. Nogueiras et al. (2019) believe the goals of higher education can be achieved using of Transformative Learning Theory and add to educators' understanding of fostering quality, potential transformative experiences.

Section Summary

A brief review of American higher education and graduate education was discussed to help examine adult learning within the higher education landscape. A brief review on a few of the more dominant adult learning theories was done to frame Transformative Learning Theory in adult learning and then within the context of higher education including graduate education to demonstrate the importance of transformative learning as a theory of how adults can learn and the various processes they take with them in graduate education. Due to the various elements and factors of adults learning in higher education, researchers and educators in the field of adult education have looked to transformative learning to examine how adult learners create meaning with their experiences, emotions, and all (Kasworm & Bowles, 2012; Mezirow, 1997; Nogueiras

et al., 2019; Taylor, 2003). The next section of this chapter further explores Transformative Learning Theory including historical development, critical responses, growth of the theory and practice, and its important role in adult education and adult learning.

Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative Learning Theory has been utilized in the field of adult education for over four decades. The development and continuous growth of the theory has acknowledged its applicability and practical aspects of adult learning by adult educators, researchers, and learners (Cranton, 2016). The introduction of Transformative Learning Theory to adult learning in the late 1970's brought with it rapid interest as well as uncertainty with theoretical and practical boundaries within the field of transformative learning (Taylor & Loras, 2014). However, a multitude of alternative perspectives emerged that included psychoanalytical, psychodevelopmental, social emancipatory, neurobiological, cultural-spiritual, race-centric, and planetary perspectives would solidify Mezirow's theory of transformative learning while continuing to build and create the opportunities for further alternative perspectives (Cranton, 2016; Taylor, 2008). This chapter section looks at the historical background and the critical responses to the original study, growth of alternative philosophical and theoretical perspectives, growth of practice, and international influences. The section concludes with the discussion on the role of Transformative Learning Theory in the field of adult education.

Historical Background

Jack Mezirow's original study in 1978 *Education for Perspective Transformation: Women's Re-entry Programs in Community Colleges,* was intended to replicate the success of the new and growing re-entry programs in higher education (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). The re-entry programs were a new and growing trend that were designed for women wanting to resume

their education or considering employment. Mezirow based the original study on his interest to investigate the growth of the re-entry programs and capture the learning experiences of those women returning to college. The women in the re-entry program represented a growing student population with "distinctive problems and needs" (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 1). The main purpose of the study was to "identify factors that characteristically impede or facilitate the progress of these re-entry programs" (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 1). There was a lack of written research based on the re-entry programs, and Mezirow felt that to develop assessment and improve programs there needed to be qualitative data on important factors concerning the students and programs. The Center for Adult Education at Columbia University's Teachers College used a grounded theory methodology to gather data intensively on 12 diversified programs, comprehensive analytical descriptions on an additional 24 programs, and mail in responses form 314 other programs (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978).

The findings from the national study on re-entry programs in community colleges demonstrated the need for continued efforts to build a knowledge base for assessment and evaluation for the specific re-entry style programs so to help determine factors that impede and/or facilitate progress (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). The major discovery from the "study was the identification of perspective transformation as the central process occurring in the personal development of women participating in college re-entry programs" (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 7). Mezirow describes that meaning perspectives are psychological structures that individuals have within themselves that define who we are and our relationships (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). It was stated in the original study that perspective transformation is the process involving structural change to ones meaning perspectives that are the "psychological structures within which we locate and define ourselves and our relationships" (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 7).

The women entering the community college programs were met with significant change within various aspects of life as they became students, and he felt the discovery of *perspective transformation* was a significant bridge between adult development and continued education (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). “Recognizing the cultural, economic, political, psychological, and religious assumptions that shape these structures—presuppositions inherited but rarely examine critically—we can reconstruct our personal frame of reference, our self-concept, goals, and criteria for evaluating change” (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 7). The re-entry programs promoted critical reflection on the culturally determined sexual stereotypes that women internalized and defended. One of the most important lines of study is “the process of perspective transformation begins when a woman becomes aware of the ways cultural assumptions and their psychological consequences have placed their stamp upon her” (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 11). Mezirow declared that within adult education, educators must help leaners look to sources that would assist them to meeting their current priorities.

Later in the same year, Mezirow (1978) introduced *perspective transformation* to the field of adult education under the claims that there was another kind of learning he believed would develop autonomous thinking, that he felt was the cardinal goal of adult education. His belief of perspective transformation was that learning as adults we are caught in our own histories, reliving them, and one needs to make new meaning and interpretations regarding past experiences (Mezirow, 1978). He chose the term “meaning perspective to refer to the structures within which one’s past experience assimilates and transforms new experience” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 42). Findings from the study described a process of perspective transformation that included 10 phases/stages.

1. A disorienting dilemma

2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and action
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictate by one's new perspective (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22)

The phases represent the dynamics of perspective transformation that appeared in the research on re-entry women (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). These phases represent the important elements of individual experience, critical reflection, discourse, and acting on new perspectives that occur within the prospective transformation process (Mezirow, 1981). The early phases of perspective transformation place emphasis on individual's experiencing a disorienting event and critically questioning assumptions and expectations (Cranton, 2016; Mezirow, 2000). The later six phases of the perspective transformation focus on the preparation and implementation of the new assumptions and ideas (Cranton, 2016). During the 1980s, Mezirow refined definitions, expanded concepts, and absorbed ideas into his theory (Baumgartner, 2012). Mezirow pulled from a variety of influences that included Freire's (1970) concept of conscientization, Gould's (1978) theory of transformation, and Habermas's (1971) work with social philosophy. Mezirow and Marsick (1978) described:

> the discovery of perspective transformation as inductively derived theory of adult development is exciting because it is echoed in the rich literatures of existentialism and phenomenology, psychoanalytic theory, developmental psychology, and constructionist theory in sociology, as well as in the perspectivism of Thomas Kuhn and Michael Foucault, the writings of Hegel, of the Marx, of Paulo Freire, and of the psychologically oriented critical theorists. (p. 55)

Mezirow's (1991) sociolinguistic distortion and levels of consciousness drew inspiration from Paulo Freire. Freire's (1970) theory of learning and education is based on the concept of *conscientization,* a process where learners "achieve a deepening awareness of both the sociocultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality through action upon it" (p. 27). Freire's work was with Brazilian peasants learning how to read. He viewed the people as subjects that are continually reflecting and acting to transform their world into a better place (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow also drew inspiration from Gould's (1978) Transformation Theory that identified "unexamined psychological assumptions of childhood that must be reassessed through a perspective transform to respond effectively to developmental tasks in adulthood" (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 17). Gould (1978) describes that an adult can be burdened with psychological blocks and often becomes aware of that resistance. Gould's (1978) Transformation Theory involves an educator assisting a learner using the 'analysis of regret' to identify specific problems to be resolved and the difficulties that the learner will face when dealing with the problem. Mezirow (1981, 1991) also drew inspiration from the theory of communicative action by Habermas (1971) to discuss the concepts of discourse and domains of learning. Mezirow (1981) paralleled his *perspective transformative* with Habermas's (1971) emancipatory domain with the inclusion of self-reflection. This inclusion would require

individuals to use self-reflection to become critically aware (Collard & Law, 1989). Mezirow used these theories, models, and ideas to build his understanding of the process of discourse and critical reflection needed for perspective transformation.

Mezirow (2003) claimed that "transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (p. 58). It is this aspect of transformative learning that considers it uniquely adult, grounded in looking at past experiences to change frames of reference that are more inclusive, differentiating, permeable, critically reflective, and integrative of experience (Mezirow, 1981; Taylor, 2008). Transformative Learning Theory is made up of ten steps or phases; however, Mezirow's (1978) original study introduced three key themes or components to the process of meaning structure transformation that included individual experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse. Throughout the development of the theory, action would become the final component of the transformative learning process (Mezirow, 2000). These themes/components would continue to shape transformative learning as a comprehensive theory of adult learning (Mezirow, 2000).

The first component of Mezirow's (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978) *perspective transformation* places a learners' own experiences as the starting point and focus for the transformative learning process. Mezirow believed that exploring previous expectations directly influenced meaning making (Taylor, 1998).

> The original publication urged the recognition of a critical dimension of learning in adulthood that enables us to recognize, reassess, and modify the structures of assumption

> and expectations that frame our tacit points of view and influence our thinking, beliefs, attitudes, and actions. (Mezirow, 2009, p. 18)

For the transformative learning process to take place, individuals must face a disorienting dilemma. A disorienting dilemma is a problem, issue, or moment that causes some level of confusion in an individual that makes them aware that there is a significant challenge to how they view world and how it works (Howie & Bagnall, 2015).

Disorienting dilemmas are disruptions in one's way of knowing that can push them into the questioning process (Mezirow, 2009). A disorienting dilemma can be, for example, starting a new job or loss of job, a death of a loved one, a move from one culture to another, or any major life transition, which is positive or negatively perceived (Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Kroth & Cranton, 2016). Mezirow (2009) would eventually say that the transformation process could result from activities that include but not limited to experiencing a different culture, reading a poem, viewing art, so long as the experience provided a significant challenge to an established perspective. These challenges can force us to question deep personal values and question our sense of self (Dirkx et al., 2006; Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow initially viewed the dilemma as a single dramatic event; however, over time, acknowledged that it could be a gradual, cumulative process (Cranton, 2016). Some educators and practitioners also believe that in more formal learning environments, disorienting dilemmas can also be created deliberately with the introduction to alternative perspectives through resources that include text, film, fiction, and discussions (Kroth & Cranton, 2014). Educators might use a variety of activities and approaches that present a disorienting event to promote critical reflection (Brookfield, 2005; Cranton, 2016). "However, transformative learning cannot take place simply because the educator or the learner decides that this is a goal of the learning experience" (Cranton, 2016, p. 91). Cranton (2016)

describes a learning environment that is free from coercion that allows all learners equal opportunities to determine on their own, the type of event they are encountering.

The second key component of the transformative learning process is critical reflection (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Merriam et al, 2007; Mezirow, 1990). Mezirow always believed that critical reflection and critical *self*-reflection are central to transformative learning (Cranton, 2016). Critical reflection involves both the processes of reflection and critique as "how we are perceiving, thinking, judging, feeling, and acting" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 106). Mezirow considers critical reflection as the distinguishing characteristic of how adults as we use critical reflection to question the integrity of assumptions and beliefs based on prior experiences learn, and thus the key step to learning being transformative (Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 2000). Mezirow (1997) describes that with learning "it becomes essential for learners to become critically reflective of these assumptions underlying intentions, values, beliefs, and feelings" (p. 6). For Mezirow (1991), critical reflection assesses the validity of one's meaning perspectives by focusing on the sources of those perspectives and the consequences surrounding them. According to Mezirow (1990):

> We learn differently when we are learning to perform than when we are learning to understand what is being communicated to us. Reflection enables us to correct distortions in our beliefs and errors in problem-solving. Critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built. (p. 1)

Although critical reflection on assumptions is used unanimously throughout transformative learning literature, Mezirow (1991, 1998) further explored critical *self*-reflection to highlight the important process of adults' critical reflection on assumptions or presuppositions that is needed for transformative learning. Mezirow (1991) drew inspiration from Habermas's

emancipatory learning to highlight how emancipatory knowledge is gained through critical *self*-reflection. “When the object of critical reflection is an assumption or presupposition, a different order of abstraction is introduced, with major potential for effecting a change in one’s established frame of reference” (Mezirow, 1998, p. 186). For adults, “when self-reflection is critical, it involves a searching view of the unquestioningly accepted presuppositions that sustain our fears, inhibitions, and patterns of interaction, such as our reaction to rejection, and their consequences in our relationships” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 87). Mezirow (1990) viewed the most significant learning experiences that adults have involve some level of critical *self*-reflection. Mezirow (1991, 2000) saw critical *self*-reflection as a means both toward understanding or knowing one’s experience.

If critical reflection is a key step to transformative learning, then the third component of the transformative learning process, rational discourse, is the central avenue through which transformative learning is promoted and developed (Mezirow, 1990). Mezirow (1991) saw the use of rational discourse concerning dilemmas as a vital piece to the transformative learning process to resolve the questions or doubts that come from critically reflecting and critically self-reflecting on our assumptions “because so much of what we need to understand must be consensually validated” (p. 77). Mezirow (1991) described rational discourse different from daily dialogue as it involves an effort to set aside previous assumptions and biases to allow oneself to being objective and open to new beliefs and ideas. Mezirow (1991) defined what he believed were optimal conditions, although not established completely, for rational discourse:

- Have accurate and complete information
- Be free from coercion and distorting self-perception
- Be able to weigh evidence and assess arguments objectively

- Be open to alternative perspectives
- Be able to reflect critically on presuppositions and their consequences
- Have equal opportunity to participate
- Be able to accept an informed, objective consensus as valid (Mezirow, 1991, p. 78)

This dialogue becomes the process for individuals to put their critical reflection into action. “Discourse, in the context of transformation theory, is the specialized use of dialogue devoted to searching for a common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation or belief” (Mezirow, 2012, p. 78). Cranton (2016) described discourse as allowing participants to try on the perspectives of others to build communication needed to understand another person’s perspective. Engaging in dialogue forces educators and learners to have the awareness of the needs and beliefs of all the participants included in the learning environment.

The fourth component, action, is that an “individual may take immediate action, delayed action or reasoned reaffirmation of an existing pattern of action” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 24). Mezirow’s theory places the action on the individual, although he did focus on social action in certain situations (Merriam et al., 2007). “When the disorienting dilemma is the result of oppressive action, the person needs to take individual or collective action against the oppressor” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 60). Mezirow’s approach to transformative learning sees action as the step taken by the individual after critical reflection and discourse with the new worldview and ideas.

Critical Responses to Original Study. Since its first publication in 1978, transformative learning has captured the attention of numerous learners, educators, and researchers within and outside the field of adult education (Cranton, 2016). The years that followed Mezirow’s introduction of *perspective transformation* received multiple critiques of his work, and those criticisms remained constant throughout its development (Kroth & Cranton, 2014; Taylor &

Cranton, 2012). One of the earliest critiques of Transformative Learning Theory by Collard and Law (1989) focused on Mezirow's failure to address social change, and his selective interpretation with Jürgen Habermas's work. Collard and Law (1989) believed his work represented fragments of an adult learning theory and built too much of a reliance on the work of Habermas, thus he painted his new theory into a corner by focusing on a theory of communication. Hart (1990) added to the critical discourse concerning the use of Habermas' critical theory calling out that Mezirow neglected issues of power within Habermas's work. In response to Collard and Law, Mezirow (1989) reiterated that his development of transformative learning was to better understand how adults learn as a foundation of adult learning, and his influences were used to construct meaning to the learning process.

Another important critique of Mezirow's work was from Clark and Wilson (1991) and their concern that he removed context from the meaning of experience. Not having a focus on context left out the important aspect of the development of women's perspectives and empowerment in society (Clark & Wilson, 1991). Mezirow (1991) claimed that he attempted to distinguish between social and learning theory by describing the dynamics of adult learning within the cultural context. He continued to argue that meanings are validated through critical reflection and rational discourse and that he moved this learning process to the level on how an individual identifies their learning within their culture, not free from culture like his critics' claim (Mezirow, 1991).

Mezirow faced more critiques on his theory from Cunningham's (1992) examination of transformative learning and current adult education theories in relation to critical pedagogy. Cunningham (1992) made the argument against Mezirow's use of critical reflection based on context and argued that with the use of praxis younger adolescents and children might be able to

develop critical awareness. A significant point that Mezirow made about the critique is that adults learn to be critically reflective and participate in rational discourse in was that are different from the way children learn. He argued that the development of a comprehensive Transformative Learning Theory was done so that it included reflection on "sociolinguistic assumptions and praxis but also encompasses reflection on epistemic and psychological assumptions" (Mezirow, 1992, p. 251). Mezirow (1992) continued to build his argument with his use of critical reflection on perspectives that are shaped by culturally assimilated epistemic, psychological, and sociolinguistic factors.

Two more important critiques came from Tennant (1993) and Newman (1994, 2012). Tennant's (1993) criticisms that Mezirow places too much attention on the individual and overlooks the social dimension. Tennant (1993) argued that adult educators must acknowledge the social dimension of adult development to distinguish between transformative learning experiences from those experiences and changes that are simply part of the social expectations associated with different phases of life. Newman (1994) originally critiqued Mezirow's use of critical reflection and its apparent lack of connection with social action. Newman (2012) would continue his critiques and argue that "transformative learning only exists in the realm of theory" and has "little or no basis in everyday practice" (pp. 40–41). Mezirow's (1994) initial arguments to Tennant and Newman were that he was attempting to develop "a generic model of adult learning to guide adult educators" (p. 243), and that not that every perspective transformation need to involve a critique of social oppression. Mezirow is quick to remind critics that he has "always made the distinction between the role of the adult educator in fostering critically reflective learning and that of fostering social action" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 61). Mezirow highlights two aspects of his argument, (1) that the nature of the disorienting dilemma may

require individual to explore social responses and (2) that adult educators foster transformative learning to help individuals become critically reflective (Mezirow, 1997).

Growth of Transformative Learning Theory. To fully understand the initial critiques and responses to Mezirow's study, one must recognize that Mezirow was the major contributor, primary spokesperson, and writer for perspective transformation (Taylor, 1998). In response to the initial critiques, Mezirow published his edited book, *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood,* in 1990 that gathered diverse perspectives on how critical reflection and hence transformative learning could be fostered (Cranton, 2016). The next year he published *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (Mezirow, 1991). These two complimentary books would introduce transformative learning as a comprehensive theory of adult learning (Kroth & Cranton, 2014). He brought together various strategies and methods to show that fostering critical reflection remained as the key element in the process of transformative learning. Mezirow's work was again met with many of the same critiques and in response he welcomed these critiques to build a more comprehensive theory.

In 1998, Edward Taylor published a critical review of transformative learning that suggest the collaborations and dimensions of the transformative experience had not been fully expressed in Mezirow's collaborative theory. Taylor (1998) indicates that further research was needed to understand the transformative learning experience. Taylor believed that recognizing these various perspectives of transformative learning would offer a broader viewpoint concerning the relationship among education and personal and social change. Taylor saw this need for expanding theoretical perspectives to solidify Mezirow's theory of transformative learning. From his review based on the theoretical and empirical literature, Taylor (1998) found seven major areas of disagreement:

1. Individual change vs. social action
2. Decontextualized view of learning
3. Universal model of adult learning
4. Adult developments: shift or progression
5. An Emphasis on rationality
6. Other ways of knowing
7. Perspective transformation: the model (p. 21)

Taylor (1998) found that most of the research done had focused solely on the individual self, and the findings showed that it was the researchers' own frame of reference that constructed the version of self, preventing them from coming to an agreement on transformative learning. The research also lacked the recognition of emotions and relational knowing; and the process of transformative learning proved to be more complex than many conceived. The most resounding findings of the research was that aside from Mezirow's (1990) book, *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood,* little investigation focused on the fostering transformative learning. Taylor's critical review of transformative learning would set the stage for the next 20 years of Transformative Learning Theory in adult education.

In response, the 2000's saw the growing abundance of studies concerning fostering transformative learning as a practice, while continuing to build alternative perspectives. "Transformative learning had become the dominant teaching paradigm discussed with the field of adult education. It has interested scholars and educators to such an extent that it is no longer just an adult education teaching construct" (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009, p. xi). However, there were still growing needs for a greater understanding on the student's role when fostering transformative learning, and the role of relationships in the transformative learning process

(Taylor, 2007). The growing research on fostering transformative learning and the considerable works of Mezirow (1997), Taylor (1998), and Cranton (2006) would influence Mezirow and Taylor's (2009) edited book, *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education.* The edited book brought together various educators to display the growing practice of transformative learning and its application across multiple educational settings and culture that elaborated on the evolving nature of transformative learning and theoretical content. To frame an approach to teaching the core elements of fostering transformative education, Taylor reframed the core elements to include "individual experience, promoting critical reflection, dialogue, holistic orientation, awareness of context, and authentic relationships" (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009, p. 4). Although the core elements have been broadened to encompass more aspects of the transformative learning process, Mezirow and Taylor (2009) reiterate that the core elements remained grounded to the original study but are also constantly evolving like the theory itself. The book presented an attempt to show the depth and versatility of transformative learning, and how it was being used across multiple fields of adult education.

The growing practice of transformative learning and its application across multiple educational settings and cultures elaborated on the evolving nature of transformative learning and theoretical content. To frame a transformative approach to teaching, Mezirow and Taylor (2009) reframed "the core elements of fostering transformative education" to include "individual experience, promoting critical reflection, dialogue, holistic orientation, awareness of context, and authentic relationships" (p. 4). Although the core elements have been broadened to encompass more aspects of the transformative learning process, Mezirow and Taylor (2009) reiterate that the core elements remained grounded to the original study but are also constantly evolving like the theory itself.

Emergence of Alternative Perspectives. Transformative Learning Theory "has offered a framework within which to examine cognitive change, explore its representation and influence on other aspects of adult learners' development and lives, and consider how to facilitate and support it in the educational process" (King, 2005, p. 13). The growth and integration of multiple perspectives within Transformative Learning Theory have created new and various connections to help expand its application and influences to help foster a multi-perspective focus on adult development and learning in the field of educational psychology. Dirkx (2012) described the various perspectives of transformative learning that go beyond the initial understanding of how adults critically reflect and make meaning.

> The kinds of learning and change reflected in these different theoretical perspectives underscores the complexity of the human condition and how our sense of self and ways of coming to know are intimately bound up with our deep relationships with ourselves, as well as one another, our social contexts, and the broader world. (Dirkx, 2012, p. 126)

Mezirow's initial psychocritical view of transformative learning that dominated the field suffered from the assumption that there is one single conception of transformative learning (Taylor, 2008). Mezirow's *perspective transformation*, referred to as the psychocritical view of transformative learning, was often criticized for being too rational, ignoring cultural context, and neglecting power issues. Mezirow never stopped in his clarification that he developed transformative learning within the context of adult education and the importance of critical reflection of assumptions (Mezirow, 1998). Mezirow was able to shape transformative learning into a model to describe how adults learn through reflection, specifically for the field of adult education (Taylor, 1998). This development would create a foundation of transformative learning that could be incorporated into various fields and practices.

Early alternative perspectives began to emerge that included psychoanalytical, psychodevelopmental, and social emancipatory (Baumgartner, 2001). More perspectives would continue to develop that included neurobiological, cultural-spiritual, race-centric, and planetary (Taylor, 2008). The psychoanalytical view of transformative learning envisions a "lifelong journey of coming to understand oneself through reflecting on the psychic structures (ego, shadow, persona, collective unconscious, and so on) that make up an individual's identity" (Taylor, 2008, p. 7). Dirkx (2000) extended the extrarational approach of transformative learning that involves very personal and imaginative ways of knowing (Cranton, 2016; Taylor & Cranton 2012). In this perspective, the use of critical *self*-reflection includes the emotional, spiritual, and imaginative aspects of transformation. The extrarational approach uses soul work, emotions, imagination, and intuition that takes learning beyond rationality for a deeper meaning and understanding of oneself (Dirkx, 2006).

Another important perspective that developed was the psychodevelopmental view of transformative learning (Daloz, 2000). This perspective sees the process across the lifespan, reflecting continuous, incremental, and progressive growth (Baumgartner, 2001; Taylor, 2008). Central to this view of transformation is an epistemological change. Daloz (2000) highlights that the conditions of transformative learning must have a presence of the other, reflective discourse, mentoring community, and committed action (Daloz, 2000). Psychodevelopmental perspective included the importance of social responsibility, and the social-emancipatory perspective builds on this concept. Taking the role of social responsibility further into action was Paulo Freire (1970) and his social-emancipatory perspective. This perspective views people as subjects in the world who are constantly in reflection and acting to transform their world into a better place (Taylor, 2008). The theory of radical conscientization provides a vision of human beings that

face challenges and struggles to lift them to a higher level of consciousness; they become subjects to the extent of the intervention in society, their reflection on this intervention, and their commitment to this engagement in society (Elias & Merriam, 2005).

Growing perspectives continued to emerge, such as neurobiological perspective, cultural-spiritual, race-centric, and planetary. From the neurobiological perspective of transformative learning researchers suggest that the brain structure changes during the learning process (Janik, 2007). These findings "offer a distinctive neurobiological, physically based pathway to transformative learning" (Taylor, 2008, p. 8) that is "volitional, curiosity-based, discovery-driven, and mentor-assisted" (Janik, 2007, p. 144). The cultural-spiritual view of transformative learning is concerned with the "connections between individuals and social structures...and notions of intersecting positionalities" (Tisdell, 2005, p. 256). The planetary perspective views the dimensions of transformative learning that integrate a holistic approach, wisdom of women, wisdom of indigenous people, and spirituality. This planetary vision of transformative learning spans the individual, relations, group, institutional, societal, and global perspectives (O'Sullivan, 1999). Another important view of transformative learning is the race-centric perspective. "A race-centric view of transformative learning puts people of African descent, most often black women, at the center, where they are the subjects of the transformative experience" (Taylor, 2008, p. 9). This view of transformative learning promotes inclusion, empowering, and learning to negotiate between cultures (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006; Taylor, 2008).

In 2012, Taylor and Cranton released their edited *Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*. In response to the immense amount of research, controversy, and promise of Transformative Learning Theory, the handbook provides an extremely comprehensive collection of work on theory and practice from a wide array of perspectives. The

various perspectives, settings, and practice of transformative include the use of complexity theory (Alhadeff-Jones, 2012), critical theory (Brookfield, 2012), cultural-spiritual perspective (Charaniya, 2012), transformation as embodied narrative (Clark, 2012), evaluating transformative learning (Cranton & Hoggan, 2012), nurturing soul work (Dirkx, 2012), women's perspective (English & Irving, 2012), ethics as an educator of transformative learning (Ettling, 2012), fiction and film (Jarvis, 2012), positionality (Johnson-Bailey, 2012), presentational knowing (Kasl & Yorks, 2012), higher education setting (Kasworm & Bowles, 2012), European theoretical perspectives (Kokkos, 2012), critical reflection (Kreber, 2012), sustainability and the new science (Lange, 2012), artistic expression (Lawrence, 2012), role of experience (MacKeracher, 2012), international and community-based (Mejiuni, 2012), African perspective (Ntseane, 2012), planetary (O'Sullivan, 2012), group work and dialogue (Schapiro et al., 2012), transformative learning in online settings (Smith, 2012), a developmental perspective (Taylor & Ellis, 2012), storytelling (Tyler & Swartz, 2012), workplace leadership and organizational change (Watkins et al., 2012), and learner-centered teaching (Weimer, 2012).

> Even though transformative learning epitomizes the core assumptions often associated with 'good' practice of teaching adults, at the same time it reflects the tension found between the individual and societal change. Most significantly, its ubiquitous presence beyond the field of adult education has led to a construct that has come to mean many things to many educators. It is our hope that these tensions will move us toward a more unified theory of transformative learning. (Taylor & Cranton, 2012, p. 17)

Taylor and Cranton (2012) believe that there is no reason that both the individual and the social perspectives cannot peacefully coexist (Kroth & Cranton, 2014). They propose a unified theory of transformative learning to move away from the idea that one perspective denies the

existence of the other, but that each perspective shares common characteristics that can inform each other (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). “A more unified theory allows us to continue to speak of transformative learning while maintaining the diversity of approaches that are so important to the complexity of the field” (Taylor & Cranton, 2012, p. 3). A unified theory would see the “cognitive and rationale perspective, the extrarational perspective, the emphasis on social change, and the relational approach all peacefully co-existing” (Kroth & Cranton, 2014, p. xiii). The handbook provides stories of individual change, organizational change, social change, and global change that serve as summary of past research, but more importantly create the platform for the future research and practice with transformative learning (Cranton & Taylor, 2012).

International Influences. As one of the defining leaders in the field of transformative learning, Edward Taylor, suggested that scholars and researchers should look to the work being done beyond American perspectives of transformative learning (Kokkos et al., 2015). Taylor discusses the interest of transformative learning that he found with European colleagues and highlights a special interest group at the *European Society for Research on the Education of Adults Conference* that focuses specifically on transformative learning that holds a conference every year in Europe about the study of transformative learning, and similar interests within Germany (Kokkos et al., 2015).

Transformative Learning Theory has had a great influence on international scholars and graduate students of adult education to engage in extensive professional discourse regarding transformative learning as a theory and practice of educating adults (Kokkos et al., 2015; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009; Taylor, 1998). Fox (2013) attributes the growth of transformative learning research on an international level to the continued search for “explanations of cultural reproduction that have changed as researchers focus more on documenting the transformative

experiences of the heretofore invisible or silenced minorities" (p. 137). This growth has been detrimental for the field of transformative learning; however, it has caused struggles in the field's direction and depth of understanding between western and international perspectives of transformative learning (Kokkos et al., 2015). International approaches to exploring transformative learning research provides new ways in which emotions and various countries' social context shaped the researchers understanding of transformative learning outside the predominant western perspective of transformative learning.

Kokkos (2012), *Transformative Learning in Europe: An Overview of the Theoretical Perspectives,* highlights how adult educators in Europe have formed communities to explore and develop the theory and practice of transformative learning. This research is significant because it demonstrates the concrete roots in the conceptual formation of transformative learning that European adult educators have as they demonstrate sharing elements of transformative learning with various theoretical backgrounds and approaches (Kokkos et al., 2015). Nada et al. (2018), *You Went to Europe and Returned Different: Transformative Learning Experiences of International Students in Portugal,* was conducted to expand on the complexity of international students learning experiences. The authors chose to use transformative learning and narrative inquiry to help understand how encountering a different culture may influence disorienting dilemmas. The authors acknowledged that transformative learning is far too complex to be determined by identifying students' marks of transformation, so a deeper narrative analysis was performed to demonstrate the transformative learning process. The research demonstrated that transformative learning is not an outcome but a process, and the important of understand sociocultural context. Ntseane (2012), *Transformative Learning Theory: A Perspective from Africa*, discussed the development of transformative learning through the Afrocentric paradigm

perspective of African people marginalized and dislocated by colonialism. The research highlights indigenous knowledge systems, the impact of colonialism, and the value of community that impacts transformative learning.

Mejiuni (2012) explored transformative learning at the collective or social level from informal pedagogical activities and nonformal educational interactions in community settings that exist outside the North American perspective. Important findings from the comparative analysis of the transformative educational activities produced shared themes that included participants having deep personal experiences, dialogue served as triggers for transformative learning, facilitators shared experiences with learners, and much of the transformative learning started at a level of individual understanding then expanded to large community and social discussions. The findings also highlight issues with transformative learning that include when evidence of a transformation shows changes in feelings, beliefs, behaviors, and there is a lack of evidence to show sustainability (Mejiuni, 2012). In their article *Putting Transformative Learning Theory into Practice,* Christie et al. (2015) elaborated on key elements of Mezirow's transformative learning theory to exemplify how the theory can help adult educators understand that social structures and belief systems can influence student learning. The authors engaged in action research and transformative learning to better understand how both can be put into practice in adult and higher education. Christie et al. (2015) believe that transformative learning can be practiced in adult higher education to allow individuals to recognize and question ingrained views of their societies and worlds in which they live.

Integrated Perspective of Transformative Learning Theory. The discussions in the previous sections introduced emerging theoretical and philosophical perspective of transformative learning. Taylor and Cranton (2012) see no reason that both the individual and the

social perspectives of Transformative Learning Theory cannot peacefully coexist (Kroth & Cranton, 2014). Taylor and Cranton (2012) proposed a unified theory to move away from the idea that one perspective denies the existence of the other, but rather they share common characteristics and can inform each other. Cranton (2016) viewed the growing fragmentation of transformative learning as typical for the development of a new theory; however, she believed the theory of transformative learning needed to become an integrated perspective. An integrated perspective would help "describe observations of a phenomenon in a way that makes sense of the observations, organize them into patterns, and to guide practice," and "allow educators to draw on those aspects of the theory that fit with their context and their goals" (Kroth & Cranton, 2014, p. 9). Using the concept of a unified and integrated approach, a unified wheel of Transformative Learning Theory represents the origins and main lenses of transformative learning as a foundation and includes, but not limited, to a handful of the growing perspectives found in *The Handbook of Transformative Learning* (2012).

At the core or hub of the unified wheel, is Mezirow's initial psychocritical view of transformative learning. The major spokes that have secondary hubs represent the alternative perspectives that include psychoanalytical, psychodevelopmental, social emancipatory, neurobiological, cultural-spiritual, race-centric, and planetary (Taylor, 2008). The rim represents the idea of a unified or integrated theory of transformative learning. The various hubs and spokes are important to understanding the historical development of transformative learning, and what can be considered transformative learning (Cranton, 2016). The hubs and major spokes represent a foundation of transformative learning that allows new perspectives to emerge that can help strengthen theory, research, and practice; thus, allowing Transformative Learning Theory (wheel) to continue to strengthen, grow, and advance. The unified wheel of Transformative

Learning Theory (Figure 2.1) “takes into account a variety of circumstances and possibilities while remaining true to the meaning of the theory” (Cranton, 2016, p. 42). The unified wheel allows an individual to take a foundational position with transformative learning while using certain pieces or aspects for practice, research, and personal life. This approach helps maintain the “diversity of multiple approaches that are so important to the complexity of the field” (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 3). Individual and social perspectives can do more than peacefully coexist, but they can share common characteristics to inform one another’s theory and practice.

Integrated Practice of Transformative Learning. Like the unified and integrated approach of Transformative Learning Theory, the practice of promoting and fostering transformative learning is a work in progress and is constantly evolving. The fostering of transformative learning and managing potential consequences of fostering these type of learning experiences offers several challenges for educators and learners throughout all areas of international transformative learning (Taylor & Laros, 2014). Cranton’s (2016) book, *Promoting and Understanding Transformative Learning: A Guide to Theory and Practice,* showcases less of a theoretical analysis and more of a practical and concrete instructional guidance for practitioners. Cranton (2016) drew from various transformative learning research to incorporate the role of imagination and spirituality in transformation, the importance of affect in the process, the idea of connected knowing, contributions from critical theory, and a holistic model of transformative learning to build a stronger practice for fostering transformative learning. Cranton described that it is the responsibility of educators to help people articulate and examine beliefs and assumptions and reminded educators that they must not impose their own point of view on the learner (Cranton, 2016). “The educator who has created an environment conducive to learner empowerment has set the stage for working toward transformative learning” (Cranton, 2016, p.

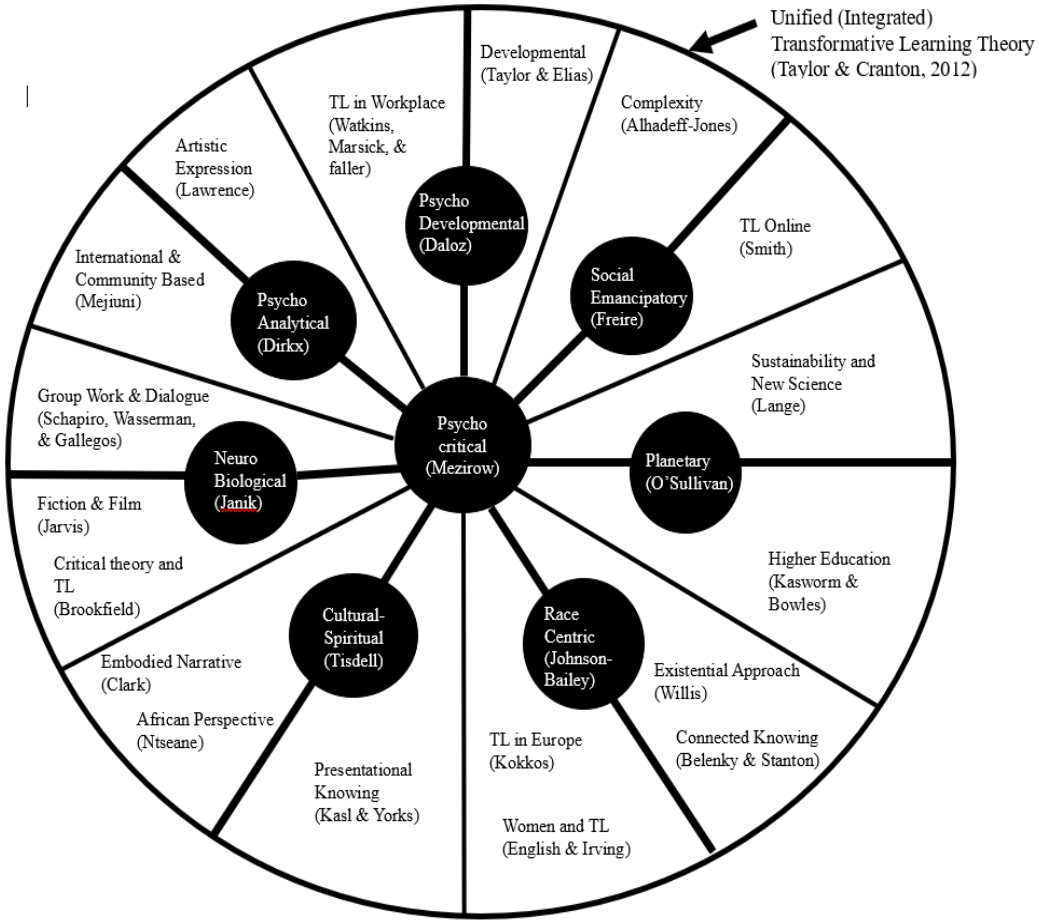

Figure 2.1

Unified (Integrated) Wheel of Transformative Learning Theory

Note. Authors and work listed in wheel from *The Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*. E. W. Taylor, P. Cranton, and Associates (Eds.), (2012).

105). As a leading practitioner of transformative learning, Cranton (2016) discussed the use of using questioning, consciousness-raising experiences, journals, experiential learning, critical incidents, and art-based activities to help create moments for learners to think. She acknowledged that an educator who fosters transformative learning is morally responsible to arrange and provide support. She describes this can be done by group support, being authentic, learner networks, helping with personal adjustments, understanding individual differences, supportive actions, and managing conflict and ethical issues (Cranton, 2016). For Kroth and Cranton (2014), the seeds of transformation can exist from back to childhood or suddenly exist without any warning, and that transformative learning is often dependent on relationships that exist in the contexts where educators and learners are supporting and helping others learn and transform.

Transformative Learning Theory can continue to create better understanding of the complexity and uniqueness of adult learners. This understanding is important for adult educators as they can continue to shape supportive relationships and comfort learners as they engage in the necessary challenges of transformative learning. Educators are faced with the challenges of not influencing learners' transformative processes or deciding when someone else has engaged in transformative learning (Cranton & Kasl, 2012). Everyone faces a journey within the transformative learning process that too daunting and complex for an educator to fully understand and lead the individual through the process. The essential role of an educator is just to be present with the student (Mälkki & Green, 2014). Educators cannot force transformative learning or tell a learner how to transform; however, they can offer tools to help the reflective process, listen, and provide a differing perspective when a learner reaches out (Cranton, 2002).

Role of Transformative Learning Theory in Adult Learning. The importance of transformative learning in the field of adult education is essentially that Mezirow (1981) was attempting to narrow the gap with the process of transition between stages of adult psychological development in major lifespan theories. The essential dimension of transformative learning is the explicit recognition of the foundational process involving critical assessment of epistemic assumptions (Dirkx et al., 2006); thus, offers "one of the sophisticated conceptualizations of reflection within a larger frame of adult learning theory" (Mälkki, 2010, p. 208). Mezirow's perspective places the learners' experience as the starting point to the transformative learning process, and he used transformative learning to explain how one's expectations directly influence the meanings made from one's experiences (Taylor, 1998). Mezirow (1991) saw learning as the process of making assumptions explicit, contextualizing them, validating them, and acting on them. The meaning making process of transformative learning allows for adults to explore the nature of knowledge to better understand how they know what they know (Merriam et al., 2007).

Transformative Learning Theory is a vital adult learning theory that can link adult development and adult learning. There are many theories of adult development that are important to adult education that include Erickson's (1963) stage-related theory of psychosocial development; Magnusson's (1995) integrative model provides a framework of multiple perspectives that interacts with psychological, biological, and environmental factors; Kegan (2000) and Grabinski (2005) work on development and environments. Like development, how adults learn is much more complex than first assumed. Adult learners present a unique aspect for educators and learning methods with their prior knowledge and experience (Merriam et al., 2007). Adults might experience many situations and factors in their lives that affect their development and desire to learn, such as age, family, job, death of a loved one, and divorce.

Transformative learning provides a theoretical framework with multiple perspectives and practical applications throughout various learning environments.

Transformative Learning Theory has seen continued growth across multiple fields of study and research. Along with this growth have been the continued criticisms of transformative learning and uncertainty on the direction and boundaries that define the field of transformative learning (Cranton, 2016). Yet, new insights on transformative learning using multiple new perspectives, contexts, and practical examples continue to help clarify and grow the theory of transformative learning (Cranton, 2016). Research and professional discourse regarding the field of transformative learning has continued to evolve, expand understandings, and cross multiple disciplines to further shape the theory and practice of transformative learning (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009; Taylor, 1998). Transformative learning and its application across multiple educational settings and cultures elaborates the core elements of fostering transformative education that include individual experience, promoting critical reflection, dialogue, holistic orientation, awareness of context, and authentic relationships (Mezirow & Taylor, 2019).

Section Summary

Transformative Learning Theory provides a process for adult learners to examine and question previous assumptions and understandings concerning themselves and the world around them as they encounter new learning experiences (Mezirow, 2000), placing the emotional experiences of learners as a key issue within the learning process (Dirkx, 2014). The type of questioning and reappraising of one's current assumptions and identity during a transformative learning experience can hold complex and powerful emotions for individuals and exploring these emotions during the transformative learning process can present a daunting journey (Daloz, 2012; Mälkki & Green, 2014). The next section of this literature review explores emotions in

adult learning focusing how these emotions might occur, the role of emotions in Transformative Learning Theory, and research that has focused on the relationship between emotions, adult learning, and transformative learning.

Emotions and Adult Learning

One's lived experiences do not become isolated learning events but are connected to previous experiences, and within these experiences lie a core of complex emotions that serve as a cognitive guide for daily interaction (Goleman, 1997). Through the experience of emotions an individual "comes to recognize what is cognitively and affectively of value to them, and who and what they are" (Dirkx, 2006, p. 31). For instance, emotions guide humans on how to console a sad family member, show happiness during virtual meetings with colleagues and friends, or ask a difficult question during a meeting. Emotions permeate one's perspective and help individuals make meaning of physical and social surroundings (Dirkx, 2006; Goleman, 1997). Emotions are intertwined within our everyday experiences and learning processes (Dirkx, 2006; Kasl & Yorks, 2002; Perry, 2006).

Emotions are also present in academic settings and become important factors for the personal growth and development of both learners and educators (Pekrun et al., 2002; Pekrun & Stephens, 2012). Lupton (1998) describes that the experience of emotion is intimately linked and central to what it means to be human. Dirkx (2000, 2006, 2012) observed that emotions have been acknowledged as important in education. Adult education presents contexts that are often highly emotional (Plumb, 2014). Even with the acknowledgment of emotions, historically the field of adult education has shied away from emotions (Kokkos et al., 2015). Plumb (2014) stated:

> Adult education has long held a narrowly instrumentalist and rationalistic notion of human cognition and learning—logical, methodical, calculative—as the prime contributor to knowledge and reasoned action contrasted sharply to its view of the emotions as impulsive, chaotic, and uncontrolled urges underlying thoughtless and reactive actions. (p. 146)

For Walker (2017), educational psychology literature has treated emotions as obstacles to overcome so that students can get down to the serious, cognitive, and rational task of learning. The role of emotions in adult education is undeniable; however, "the study of emotions is characterized by widespread unevenness in how it has been theorized, conceptualized, and enacted in adult learning" (Dirkx & Espinoza, 2017, p. 1). This unevenness is due to how emotions are managed by educators and the focus on emotions is at the expense of rigor and criticality of the learning process (Plumb, 2014). "Despite the widespread acknowledgment on the importance of the emotions in adult learning contexts, the literature of adult education offers little comprehensive exploration on the nature of the emotions and their place in adult learning" (Plumb, 2014, p. 145).

> If and when emotions are acknowledged by educators, it is often to provide opportunities for learners to 'vent' and 'get it off their chests' so they can get back to the 'business of learning.' Educators within formal settings of adult learning seek to control, manage, limit, or redirect outward expressions of emotions and feelings (Dirkx, 2001, p. 67).

Tennant (2005, 2012) expressed similar concerns on the tendency of adult education to be overly cognitive and not fully integrate the role of emotions in learning.

The role of experience combined with the variety of contexts with which adult learning takes place demonstrates the critical roles that emotions and feelings have with the sense of self

and in the processes of adult learning (Dirkx, 2001). Dirkx (2001) explains that in any learning environment, an adult can view the learning experience as life-changing, another can make a deep connection with some aspect to their personal lives or other learners, and another might view the experience as boring and useless. Each adult learner brings with them a unique set of circumstances and/or lived experiences into a learning environment. “Through our emotional experiences, we recognize that our conscious sense of agency is often subverted by desire” (Dirkx, 2001, p. 65). It is in these situations where individuals can face a self that is contradictory and fragmented by multiple voices claiming a different sense of reality (Clark & Dirkx, 2000). Clark and Dirkx (2008) recognized how emotions become integral to the learning process due to the expression of various emotions that course through our bodies, sociocultural contexts, and subjectivities.

Emotions and Transformative Learning

Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning concerns itself with allowing adults to make sense of life’s experiences, emotions, and all (Mezirow, 2009). “Transformative learning, especially when it involves subjective reframing, is often an intensely threatening emotional experience in which we have to become aware of both the assumptions undergirding our ideas and those support our emotional responses to the need to change” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 6). Transformative Learning Theory offers a framework to help adults facing a disorienting dilemma that can cause disruptions in one’s frames of understanding. These disruptions can cause one to experience emotions such as confusion, uncertainty, or anxiety place adults emotional experience as a key issue within transformative learning (Dirkx, 2012; Taylor, & Loras, 2014). These explore emotional experiences and develop an understanding with these multiple selves and realities (Dirkx, 2001). However, when exploring emotional experiences can often reveal “a

multiplistic, contradictory self" (Dirkx, 2001, p. 65), that needs to be looked at deeper within the transformative learning process to better understand the role of emotion.

MacKeracher (2012) found that most of the readings she found on transformative learning seemed to occur in a vacuum as they were missing the emotional responses and interactions with others. She asked, "Where is the messiness, the chaos, and the emotional roller coaster that transformative learning brings to me" (MacKeracher, 2012, p. 349)? Her questions highlight the gaps throughout the literature concerning the attention given to developing learners' emotional awareness as they engage in transformative learning (Nogueiras et al., 2019). Taylor and Cranton (2012) acknowledged the tension between emotions and reason throughout the history of transformative learning, and that some of that tension still exist. They argue that the field needs to stop seeing "rationality separately from emotions because the very existence of rationality is rooted in the presence of emotion" (p. 566). This unification of the field recognizes the relationship between cognition and emotion to that greater attention can be put on research and facilitating the transformative experience (Cranton, 2016; Taylor & Cranton, 2012).

> For future research, those who recognize the significance of emotion and its inherent relationship to reason, it is important to explore ways that help learners develop emotional awareness as they engage in transformative learning. This awareness also seems to have direct application for better understanding of why critical reflections is so central to transformative learning. (Taylor & Cranton, 2012, p. 567)

Hoggan et al. (2017) discussed the concerns with the research of transformative learning and what they refer to as stuckness. They reiterate the concerns of Taylor and Cranton (2012) and Mälkki (2011) that the critiques of Mezirow have become overused to the point that they are often second-hand and third hand, "causing important issues and tensions to become simplified

and dichotomized" (Hoggan et al., 2017, p. 49). An area that they discuss is the tension between the emotional and cognitive aspects that Taylor and Cranton (2012) recognized as a major area of tension in the field of transformative learning. Hoggan et al. (2017) sees the human experience as intersubjective and that tension between cognition and emotion in transformative learning is a false dichotomy. "It is impossible to separate cognition from emotion, just as it is to completely separate the individual from the social" (Hoggan et al., 2017, p. 54). Mezirow did discuss the importance of emotions in his early writings; however, they were not discussed as a main role to the theory, unlike the cognitive aspects (Mälkki, 2010).

Scholars of transformative learning (Cranton, 2016; Dirkx, 2008; Taylor & Cranton, 2012) have acknowledged the power of emotions within learning, and Mezirow would later admit the role of emotion, intuition, and imagination had been underrepresented in earlier studies of transformative learning (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). In fact, a key issue when investigating transformative learning is students' emotional experience (Dirkx, 2012; Nogueiras et al., 2019; Taylor & Loras, 2014). "Emotions are more than mere addenda to the learning process or barriers to rational thought; they can instigate the learning process and lead to more holistic ways of knowing and being" (Hoggan et al., 2017, p. 55). The conflict learners have with emotions throughout the transformative learning process can be used to create intense levels of reflection and learning (Cranton, 2016; Dirkx, 2006, 2008). Given the proper fostering environments and skills needed to understand negative or chaotic emotions, individuals can reach an intense level of reflection that could not otherwise be fully understood (Cranton, 2016). For adults to understand what is communicated requires that learners engage in "critical reflection to question the integrity of assumptions and beliefs based on prior experiences" (Taylor, 1998, p. 9).

Emotions portray complex relationships within individuals, and when used properly, they can be a great source of power, voice, building new perspectives, and exploring differences and contexts (Clark & Dirkx, 2008). Mälkki and Green (2014) see the power of emotions within transformative learning and believe that looking at emotions may help "better welcome them, to let them be, and be with them, so that we can work through them and the assumptions that are covered by them, instead of being automatically disposed to avoid considering the unpleasant issues" (p. 15). Important research and developing perspectives of transformative learning have helped add to the discussion of emotions and transformative learning that include but not limited to Belenky and Stanton (2000) connected knowing, Cranton (2006) fostering authentic relationships in the transformative classroom, Charaniya (2012) cultural-spiritual perspective, Clark (2012) embodied narrative, Dirkx (2000, 2006) extrarational and soul work, Green (2012) focus on trauma theory and praxis, Hoggan and Cranton (2015) promoting transformative learning trough reading fiction, Johnson-Bailey and Alfred (2006) positionality and transformative learning, MacKeracher (2012) concerns of developing learners' emotional awareness as they engage in transformative learning, Mälkki (2010, 2012, 2019) rethinking the disorienting dilemma and chaotic emotions, Mälkki and Green (2014) navigating the emotional journey of transformative learning, Merriam et al. (1996) learning that comes from the negative interpretation of life experiences, Nogueiras et al. (2019) transformative learning of masters' student with focus on emotional experience, O'Sullivan (1999) ecological perspective, Sands and Tennant (2010) transformative learning in the context of suicide bereavement, Tolliver and Tisdell (2006) inclusion of spirituality in transformative learning, Walker (2017) shame and transformation, Watkins et al. (2018) therapist identity formation in clinical supervision, and Yorks and Kasl (2006) expressive ways of knowing.

Key Research on Emotions and Transformative Learning. As mentioned in the previous section, research has shown the importance of emotions within the discussions of transformative learning. The next section discusses the key adult educators and research on emotions in transformative learning that have shaped the purpose and context of this dissertation.

***Extrarational*.** Dirkx's (2000, 2006) perspective on adult learning focuses on the nature of the self, the various ways individuals have come to think about and understand our senses of self, identity, and subjectivity. Dirkx (2000) would extend the extrarational approach of transformative learning that involves a very personal and imaginative way of knowing. He refers to this view of transformative learning as soul work or inner work, which suggests a more integrated and holistic understanding of subjectivity, one that reflects the intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions of our being in the world (Dirkx et al., 2006). His work on the extrarational approach to Transformative Learning Theory added a vital perspective. This approach draws attention to the "experience and manifestation of emotional dynamics in learning, suggesting largely unconscious issues evoked by various aspects of the learning setting" (Dirkx, 2006, p. 17). The use of critical *self*-reflection includes the emotional, spiritual, and imaginative aspects of transformation. The extrarational approach uses soul work, emotions, imagination, and intuition that takes learning beyond rationality for a deeper meaning and understanding of oneself (Dirkx, 2006).

The experience of a dilemma may cause resistance to learn, as well as a deeper level of self-awareness. The research on transformative learning suggests that it involves an individual in a profound meaning-making process that reflects the person's relationship with both the self and their sociocultural context (Taylor, 1998). This understanding is seen as both very personal and deeply social, engaging the learner in collaborations with others.

> Developing awareness of these relationships involves cognitive, affective, somatic, and spiritual processes, mediated by reflective analysis, story, symbol, or ritual. Such work may lead to profound shifts in one's awareness or consciousness of being in the world-what we refer to as transformative learning. (Dirkx, 2006, p.19)

Dirkx (2006) believes that emotions are deeply involved in the process of transformative learning in two ways: during the critical reflection process and a person's unconscious emotional response to various aspects of the learning experience. Dirkx argues that these powerful emotions within the learner's experiences suggest a deeper involvement of the learner's psyche. "The language and processes of critical reflection do not seem well suited to working with these extrarational, unconscious processes and dynamics" (Dirk, 2006, p. 20). In this perspective, the use of critical *self*-reflection includes the emotional, spiritual, and imaginative aspects of transformation that takes learning beyond rationality for a deeper meaning and understanding (Dirkx, 2006, 2012). Mezirow acknowledged Dirkx's perspective and reminded him that it is the rational process of critically assessing one's epistemic assumptions that save transformative learning from becoming reduced to faith, prejudice, vision, or desire (Dirkx et al., 2006). Dirkx does not deny the existence of a rational process of transformative learning within awareness; he is more interested in understanding the subjective and inner world and its leading to deep shifts (Dirkx et al., 2006).

Edge Emotions, Comfort Zones, and Liminality. Kaisu Mälkki's (2010, 2012, 2019) research discussed how emotions and safe relationships are inextricable factors within the process of reflection. Mälkki (2010) believes that the tension between reflection and meaning perspective must be examined to understand the nature of the process of reflection. During this reflection there is an emotional dimension that she describes as going hand in hand with

reflecting on one's assumptions. Mälkki suggests that the meaning perspective may be seen to be supported and protected by emotions. Mälkki (2010) introduces the concepts of the comfort zone and edge-emotions to capture the intertwinement of emotion and cognition in a way that offers an understanding of the challenges to reflection. Reflection on one's assumptions can become difficult, and these "assumptions becoming problematic is a challenge to one's comfort zone, and edge-emotions emerge to orient one's thinking automatically back to the comfort zone" (Mälkki, 2010, p. 56). Due to this, Mälkki (2010, 2012, 2019) suggest that individuals need to recognize and accept their edge emotions; allowing individuals to recognize, organize, and work with their emotions during critical reflection.

Mälkki's (2012) *Rethinking Disorienting Dilemmas Within Real-life Crises,* is a qualitative study of involuntarily childless women that was conducted to elaborate on the possibilities of how a disorienting dilemma, life-event crisis, may trigger reflection. The qualitative study applied Mezirow's theory of transformative learning to analyze involuntarily childless women in the process of negotiating emotionally chaotic experiences. Mälkki (2012) chose Mezirow's theory as a starting point and used a similar study by Sands and Tennant (2010) that emphasized the relevance of affective dimension along with Mezirow's cognitive focus. She found reflection as a way for the women to make meaning in a chaotic situation, with no pre-made labels with which to conceptualize one's experience (Mälkki, 2012). The process was inherently emotional, for one in a state of chaos and emotional burden distinguishes one's experience from the normal context (Mälkki, 2012). The role of reflection on disorienting dilemmas within the context of a non-facilitated life-event crisis appear to be inherently emotional experiences, reflection brings both positive and negative issues to wake, and meaning from reflecting is only understandable regarding the individual's unique perspective (Mälkki,

2012, 2019). The study suggest that future research is needed on reflection and looking at the terrain between the life crisis context and the context facilitated within educational settings.

Green (2012) explored the role and contribution of trauma theory and praxis to the understanding of transformative learning. “An important aspect of transformative learning that the author bases the work on is that transformative learning acknowledges that the container changes shape—the person reconfigures over their lifetime” (Green, 2012, p. 199). Green focuses on Mezirow’s (1991) concept that an individual’s frames of reference are confronted and reframed during the transformative learning experience. His grounding of transformative learning through Mezirow’s cognitive approach along with Kegan’s (1982) discussion on development helped Green (2012) frame transformation that involves some type of anxiety and depression. Green (2012) sees “the emotions of anxiety and depression accompany the very difficult process of dis-integration, re-constitution, and re-integration that is transformational learning” (p. 200). Basing transformative learning in this frame determines that transformative learning is both a cognitive and affective process, and that “grieving is a necessary part of the transformational process” (Green, 2012, p. 200). Green believes that Transformative Learning Theory needs to acknowledge the danger of individuals moving in the transitional zone between two ways of being and that those individuals face those limits in the liminal zone (Green, 2012). An important piece of the study is that individuals within a crisis or in the liminal zone may not be able to engage in critical reflection; however, transformative learning can function as a map that provides navigational points that one can look to during the process (Green, 2012).

In the Mälkki and Green (2014) article, *Navigational Aids: The Phenomenology of Transformative Learning*, discuss the notions of liminality, comfort zone, and edge-emotions to explain the transformative process and provide a standard frame of reference for educators and

learners. Due to the trends in the field, the study was shaped with the concept of focusing strictly on specific aspects or micro-processes of transformative learning to develop a more in-depth understanding of transformative learning. They looked at transformation as a journey through liminality, which is defined by a "psychological, neurological, or metaphysical subjective state... being between two different existential planes, and what happens in the 'in-between' zone where all that was once stable has become fluid" (Mälkki & Green, 2014, p. 8). A common ideology of changing the view of assumptions is that it is easy; however, Mälkki and Green (2014) believe that the process entails struggle with the "liminal zone, where one is faced with the challenge to give up one's preconceived destination, and reliance on one's present meaning perspective" (p. 12). All individuals have current sets of beliefs and assumptions that they referred to as one's comfort zone. A disorienting dilemma is an event that forces an individual out of their comfort zone. Outside of the comfort zone is where one encounters emotions that Mälkki and Green (2014) refer to as edge-emotions. The important piece is that the value of emotion is the pathway to assumption, so to reach your assumptions, you must "acknowledge and accept edge emotions" (Mälkki & Green, 2014, p. 15). They believe that if an individual is free to move throughout the liminal zone to engage edge-emotions experienced from a disorienting dilemma, then one can understand them fully and use them to develop deeper meaning-making within the transformative learning process (Mälkki & Green, 2014, 2018).

Mälkki and Green's (2016) article *Ground, Warmth, and Light: Facilitating Conditions for Reflection and Transformative Dialogue,* focused on the two main points of how dialogue can be utilized to facilitate transformative learning and reflection, and exploring how safe and accepting learning environments can be created. They discuss how edge-emotions can be used to prompt reflection, "through these emotions that the problematic assumptions may be accessed

and identified. This becomes more possible when we value the edge-emotions as a potential doorway to a greater existential truth" (Mälkki & Green, 2016, p. 171). Mälkki and Green (2016, 2018) view the embracing of unpleasant emotions as a pathway to greater existential truth. They describe the ground as the guidelines that welcome all points of view, the warmth is provided by the feelings of belonging and acceptance, and the light refers to the insights that occur because of dialogue (Mälkki & Green, 2016).

Suicide Bereavement. Diana Sands and Mark Tennant's (2010) *Transformative Learning in the Context of Suicide Bereavement* examines the experience of suicide bereavement through the lens of transformative learning. Theories of suicide bereavement hold several commonalities with transformative learning in their quest for meaning through discourse, dialogue, and re-storying past events and relationships (Sands & Tennant, 2010). Suicide bereavement can cause the disruption of one's understanding of the world and forces them to question their assumptions of the constructed world (Sands & Tennant, 2010). The findings of the study produced key themes of intentionality, reconstructing the relationship, and repositioning the relationship. These phases illustrate very emotional aspects of the individuals meaning-making process throughout the phases of transformative learning (Sands & Tennant, 2010).

Shame. Jude Walker's (2017) study on shame and transformation in adult education is an important study attempting to bridge the gap between emotions and transformative learning. Shame is described as a collective human experience that, at times individuals feel damaged, inadequate, and lacking. Walker believes that for certain individual's shame, can resemble a disorienting dilemma that can trigger critical reflection and make changes (Walker, 2017). Research on shame is important to transformative learning because it is manifested in social

interactions. Transformative learning is an attempt to understand ourselves through engagement with others (Mezirow, 1991; Walker, 2017).

Trauma. Chad Hoggan's (2014) *Insights from Breast Cancer Survivors: The Interplay Between Context, Epistemology, and Change,* aim was to discuss further how resolution occurs in the context of living through and after such an event. Hoggan (2014) uses Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) in relation to Mezirow's transformative learning to understand better positive changes that result from struggles with potentially traumatic experiences. Hoggan (2014) found three roles of context for women played a central role in shaping outcomes of the transformative learning process. First, becoming a cancer patient served as a disorienting dilemma that instigated the learning and change process. Second, the new context of being a cancer patient played a central role in influencing a new epistemology to negotiate their transformative learning experience. Third, the role context plays in transformative learning is that the new context also shapes and informs the eventual learning outcomes (Hoggan, 2014).

Art-Base Transformative Learning. Chad Hoggan and Patricia Cranton's (2015) *Promoting Transformative Learning Trough Reading Fiction,* adds to the growing discussion of arts-based transformative learning. The study explores how fictional stories have the potential for creating an environment that allows the opportunities to make important connections with personal experiences, emotional responses, and role models that may lead to transformative learning (Hoggan & Cranton, 2015). Hoggan and Cranton found that fictional stories can arouse strong emotions, and these emotions can create a desire to change and prompt critical self-reflection for some readers.

Spiritual. Tolliver and Tisdell's (2006), *Engaging Spirituality in the Transformative Higher Education Classroom*, was done to make their definition of transformative learning

explicit within the field of transformative learning. Tolliver and Tisdell (2006) "believe that transformative learning creates a more expansive understanding of the world regarding how one sees and experiences both others and self and is grounded in one's entire being" (p. 37), and "learning is more likely to be transformative if it permeates one's whole self" and "has a spiritual component" (p. 38). Tolliver and Tisdell (2006) believe that the spiritual essence should be included in transformative learning because it evolves around developing a more authentic identity. This vision of transformative learning sees meaning making that connects naturally with spiritual, intuitive, and emotional process that can lead to transformation on either an individual or sociocultural level. Tolliver and Tisdell (2006) call for the inclusion of spirituality in facilitating transformative learning by building practice that is authentic, open, accepting, and honor various ways of learning and meaning making. The inclusion of the spiritual allows educators, researchers, and learners to reach beyond the traditional perspectives of transformative learning. This perspective of transformative learning includes spiritual, affective, imaginative, cultural, communal, and rational ways of knowing.

Emotional Experience. Nogueiras et al. (2019), *Experiencing transformative learning in a counseling masters' course: A process-oriented case study with a focus on the emotional experience,* uses Transformative Learning Theory as a means in higher education to help adult students in the transition of knowledge and develop increasingly sophisticated ways of meaning-making (Kegan, 1994; Nogueiras et al., 2019; Perry 1970). When an individual is faced with a disorienting dilemma or frames of comfort are challenged, they might experience emotions such as confusion, uncertainty, or anxiety (Dirkx et al., 2006; Formenti & Dirkx, 2014; Nogueiras et al., 2019). These disruptions place students' emotional experience as a key issue within transformative learning (Dirkx, 2014; Taylor & Loras, 2014). Nogueiras et al. (2019) argue that

research needs to expand from just a retrospective account, and they see a combination of longitudinal and retrospective accounts of students' emotional experiences as key to investigating transformative learning processes. They believe that their single case research study is an important piece to understanding the relationship between emotions and transformation, depicts transformative learning as a process of stability—destabilization—transition—resettlement, and provided four types of emotions relevant to the phases (Nogueiras et al., 2019). The emotional and transformative learning processes of a higher education student provides an in-depth look at how context shapes and influences an individual's meaning making and emotional processes.

Insights from Other Discipline. According to Alexander et al. (2012), to avoid misrepresentation of ideas and findings educational psychologists need to continue to borrow ideas and findings from other disciplines such as adult education to help inform the direction of the field's scholarly and practical efforts. To help unite and continue building the field of transformative learning, new insight and research from various disciplines is needed. Tisdell (2012) discussed that adult educators (Dirkx, 2006; O'Sullivan, 1999; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006) have looked to other disciplines to bring insights and make connections with their discussions on transformative learning. A new insight that scholars of transformative learning can use is second wave *dark side* positive psychology as a lens within their own research as it relates to the meaning of life that discusses challenging experiences, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Ivtzan et al., 2016). The integration of second wave positive psychology within Transformative Learning Theory offers new concepts to help acknowledge and embrace emotions, build depth of meaning, and create an openness that is needed when individuals face dilemmas. The interweaving of second wave *dark side* positive psychology can help individuals appreciate the

nuances of the whole spectrum of emotional experience. Before exploring second wave positive psychology, a brief introduction on the initial first wave of positive psychology is needed.

Positive Psychology (First Wave Positive Psychology). "Positive psychology is the scientific study of the good life" (Watkins, 2016, p. 3). In 1998, Martin E. P. Seligman set out to create a new direction and orientation for psychology that urged psychologists to bring the focus of psychology back on the mission of building human strength and nurture genius (Compton & Hoffman, 2013). The orientation of positive psychology is the science that focuses on the positive aspects of human life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Seligman's urging of a new discipline was named positive psychology that encouraged increases with research focusing on well-being and areas of human strength (Compton & Hoffman, 2013; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) discussed three basic areas or dimensions of interest in positive psychology that include positive subjective states, positive psychological traits, and positive intuitions. "In the most general terms, positive psychology is concerned with the use of psychological theory, research, and intervention techniques to understand the positive, adaptive, creative, and emotionally fulling aspects of human behavior" (Compton & Hoffman, 2013, p. 1). The *first wave* of positive psychology movement represented a shift in perspective away from the field of psychology and its often emphasis on individuals' shortcomings (Boniwell, 2012).

The third edition of *Positive Psychology in a Nutshell* provided Boniwell (2012) the opportunity to explore the success and discoveries that positive psychology has had over the past twenty years. Boniwell (2012) shares that the discussion on positive psychology within the book mostly comes from the growth of positive psychology found within academic books, scientific papers, conferences, and the discussions and research being done by students and scholars alike.

The influence of positive psychology has seen significant growth and influences with courses throughout several American and European universities (Boniwell, 2012). Positive Psychology is the theory and research on the positive aspects of life. However, the reality is that "positive psychology investigates and researches some of the most difficult and painful human experiences" (Ivtzan et al., 2016, p. 1), and the role that those experiences have with how people function and transform as human beings.

Second Wave Positive Psychology (SWPP). Within the early positive focus of positive psychology, some psychologist began to focus on the negative aspects and dominant messages with the positive psychology movement (Held, 2004). Held (2004) focused on what she deemed as the dominant message of positive psychology that reinforced "positivity is good and good for you, and negativity is bad and bad for you" (p. 12), this influenced her desire to incorporate a more nuanced and integrative approach with positive and negative emotions, and credited pieces of research from within positivity psychology that expressed similar concerns with the dominant message (Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003; Carstensen & Charles, 2003; Carver & Scheier, 2003; Larsen et al., 2003; Ryff & Singer; 2003).

Held (2004) believed that positive psychologists were overlooking negativity. She described a dismissive reaction to negativity in positive psychology as forms of negativity about negativity, and negativity about the wrong kind of positivity (Held, 2004). Held (2004) first suggested a more nuanced approach to the notions of positive and negative aspects of life and that this approach might be described as the *second wave* of positive psychology" (Ivtzan et al., 2016, p. 2). A main characteristic of this emergent second wave is an embrace of the negative side of life, which Held (2004) referred to as *second wave* positive psychology. As positive psychology represented a shift in perspective from the field of psychology to focus of positive

aspects of human life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), the emergent *second wave* was a stepping away from the early positive focus of *first wave* positive psychology (Ivtzan et al., 2016). In 2011, Wong used the term *dark side* as an extension of Held's term *negative side*. In Wong's (2011) discussion of positive *psychology 2.0* he discussed well-being using the yin-yang symbol to help symbolize the intertwining and values of positive and negative emotions. He argued that the combination of existential and positive psychology perspectives can help lead positive psychology in future research (Compton & Hoffman, 2013).

Ivtzan et al. (2016) continuing development based on the work of Held (2004) and Wong (2011), they chose to use the term second wave *dark side* positive psychology (SWPP) to refer to the challenging experiences, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors which trigger discomfort (Ivtzan et al., 2016). Their use of *dark side* is not a negative viewpoint but is the engagement with the darker side of life, and one should not confuse experiences with outcomes. Ivtzan et al. (2016) see the development of the *dark side* to help highlight "important elements in this new wave of research and theory" so that "readers may construe or appraise these developments in their own ways" (p. 3). Ivtzan et al.'s (2016) book *Second Wave Positive Psychology: Embracing the Dark Side of Life*, continued the development of second wave positive psychology from several scholars within the field of positive psychology. The term *dark side* was chosen to refer to the challenging experiences, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors which trigger discomfort in us (Ivtzan et al., 2016). It is important to understand that *dark side* does not mean bad but the engagement with darker side of life, and one should not confuse experiences with outcomes.

Ivtzan et al. (2016) developed their book to take one along a journey that highlights the "important elements in this new wave of research and theory; readers may construe or appraise these developments in their own ways" (p. 3). Highlights include the focus on dialectics of

emotion, which appreciates how emotions themselves as having binary opposites. Second wave appreciates how there is a discourse on the tension that occurs between positive (light) and negative (dark) emotions (Ivtzan et al., 2016). Another highlight in the book is the discussion on relation between theories of developmental psychology and positive psychology. The focus on developmental theories through the lens of the *dark side* offers insight as to how other scholars can use *dark side* as a lens within their own research. The book continues with the discussion on adversity, resilience, and growth that focuses on the positive outcomes that can come from engaging the *dark side*. The authors also discuss the benefits of mortality and positive psychology. Focusing on the benefits of one contemplating mortality can offer a means to engage in deep critical self-reflection (Ivtzan et al., 2016). Another important highlight in the book is on wellbeing that focuses on suffering, compassion and interconnectedness that introduces an extremely important piece of compassion that involves opening up to the *dark side* that can lead to connecting with other people's suffering (Ivtzan et al., 2016). This is followed by the important aspect of *dark side* and spirituality that the authors relate to for the transcendence of self. "The *dark side* of spirituality, true engagement of self, carries the seed for important transformation" (Ivtzan et al., 2016, p. 154). The last highlight in the book is the discussion on the hero's journey. This journey occurs when one encounters and embraces the difficult and chaotic experiences in life, turning them into key moments of growth and development.

Section Summary

The type of questioning and reappraising of one's current assumptions and identity during a transformative learning experience can hold complex and powerful emotions. The transformative process places the emotional experiences of learners as a key issue within the learning process (Dirkx, 2012). This section briefly discussed emotions within adult learning, the

role of emotions in Transformative Learning Theory, and key research that has focused on the relationship between emotions, adult learning, and transformative learning. The section included a discussion on how scholars of transformative learning have looked to make connections and insights from other disciplines and how the integration of second wave positive psychology offers new concepts to help acknowledge and embrace emotions, build depth of meaning, and create an openness that is needed when individuals face dilemmas. The incorporation of second wave positive psychology's dialectical nature of emotions can allow one's perceived emotions to be a part of one's learning experiences. The next section of this literature review synthesizes adult learning, transformative learning, and emotions to help frame the context and specific focus of this study.

Synthesis of Adult Learning, Transformative Learning, and Emotion.

This chapter has focused on adult learning in doctoral education, transformative learning in adult learning, and emotions within adult learning. In particular, research on emotions included insights from second wave positive psychology to enhanced discourse and reflection on the dialectic nature of emotions. In this section, all the aforementioned literature is synthesized to highlight important connections within the literature and help funnel the focus of this dissertation study. Figure 2.2 demonstrates the previous sections of Chapter Two that explored literature concerning the integral relationship between adult learning, transformative learning, and emotions within the context of doctoral graduate education.

Doctoral Graduate Education

Merriam et al. (2007) described that "adult learning does not occur in a vacuum" (p. 25), nor do the various disciplines, theories, and concepts used within adult education. Learning

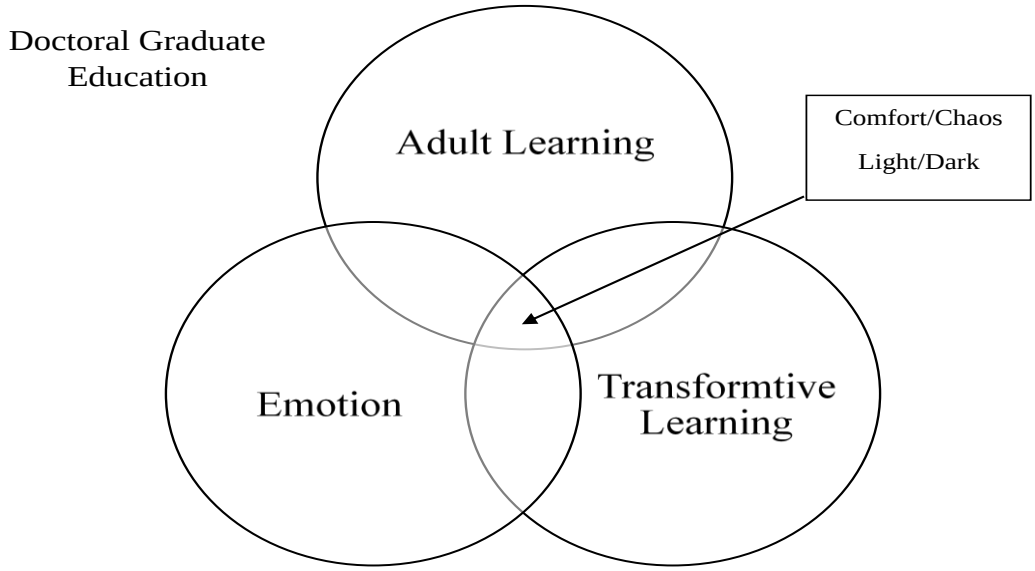

Figure 2.2

Intersections of Adult Learning, Emotion, Transformative Learning in Context of Doctoral Graduate Education

happens throughout one's entire multi-faceted life, and the direct connection between the social context of learning and an individual's acquisition of it, can help them become more creative, flexible, adaptive to changes and transitions in various social institutions (Illeris, 2004; Jarvis, 1992). Adult learning in graduate education, more specifically at the doctoral level, presents an arduous and complex journey between academic and personal responsibilities (Roberts, 2010). Adult learners enter these new learning environments they bring with them previous experiences full of emotions and cognitive beliefs (Kasworm, 2008). Due to the various elements and factors of learning in higher education, researchers and educators have looked to transformative learning to examine how adult learners create meaning with their experiences, emotions, and all (Kasworm & Bowles, 2012; Mezirow, 1997; Nogueiras et al., 2019; Taylor, 2003).

Emotions are an important piece to rational thought and the meaning-making process, and the empirical research presented in this chapter demonstrates the importance of emotions within the transformative learning process. Transformative Learning Theory provides a process for adult learners to examine and question previous experiences, assumptions, and understandings concerning themselves and the world around them as they encounter new learning experiences (Mezirow, 2000). The role of experience combined with the variety of contexts with which adult learning takes place demonstrates the critical roles that emotions and feelings have with the sense of self and in the processes of adult learning (Dirkx, 2001).

Relationship Between Adult Learning and Transformative Learning

The importance of transformative learning in the field of adult education is essentially that Mezirow (1981) was attempting to narrow the gap with the process of transition between stages of adult psychological development in major lifespan theories. The essential dimension of transformative learning is the explicit recognition of the foundational process involving critical

assessment of epistemic assumptions (Dirkx et al., 2006); thus, offers "one of the most sophisticated conceptualizations of reflection within a larger frame of adult learning theory" (Mälkki, 2010, p. 208). Transformative learning is a vital adult learning theory that can link adult development and adult learning.

Mezirow (1991) saw learning for adults as the process of making their assumptions explicit, contextualizing them, validating them, and acting on them. Mezirow's (1991) places the learners' experience as the starting point to the transformative learning process. He saw transformative learning as a process to better explain how individual expectations directly influence the meanings that they make from experiences (Taylor, 1998). Transformative Learning Theory has seen continued growth across multiple fields of study and cultures with research that elaborates elements of fostering transformative education that include individual experience, promoting critical reflection, dialogue, holistic orientation, awareness of context, and authentic relationships (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009).

Relationship Between Adult Learning and Emotions

One's lived experiences do not become isolated learning events but are connected to previous experiences, and within these experiences lie a core of complex emotions that serve as a cognitive guide for daily interaction (Goleman, 2005). Through the experience of emotions an individual "comes to recognize what is cognitively and affectively of value to them, and who and what they are" (Dirkx, 2006, p. 31). Emotions are intertwined within our everyday experiences and learning processes (Dirkx, 2006; Kasl & Yorks, 2002; Perry, 2006). Emotions are also present in academic settings and become important factors for the personal growth and development of both learners and educators (Pekrun et al., 2002; Pekrun & Stephens, 2012) and adult education presents contexts that are often highly emotional (Plumb, 2014). The role of

emotions in adult learning is undeniable; however, "the study of emotions is characterized by widespread unevenness in how it has been theorized, conceptualized, and enacted in adult learning" (Dirkx & Espinoza, 2017, p. 1). The role of experience combined with the variety of contexts with which adult learning takes place demonstrates the critical roles that emotions and feelings have with the sense of self and in the processes of adult learning (Dirkx, 2001).

Relationship Between Transformative Learning and Emotions

Scholars of transformative learning (Cranton, 2016; Dirkx, 2008; Taylor & Cranton, 2012) have acknowledged the power of emotions within learning, and Mezirow would later admit the role of emotion, intuition, and imagination had been underrepresented in earlier studies of transformative learning (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). In fact, a key issue when investigating transformative learning is students' emotional experience (Dirkx, 2014; Nogueiras et al., 2019; Taylor & Loras, 2014). The conflict learners have with emotions throughout the transformative learning process can be used to create intense levels of reflection and learning (Cranton, 2016; Dirkx, 2006, 2008). Hoggan et al. (2017) describes that "emotions are more than mere addenda to the learning process or barriers to rational thought; they can instigate the learning process and lead to more holistic ways of knowing and being" (p. 55). Given the proper fostering environments and skills needed to understand negative or chaotic emotions, individuals can reach an intense level of reflection that could not otherwise be fully understood (Cranton, 2016). For adults to understand what is communicated requires that learners engage in critical reflection to question the integrity of assumptions and beliefs based on prior experiences (Taylor, 1998).

Intersection of Adult Learning, Transformative Learning, and Emotions

The intersection of adult learning, transformative learning, and emotions in Figure 2.2 (p. 84) *Comfort/Chaos* and *Light/Dark* represents an area that has the potential for growth and

conflict for learners. Scholars of transformative learning have explored the conflict learners have with emotions throughout the transformative learning process can be used to create intense levels of reflection and learning (Cranton, 2016; Dirkx, 2006, 2008; Mälkki, 2012, 2019; Mälkki & Green, 2014, 2018; Sands & Tennant, 2010). Yet the possibilities of growth within the intersection of adult learning, transformative learning, and emotions can also hold dangerous conflicts for learners that should concern adult educators and higher education programs. These new learning experiences in relation to learners may "challenge individuals to move beyond their comfort zone of the known, of self and others" (Kasworm & Bowles, 2012, p. 389). Challenges to one's comfort zone brings even more complexity to the adult graduate learner's identity within and outside academia which can contain very complex and powerful emotions for individuals as they confront personal and cultural elements within their identities (Cranton, 2016). An overlying critique of transformative learning research is that the difficulty of the transformative journey is often neglected (MacKeracher, 2012; Mälkki, 2012, 2019; Mälkki & Green, 2014, 2018). There is a lack of scholarly research concerning the difficulties and contradictions on the factors that make individuals decide to engage in the critical reflection process that leads to a transformative experience, or the emotional depth individuals needed to make meaning with their disorienting dilemmas (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Mezirow (2000) referred to the possibility of intensely threatening emotional experience. Daloz (2012) and Mälkki and Green (2014) describe how a transformative experience can represent a daunting journey void of understanding. Kasworm's (2008) work on adult education in a higher education setting focused on the emotional chaos that might occur during a life-event crisis. Mälkki (2012) asked how one can make meaning while in emotional chaos and life crisis. Green (2012) discusses the danger of individuals moving in the transitional zone between two ways of being. Green and Mälkki

explored the concepts of comfort zone and edge-emotions that captures the intertwinement of emotion and cognition in a way that offers an understanding of the challenges to reflection (Green, 2012; Mälkki, 2010, 2012, 2019; Mälkki & Green, 2014, 2018).

Learners may face a difficult journey through the transformative learning process. The conflict that exists needs to incorporate the dialectics of emotions to allow perceived positive (*light*) and negative (*dark)* emotions to be a part of one's experiences to help understand that specific mental states that "inherently involve complex, intertwined shades of *light* and *dark*," so that one can be more accepting and reflective of the emotions that they experience (Ivtzan et al., 2016, p. 19). Embracing both the *comfort* and *chaos*, and the *light* and *dark* offers the potential for enhanced discourse and reflection on the dialectic nature of emotions experienced during the transformative learning process (Cranton, 2016; Dirkx, 2006, 2008). When used properly, emotions can give learners power, build new perspectives, and work across varying differences and contexts (Cranton, 2016; Ivtzan et al., 2016). The focus of this dissertation was to provide a way for the researcher to focus deeply on the range of emotions throughout a transformative learning journey and how a learner engages both the *light* and *dark* sides of life (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Chapter Summary

Chapter Two provided a comprehensive review on the literature relevant to this study to aid the reader in understanding the complexities of Transformative Learning Theory in adult learning. First, I briefly introduced higher education, graduate education, adult learning in higher education, and adult learning theories were done to frame the importance of transformative learning as a theory of adult learning in higher education. Second, I reviewed the historical background of Transformative Learning Theory beginning with the historical origins, critical

responses, theoretical growth, and alternative perspectives that have emerged. Third, the discussions on emotions are exhaustive, I focused on the role of emotions within educational psychology, adult education, and then transformative learning to narrow focus on transformative learning literature that emotions as a core element. I introduced and discussed second wave positive psychology to create and develop connections to further the discussion on emotions in transformative learning. Fourth, I synthesized adult learning, transformative learning, and emotions to highlight how the three areas intersect and create an area that represents the potential for emotions to be used with building understanding, new perspectives, enhancing work across varying differences and contexts, but also the danger and conflicts that also exist (Cranton, 2016; Ivtzan et al., 2016). The following chapter, Chapter Three, I present the methodology and methods used in this study including the research design, methodology, data collection, data analysis, plans to ensure qualitative rigor and trustworthiness, subjectivity statement, and limitations of the study.

Chapter Three

Methodology

As the previous chapters discussed, adult learning in graduate education presents complex environments full of individuals with complex backgrounds, experiences, emotions, and cognitive beliefs (Cranton, 2016; Hegarty, 2013; Hubball et al., 2010; Kasworm, 2008; Kasworm & Bowles, 2012). Due to the various elements and factors of adults learning in higher education, researchers and adult educators have looked to Transformative Learning Theory to provide a process for adult learners to examine and question previous experiences, assumptions, and understandings concerning themselves and the world around them as they encounter new learning experiences (Mezirow, 2000). This process of examining previous experiences places the emotional experiences of learners as a key issue within the learning process (Dirkx, 2012). The problem is that there has been a lack of research with focus on the difficulty of the transformative learning journey. Currently, there is a lack of scholarly research concerning the difficulties and contradictions that make an individual decide to engage in the critical reflection process that leads to a transformative experience, or the emotional depth individuals need to make meaning with their disorienting dilemmas. Chapter One provided a background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, and research questions to be answered. Chapter Two provided a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to this study to aid the reader in understanding the complexities of adult learning, Transformative Learning Theory, and emotions within the landscape adult graduate education.

As a reminder, the purpose of this autoethnographic dissertation was to have a better understanding of how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions

within a transformative learning experience at an R1 institution in the southeastern region of the United States. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How does the cultural context of a doctoral student shape the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience in graduate education?
2. How does the doctoral student engage emotions resulting from a disorienting dilemma?
3. In what ways does the doctoral student navigate the transformative learning process while attending a doctoral program?

In this chapter I present the research methodology and methods used for this study including epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology, methods, and research context. I then discuss the data collection methods, data analysis process, ways in which I ensured trustworthiness, subjectivity statement, limitations to the study, and end the chapter with a conclusion.

Research Design

Science is commonly used as grand explanations to tell us how things work (Stake, 2010). For each of the more exact quantitative sciences that rely heavily on linear attributes, measurements, and statistical analysis; there is a qualitative side that relies on personal experience, intuition, and skepticism to explore humanist perceptions and thinking (Lincoln et al., 2018; Stake, 2010). Qualitative research provides researchers with an interesting and engaging approach to the ways people interact and experience the world around them and form a broad interpretation of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Given, 2016)**.** Stake (2010) focuses on qualitative research to help explain how things work within the worlds of professional people, including the field of education. The continued development of any field of study is driven by

research, which is dependent upon the curiosity and energies of those individuals attracted to the practice and study in that field (Cranton & Merriam, 2015). The social sciences, health sciences, and humanities have a rich and growing history with the use of qualitative research, a history that usually takes a human-focused perspective in the design and implementation of the research Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Qualitative research is interested in understanding how individuals make meaning of a situation or phenomenon and using an interpretive approach draws focus on complex nature of transformative learning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 2002). For this dissertation study, I utilized a qualitative, autoethnographic research design to build an evocative autoethnographic approach using a personal narrative.

The four elements to this research design include (1) the researcher's epistemology; (2) the theoretical perspective, lens, or framework; (3) autoethnographic methodology; and (4) qualitative methods of data collection (Crotty, 1998). Each element is crucial in qualitative research design because it provides a clear foundation and understanding of the phenomenon the researcher is studying (Creswell, 2018). However, these elements need to be adaptable and flexible to address the spontaneity of the phenomenon (Gobo & Molle, 2017). The characteristics of the research design are addressed throughout the study.

Epistemology

Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe epistemology as the theory of knowledge, and in research terms defines the relationship between the knower and the known. Epistemology is concerned with the nature, origins, limitations, and justification of truth (Given, 2016). Epistemology ask the researcher to explore the nature of knowledge, and a researcher's epistemology lays the foundation for how the research will be designed and conducted (Crotty, 1998; Given, 2016). The researcher's epistemological worldview "shapes the decisions made

about research at every stage of the project, from the types of research questions to be addressed, through the methodologies and methods chosen to gather data, as well as the presentation of results" (Given, 2016, p. 10). The researcher's epistemological stance is needed when determining the theoretical framework and methodology of a study. Crotty (1998) referenced three major types of epistemologies that are objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism.

Objectivism is the belief that reality exists separate from the outside world of the individual mind (Crotty, 1998). Objectivist search to discover an objective truth that is empirically verifiable, valid, generalizable, and independent of social thought and social conditions (Crotty 1998). The second epistemology Crotty (1998) discusses is constructionism. Constructionism is grounded in the beliefs that people actively construct reality on how they see the world (Given, 2016). "People's understanding of reality is shaped by cultural beliefs and experiences, as well as the influence of social constructs of reality, resting in different versions of reality for different people" (Given, 2016, p. 15). Constructionism is based on the belief that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with, perceive, and understand the world in which they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998). A third epistemological stance is subjectivism. Subjectivism is the belief that meaning exists within the subject, and that the subject imposes meaning on an object (Crotty, 1998). Meaning is imposed by people with their minds without the contribution of the object (Crotty, 1998). Commonly associated with research frameworks such as critical inquiry, feminism, and postmodern perspectives and approaches; subjectivists assume that every individual observes the world from a specific place of purpose and interest (Crotty, 1998).

As mentioned before the purpose of this autoethnographic dissertation was to have a better understanding of how a doctoral student's cultural context shapes the role of emotions

within a transformative learning experience. The epistemological stance of subjectivism offers a research path that helps "see the world as we are; that which we have inside, we see outside" (Pratt, 1998, p. 24). Based on this epistemological stance, subjectivism was the appropriate epistemological paradigm because it seeks to understand meaning behind action, knowledge, interests, purposes, and the values of individuals (Schwandt, 1994). Muncey (2010) discusses the paradigmatic concerns and struggles that autoethnographic studies have had in the academic community. She does not believe that autoethnography follows one common paradigm or theoretical framework, and that researchers face certain roadblocks concerning paradigmatic, organizational, academic, and worldview assumptions (Muncey, 2010). Bochner and Ellis (2016) describe autoethnography as having a "between-ness with art and science, rationality and emotionality, and moves between epistemology and ontology" (p. 67). Yet, it is the direction of this research that the epistemology be grounded in subjectivism.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical perspective is a collection of beliefs, values, and techniques of a community or individuals being studied (Creswell, 2013). The theoretical lens can guide the development of research questions, along with the collection and analysis of data (Creswell, 2013). For Crotty (1998) the theoretical perspective of a study is the philosophical stance that informs the methodology to be used. The personal perspective, epistemological background, field of the researcher, and past experiences of the autoethnographer ultimately determine how theory was framed within the study (Crotty, 1998; Hughes & Pennington, 2017). According to Crotty (1998) some examples of theoretical frameworks qualitative researchers may utilize to guide their researcher are positivism, critical inquiry, and interpretivism.

Positivism is the belief that knowledge can only be gained through the scientific method, and scientific facts that are "both accurate and certain" (Crotty, 1998, p. 27). Grounded in the realist perspective, positivism views a singular reality that can be measured (Given, 2016). From positivist perspective and beliefs, turns in social science research were provoked by poststructuralist, postmodernist, and feminist critics on postpositivism's assumptions regarding human authority and scientific truth (Bochner, 2013). The postmodern era made it possible for scholars who were searching and conducting research to discover new lenses that view the world differently, with varying assumptions and biases (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). Postmodernism questions the dominance of traditional scientific methods and demonstrates the many ways to gain and share knowledge, which relies more on the role of subjectivity (Wall, 2006). Postmodernism allowed critical theories and other emancipatory theories to emerge and opened the space for academic inquiries using new qualitative approaches and strategies focused on questioning power imbalances (Anderson, 2006). From these turns, autoethnography began to blossom, grounded in postmodern philosophy, and highlighted the purpose of reflexivity and voice in social research (Wall, 2006). "Autoethnography synthesizes both a postmodern ethnography," and a "postmodern autobiography. It opens up new ways of writing about social life" (Reed-Danahay, 1997, pp. 2–3). For autoethnographers, the developments of these theoretical frameworks have influenced the use of autoethnography in qualitative research (Adams et al., 2013).

Critical inquiry questions values, assumptions, power, access, and technology throughout social structures due to race, class, and gender (Crotty, 1998; Rorabaugh, 2012). Hughes and Pennington (2017) discuss several critical social theories including feminist theory, black feminist theory, queer theory, critical race theory, social justice leadership theory,

Transformative Learning Theory, and Dabrowski theory have been used as theoretical foundations to bring autoethnographic works "into larger contexts and illustrates how individual analysis can contribute to, critique, and illuminate existing theories" (p. 43). Hughes and Pennington (2017) discuss autoethnography as a methodology to center within critical social research. From critical positioning, one must come to the research process with questions about their identity and role in society. They also argue for researchers to maintain paradigmatic and theoretical guidelines to keep work from becoming autobiographical storytelling (Hughes & Pennington, 2017).

Interpretivism's response to the dominance of positivism, rejected the notion that a single verifiable reality exists. A key philosophical assumption of research in the interpretive paradigm is that individuals construct reality through the interactions with their social world (Denzin, 2014). Denzin (2014) set out to take the traditional life story in a new direction and turn it into an interpretive autoethnography. He later advanced interpretive autoethnography into what he calls the interpretive performance autoethnography, which is a "critical, performative practice, a practice that begins with the biography of the writer and moves outward to culture, discourse, history, and ideology" (Denzin, 2014, p. x). His interpretive performance autoethnography allows the researcher to look at one's own life as being unique and grounded in historical moments, then use a progressive-regressive method to interpret life from those historical moments (Denzin, 2014).

For this study, I utilized an interpretivist perspective and the critical perspective of Transformative Learning Theory to guide this research. Interpretive researchers believe that the social world is constructed by people, and the research seeks to investigate how people make sense out of the world. Cranton and Merriam (2015) describe the key philosophical assumption

that research is based on in the interpretive paradigm, "is the view that reality is constructed by individuals in interaction with their social worlds" (p. 50). Interpretive researchers believe that there is no single correct route or method to knowledge or theory. One of the research questions regarding this study ask how does the cultural context of a doctoral student shape the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience in graduate education, and the interpretivist perspective helped explore emotions in connection to the social and cultural context of an individual, and how they affect the transformative learning process. An interpretive perspective helped focus an in-depth examination of emotions during the transformative learning process, build more insight and understandings of behavior, and look beyond observable and measurable reality to interpret explain actions from the participant's perspective (Scotland, 2012). The type of research within this study is not concerned with cause and effect, but in understanding and discovery (Cranton & Merriam, 2015). Conducting research in the interpretive paradigm allows for researchers to use the stories of the individuals in the study that provide a great amount of detail.

As a critical perspective, Transformative Learning Theory's essential dimension is the explicit recognition of the foundational process involving critical assessment of epistemic assumptions (Dirkx et al., 2006). Transformative Learning Theory "alters problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 58). It is this critical perspective of Transformative Learning Theory that is important for this study in that it is grounded in looking at past experiences to change frames of reference that are more inclusive, differentiating, permeable, critically

reflective, and integrative of experience through critical reflection, dialogue, and taking action (Mezirow, 1981; Taylor, 2008).

An important factor in the decision to use Transformative Learning Theory is the basic concept that at its core, allows for individuals to look upon their own understanding with their development and reflection (Mezirow, 1990). Mezirow's theory of transformative learning was chosen for this study, as it offers "one of the most sophisticated conceptualizations of critical reflection within a larger frame of adult learning theory" (Mälkki, 2010, p. 208). O'Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) discuss that any research is an interpretative process, and the "way in which a researcher understands the phenomena under investigation and the data produced from the participants is intrinsically influenced by the person the researcher is" (p. 21). Transformative Learning Theory provides the appropriate experience and reflective lens needed to help frame this autoethnographic approach. This research topic and qualitative methodology are built around the concept of experiential understanding with emotions felt throughout the transformative learning process (Stake, 2010).

Mezirow describes a process of perspective transformation that includes ten phases/stages.

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and action
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans

8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictate by one's new perspective (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22)

The phases/stages represent the dynamics of perspective transformation that appeared in the research on re-entry women (Mezirow, 1978). These phases represent the important elements of individual experience, critical reflection, discourse, and acting on new perspectives that occur within the prospective transformation process (Mezirow, 1981). The early phases of perspective transformation place emphasis on individual's experiencing a disorienting event and critically questioning assumptions and expectations (Cranton, 2016; Mezirow, 2000). For the transformative learning process to take place, individuals must face a disorienting dilemma that causes ruptures in one's understanding that can push them into the critical questioning process on thoughts, assumptions, and understandings of themselves and the world around them (Cranton, 2016). Disorienting dilemmas present challenges that "cause a level of confusion in individuals' sufficient enough to bring them to an awareness of there being significant challenge" (Howie & Bagnall, 2015, p. 349). Challenges can vary, and at times, can force one to question deep personal values and question one's sense of self (Mezirow, 1991). This level of questioning can contain very complex and powerful emotions as learners question their belief systems, who they are, how they see the world, and interpret what is happening to them (Cranton, 2016). Transformative Learning Theory provides the appropriate critical and interpretive lens for researching how cultural context shapes and influences an individual's meaning making and emotional processes throughout the transformative learning process of a doctoral student (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Nogueiras et al., 2019).

Research Methodology: Autoethnography

Methodology is a particular research approach or strategy grounded in a particular school of thought that is connected throughout all the choices of the research design, methods, and outcomes (Crotty, 1998; O' Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). The research methodology, or strategy, for this doctoral dissertation, is autoethnography. "Autoethnography is a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text" (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 6). Ellis and Bochner (2000) refer to autoethnography as "action research for the individual" (p. 754). Simply put, autoethnography is a qualitative method that provides rich insight into a phenomenon by exploring an individual's personal experience in depth, which allows for extraordinary and real-life aspects of personal experiences to be expressed within a larger social context (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Autoethnography, from a social science perspective, not only tells stories but expands the understanding of social realities through the lens of researchers (Chang, 2013).

Formation of Autoethnography. Jones et al. (2013) detailed four interrelated historical trends that contributed to the formation of qualitative, autoethnographic research methods over the past 45 years. The first trend was the recognition of the limits of scientific knowledge and a growing appreciation for qualitative research (Bochner, 2013). Events and developments in human history that include colonial domination, aftermaths of war, and genocide, began to make "people question the ideas of Enlightenment thinking and objectivist methods" (Jones et al., 2013, p. 26), and start questioning everything we know about the world and how we are a part of it. Qualitative research allowed researchers to focus on the micro and situated elements in life, and the qualitative method provided a way for "scholars to answer questions about the nature of reality, knowledge, action, and values that were generated in the nature of reality, knowledge,

action, and values that were generated in response to developments and events in human history" (Jones et al., 2013, p. 26). Wysocki (2001) described qualitative research as methods that allow emphasis to be put on the depth of understanding and deeper meanings of human experiences.

The second historical trend was a heightened concern about the ethics and politics of the researcher. For Jones et al. (2013), this trend helped cultivate the creation of autoethnography due to a heightened concern with the welfare of research participants and ethical issues within research. Concerns were based on how cultural members would be studied. They cited two of the most famous cases in the Tuskegee Syphilis experiments and the Stanley Milgram's experiments on destructive obedience. The concerns over research manipulation and abusive practices prompted the passing of the National Research Act in 1974 that created the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research (Adams et al., 2015). The commission's authored Belmont Report which developed ethical principles and guidelines for research on human subjects that incorporated informed consent, assessment of risk and benefits, an internal review board, and fair selections of research subjects (Adams et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2013). During this time, the decline of brute fact and growing concerns with research ushered in the crisis of representation era (Van Maanen, 1988). Anthropologists and ethnographers began to question ethical concerns within their research and practice, most notably Goldschmidt's (1977) self-appraisal of the field of anthropology and Hayano's (1979) concerns of anthropologists conducting and writing ethnographies on their own people (Adams et al., 2015).

The third trend, the crisis of representation, found research moving away from the positivist paradigm, drew focus on the lack of narrative, the literary and aesthetic, emotions and the body within research (Jones et al., 2013). Emotions and the body were missing from the research and often cast out. Emotions and lived experience of phenomena were often seen as

feminine, and the bodies of researchers' and participants were placed in the outer limits of social science research (Jones et al., 2013). Researchers in the fields of sociology, anthropology, communication, women and gender studies were "writing and advocating for personal narrative, subjectivity, and reflexivity in research, though they did not often use the term autoethnography" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 16). Within the social sciences, much of the research and practice lies within the social relationships, dialogue, and storytelling of individuals; thus, the narratives of the individuals and the researchers become valuable pieces to qualitative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The incorporation of narrative and aesthetic was driven by scholars who were speaking out about the silences and absences that highlight the intersectionality of all individuals within research (Adams et al., 2015).

The fourth trend was the importance of social identities and identity politics. The 1960s and 1970s saw an era of Black Power, second-wave feminism, stonewall riots, and Vietnam that caused great social unrest and counter-culture activities that ignited the battle to claim non-mainstream identities. The emergence of identity politics focused on how identities influenced, governed, and led to the questioning of why some people are treated more humanely than others. This unrest called into question mainstream research and assumptions. The major influence of this questioning was the emphasis on reflexivity in qualitative research and how one's intersectionality impacts what and how we study and conduct research (Jones et al., 2013; Adams et al., 2015). The discouragement of prejudice and mistreatment has been an important trend in the development of autoethnography. The modern world continues to question "who can speak on behalf of others and whether groups can be excluded from particular communities or activities" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 15). Autoethnography offered an alternative method to the

previous research methods that were viewed by some as limiting and empiricist social science (Bochner, 2013).

Purpose of Conducting Autoethnography. Even with a limited focus on autoethnographic scholars and their purposes, concerns, and limitations when doing autoethnographies, one can begin to see the difficulty of trying to explain the complexity of autoethnography. To help clarify the complexity and shed light on the elements that make autoethnography so unique and compelling as a method, Jones et al. (2013) defined five purposes of autoethnography that are intertwined and mutually implicated. The five purposes of autoethnography are: (1) disrupting norms of research practice and presentation; (2) working from insider knowledge; (3) moving through pain, confusion, anger, and uncertainty and making life better; (4) breaking silence, (re)claiming voice, and writing to right wrongs; and (5) making work accessible (Jones et al., 2013).

The first purpose, disrupting norms of research practice and representation of such life experiences that did not always have a home in traditional research (Jones et al., 2015). The development of autoethnography began to provide avenues for researchers to include the role of personal experience, illustrate the personal to better understand cultural life, and "decision-making processes researchers engage in the conduct of their work" (Jones et al., 2013, p. 33). Represented by Walker's (2009) feminist critique on families' studies, she reflected on her term as editor of the *Journal of Marriage and Family* about how she was conflicted between publishing traditional social science essays and more feminist essays that were developed using lived experiences and discussed inequalities, power, privilege, and family issues. At the end of her critique, she included personal experiences that touched on her brother being accidentally shot, her sister committing suicide, her and her father's cancer. Her confliction between looking

past these life experiences and focusing on the more traditional, and reflecting on her own life experiences, she thus called for research that allows life experiences to come alive (Walker, 2009).

The second purpose, working from insider knowledge, allows autoethnographers to use their personal experiences to detail and build thick descriptions of cultural experiences to further explore and facilitate to others those experiences (Jones et al., 2013). Some examples of this insider knowledge include Muncey's (2010) experiences with teenage pregnancy from repeated incestuous sexual abuse, Tillmann's (2009) experiences with eating disorders, Rambo's (2005) experiences of childhood sexual abuse, and Wyatt's (2012) relationship with his deceased father. These stories present insider knowledge that often details very personal experiences that could not be described from an outsider's perspective. Autoethnographers offer intimate and explicit insider knowledge to personal and cultural experiences that might be difficult to obtain through traditional methods (Jones et al., 2013).

The third purpose; moving through pain, confusion, anger, and uncertainty and making life better; is another purpose of autoethnography that allows researchers to write through painful, confusing, and chaotic experiences (Jones et al., 2013). Whether dealing with job loss or the loss of a family member, the writing and performing process can be a method to figure out life and difficult experiences, thus becoming cathartic. This purpose of autoethnography is not about producing work for just the individual researcher, but for others. Researchers hope to offer reflection, insight, and hope to readers and audiences who might have had similar experiences or who might be interested (Jones et al., 2013). Working through these difficult experiences may offer compassion to others who are having similar experiences, in hopes of making life better.

The fourth purpose; breaking silence, (re)claiming voice, and writing to right; offers a means for researchers to focus on reflexivity and voice (Wall, 2006). Autoethnography serves as a purpose to allow critical theories and other emancipatory theories to question power imbalances by privileging subjectivity, personal voice, and emotional experience (Hughes & Pennington, 2017; Jones et al., 2013). Muncey (2010) describes that autoethnography allows us to "doubt history, question the narratives on which our culture is based and accept rewritings as just another perspective on the truth" (p. 48). Autoethnographers use their autoethnographies to offer intimate and explicit insider knowledge to personal and cultural experiences that might be difficult to obtain through traditional methods (Jones et al., 2013).

The fifth purpose, making work accessible, is another purpose of autoethnography to create work that is appealing to a wide audience that reaches outside the academic world (Jones et al., 2013). Autoethnographers look to connect audiences using literature, visual art, dance, film, and performance projects (Jones et al., 2013). The desire to expand audiences offers researchers the flexibility and creativity to develop work that engages individuals through various mediums.

Process of Conducting Autoethnography. Understanding the purpose of why one chooses to do an autoethnography is important when engaging critically with the research process. All individuals are faced with thoughts, feelings, identities, and experiences that create ruptures in how they identify with who they are in relation to others and the world around them. The decision to take on an autoethnographic project must be made by the researcher when they encounter these ruptures and have a burning need to further explore the rupture. Determining 'where one is' serves as a starting point to an autoethnography and then one needs to find themselves within the story. Some choose to begin autoethnographies with personal experiences

they want to explore deeper and find more meaningful. The experiences that significantly shape or alter our lives are often called epiphanies, and these epiphanies cause one to pause and reflect on things about oneself that existed before the crucial event (Denzin, 2014). However, one does not need to have an epiphany to begin an autoethnography but can determine a starting point to an autoethnographic project through encounters with everyday experiences, or intuitive experiences. Once the researcher determines where the project starts, they need to situate themselves within the story and they do this by creating an interpretive community (Adams et al., 2015). This community is created through developing dialogue with other researchers and collecting work about or like the researcher's desired topic. The researcher is engaged in searching through existing research, personal, and cultural texts to determine a gap or missing layer within research that they believe their own research can be meaningful (Adams et al., 2015: Denzin, 2014). Hughes and Pennington (2017) argue that autoethnographers must be in constant dialogue with oneself during the research process and encounters that occur during this process because it can be difficult and convoluted.

Hughes and Pennington (2017) describe that autoethnography follows the same guidelines of fieldwork as ethnography research, being that the research is a self-narrative within a social context. When exploring personal experience, a researcher may meet others, thus widening the research participants. Autoethnographers may need to observe, talk, listen, share stories, and conduct interviews with others during fieldwork. From the beginning to the end of the project, writing is a constant piece to the process of conducting an autoethnography (Ellis, 1999; Muncey, 2010). Throughout the project, the collection of personal experiences, artifacts, cultural data, fieldwork, and the individual self, begin to merge as the autoethnographer develops

the story to be told, choosing the form of autoethnography representation, and how they want to share their work (Adams et al., 2015).

For Denzin (2014), the emphasis on self, biography, history, and experience must always interweave with the concerns of performance, process, and analysis. The style and analysis of autoethnography needs to be constantly thought of when deciding on the process to complete the project. Denzin's (2014) concerns, like Adams et al. (2015), deal with accounting for the multiple narratives and moving forward and backwards throughout various stages of the research project. Ellis (2004) also acknowledges that the process of autoethnography is not linear and that "there are a number of ways to go about writing autoethnography. It really depends on where along the continuum of art and science you want to locate yourself" (Ellis, 1999, p. 673). Like most aspects of autoethnography it is complex, and similar to being sent "into the woods without a compass" (Ellis, 2004, p. 120). However, Ellis (2004) points out that it is this uncertainty of the process that experienced autoethnographers are willing to accept and is needed for researchers to explore various aspects of autoethnography (Ellis, 2004).

For Chang (2013), this uncertainty with autoethnography can be due to it being a highly personal process with the researcher serving as the foundation of the research. One might be uncomfortable at first serving as the primary source of the research and primary source of data. Yet, being the source, opens various data sources "such as memories, memorabilia, documents about themselves, official records, photos, interviews with others, and on-going self-reflective and self-observational memos" (Chang, 2013, p. 108). As the central data source, a researcher can continuously reflect and re-encounter data throughout the research. Muncey (2010) provides similar strategies and tools such as snapshots, artifacts/documents, metaphor, and psychological

and literal journeys to help one reflect on and convey their individual feelings, experiences, emotions, and behaviors within their life when conducting an autoethnography.

Types and Approaches of Autoethnography. The focus in this section helps build an understanding of an individual researcher's desired approach to undertaking an autoethnographic project that is intertwined and connected with all other aspects of the study. As an empirical research methodology, autoethnography presents paradigmatic purposes "in which the researcher takes an active, scientific, and systematic view of personal experience in relation to cultural groups identified by the researcher as similar to self or as others who differ from self" (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 11). Various scholars (Denzin, 2014; Muncey, 2010; Reed-Danahay, 1997) have discussed that autoethnography is not just a stand-alone empirical research methodology but is a very effective research method; while others have connected autoethnography with traditional qualitative research tools (Hughes & Pennington, 2017).

Whether as a standalone research methodology, a method, or linked with traditional empirical methods, the complexity of autoethnography is much too difficult to define within a limited space and adding to this confusion are the numerous types and various names that have been used for autoethnographic research. Ellis and Bochner (2000) discuss the broad rubric of autoethnography that can include types and terms linked to autoethnography that include, but are not limited to analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 2006), interpretive performance autoethnography (Denzin, 2014), narrative ethnographies (Ellis, 2004), personal narratives (Ellis, 2004), collaborative autoethnography (Gale & Wyatt, 2009), critical performance autoethnography (Madison, 2012), performance autoethnographies (Pelias, 2011), and racial autoethnography (Taylor et al., 2008). Bochner and Ellis (2016) recommend that instead of focusing on the types and categories, one should focus on the historical perspectives of

autoethnography. Focusing on the historical perspectives of autoethnography highlights two of its dominant approaches: evocative and analytical.

Evocative. Evocative autoethnographies have dominated much of the discourse regarding autoethnographic research (Anderson, 2006). The various historical 'turns' in social science research resulted in many scholars questioning the authority of human knowledge and what was deemed the truth, this became a time for exploration in qualitative research (Adams et al., 2015). Autoethnography was a growing form of this qualitative research, and within this research autoethnographers were taking an approach described as an evocative approach (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). In its simplest form, evocative autoethnography is an approach by researchers that draws upon postmodern sensibilities and distance themselves from realist and analytic ethnographic traditions (Anderson, 2006)

Ellis' (1999) introduction of a 'He*art*ful Autoethnography' was aimed at "extending ethnography to include the heart, the autobiographical and the artistic text" (p. 669). Ellis was seeking to introduce an approach that includes researchers' emotions, bodies, and spirits. Taking an evocative approach would help produce stories that celebrate experience and the intimate details within them, focus on the humanness along with a greater sense of moral and ethical concerns, encourage empathy and compassion, and allow all voices to share life experiences (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Ellis, 1999). The experimentation and exemplified variations of evocative autoethnography by Ellis and Bochner (2004) infuse social science with the emotions and person of the researcher. They describe an approach that blurs genres of writing, has heightened self-reflexivity, has an increased focus on emotion, and is skeptical of the generalization of knowledge (Anderson, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2004).

Analytical. Recent efforts have been made to highlight the positives of taking an analytical approach. In response to the dominant evocative autoethnography, Anderson (2006) called attention to the value of approaching autoethnography through the "analytic ethnographic paradigm" (p. 374). Although Anderson recognizes the creativity and enthusiasm of scholars developing autoethnographies through the evocative paradigm, he is concerned with dominant success of the evocative approach. He expressed that evocative may have the unintended consequence of overshadowing other visions of autoethnography and obscuring the use of autoethnography in other traditions of social research (Anderson, 2006).

Anderson's analytical approach was an attempt to create an alternative to evocative ethnography by clarifying concerns considered with epistemological paradigms within the evocative approach and provide a consistent qualitative approach for realist or analytic ethnographers rooted in traditional symbolic interactionism (2006). The analytical autoethnographic approach consists of five key features that include the (1) researcher being a complete member of social world within the study, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher's self, (4) dialogue with others beyond self, (5) commitment to theoretical analysis (Anderson, 2006). The virtues of an analytical autoethnography are based on Anderson (2006) and his description of a specialized subgenre of analytic ethnography that is based on the appeal of individuals looking to develop an ethnographic inquiry with a highly involved researcher's self in the research.

Current Autoethnographic Dissertation. The purpose of this autoethnographic dissertation was to have a better understanding on how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience at an R1 institution in the southeastern region of the United States. This study is based on the third purpose of doing an

autoethnography that Jones et al. (2013) described as moving through pain, confusion, anger, and uncertainty to make life better. This purpose allows researchers to write through painful, confusing, and chaotic experiences as a method to figure out life and difficult experiences, thus producing work for the individual researcher, but more importantly for others. To engage in the phenomenon of emotions within a transformative learning experience, an evocative autoethnographic personal narrative approach provided rich insight by exploring an individual's personal experiences in-depth (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). An evocative approach based on Ellis and Bochner (2000) beliefs is that it can help infuse social science with the emotions and person of the researcher. Taking an evocative approach for this autoethnography provided a way to focus deeply on my own range of emotions during the transformative learning experiences.

Common critiques of the evocative approach are that it is very philosophical and abstract, and genres of writing and research become blurred (Anderson, 2006; Wall, 2006). Yet for Richardson (2000) evocative writing offers multiple ways of thinking, reaching diverse audiences, and nurturing writers conducting the qualitative research. Ellis (2004) sees the use of personal narratives to help understand oneself or some aspect of life as it intersects with a cultural context. Within this cultural context the research is able to connect "to others and invite readers to enter the author's world and to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives" (Ellis, 2004, p. 46). Ellis's (1999) belief in the evocative draw me to this type of approach, and she describes the decision to use personal narratives in autoethnography is based on authors who view themselves as the phenomenon and want to draw attention in the research that is focused on their academic, research, and personal lives. An autoethnography is accomplished using personal writing and reflection, and Ellis and Bochner (2000) warn graduate students interested in conducting autoethnographic dissertations and the

concern with the type of reflection that comes with it. The use of Transformative Learning Theory provided this autoethnography with a theoretical lens created within adult learning with focus on reflection; however, to fully understand the depth and struggles of emotions during my transformative learning process, the use of a personal narrative offered the chance to get the most honest reflections of the researcher.

Within the social sciences, much of the research and practice lies within the social relationships, dialogue, and storytelling of individuals (Cranton & Merriam, 2015). An autoethnographic personal narrative analysis is "particularly well suited for the study of transformative learning because it allows people to convey their personal experience of this type of learning through stories" (Merriam & Kim, 2012, p. 63). Muncey (2010) describes narrative as a method that overlaps and interweaves with autoethnography as people are natural storytellers. Narratives are peoples' identities, and the "stories people tell shape and construct the narrator's personality and reality as the story is retold and reconstructed throughout the individual's life" (Muncey, 2010, p. 43). Debates regarding narrative are focused on whether the narrative text is different from the context the narrative was constructed in, yet Polkinghorne (1998) sees the personal narrative as a snapshot in time that changes with the context in which it is told. According to Muncey (2010) the terms 'storytelling/storyteller' and 'narrative/narrator' are often used synonymously; however, debates still exist on their use. While some scholars, Frid et al. (2000), believe that narratives are the events experienced by the narrator and storytelling is the repetition of a story by others than the narrator, other scholars such as Denzin (2014) see the narrative as a story that one tells describing a sequence of events significant for the narrator and audience.

The arguments of Denzin, Ellis, Muncey, and Polkinghorne placing the researcher as the storyteller have influenced the decision to conduct an autoethnography. Using a personal narrative allowed me as the researcher to tell my story through various data sources that include memories, personal journal, graduate academic documents, photos, literature, music, interviews with self and others, and ongoing self-reflective psychological and literal journeys (Chang, 2013; Muncey, 2010). The synergy of autoethnography and personal narrative placed me as the narrator with the purpose and interest of telling my story (Adams et al., 2015). This approach was the best way to show readers how emotions affect meaning-making and critical reflection. Being that personal narratives are the most controversial form of autoethnographies, the background, purpose statement, theoretical framework, and qualitative methodological alignment were built within adult learning and qualitative research for this academic dissertation.

Research Context

Stake (2010) defines context as the background information of the research project and contexts are extremely important. Within an autoethnographic study there are several varying contexts documented, and an important early feature of the storytelling is providing a setting, place, or context in which the story occurs (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). This study took place at Southeastern, Research 1: Doctoral University. The reported enrollment at the university in the Fall 2020 was 24, 254 undergraduates and 6,305 graduate students (OIRA, 2020). With 11 colleges and over 1,500 faculty members, the graduate school offers 54 doctoral degrees, 79 master's degrees, 5 educational specialists' degrees, two professional programs, and 29 graduate certificate programs (gradschool.utk.edu). Conducting an autoethnography, the researcher served as the primary participant of the research. This study occurred during the period of late Fall 2017 through Spring 2021 of the researcher's doctoral studies.

Methods: Data Collection

Autoethnography can be difficult to grasp based on a lack of methodological clarity, this can cause problems for would be autoethnographers, particularly for graduate students pursuing autoethnographic dissertations (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2012). Chang (2016) discusses the pit falls of doing an autoethnography surround areas such as autoethnographers depicting selves as a singular voice within a culture, the power of storytelling neglects cultural analysis and interpretation, over-reliance on personal memory, and researchers losing site of ethical principles within the research. However, when the collection of data is guided by ethical, aesthetical, and relational sensibilities, then autoethnographers can become eclectic bricoleurs, as they draw on various objective and personal forms of data within their research (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2012). Autoethnography "offers a variety of modes of engaging with self, or perhaps more accurately with selves, in relation to others, to culture" (Allen-Collinson, 2012, p. 297). Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2012) discuss three types of data—fieldnotes, personal documents, and interviews—found throughout a majority of autoethnographic research, but data collection needs to be designed around the type and focus of the autoethnographic research. IRB approval (Appendix A) was giving regarding four forms of data to be collected for this study.

Journal. The primary source of data for this dissertation came from the researcher's journal. The journal used for this study began as my researcher's journal but became an extension of my personal narrative that provides many layers to my personal and academic experiences. Chang (2016) discusses that written texts concerning the individual researcher can be "limited in telling the truth about a person, place, or context because they are incomplete, lost, or partial. Therefore, other artifacts can be sought out to fill the gaps left by insufficient textual data" (p. 109). Muncey (2005) sees these types of artifacts as a valuable data collection

technique in autoethnographic research because "additional evidence is supplied by meaningful artifacts acquired throughout life…and fill some gaps" to build on other forms of data collected (p. 75). The time of this study occurred from late Fall 2017 through Spring 2021, and the journal time frame occurred from early Fall 2018 and stopped in early Spring 2021. The full 100+ pages captured the various material manifestations—reflection entries, pictures, drawings, lyrics, poems—of the researcher's culture that illuminate emotional and academic experiences (Chang, 2016). "The style and voice might metamorphose into a poem or a picture, a story or a drama or a film, but it should allow the recipient of the piece, the reader or the viewer, access to the inner story that cannot be told by other more conventional means" (Muncey, 2010, p. 56). For Muncey (2010), the use of artwork, snapshots, poetry, music, and metaphors serve as important artifacts in creating and re-presenting autoethnographic data and development. Efforts were made to remove identifiable locations, names, and significant events involving others outside of the researcher's narrative. The journal was scanned using a password enforced, university copy machine for hard copies that were shredded once the analysis was completed.

Autoethnographic Self-Interviews. A secondary source of data for this research included the collection of verbal data in the form of one semi-structured, 60–120-minute, autoethnographic self-interview; and one unstructured, 60–120-minute, autoethnographic self-interview. Interviews provide researchers the opportunities to gain access to participants' cultures and values, interpretations of perceptions, meanings of life, and other significant experiences that cannot be truly quantified (Edward & Hollands, 2013; Flick, 2014; Roulston, 2013; Spradley, 2016). The use of an autoethnographic self-interview is an important tool as one's memories is filtered through an interpretive lens during self-reflection and involves dialogue between one's past and present selves (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2012). Crawley and

Husakouskaya (2012) referred to self-interviewing as reconstructing scenes of lived experiences, and Anderson (1999) self-interviewed to recall past experiences when reflecting on fieldnotes.

This first autoethnographic self-interview was a semi-structured, 60–120-minute interview that followed the late Fall 2017 through Spring 2021 timeline of the doctoral student. The semi-structured, self-interview guide (See Appendix D) used questions regarding significant milestones, events, and experiences of the doctoral journey. These questions served as significant landmarks allowing the researcher to delve into various events and experiences within their doctoral journey. This interviewing process allowed the researcher to reconstruct scenes from their lived experiences as a doctoral student (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2012; Chang, 2008). The self-interview was conducted in the researcher's home using a secure zoom session and a secondary audio recorder. The zoom recording and audio recording were uploaded to a UTK secure Google Drive that only the researcher and major advisor had access. Using the zoom recording in relation to audio recording was done to ensure the integrity of the self-interview process. The zoom recording was sent within two hours after the interview to a paid, confidential transcription service, Rev.com, to add another level of trustworthiness.

The second autoethnographic self-interview followed an unstructured, 60–120-minute format as the researcher read through their personal/researcher journal. The journal offered a space for raw and unfiltered reflections and thoughts, and self-interviewing offered the opportunity to recall emotions with past and present experiences (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2012). The unstructured, self-interview guide (See Appendix E) was used to frame and begin the interview session. The self-interview was conducted in the researchers home using a secure zoom session and a secondary audio recorder. The zoom recording and audio recording were uploaded to a UTK secure Google Drive that only the researcher and major advisor have access.

Using the zoom recording in relation to audio recording was done to ensure the integrity of the self-interview process. The zoom recording was sent within two hours after the interview to a paid, confidential transcription service, Rev.com, to add another level of trustworthiness. For both self-interviews, a self-informed consent form (See Appendix B) was developed to conduct the interviews according to institutional IRB policies. The informed consent forms are important for self-interviews to protect the researcher, but also protect others within the researcher's academic and personal lives.

Autoethnographic External Interviews. Autoethnographic interviews can also include the interviewing of others in "conjunction with the researchers, to gain deeper understandings of topics and events" (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2012, p. 70). Interviewing others for external data can provide a way for the researcher to connect personal experiences and intuitions to others (Adams et al., 2015). Autoethnographic interviews can be direct or indirect with family members, friends, colleagues, mentors, and peers (Adams et al., 2015). Familiarity with some interviewees can be good at having an "established rapport with the interviewee's knowledge of the interviewer, which can help get to the core of business quickly and more deeply" (Chang, 2016, p. 6). Familiarity can also be bad in cases where the interviewee may not be fully open to sharing aspects of the researcher's story. Concerns of upsetting or contradicting the researcher, a third-party interviewer can be used (Chang, 2016); however, contradictions to the experiences of the researcher are valuable as they can deepen and complicate one's story (Adams et al., 2015).

As a third source of data came from two external participant interviews. The semi-structured interviews were conducted during a face-to-face, 60–120-minute session. Convenience sampling approach was used to conduct interviews with two peers of the researcher (Given, 2016), who have been doctoral students at the same university during the same period,

late Fall 2017 through Spring 2021. The individuals selected for external data interviews were peers of the researcher that had an established rapport and knowledge of the researcher's emotional experiences as a doctoral student. One of the interview subjects was from the same program as the researcher, the other was from a different program but had taken classes with the researcher. An interview guide (See Appendix F) was constructed using similar questions from the self-interview guide relevant to the period of the researcher's doctoral experiences. The questions include significant milestones, events, and experiences of the doctoral journey, allowing the researcher to reconstruct scenes from their lived experiences as a doctoral student (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2012; Chang, 2016). Using similar interview questions allowed the participants to provide a different perspective of certain key moments concerning the researcher's experiences. Using a semi-structured interview allowed the interviewee to add insights and reflections on aspects of the researcher's experiences that may not be known or thought of by the researcher.

A peer informed consent form (See Appendix C) was developed to conduct the interviews according to institutional IRB policies. Interview locations were negotiated between the researcher and the interviewee to determine an environment that both believed was safe and confidential. During the interviews, field notes and reflective memos and audio recordings were be done to facilitate an accurate analysis of the data (Roulston, 2013). Audio recordings were utilized for both interviews and sent within two hours after the interviews to a paid, confidential transcription service, Rev.com. Identifiable information from interviews were de-identified and pseudonyms were used in lieu of the participants names. Participants were provided the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym but reminded to choose one that is lacking identifiable information. Before the interviews, participants were encouraged not to discuss any

identifiable locations, names, or significant events involving others outside of the researcher and interview participant to help maintain anonymity of interviewees and others. If any were discussed, they were removed and excluded during data analysis. An electronic copy of the interview transcription was provided via secure e-mail to the interviewees for them to review information and provide any feedback, edits, or clarification with the dialogue in the transcriptions.

Historical Artifacts. A fourth source of data includes artifacts from the researcher's doctoral experiences in the form of academic assigned papers, peer reviewed publications, and peer reviewed conference presentations (Appendix G, H, I, J, K, L). Artifacts of the researcher represent materials that represent their culture and illuminate historical context (Chang, 2016).

> Textual artifacts concerning you or authored by you are also useful autoethnographic data. Personally produced texts are particularly invaluable to your study because they preserve thoughts, emotions and perspectives at the time of recording, untainted by your present research agenda. (Chang, 2016, p. 107)

Academic assigned papers, peer reviewed publications, and peer reviewed conference presentations from the period of late Fall 2017 through Spring 2021 of the researcher's doctoral studies served as important data collection artifacts. These artifacts serve as important landmarks, because they not only represent the researcher's emotional journey within their academic experience, but they illuminate the culture of a doctoral student at an R1 research institution and professional academia.

Data Analysis

Data analysis and interpretation for a qualitative researcher "will reflect the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structure the study in the first place" (Merriam,

1998, p. 48). Data analysis in an autoethnography is another aspect of the research process that is intertwined and connected with all other aspects of the study. Various scholars (Denzin, 2014; Muncey, 2010; Reed-Danahay, 1997) have discussed that autoethnography is not just a stand-alone empirical research methodology, while others have connected autoethnography with traditional qualitative research tools (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). For autoethnographers (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2013) approaching research from an ethnographic positioning, the use of analytic-interpretive process and analytic reflexivity have been used throughout the data collection and analysis process. Many autoethnographic researchers have used narrative methodological tools to conduct researcher such as Ellis's (2004) narrative ethnographies and personal narratives, Ettorre's (2017) personal stories and autoethnography, Gale and Wyatt's (2009) collaborative autoethnography, Madison's (2012) critical performance autoethnography, Taylor et al.'s (2008) racial autoethnography, and Spry's (2001) self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self and others in social context.

As previously mentioned, an evocative autoethnographic approach was taken using a personal narrative in seeking better understanding on how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience. Ellis and Bochner (2000) refer to the use of the researcher's personal narrative as evocative narratives. "In narrative analysis, the research product is a story—a case, a biography, life history, autobiography, or autoethnography—that the researcher composes to represent the events, character, and issues that have been studied" (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, pp. 184–185). Bochner and Ellis (2016) discuss how the evocative autoethnography can be analyzed using a narrative analysis or a narrative-under-analysis. They differentiate between the two by suggesting that narrative analysis thinks with a story and the narrative-under-analysis thinks about a story

(Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Bochner & Riggs, 2014; Riessman, 2008). A narrative analysis highlights the notion that narrative is ambiguous and incomplete representations of experience and draws attention to the involvement of the researcher in the production of the narrative (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Bochner & Riggs, 2014; Riessman, 2008). In an evocative autoethnography the story of the researcher itself "always occupies the prominent position. In deciding the best way to do analysis in autoethnography, one consideration is whether you are interviewing other people in your study" (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, pp. 186–187). Researchers have the flexibility to decide how and to what extent they can blend a narrative analysis and narrative-under-analysis by allowing the others to add to the prominent story (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Bochner & Riggs, 2014). A narrative-under-analysis was slightly blended within the analysis due to the inclusion of two external interviews.

For this autoethnographic study, a thematic narrative analysis was used to analyze the data. The use of thematic narrative analysis is due to its focus on what is said or what gets told (Riessman, 2008). A researcher must consider important factors in determining the use of thematic narrative analysis that include theoretical perspective, epistemological position, research questions, and use and definition of narrative (Riessman, 2008). My decision to use a thematic narrative analysis is based on the factors of a subjectivist epistemology, an interpretivist perspective and the critical perspective of Transformative Learning Theory, and the importance of the personal narrative (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Riessman (2008) articulates several studies that involved several forms of data—oral, written, and visual—to analyze narrative materials; however, each study's structure of thematic narrative analysis is different due to the varying elements of the study. Using thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008), along with the structure of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase thematic analysis process, allowed for a rich

description that is suitable for the many kinds of data to be collected. The structure enables the researcher to get a sense of the predominant and important themes, and to focus attention on contexts and reject generic explanations (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Riessman, 2008). The structure of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis includes the six phases: familiarizing with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report were used as a structure for the researcher to follow during data analysis. Using thematic narrative analysis throughout the process strived to preserve sequence and details within the evocative nature of the personal narrative (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Riessman, 2008).

Part one of analysis is familiarizing oneself with the data. For this study, familiarization with the data was accomplished through the collection and management of autoethnographic data. Collecting various forms of autoethnographic data can come from narrative texts, interviews, journals, previous documents, images, and various other artifacts (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Chang, 2016; Muncey, 2010). The various forms of data represent fragmented pieces of an individual's story and culture (Chang, 2016). Some are collected from past experiences and others during the present research, with some data coming from the researcher and others coming from external sources (Muncey, 2010). As Bochner and Ellis (2016) and Chang (2016) discussed, some researchers might be tempted to wait and analyze the data together later in the research process; however, waiting to deal with the various forms of data can be problematic. Chang (2016) discusses two important benefits that a researcher can lose by procrastinating with analyzing data. "First, periodical organization of data steers the subsequent collection process effectively toward your research goal. Second, clearly labeled and classified data will be readily accessible and identifiable in the later stage of analysis and interpretation" (Chang, 2016, p. 115).

As the various forms of data are collected, they were labelled to be easily identifiable, then sorted and grouped by structural and topical categories. Using a similar template to Chang (2008), a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was developed to help organize and label the forms of data, leading to the initial analysis of each piece of data.

The working data management table allowed the multiple sources of data to be organized so that a researcher can determine if more data needs to be collected, where enough data is, the relevancy of incoming data, and the organized data become the bases of analyses (Chang, 2016). The organization of data is important in planning for analysis due to the autoethnographic research process not being linear (Jones et al., 2012). The organizing of data allows the researcher to begin analysis as the data is being collected and continue to analyze the data throughout the research (Maxwell, 2013). Data was collected, organized and labeled with an excel spreadsheet serving as the groundwork for further analysis and interpretation (Wolcott, 1994).

Phase two of thematic analysis is concerned with generating initial codes in a systematic fashion across the entire data set and assembling data relevant to each code (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Attention was given to the reflexive dialogue of the researcher before, during, and after the analytic process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Acknowledging the researcher's theoretical position and values concerning transformative learning described so far in this study have developed an understanding of the analytical lens that the researcher needed to be aware of when coding (Given, 2016; Saldaña, 2016). Transformative Learning Theory and second wave positive psychology influence the analytic lens for this study. Also, this autoethnographic dissertation research questions are based on how a doctoral student's cultural context shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience, how does a doctoral student engage

emotions resulting from a disorienting dilemma, and in what ways can a doctoral student navigate the transformative learning journey. The elements of this study along with how I perceived and interpreted the data, necessitated the three rounds of emotion, process, and value coding to develop relevant codes (Saldaña, 2016).

A first round of coding was done using emotion coding. "Emotion coding is appropriate for qualitative studies in matters of social relationships, reasoning, decision-making, judgement, and risk-taking" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 125). Emotion codes are a combination of In Vivo codes, emotional states, and reactions (Saldaña, 2016). The round of emotion coding was done because of the importance and purpose of the study focusing on the emotions of the individual doctoral student with the understanding that the emotions analyzed are not fully adequate and that the confusion and indecision with emotions are being embraced within this study.

A second round of coding was done using process coding. Process coding allows connections to be made with emotions between the various sets of data. Emotion coding and process coding were chosen at this point because "one can't separate emotion from action; they flow together, one leading into the other" (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p. 23). Process coding connotes action in the data from simple to conceptual actions, searching for "routines and rituals of human life," and "processes imply actions intertwined with the dynamics of time" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 111). Process coding uses gerunds ("-ing" words) exclusively to imply or suggest action within the data (Saldaña, 2016). Developing processes helped align data with the engagement and navigation of the doctoral student's experiences.

A third round of coding was done using values coding. "Values coding is the application of codes to qualitative data that reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 131). Values coding highlights personal

meaning, how we feel about ourselves, others, things and ideas, and beliefs that are formed and changed through social interactions, institutions, and culture (Saldaña, 2016). Like emotion and process coding, value coding can be used through multiple forms of data that include interview transcripts, journals, media, and field notes that enhance coding and trustworthiness (LeCompte et al., 1993; Saldaña, 2016). The rounds of emotion, process, and values coding are important because when analyzing and interpreting autoethnographic data the researcher must be able shift attention back and forth between the personal and the social context, because in the intent of the study remains on gaining cultural understanding (Chang, 2016).

Phase three of thematic analysis is the searching for themes. Riessman (2008) reminds researchers conducting thematic narrative analysis that during this phase need to strive to preserve sequence and details within long sequences. This phase began when all the data was coded and involved the refocusing and considering with how different codes may combine to form an overarching theme to a broader level of potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Sometimes called emergent themes, patterns and issues begin to arise from the data analysis (Given, 2016). “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). According to Saldaña (2016), a theme is “an outcome of coding, categorization, or analytic reflection, but is not something that is, in itself coded” (p.15). A coding table using Microsoft Excel was used to help sort coded data, candidate themes, and sub-themes.

Phase four of thematic analysis is reviewing themes and refining themes. There are two levels in this phase with the first being “that you need to read all the collated extracts for each theme and consider whether they appear to form a coherent pattern” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.

91). If there is a coherent pattern then, the second level of this phase involves determining if individual themes need to be validated in relation to the entire data set. A thematic map was created to help visual the themes that emerged to see if the themes relate to the data. The main purpose of this phase was to re-read my entire data set to determine if themes relate to the data, code or re-code any additional, and, or missing data that might have previously been overlooked (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase five of thematic analysis is defining and naming themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe this phase as the "ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme" (p. 87). The defining and refining of themes was attempting to get at essence of the theme by going back over the data extracts for each theme and organizing them coherently. This was done by conducting and writing a detailed analysis for each theme, as they relate to other themes, and if any of the themes contains any sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this phase, it was determined how the themes relate to the research questions that focus on how a doctoral student's cultural context shape the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience, how does a doctoral student engage emotions resulting from a disorienting dilemma, and in what ways can the doctoral student navigate the transformative learning. Having these questions helped determine how themes were related to the overarching story (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase six of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis begins when a set of fully worked out themes is provided, then the final analysis and final report are produced. Chapter Four of this dissertation provides various examples and data extracts to provide the essence of the story across themes. The analysis allows the autoethnographer to present findings that allows others to interact with the story and to come to an understanding and make meaning from it

(Ellis, 1999). The autoethnographers' story is shared through the data in hopes of offering reflection, insight, and hope to readers and audiences who might have had similar experiences or who might be interested (Jones et al., 2013).

Promoting Qualitative Rigor

O'Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) discuss that there are generally three quality markers of transparency, reflexivity, and trustworthiness used to promote rigor in qualitative research. To represent the data and produce quality qualitative research, an initial strategy was used from the very beginning to ensure transparency. The in-depth collection of data and organization process that occurred, the various forms of data, and the mapping of themes were done to highlight transparency. Providing consent forms, interview guides, transcripts, and the data analysis process provides transparency with the actions of the researcher. Transparency is very important throughout the autoethnographic process to provide honesty with how data was collected, coding was derived, and decisions were made (Butler-Kisber, 2018; Cranton & Merriam, 2015; Tracy, 2010). The attention given to the reflexive dialogue before, during, and after the analytic process regarding the researcher's theoretical positioning and research questions were discussed to highlight the reflexivity throughout the design of the research. In the first half of this study, the purpose of this study, a review of relevant literature and theoretical framework was provided and linked together to build an understanding of the analytical lens that the researcher had to be aware of when designing the study, its methodology, methods and developing the data analysis process (Given, 2016; Saldana, 2016). In qualitative research, the researchers must situate themselves within the work and maintain a reflective stance throughout (Butler-Kisber, 2019). As a primary source of data, and the continued effort of the researcher's journal allowed for self-disclose on assumptions, beliefs, and biases using memos and reflections to be captured

throughout the research process (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The inclusion of a researcher's journal allows for transparency and shows how and why interpretations evolve (Butler-Kisber, 2019).

The notion of trustworthiness has been at the core with how to value and measure quality in qualitative work (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). Trustworthiness is relevant at the points of data collection and during the process of interpretation (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). "Trustworthiness in qualitative research is achieved by designing and implementing projects that are credible, dependable, and confirmable so that the findings may be transferable across populations, settings, or contexts" (Given, 2016, p. 76). So far in this research, the development of trustworthiness has been built through research questions that provide boundaries and flexibility, designing a congruent methodology and methods, through a detailed and organized collection of data with an analysis designed to create rich and detailed findings. Other approaches were used to build trustworthiness within this research.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a process used to establish credibility of a claim and validity (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015; Seale, 1999). Applying methodological triangulation for qualitative research refers to the multiple types of data collected, researcher viewpoints, theoretical framing, and data analysis (Flick, 2014; Tracy, 2010). Triangulation allows researchers to investigate and conduct research from various angles and perspectives (Given, 2016). For this research, triangulation was met through the collection of various forms of autoethnographic data ranging from the journal of the researcher, researcher self-interviews, external participant interviews, researcher's academic papers and conference presentations, images, and various other artifacts (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Chang, 2016; Muncey, 2010). The various forms of data helped create a more holistic picture of

the autoethnographic focus, and building triangulation represents quality and rigor with the data (Freeman et al., 2007).

Advisor Debriefing

Advisor debriefing for this study allowed the academic advisor of the researcher to review the data and research process based on their knowledge of adult learning, doctoral education, Transformative Learning Theory, and qualitative research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the importance of the reviewer with not only support but challenges and pushes the researcher with hard questions concerning data and interpretations. For this doctoral dissertation bi-monthly meetings with the academic advisor, who also serves as the doctoral committee chair, were used to review the development of the research design. The bi-monthly meetings continued throughout the entire study to review transcriptions, codes, categories, and themes to gain a second opinion about data findings, adding credibility to the study.

Member Checks

Another strategy used to best represent the data was member checking for the external interviews. “The most crucial technique for establishing credibility is through member checks” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). Creswell (2018) describes that member checking can occur throughout multiple points of the research process including data collection, analysis, transcribing, and interpretation. During the study, the initial transcript provided by the transcription service was sent via a password protected email to the participants to verify and offer any corrections to the dialogue that had been transcribed or wording that they felt were misunderstood when transcribed. The two participants had seven days to provide feedback, the participants were informed that no feedback meant to be understood as approval of the transcript.

During the analysis process, meetings with both participants occurred via zoom to share and discuss coding, categories, and the theming process. These conversations provided feedback and discussions on the development of themes and categories. Both participants asked for clarification on theming details and confirmed the findings.

Thick Description

Describing the setting, participants, and themes of a qualitative study in a deep, dense, detailed, and rich detail is another procedure for establishing credibility (Denzin, 1989; Tracy, 2010). This is done by creating in-depth illustrations within cultural settings with abundant concrete detail (Bochner, 2000; Tracy, 2010). Any event or interaction out of context could mean many things, but thick description is important because it adds complexity and circumstance to the data (Tracy, 2010). This research engages in the phenomenon of emotions within a transformative learning experience, and the decision to take an autoethnographic approach using the personal narrative is to provide rich insight into explaining an individual's personal experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Throughout the research process, thick and rich descriptions were recorded using the researcher's journal, self-interviews, external interviews, and artifacts.

Subjectivity Statement

A researcher's subjectivity focuses on who they believe themselves to be as an individual, their background, and how it is related to a study (Preissle, 2008). Campbell (2016) described one's subjectivity as a garment and argued that researchers should not try to remove this garment but acknowledge it and deeply analyze why one has approached issues, questions, and experiences within their research.

> I have lost count of the number of people who launch enthusiastically into the detail of their research interests and when asked why they are interested, admit sheepishly that

> they themselves have experience of the concept they are studying. When asked if they are writing themselves into the study, they are horrified that this blatant display of subjectivity will somehow infect the quality of their work. (Muncey, 2010, pp. 1–2)

Muncey (2010) brings up important points regarding those who attempt autoethnographic research with the subjective filter they will use when including their own experiences within study and how they plan to conduct the work. The following subjectivity statement is an attempt to describe the type of filter and embrace the garment that drawn me to using an autoethnographic approach for this research.

Who wants to hear about the struggles of a middle-aged, non-disabled, cisgender, straight, white male from a middle-to-upper class family in the Midwest, U.S.? What would you say if I told you I have been a bully in the past, I have treated people in mentally abusive ways? This is a part of who I have been, and is a part of my positionality, privilege, and subjectivity. I am not proud to admit that I have acted certain ways, but it is that it is through humility, shame, and reflection that I have looked to grow and learn from.

It is a difficult thing to hear later in life that you were considered an awkward kid. Growing up I was impossibly shy and introverted, but I was happy and creative. My shyness and sensitivity seemed very fitting as the youngest member of my family. I cannot exactly recall the moment when things changed during my childhood, but I remember becoming a target of negativity and bullying. What started as small incidents, spread through all areas of life. At a young age I did not understand all the things being said to me and I began to think that everything I did was not normal compared to everyone else. I learned in those early years what it felt like to be embarrassed, self-conscious, sad, and afraid.

In high school I found my outlet in football. I was good at it, and I found a way to express my anger. Anger defined why I played football and football became my avenue in life. I used football to leave home for a good college, and my experiences as a college athlete were so good that I decided to become a coach, and as a coach I became the bully. It is ironic to think about how as kid I used football as my outlet for anger, and as a coach I used my power as an outlet for my anger. My years spent as a coach were an extremely difficult period in my life. I was in this environment that to survive I had to be confident, demanding, and relentless, which resulted in my own shame, fear, guilt, hate, anger, and sadness. It was in my last coaching position that the school let our coaching staff go, and this job loss that resulted in me stepping away from the only career and life I had known.

I looked to adult education for a change to help me start over and change my life, thus beginning my journey in adult education. As much as I anticipated the changes I would be going through, I discovered early on how complex and emotional the learning process was for me. I had to reflect deeply on who I really was as a person before I could make changes in my life and discover new possibilities. While working on a project during my masters, I came across a piece of art that I had an immediate connection with. One day, at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, I came across a sculpture depicting a man stumbling to his knees and hands trying not to collapse any further as he was moving forward.

This art piece resonated with me and has become a symbol of my time as an adult learner. The image of a struggling man (Figure 3.1) is often thought of in a negative reference; but I saw this sculpture as myself being knocked down and stumbling, striving to get back to my feet and move forward. This symbol of my struggles would become the inspiration for my theme *transformation* for my master's portfolio. For me, the transformative learning process resembled

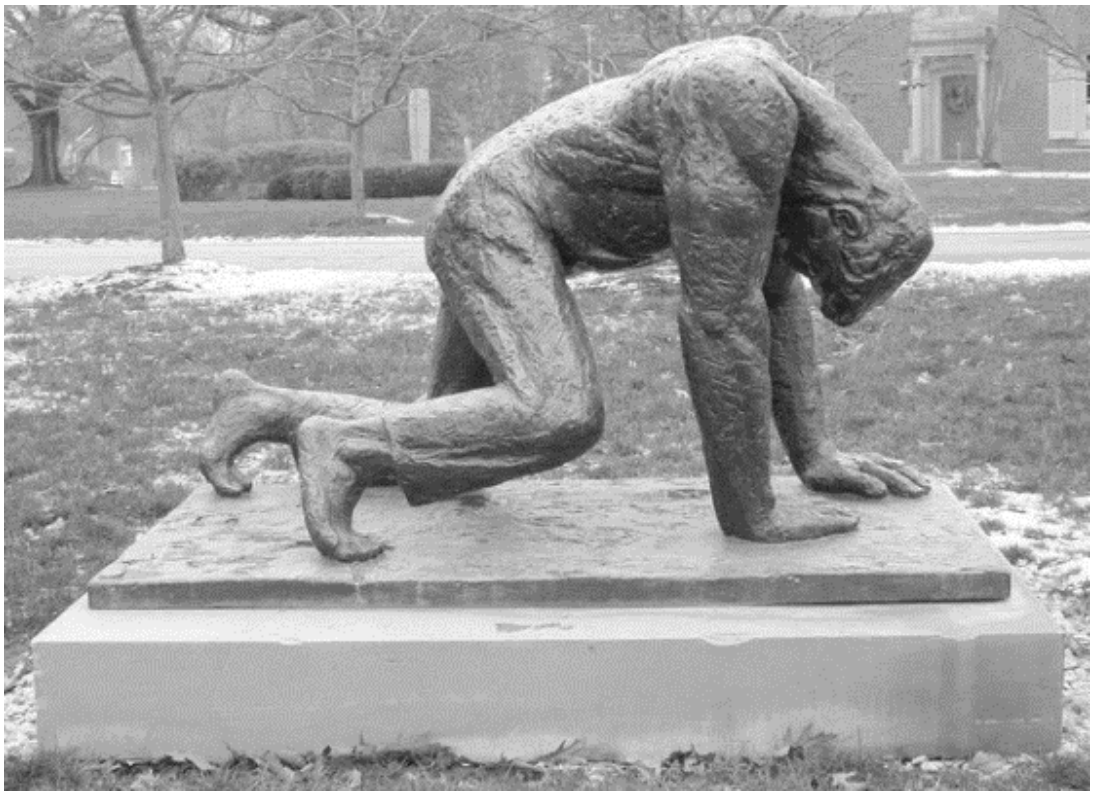

Figure 3.1

Struggling Man

Note. Rubins, D. K. (1969). *Stumbling man* [Sculpture]. Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN.

the struggles, conflict, discovery, and new understanding that shaped my journey.

It was a few years later during my first semester as a doctoral student, I would face my darkest journey that would last throughout my graduate experience. The years between the end of my master's program and moving to Tennessee to start my doctoral program were full of personal highs and lows. But it was during my first year as a doctoral student that I began living two lives, one in the light, and the other in the dark. In the light I continued as a graduate student going to campus and classes interacting with my friends, peers, and professors. I looked for comfort in the environments of my doctoral courses and the literature of adult education and transformative learning to draw connections and make meaning with what I was experiencing. I attempted to carry on as normal with the weekly family phone calls and going to my part time job; however, I was also living a life in the dark. What began with the collapsing of my marriage and witnessing the effects of drug addiction, spiraled into conflicts with abandonment, financial hardships, alcohol, and severe emotional distress. I slowly descended into a darkness where I battled depression, shame, and even contemplating taking my life.

This darkness had grown from difficult life situations and become a state of emotional chaos, confusion, and struggle of self in which I had no previous experiences. My struggles as an adult learner, my journey of struggles is not used in a negative tone. I use the concept of struggle as a lens to help me explore how my emotions have impacted and continue to impact my learning and development. Throughout my journey as an adult learner, I have always struggled with complex series of positive and negative emotions, and the role they play in my learning process. I seemed to be plagued with the negative emotions of shame, fear, guilt, hate, anger, jealousy, and sadness. No matter how powerful the learning experiences I encountered, and the positive changes I was making in my life, a dark shadow of fear and self-doubt loomed over me.

Through this process, my emotional struggles have become ingrained in my storytelling, and I use them to help understand my learning processes and perceive my emotions as the key to helping me better understanding how I am really feeling and thinking. This perspective offers new levels of understanding to be explored, and I believe my emotional struggles can allow me to reach an intense level of reflection that I would not otherwise be able to engage. The focus of this study provided me the chance to deepen my search for new meanings and understanding.

As Joan Didion (1979) says, "we tell ourselves stories in order to live" (p. 1), and I felt that for me to survive was for me to become my research and the research to become me. The beauty of life is that as individuals we attempt to describe and express what it is in life we are experiencing. Taking an autoethnographic approach helped me better understand the role of emotions within the transformative learning process of an adult learner in graduate education during a life-event crisis. The decision to conduct autoethnography provides the space and tools for me to explore personal experiences in great depth so that extraordinary and real-life aspects of personal experiences can be expressed within a social context (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). My own unique story, philosophical positioning, and set of assumptions have helped define and shape the decision to do an autoethnographic study that I believe must be conducted to fully examine the complexity of emotions involved that might influence the transformative learning process. This autoethnographic approach can help provide a window to a life in crisis that represents the state of emotional chaos, confusion, and struggle of self that left me searching for significant and legitimate perspectives that challenge and help me with the way I view myself and the world around me. A personal narrative autoethnographic approach helped explore in great depth and embrace the emotional struggles that I have been experiencing during my time in graduate education so that I can live and learn, and maybe help others who are going through

similar experiences. Doing so is the best way to show readers how emotions affect meaning-making and critical reflection.

As a doctoral graduate student in an adult learning program, there are academic guidelines that the dissertation process follows. The use of Transformative Learning Theory provides my autoethnography with a theoretical framework created within adult education and provides the appropriate experience and reflective lens needed to help frame the autoethnographic approach. The decision to use a personal narrative was made in hopes of getting the most honest reflections and places narrative methodology alongside autoethnography to help guide the research design and analysis. The decision to take an evocative approach is based on its heightened self-reflexivity and increased focus on emotions (Anderson, 2006; Ellis, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 2004).

I understand that the decision to do an autoethnographic study may be seen to some a version of self-therapy, self-indulgence, and narrow focused; however, I believe that to fully examine the complexity of emotions involved that might influence the transformative learning process, I need to be the research. It is important to remember that my experiences not only define who I am but can help build relationships with others. My subjectivity is threaded throughout this entire study. My personal attachment to adult education, transformative learning, and second wave positive psychology serves as my greatest bias as a researcher (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). I believe that adult education can empower willing individuals to make positive changes in their lives, and that transformative learning has the potential to create new meaning and change one's life. The transformative learning process can create new experiences and perspectives that can help tear down and continually reshape my subjectivity and epistemological

views as I search for new meanings and understanding of who I am as a person, graduate student, adult learner, and researcher.

Limitations

The first limitation of the study was the time frame during which this study was conducted, late Fall 2017 through Spring 2021. In Spring 2020, the world was faced with the COVID-19 global pandemic. My *dark side* and transformative learning research had been accepted to three professional conferences during Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. The first conference was an international conference in the summer that would allow me to travel to Spain. The second conference in the field of adult education went to a virtual format, and a third conference focusing on qualitative research was cancelled. These three conferences would had offered crucial opportunities for professional development and the continued sharing of my research and journey in hopes of making connections while enhancing dialogue and critical reflection. A second limitation for the study was the length of external interviews with two peers of the researcher. As interviews for the study were allotted for 60 to 120 minutes, the two peers of the researcher recalling of experiences were less detailed, resulting in relatively shorter length interviews and data.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an in-depth review of this study's research design, methodology, data collection, and data analysis. The chapter included plans to ensure qualitative rigor and trustworthiness, and the subjectivity of the researcher. In the next chapter, Chapter Four, I present the study's findings through the four major themes that were identified, including two peer interviews that provide additional context and confirmation with the findings from the personal narrative.

Chapter Four

Findings

This study focused on having a better understanding of how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience. Chapters One provided a background of the study and Chapter Two provided a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to this study to aid the reader in understanding the complexities of adult learning, Transformative Learning Theory, and emotions within the landscape of adult graduate education. Chapter Three addressed the study's research design including epistemology, theoretical framework or perspective, methodology, data collection, data analysis, assurance of trustworthiness, my subjectivity as a researcher, and the limitations of the study.

This chapter consists of five sections that begins with a summary of the data collection and data analysis process is given. Second, I provide a brief re-introduction of the autoethnographer/participant of the study to allow the reader to review the context leading up to the start of my doctoral experiences and the disorienting dilemma from which this study began. Third, I highlight the four major themes from the study. Fourth, I give findings from the peer interviews to provide further context and confirmation with the autoethnographer findings. Lastly, I provide a summary of the chapter.

Summary of Data Collection and Analysis

Data collected for this study began in Fall 2017 and ended in Spring 2021. The primary source of data for this doctoral research came from my journal that I began in the Fall 2018. I conducted two autoethnographic self-interviews as a secondary source of data for this research. I conducted the semi-structured self-interview and the unstructured self-interview, both lasted for 60–120-minutes, in my home using zoom and audio recordings to provide further trustworthiness during data collection. A third source of data came from two external participant interviews. I

used convenience sampling to conduct face-to-face, semi-structured interviews that lasted 60–120-minutes with two peers of the researcher who had been doctoral students at the same university during the same period, Fall 2017 through Spring 2021. The participants chose interview locations to provide private surroundings. Audio recordings were utilized for both interviews and sent within two hours after the interviews to a paid, confidential transcription service, Rev.com. A fourth source of data included artifacts from my doctoral experiences in the form of academic assigned papers, peer reviewed publications, and peer reviewed conference presentations from Fall 2017 through Spring 2021.

Taking an evocative autoethnographic on my personal narrative sought a better understanding on how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience. A thematic narrative analysis on the personal narrative highlights the notion that narrative is ambiguous and incomplete representations of experience and draws attention to the involvement of the researcher in the production of the narrative (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Bochner & Riggs, 2014; Riessman, 2008). I conducted a thematic narrative analysis to analyze the data based on the study's subjectivist epistemology, interpretivist perspective and critical perspective of Transformative Learning Theory, and the importance of the personal narrative (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Riessman (2008) articulates several studies that involved several forms of data—oral, written, and visual—to analyze narrative materials; however, each study's structure of thematic narrative analysis is different due to the varying elements of the study. Using thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008), along with the structure of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase thematic analysis process, allowed for a rich description suitable for the many kinds of data collected.

The structure of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis includes the six phases: familiarizing with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report that were used to provide structure for me as researcher during the data analysis. The structure enabled me as a researcher to get a sense of the predominant and important themes, and to focus attention on contexts and reject generic explanations (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Riessman, 2008); however, my focus on thematic narrative analysis throughout the process helped preserve sequence and details within the evocative nature of the personal narrative (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Riessman, 2008). During phase two of thematic narrative analysis, three rounds of coding were done for each data source using Emotion, Process, and Values coding. The rounds of emotion, process, and values coding were important because when analyzing and interpreting autoethnographic data they allowed me to shift attention back and forth between the personal and the social context.

A coding table developed in Microsoft Excel allowed me to organize codes, review for emergent themes, sort themes into candidate themes, sub-themes, and code data relevant to the themes. These themes were then refocused and considered with how different codes may combine to form an overarching theme to a broader level of potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An important aspect of reviewing and refining themes held constant to Riessman's (2008) reminding that researchers conducting thematic narrative analysis need to strive to preserve sequence and details within long sequences of the narrative. Themes were defined and named to get at the essence of the theme by going back over the data extracts for each theme and organizing them coherently. In this phase, themes were related to the research questions that focus on how a doctoral student's cultural context shape the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience, how does a doctoral student engage emotions resulting from

a disorienting dilemma, and in what ways can the doctoral student navigate the transformative learning. During phase six, final analysis produced findings so that others can interact with the story in hopes of offering reflection, insight, and hope to readers and audiences who might have had similar experiences or who might be interested (Jones et al., 2013).

Autoethnographer/Participant of the Study

This doctoral dissertation focused on having a better understanding of how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience. As an autoethnography the primary participant of this study is myself, that I first introduced within the study with my subjectivity statement at the end of Chapter Three. In this section I highlight important aspects leading to my decision to being a doctoral student and the events that occurred late Fall 2017 to the beginning of my researcher journal in Fall 2018.

I grew up in the small town of Danville, Indiana on the west side of Indianapolis. I received my Bachelor of Arts in political science from Wittenberg University, Ohio. After undergrad I made the choice to pursue a career as a college football coach. It was at my third school, Grand Valley State University, MI, that I had the opportunity to take some graduate level courses in adult and higher education. After making the decision to leave a 9-year career in coaching college football, I attended the adult education master's program at Indiana University, Bloomington. I looked to adult education for to help me start over and change my life, thus beginning my journey in adult education in graduate education. I worked full-time through my master's program and after I graduated decided to take some time off from school. The plan of taking one year off after my master's turned into three years as I was promoted at work, got married, and moved. During this time, I slowly lost sight of pursuing a doctorate and applying for doctoral programs. Life and marriage had its complications and during this time I looked to

adult education again to fulfill my goals and for a chance to move my marriage to a new state for a fresh start. In the Summer 2017, we moved to Knoxville, found an amazing apartment, went to parks and hiked, and that August I started my doctoral program. Life was just a dream, yet this move was a band aid on the difficulties within the marriage over the past three years. During the last few weeks of the semester everything came to a crashing halt. Marital troubles led to months of arguing, distrust, failed counseling, abandonment, financial hardships, struggles with alcohol, and severe emotional distress. Fall 2018, I began keeping a journal and this journal offers a raw, uncut look at my emotional and academic experiences as a doctoral student.

Themes from the Study

The thematic narrative analysis on my personal narrative illuminated four key themes: 1) academic discovery and responsibilities, 2) you can only breathe because I let you, 3) traveling through the dark to a transformative emergence, and 4) building compassion. Table 4.1 illustrates the emergence of the themes through my coding process.

Theme One: Academic Discovery and Responsibility

The first theme that emerged from the personal narrative was *academic discovery and responsibility.* This theme is embodied in the Figure 4.1 that was the first thing to go into the journal and placed on the inside cover. The struggling man is the sculpture that became my inspiration throughout my master's journey. I saw myself being knocked down and stumbling, striving to get back to my feet and move forward. This symbol of my struggles would become the inspiration to my master's portfolio and remained an inspiration as I came into the doctoral program. The struggling man embodies the first theme *academic discovery and responsibilities* in that it represents the love, excitement, and dedication that I brought with me into the doctoral program and the continued commitment to learning, research, and practice throughout the

Table 4.1

Examples of Coding Process

Themes	Categories	Codes
1) Academic discovery and responsibilities	a) Love and dedication to adult learning b) Professional Development and Engagement c) Qualitative research	i. Love, engaging in adult learning, excitement, building knowledge, building rapport, classroom engagement, determination, annoyed but respectful ii. engaging in professional discourse, professional acceptance, interactions, joy, excited, integrity iii. wanting to discover, interest and engagement in qualitative, autoethnography, subjectivity, reflexivity on others, intrigue, arduous
2) You can only breathe because I let you	a) Exposing negative layers of self b) Emotional Chaos c) Contemplation with suicide	i. alone, raw, exposed, angry, failure, nameless, vulnerable, embarrassed ii. comfort zone is full of negative coping mechanisms, chaos, thinking about disappearing, shame, guilt iii. wanting to go to dark and be alone, contemplating on taking life, lost hope, sadness, despair, hate, suffering
3) Traveling through the dark to a transformative emergence	a) Embracing the dark side of life b) Connection to transformative learning	i. tale of two lives, anger, trying new roles, conflicting interactions, must be pulled back to move forward, finding inspiration in darkest of time, embracing the darkness, eyes on light, hopeful, conflicted, scared, courageous, strength ii. engaging in critical self-reflection and critical discourse to better understand journey, frustration with recognition, reintegration is messy, power of transformation, hope, transformative, feeling new, struggling
4) Discovering compassion	a) Compassion through shared suffering b) Aesthetic appreciation	i. Relationship building, respect, giving others healthy space, understanding others situations, compassion in sharing struggles, suffering is ok, sharing vulnerabilities and triumphs, love, companionship, humility, happy, satisfaction ii. Lyrics speaking when no voice, artwork enhancing levels of reflection, nostalgia, using music for inspiration, enjoying the small things, finding inspiration in the beauty of life, in awe, relaxed, humble, wonder, peaceful

Figure 4.1

Struggling Man (8/30/18)

Note. Rubins, D. K. (1969). *Stumbling man* [Sculpture]. Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN.

struggles and conflict of my doctoral student experiences. The theme includes the categories of *love and dedication to adult learning, professional development and engagement*, and *interest in qualitative research*. As a theme, academic discovery and responsibilities, addresses the constant academic engagements throughout the highs and lows of the doctoral journey.

Love and Dedication to Adult Learning. The category *love and dedication to adult learning* was expressed throughout with discussions and experiences including academic responsibilities, building an academic community with peers and scholars, and critically questioning research and practice throughout the field. During a self-interview I talked about the intense connection to adult learning that I developed during my time as a master's student that brought me to my doctoral program and a desired future in adult education.

> There were a lot of layers there that I didn't know existed and you know, I created a version of self that was not good to survive in that environment[coaching]. I found, I guess the simplest way, I found myself in Adult Learning and I remember, I was working full time and when I was taking classes and I just absolutely loved that program. It wasn't until about the end of the second year, my advisor says, "Have you ever thought about moving on with this?" You know, I said to her "it's funny as I don't know if you read my full time and when I was taking classes and I just absolutely loved that program. It wasn't full time and when I was taking classes and I just absolutely loved that program. It wasn't until about the end of the second year, my advisor says, "Have you ever thought about moving on with this?" You know, I said to her "it's funny as I don't know if you read my letter. I wrote a letter when my, when you know to apply, my opening cover letter whatever is, my goal was to get my master's but my long-term goal was, I wanted to be a

> professor and I even wrote that." That was kind of where I started thinking about, I had already, always planned on doing that, told people that's what I wanted to do. Had some opportunities to go back to coaching, but no, I wanted to stay in Adult Learning, adult education.

This commitment to adult learning was expressed throughout the doctoral journey. During my second year I noted in my journal:

> 9/10/18 – The reason I am here is the same reason I loved being in class at GVSU. I still don't know who I am, and adult learning has given me a chance to find and discover. My dissertation topic is based on my search for this, I only really know how to relate it to myself. I only know one story, my own.

This love of adult learning was expressed throughout the various interactions with faculty in the program as well. I expressed the gratitude I had interacting with faculty later on that day in another journal entry. "9/10/18 – Had a meeting with [professor]. They remind me of why I want to be in adult education and they love movies as much as I do. It is going to be a great presentation." The love and dedication to adult learning was also seen through the efforts to build an academic community within the adult learning program. I recalled in a self-interview the beginnings of my new community:

> So, classes start, I come in to classes and I have this new group and you know, the first few classes it's meeting all my colleagues and peers. And I was really nervous and when that first class started, but then it was like I never left. I had been looking through my stuff, but it was just, it's like hit the ground running, whatever you want to call it. I mean, I was, we were talking about adult learning theory and things like that, that I felt like I never even...Yeah, it's like it never went away. And what I loved is the program was

> smaller, you know three or four professors and 12 to 15 students with half of them in their dissertation process. So, I had three classes, I had an assistantship, didn't have a second job. So, I was going to the office, we had this big room at the time where me and three, four other people in the program, we just would be there four or five days a week studying, just kind of hanging out. It's crazy because I think back now, so much happened in that first semester. We were all and that first semester is such a struggle, you know psychologically, but God, I was loving the classes. I mean there were a handful of these people in the class, we became friends like we had been friends for past 10 years.

Whether building one-on-one rapport, working together in activities and group projects, or digging into each other's research was an important factor in my continued academic discovery. These interactions were not always in a positive nature, but still important in building academic community. In a journal entry I expressed some of my frustrations having to deal with another student in class:

> 9/6/18 – What do I value in research ethics? How do I engage in ethical practices? Ethical considerations for own study? Minimal risks and benefits? Ok, I love class but I am stuck on that one student who won't shut up. They comment every damn minute and answer every question. I know it's dragging the class down; everyone is gun shy. News flash everyone in the room is smart, yet you are trying to take place over others. It is getting worse, with answering others' questions before professor can. Comment one more time after I speak and I am going to snap.
>
> 9/6/18 – One thing that came to me is the convo on vulnerable populations. That [student] back in [class] said she was trying to prove Mezirow wrong by saying that transformative learning could be done within [specific population individuals]. That is unethical and a

> population that should not be researched. The use of critical reflection makes it unlikely adult, and it is an individuals' own reflection and perception if they experienced a transformative experience.

The commitment to academic discovery and responsibilities addresses the continuous engagement and the need to critically questioning academic work and self-worth that occurred throughout the doctoral journey even as aspects of my personal life were falling apart. During a self-interview I shared some of my experiences with trying to remain responsible and engaged with my academic duties:

> It affected me as student because not that I would be you know, it was such an escape from like all the conversations you have, like the bad, the arguments, and the different negative communications [with spouse]. When I was in the office and there was somebody else there or I was on fifth floor or when I was in class, like even if I wasn't happy, I was still happy. You know I could, it was an escape to keep ... to keep reading, to keep reading through these chapters and these you know. It's funny, whenever you are kind of like getting in a bad place, you start reading stuff and you know, it makes you feel, but it makes you reflect on what you're doing. I made sure in the Spring, man, I would go to class, never unprepared. I would only talk when I felt was right. You know, I would be very empathetic, very caring of how I'd say things so that like gave me a way to really just kind of keep going.

This category represents the love, excitement, and sense of responsibility to adult learning that I brought with me into the doctoral program. When faced with a new disorienting dilemma as a doctoral student, I found comfort in my academic program and looked to education and research. *My love and dedication to adult learning* grew from the times earlier in my life when I felt there

were pieces missing and I looked to adult learning for answers. Through the engagement in adult learning I developed an intense connection and desire to remain dedicated to building a future in adult education.

Professional Development and Engagement. The category of *professional development and engagement* is highly important for this theme as it represents individual professional development, partnerships, and participating in the professional field. Shared throughout the personal narrative are discussions and experiences with the responsibilities as a graduate research assistant and partnering with colleagues and faculty for presentations and publications. Professional conferences offered crucial opportunities for professional development and in return provided accomplishments, excitement, and a sense of belonging as a member in the field of adult learning. In a journal entry I discussed some my first experiences at a conference:

> 10/3/18 – As they went around the table it was very interesting to hear each person's reason for being at the round table. I was able to hear others and I wanted to speak up just because I was excited to hear their perspective. It made me realize that what I want to do with my research topic. It's not me, it's the subject and ideas that they discuss that make me feel good and realize that there are reasons why my research is valid and others might want to read it.

I continued with great excitement in another entry that day about having the opportunity to talk with a well-known scholar in adult learning:

> 10/3/018 – Ok, so I just got to talk with [well known scholar in adult learning] for about 30 minutes. They are not what I expected but so much more than I thought. They are very intense, and I felt like they were trying to get a read on me. One of the best things about

> talking with them was sharing stories about who we are and some of our family background. It was great, we laughed and joked about all types of stuff.

An important aspect of this professional engagement and development as a doctoral student is the ability to participate in professional conferences. I expressed how meaningful it was to present at professional conferences and partner with faculty:

> 10/4/18 – I was proud of the PowerPoint and the videos in it. I was very nervous to start. It was a decent, no it was very good turnout, which only made me more nervous. [Peer] was a big help in setting up room, just as getting the employee to make sure the projector had volume. [Faculty] started off and it is intimidating as hell to follow a hall of famer in the field, and when it was given to me, I just saw eyes staring at me. However, I just said to myself 'you know this is part of it, so take it.' I got jammed up at first but began to find rhythm. I tell you, getting head nods is one hell of a feel-good moment. It just felt right and I loved talking about it. The video clips were a hit, you could really tell that people enjoyed having them and our breakdowns after each clip were so vital. Giving them pre-context and past detail was a perfect framing for the video clips. I was shocked at the amount of feedback we were getting. [Well known scholar in adult learning] was there, and it was great getting their story of how film is used in their classes to understand adult development. It was an amazing expiring and people shared a lot of ideas and responses to the topic. I owe [faculty] a huge amount for this.

The value of presenting lead to valuable conversations during and after. I shared how at the end of a second presentation, individuals from the audience stuck around to talk with us and each other. "I was excited about having conversations with [faculty and students from other universities] coming up to us after the presentation to express interest with the topic" (10/5/18).

These conversations helped me develop "ownership of the presentation" (10/5/18). It was a year later at the same conference that I was able to share my current research and engage further in professional discourse. I recalled my nervousness and excitement with presenting my research:

> 10/10/19 – Dark side presentation. Wow! It was amazing! I was nervous but there were so many people in the room, there were even people setting out in the hall, but oh my god [two well-known scholars in adult learning] were there. I was so nervous, I was sweating and rambling but I think I started to pull it together. I was not planning on sharing too much but I decided, why not? During questions [well known scholar in adult learning] raised their hand and I actually said, 'I was afraid you would ask a question' and it made them smile. They asked about embracing one's inner dark side. I wanted to clarify that it was too dangerous for me and I did not want to go too deep in the presentation. Other [well known scholar] asked about spirituality and asking if I was more concerned about psychoanalysis or learning. I think I answered well. After presentation first [scholar] and I spoke, they said it was very interesting and suggested I email him. I have never felt so accepted and respected in adult learning.

This category is highly important because it represents the opportunities I had to engage with members of the field, develop and present research. Professional conferences provided opportunities to speak with fellow graduate students, scholars, and researchers from the field. These engagements provided vital feedback, dialogue, reflection, sense of accomplishment, excitement, and belongingness to the field of adult education.

Interest in Qualitative Research. *The interest in qualitative research* plays a critical role in the first theme because of my desire and interest to explore the ways people interact and experience the world around them and form interpretations. I talked about how it was early on in

a qualitative research course that one of the requirements was keeping a researcher journal, and this journaling sparked my interest in the research process. During a self-interview I expressed how my qualitative research impacted my reflection process:

> That's when I knew I wanted to be a qualitative researcher, the cause of reflection and we had to do a journal for that class, and that's when things started getting difficult. I started writing in the journal and the deeper I dug into the qualitative research, and the deeper I dug into my own critical reflections.

I went on to discuss how this reflection process was tough, but the continued engagement in qualitative research provided a new avenue for of academic discovery. This engagement lead me to engaging in discourse with faculty regarding methodology. In a journal entry I talked about my concerns and looking to faculty for guidance:

> 10/31/19 – I am struggling very bad with the use of methodology in my interview project. I was leaning towards an interpretive narrative for the interview, but now I am wondering if I can use case study. I originally thought of a narrative however I am thinking about the boundaries that exist between narrative and the one-time interview. I went and talked with [professor] and realized that my paper might be more of a single person case study. We previously used narrative to tell our story; however, looking at the interview questions and after the interview I realized that the interview might be a case study.

The back and forth that is occuring in the previous journal entry demonstrates an important process of reflexivity that is vital to qualitative research. The struggle with coming to terms with qualitative research, my own research interests, and my positionality as a researcher is best illustrated in Figure 4.2 with a sketch attempting to shape and build my conceptual framework within my research focus.

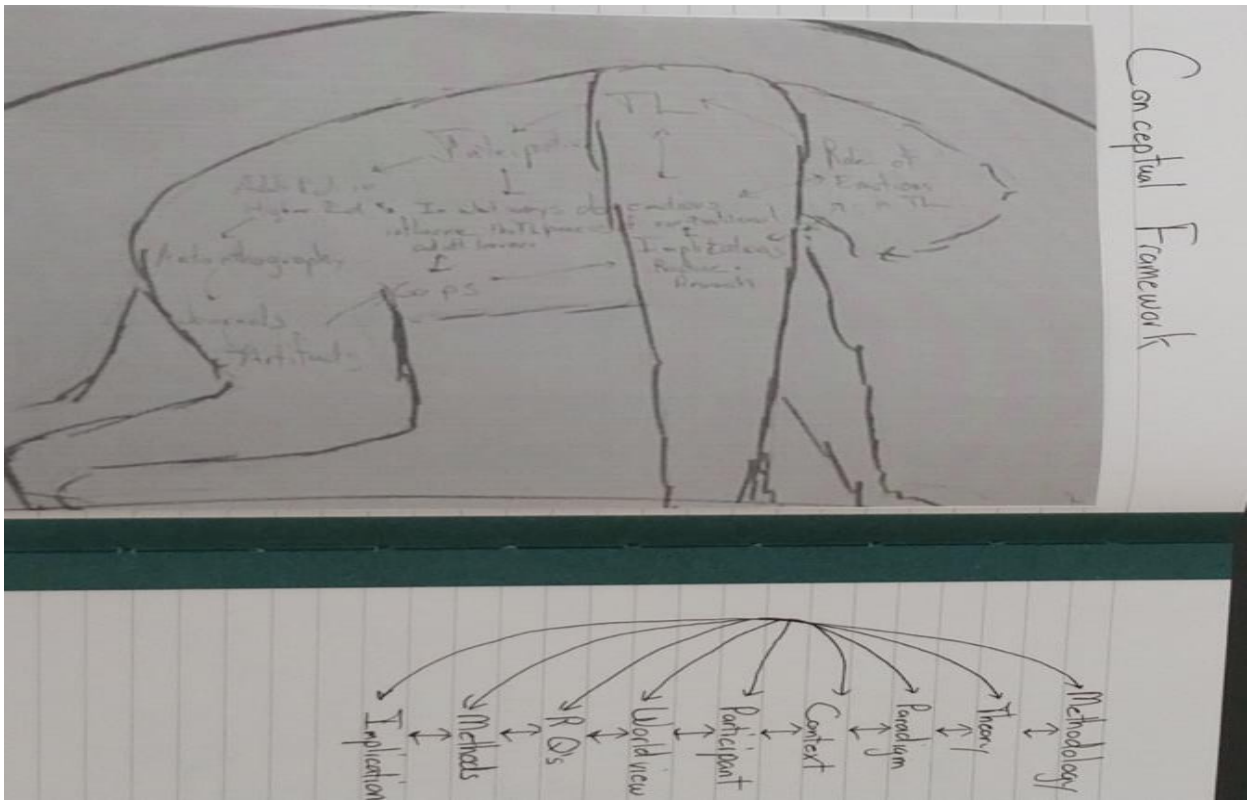

Figure 4.2

Conceptual Framework (11/1/18)

Learning about the values and foundations of qualitative research became vital to interweaving together my academic and personal life. During a self-interview I recalled how my personal perspective began merging with my research focus:

> That is really where, what had been transpiring for the last four or five months, about six months with, my personal life started to become my research and that's when I started focusing. Always had looked at transformative learning and was looking like what I talked about earlier. The emotions that I went through and the transformation and my master's coming out of coaching and coming into academic and things like that. That was that point when, I remember I was sitting in my advisor's office and I said, I think there might be a change in my research.

This engagement into qualitative research brought the important pieces of seeking to understand epistemology, reflexivity, critical thinking, and subjectivity as I continued to question my position as a qualitative researcher. A journal entry expressed my concerns with using autoethnography:

> 8/30/18 – If I truly want to do an autoethnography then the first question I have to ask myself is…Who am I? Why is it important to me to do an autoethnography? Who would this be written for and why would they care? What is it about my story that anyone should care about. Getting to the depth of me…Why did I pick my current topic? What is it about my topic that I care about and who gives a shit about my struggles?

Throughout the personal narrative I shared thoughts, feelings, identities, and experiences that created interest and tension with how I was identifying who I was in relation to others and the world around me. The findings support the use of qualitative research with providing researchers

an interesting and engaging approach to studying the interactions and phenomena of the way people experience the world around them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, Given, 2016).

Theme Two: You Can Only Breathe Because I Let You

The second theme that emerged from the personal narrative was *you can only breathe because I let you.* You can only breathe because I let you as a theme represents the two lives I was living as a doctoral student and the battle that raged between the two. One life I was living in the *light*, I continued as a graduate student going to campus and classes interacting with my friends, peers, and professors. The other I was living a life in the *dark*. My disorienting dilemma occurred in late Fall 2017 with the collapsing of my marriage that spiraled into conflicts with abandonment, financial hardships, alcohol use, and severe emotional distress. I slowly descended into darkness battling depression, shame, and even contemplating taking my life. This theme represents the growing emotional chaos and growing darkness that occurred while I was trying to stay committed to my academic responsibilities. The essence of this theme can be found in one of my first few journal entries:

> 9/2/18 – Varúð (Take warning) (Caution). You lose so many things as you grow. So many want to be young again. I have a hard time with this because as I get older, I recall memories and I only think of what is bad about those memories. I am not sure if this is the building of stories and experiences that we do as we get older in an attempt to keep these images strong in our memories or is the vale pulled over our eyes. Are we just liars? I have specific memories that I will never lose until the day my mind won't let me but as I play back memories, I become overwhelmed with shame, sadness, and regret. Did I always do so wrong or am I so wrapped up in my struggles that the images in my mind will always have these shadows in them.

On the opposite page of the Varúð journal entry (9/2/18) I taped in Figure 4.3, the art work for the album that includes Varúð (Birgisson et al., 2012). The floating ship represents how I was already feeling before I began the journaling process. I felt like a ship lost at sea, helpless, because I was still moving but not sure of any clear direction ahead and felt like I was losing the ability to make decisions and change directions. Varúð is the Icelandic word for take warning or caution and I remember writing this inside the first page with the foreboding feeling to proceed with caution because that the worst was yet to come. The theme *you can only breathe because I let you* represents the fight to live with the expressions of being in an emotionally chaotic place, losing sight of direction, descending into a dark place, and struggling with allowing the dark to consume me. The theme includes the categories of *exposing negative layers of self*, *emotional chaos*, and *contemplation with suicide*.

Exposing Negative Layers of Self. The category *exposing negative layers of self* is about the judgmental self-reflection and self-awareness I was struggling with as a person and doctoral student. This category highlights how this reflective process began to expose negative layers of self that were expressed throughout as being alone, emotionally raw, exposed, embarrassed, angry, and feeling like a failure. The reflection process on emotional dilemmas can bring both positive and negative issues to light. I shared some of this process in a self-interview:

> And then there's good days. There are journal entries that are talking about class, talking about methodologies, subjectivities, and reflexivity. It's like you have these moments, deep thinking, very deep, very metaphorical, and then all of a sudden it turns to anger. It's like I'm in class, I'm writing, but I can't think about the person who won't shut up. The next day I'm going, Oh my God. I'm just pissed at everybody. And then the next day I'm in such a deep internal reflection that it's hard to really make sense.

Figure 4.3

Varúð

Note. Birgisson, J, Holm, G., & Sveinsson, K. (2012). Valtari [Album Cover]. Parlophone Records Limited. https://sigurros.com/

As more layers were exposed, I expressed concerns regarding my future in the program:

> And then on the flip side, trying to save your marriage I guess from the ups and downs we had before we came. As soon as this happened, it just brought everything back to light. I was being asked to drop out of the doctoral program, I'm thinking to myself, man, I'm in a place I want to be and it{dilemma}was threatening it.

It was during these times that I began to shoulder all the blame for everything that was happening in my personal life and this made me questioning my self-worth as a member within an academic field.

> 9/30/18 – It just makes me so sad to see this person who I have lived with for almost five years become someone who I do not even recognize. I take the blame, all the bad is too much to overcome. I am overcome with shame, guilt, fear, and sadness. Is this all my fault? Here I am pretending to be a member of an academic field and a researcher who cares for others and looks to tell others' stories, how am I supposed to be an adult educator and qualitative researcher when I have failed to provide and protect those closest to me. Will I always be fake?

Exposing the negative layers of myself is best captured with the journal entry and sketch shown in Figure 4.4. The journal entry represents that behind everything good there has been pain, and with each image and word I wrote, exposed another layer of negativity and pain.

Emotional Chaos. The category of *emotional chaos* is an important layer within this theme as it represents the chaotic movements between positive and negative emotions that were experienced while trying to balance life and a doctoral program. Emotional chaos represents the state of chaos and emotional burden felt from my disorienting dilemma, and the chaotic movements in and out of my comfort zone. Reflection in this state relates to my specific meaning

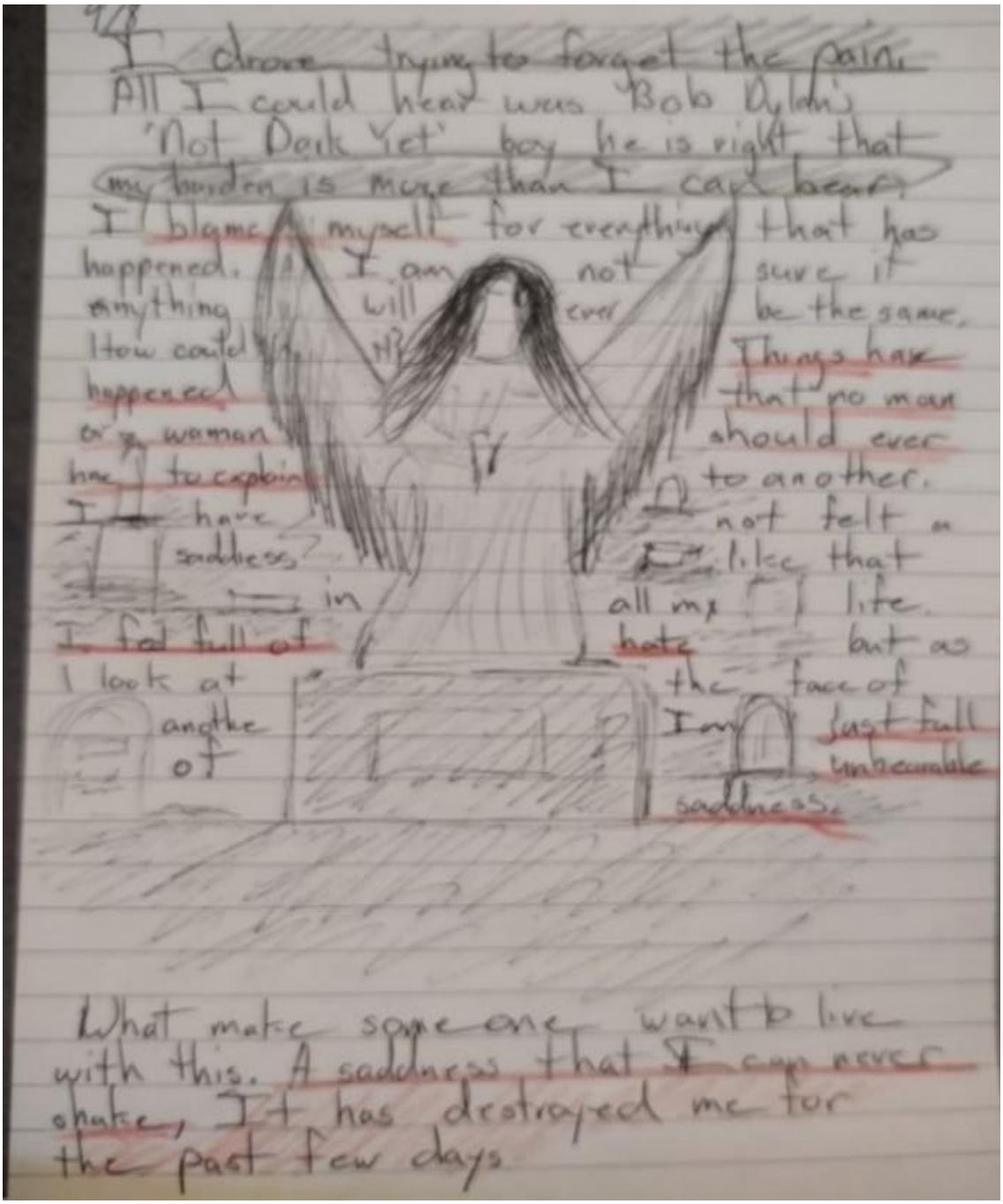

Figure 4.4

Some Kind of Pain (9/8/18)

perspectives that are expressed throughout the findings with terms describing confusion, shame and guilt, and looking to negative coping mechanisms. In a journal entry I describe the growing sense of confusion and shame:

> 8/26/18 – I can't read, I can barely write. I have no silence. The music I play helps provide a cover to the growing sound. What was once silence turned to a low rumble almost like a far-off train shaking the ground. This growing noise is not too particular but it just grows and becomes a presence that shakes my being to its the core. How do I find silence when I am always trying to fight the noise?

During this time of emotional chaos, to manage all that was happening, I began to compartmentalize everything into two different worlds. During a self-interview I detailed how I was attempting to separate my two realities:

> You know, once I put the dress clothes on, once I walked into the deal, it was shut out everything that had been going on. Presented, talk with professors and other people. It was crazy. It's crazy to think of how dualistic I was. So went back to school and I just stayed the path. Two different worlds. Go to school, present myself, do my thing, go to work, work as much as I could and then go home and just be in a really bad place. I would come home and do school stuff and I'd start just dive bombing in my head, writing the journal and just being terrible, just writing bad things.

The journal entries from those emotionally chaotic nights, often laden with musical lyrics, show a descension to a darker place. A journal entry illustrates this descension:

> 9/7/18 – I spend all my nights drinking, so I don't have to spend them thinking, and I know I won't last long this way. Run seven miles, step up, see if I can fly. In my best guess, not too far off. In my chest the rhythm is gone and I set alone in an empty

> apartment writing notes of what I am thinking about, and those few who I haven't let down. I keep running up that hill, step to the edge, see if I can fly, don't care if I live or die.

Emotional chaos is expressed throughout the personal narrative as being lost and directionless where present life is difficult to imagine. A coherent direction and path forward were blurred by confusion and questioning. A journal entry expressed the confusion that I was feeling:

> 10/1/18 – I don't think I should be, maybe I should just leave town and find a place to etch out, a piece that has the least impact in this world. No matter what someone says I will always be haunted by this. I guess the thing to ask is can I use this to develop as an academic or should I just fade away?

I talked in a self-interview about how this chaotic state slowly began to seep into my academic life:

> It was that semester ending, I had a big paper for [class] but we had to talk about our researcher journals, and I was the last person to go. I had taken pictures of my journal and I talked about how I was having a hard time just about life, I'd had a couple different pictures and stuff. It was the first time I've shared stuff like that, but I never really said exactly what kind of hard time I was having, the pictures. Like the inner monster with the words written below it shown in Figure 4.5. The sketch and lyrics below are recognizing a growing inner sense of darkness. It recognizes a monster made of anger, shame, and sadness that tries to eat you alive. The monster is born from deeds done and will disguise itself like a helpless injured bird and lie at all costs to take control of your soul.

As the emotional chaos continued into the winter break, circumstances involving personal life continued to occur and add more stress. I detailed some of the circumstances that were occurring

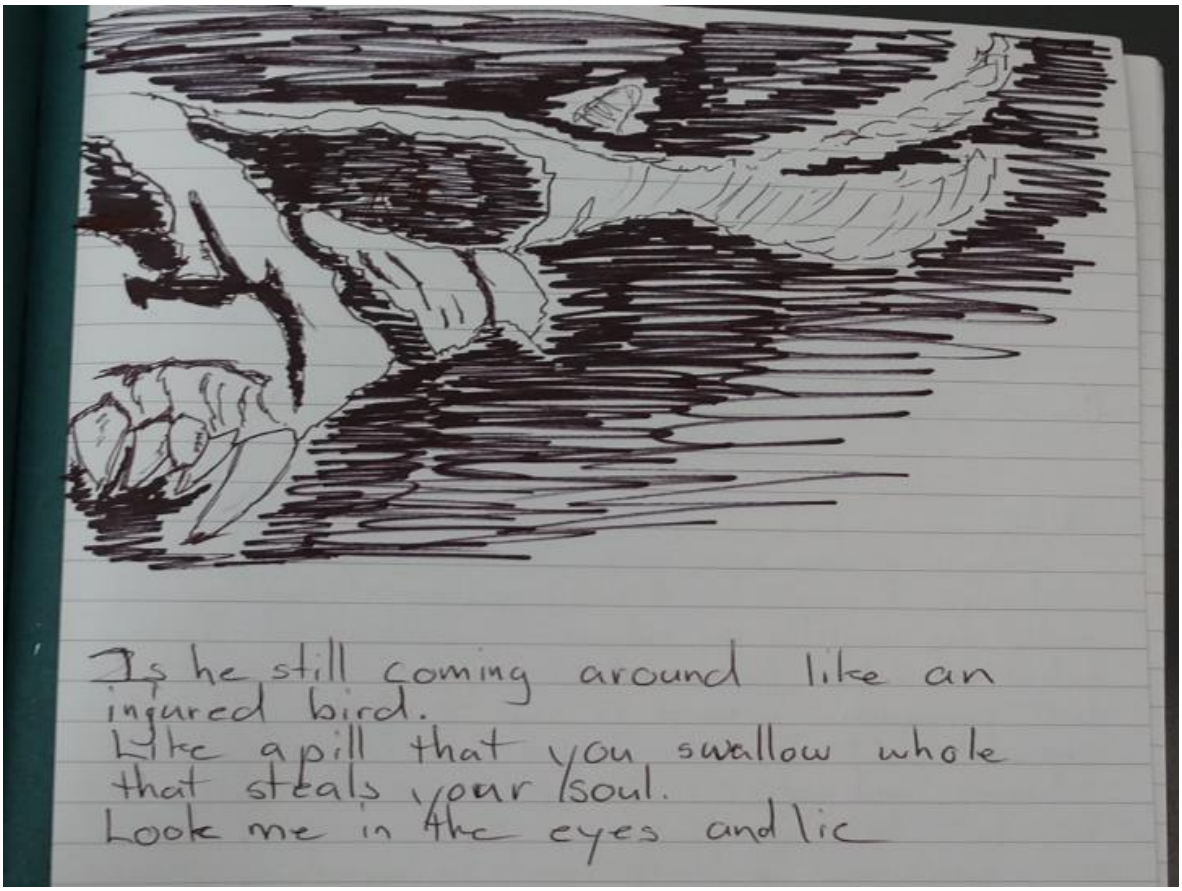

Figure 4.5

Inner Monster (9/12/18)

during this time in a self-interview:

> And it's Thanksgiving time. I'm working a bunch of hours at other job because we're so busy and it's like the day before Thanksgiving, I work a double shift, come home. Sissy [cat] is kind of like, not acting crazy and like, 'Oh, how come you're tired?' I go over to the table and there's the papers, divorce papers. And like, half the kitchen stuff was gone, the TV and couch were left behind. So, you're just kind of looking around like half the stuff's gone and you're just like, 'Okay.' Yeah. So, it's just like I put them down and keep ... I mean, I don't know how I was moving forward. It was weird. However, it's like every day I would travel forward and then I would take steps back.

During the Spring semester of 2019 the state of my emotions become even more chaotic. I discussed in a self-interview the downward spiral that I felt was happening in life:

> Then the spring happened and I was back in classes. I was so self-conscious and it bothered me when people would look at me. I was afraid they could see what was really going on. That's when I started living two lives, one in the *dark* and one in the *light*, it's like at work and school was in the light, but the other life, I mean I was in the dark. I mean talk about getting lost every night, diving into own negative thoughts. Your contemplation of what you're doing, what you're going to be just it's such a dark place, you get in that dark sometimes you can't see, you don't even...Your body stays in motion, but it was so chaotic. That spring was where things got really, really, really bad with my [former spouse] and her dealings and I tried to help but the one word I describe this period is the shame, like the amount of shame and guilt I had. That's all I felt. I think February, January, February, March, all I felt was just shame. I blamed myself for everything even though I had no control over what she was doing and you feel fake

> because you're lying to everyone. I go to class, work, I keep repeating myself. It was a repetition. I'd be in the middle of reading a chapter, and next thing I know I'd just be overcome with just like guilt and just thinking about something that had happen, then trying to reflect on the shit we're talking about in class. You're just going, I'm sitting there thinking, I wonder how much everybody in this room thinks, how big of a joke they think I am. Say that as like, "Oh", imposter syndrome, no, like I'm talking about my life in relation to being a part of this, like my human existence, I don't give a shit if people don't think I belong in the program. Like this was deeper. I had taken every ounce of guilt, everything that was happening. And I was blaming myself. So, I was working full time now and at night just sit on the couch and just drink. Drinking to help shut the voices out, and it never worked. Of course, when I started listening to music, I start writing stuff, get emotional, write more shit in my journal, pass out on couch, wake up the next day and be like, well, that happened.

The findings represent the chaotic movements between positive and negative emotions as I was trying to mentally manage the circumstances that were occurring in my life. This movement was not limited to just my personal life but also in my academic life. The emotional chaos was becoming a deeper crisis and I was losing the ability to reflect and see clearly.

Contemplation with Suicide. The category *contemplation with suicide* sadly recognizes moments during the doctoral journey where negative self-judgement and emotional chaos led to moments of suicidal thoughts. This is expressed throughout the findings with expressions of fear, giving up hope, having no answers, wanting to go to a dark place and be alone. This category holds some of the most important pieces within this second theme, *you can only breathe because I let you.* These experiences represent the stress, struggle, and depression that can weigh down

someone as they navigate through life and graduate school. During a professional conference in Fall 2018, I experienced my first thoughts with the contemplation of giving up. I talked about the events from that night in the following journal entry:

> 10/4/18 – It was Thursday night; I head back to the hotel to change and go for a small drive. At least I was able to just go right in to my room this time. I headed down the beach road and check out the impressive homes. I made it back to the conference hotel and decided to head down to the beach. I walked out and took a few pictures of the sun setting (Figure 4.6) and out of the corner of my eye I see someone waving. I look around and realize they are waving at me. [Friends] are hanging out on the beach and I head over and talk for a few minutes. The sun is setting but the beach is illuminated with this mix of dusk lighting reflecting off the sand. I lied to my [friends], I had not eaten dinner, but I wanted to walk the beach alone in the dark. When you first walk out it is a surreal feeling. The never-ending water line and the crashing waves, the power that you feel from it standing there. The waves push at you with a force of air and salt water mist, and the noise is just, wow. How do you describe the sound an ocean makes on the shoreline? The longer I stand there the deeper I look into the waves and begin to lose myself in the sound. In that moment, the voices and demons start to fade away. If I go further into the waves, will it help silence them for good? Just a few more minutes of struggle for the reward of peace and quiet. I needed to process my relationship with the sound. As I walked, I began to step in the water just to remind myself that it was still there. I turned and kept walking down the shoreline. It was symbolic to walk along the beach allowing the crashing waves to comfort me with what was just in my head in relation to the crashing waves. Oh god forgive my mind!

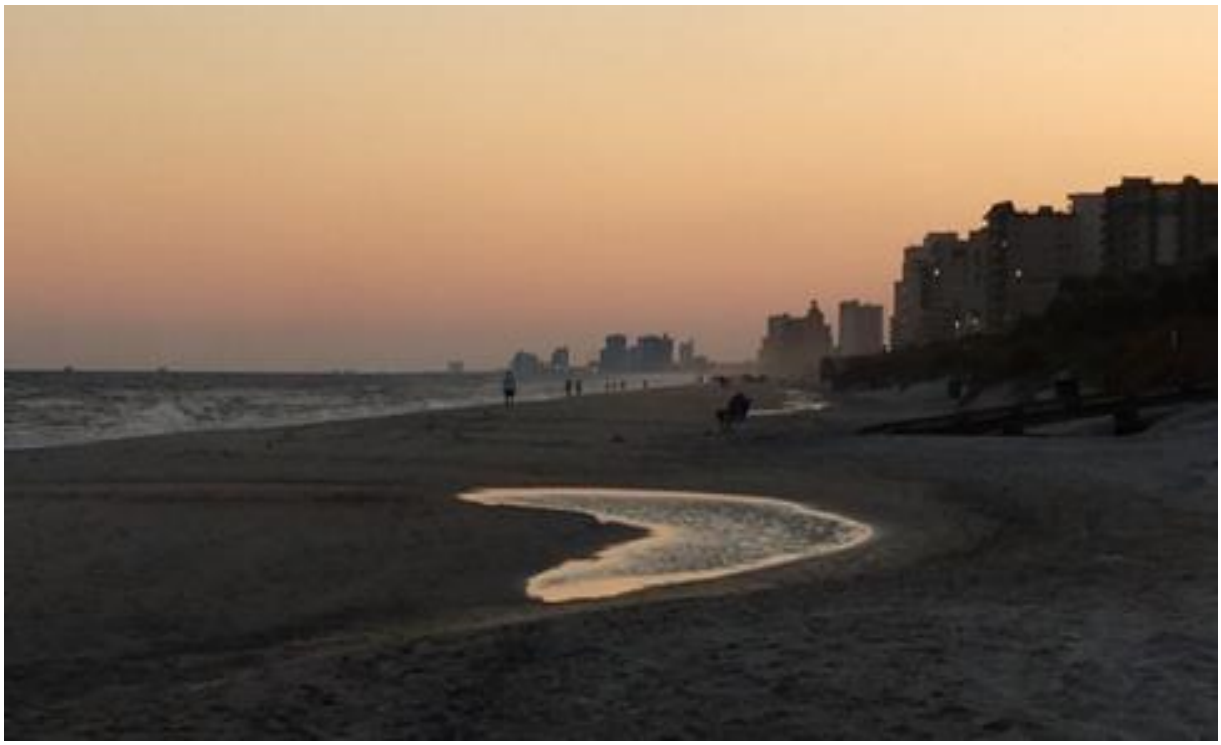

Figure 4.6

Ocean and the Sound (10/4/18)

As time progressed in the doctoral program, my emotionally chaotic state only worsened. The events of the Fall 2018 lead to the Spring 2019 when things started getting really bad with [former spouse] and her dealings. The stress from that was mounting and I felt like I was just "walking depression, just a body in motion." This was my darkest time as a doctoral student and I made plans looking for a way out. In my self-interview I shared the details of that night:

> And it just kept getting bad. I go out to the park one night, I made the decision, I drive out at 3:30, I'm super nervous. So, I just run like normal route. It's like a seven-mile route and half the reason I ran the whole thing, because I want to see who, if there's people out there, but I wasn't quite sure. So, then there's this newer trail goes up in the hill, it's in the woods, just a circular trail, go up there, take a loop that goes up and circles back down. And so, I sat on the back of the truck, had the bag next to me, took the knife out, put it in my pocket and I just sat there and I stare at the opening of this trail. Now this opening goes into thick woods on the hill, or whatever you call it. And the sun setting, probably 10 minutes past after set and that trail is just pitch black, even though you can see everything else, it's just pitch black. And the more I stare at it, it just scares the living shit out me and I just keep staring at it. I sat there for a while. I moved my hand, I hit the knife. And I realized why I was still there, kind of look back at the trail. And there's two things I thought of. First thing was like, man, I would hate for somebody to find me, like how could I do that to somebody, I would just feel terrible when somebody found me. And the second thing was Sissy [cat] was at home with nobody there. And I mean, she relied on me. She had been by herself for about five hours that day. So, I knew she was just dying for me to get home, just sit on the couch with me. So, I just made the decision that tonight's not the night, try tomorrow. That's sad when you think about that, try

> tomorrow, try tomorrow isn't to like, oh, let's try to move on and live the next day. Let's see how we feel about it the next day, about trying again. I'm driving home and I keep thinking about Sissy. I'm thinking about class, the dark. And I thought to myself as dark as it was, I could still see light. I thought about the title of the book [reading for class] embracing the dark side. Before I left, I took a picture (Figure 4.7), and when I got home, I looked at that picture and everything's dark and you see the fading light of the sun. That night I kept staring at the dark and by brushing the knife in my pocket it broke my attention and I looked up at the fading light and it made me think about other things. So that drive home that's what I was thinking about that.

That night was the beginning of a journey in the dark throughout the days, weeks, and months that followed. A few weeks after that night I was faced with another devastating situation. I shared the difficult event:

> A few weeks later Sissy had stopped eating. I'd been taking her to the vet, but there was nothing to do but make her comfortable. A few days later she was in a lot of pain and I took her back in so they could help her pass. She is laying on the table, her eyes are open they just gave her the medicine to calm her down, she's just lying on the table and she just kept staring at me and I kept staring back at her. The picture in my journal (Figure 4.8).

In a self-interview I describe life after that Easter:

> That was Easter, then May came through. I remember pieces. The only thing I remember about that summer is working and I took [class]. What do I say about that summer? I tried to like, I attempted to date again, which was horrific, no self-confidence whatsoever. I wasn't eating. Insomnia, I mean, I'd go to go lay down and my head would just, it's like I would go to lay down and like time would slow down. There were people at work and

Figure 4.7

You Can Stay in the Dark, Just Keep Eyes on the Light (4/3/19)

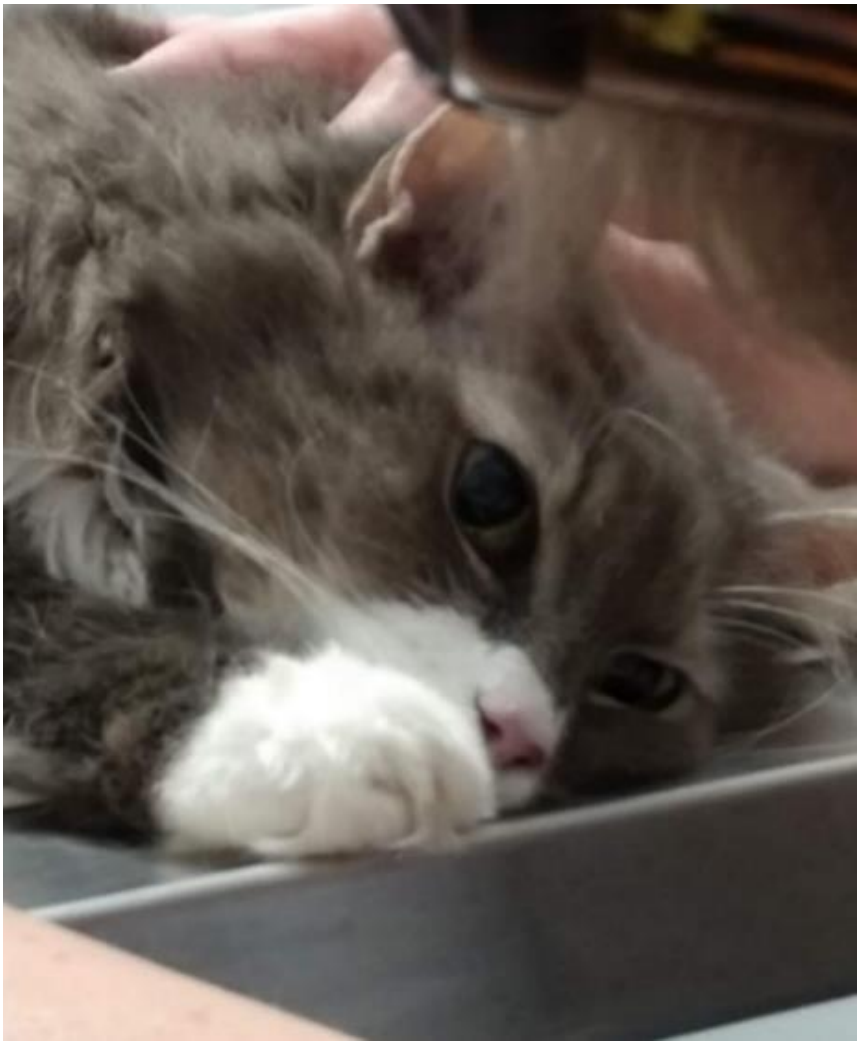

Figure 4.8

Sissy (4/24/19)

> some new people like, ‘Man, you just look so sad.’ I'm like, ‘Oh I'm fine.’ Yeah. Middle of June people be like, are you sleeping? I mean maybe, I just didn't sleep, so much hate, so much anger. And still just riddled with shame. I don't member anything about that class. However, I do, I don't remember anything emotionally, but we had to do observations and I think that class is the only thing that kept me alive that summer because I planned. It was so chaotic for me emotionally and I would read, I didn't care what it was, it's like autoethnography, I'm going to use this. I didn't read any of it. I mean I did, but I didn't. Every day was survival. I would go run as far as I could, see if I could dehydrate myself, stupid stuff, wake up six in the morning, sit on the couch. Because I had just sat there and had a few drinks. Tried to date and that was bad. I mean, how stupid, just the idiotic things you contemplate.

In a journal entry I shared how the summer months were taking a toll on me:

> 7/12/19 – How do I continue? I cannot live like this every day I'm full of hate and pain. I wake up every day full of sadness. I'm sick and tired of being sad, but I don't know anything else in the world.

That next day I experienced an event that ended my thoughts with taking my own life:

> 7/13/19 – I ran out at 7 islands. It’s kind of a thrill running in nothing but storm clouds. I was feeling good and really made it through first 5 miles way to fast. As I climbed the hill to the top trail the thunder began to roll and a few rain drops. As the rain started to pour and lightning strikes in the air, and thunder rumbles I stuck my arms out and yelled ‘come on.’ I wanted to go I wanted to feel the power and rage from above, but it just rained harder. Running in the rain made me think of the song playing earlier. Man on fire, and the rain was a way to remind me to not burn away. But I was ready to go.

This category shows just how dangerous of a path emotional chaos can lead to. My engagement with all these circumstances was causing me a high level of discomfort. I was contemplating ways to avoid and escape this discomfort that reached the point of me planning to take my own life.

Theme Three: Traveling Through the Dark to a Transformative Emergence

The lyrics along with some of my own additions from the song *God's Fault* by Matthew Mayfield (2016) were written in the journal entry below and represent the essence of the third theme that emerged from my personal narrative, *traveling through the dark to a transformative emergence.*

> 9/25/19 –Oh my my my, my sweetest friend, Oh my my my what have you done? Oh no, no, no not this again. Oh no, no, no please God, but you batten down his hatches, and closes your eyes, beg the good Lord for the answers he's never gonna find. And washed out in the shadows, I'm a whisper in the night, confusion, disillusion. I look him in the eye: This ain't God's fault brother, he still toes the line...This ain't God's fault brother I'm afraid this one's mine. Blood, sweat, piss and I'm on the floor again. I swear to God this is it. Evan, Jim, and Jack a routine maintenance kit. So, I batten down my hatches and I close my eyes. Beg the good Lord for the answers I'm never gonna find and washed out in the shadows, you're a whisper in the night, confusion, disillusion as you look me in the eye. This ain't God's fault brother, he still toes the line...this bed is a cage. This bed is a cage and I have to lie in the one that you've made. So, I batten down my hatches and I close my eyes. Beg the good Lord for the answers I'm never gonna find and washed out in the shadows, you're a whisper in the night. Confusion, disillusion as you look me in the eye. This ain't God's fault Adam, I'm afraid this one is mine.

I found these lyrics as inspiration during my battles that had been raging inside me over those past two years. The lyrics represent a conversation between the two different voices in my head. 'You' and 'I' represent the two separate lives that I had been living during my time as a doctoral student. The two lives had been battling, one to survive and one to die, and now they are recognizing one another and the pain they have caused. They are acknowledging this pain and how they cannot continue down this road. This theme recognizes that embracing the negative is needed to travel through the dark in hopes of bringing extremely difficult feelings and experiences to the light, in hopes of learning and transforming from them. Interwoven throughout the experiences shared in the previous themes thus far are pieces that represent traveling through the dark and this theme represents the need to embrace the chaos and negative experiences to better understand and transform from them. The theme includes the categories of embracing the dark side of life and connection to transformative learning.

Embracing the Dark Side of Life. The category *embracing the dark side of life* is at the core of this theme and found throughout the personal narrative. Embracing the dark of life is described as fully engaging in the fear, pain, distress, or confusion that is occurring throughout my experiences. Embracing the dark side of life is expressed throughout the personal narrative with phrases and ideas that include blending of two lives, finding inspiration and light in the darkest of times, and keeping eyes on the light. One of the first expressions of embracing the dark side of life occurred a few days after the conference and the contemplations with my life on the beach. The journal entry (Figure 4.9) gives affirmation to my decision and the choice I made to engage the chaos to keep moving forward.

The single most important artifact throughout my story is the sunset picture presented earlier in Figure 4.7 (p. 170). The picture represents the place I chose to die and the deep feelings

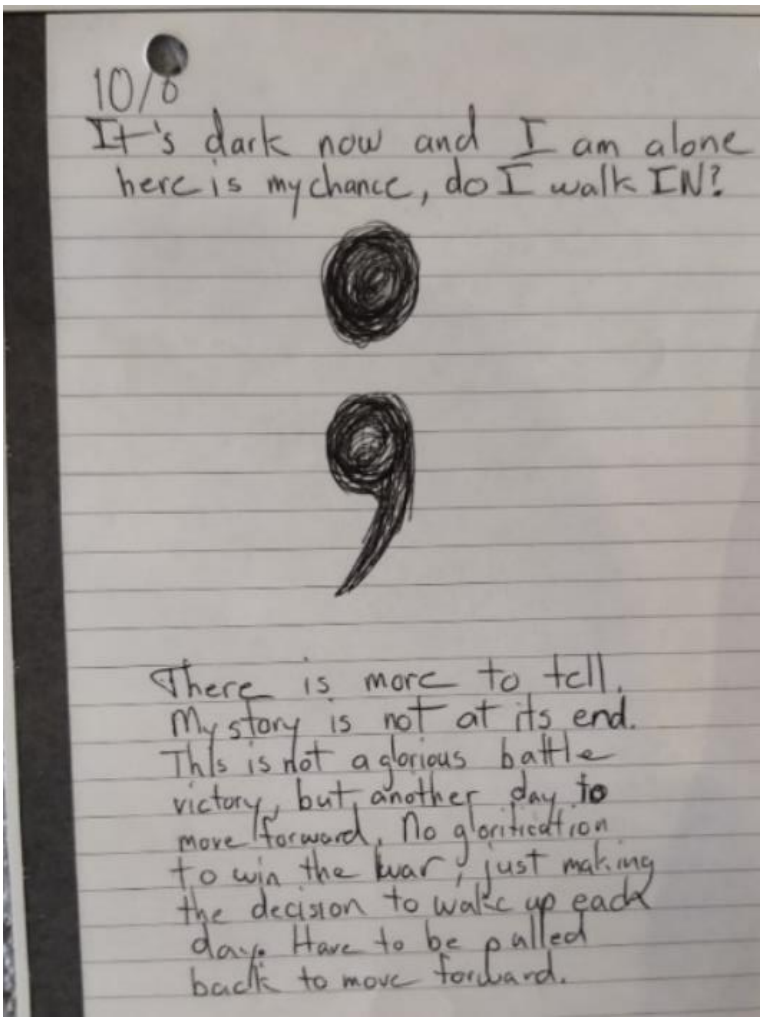

Figure 4.9

More to the Story (10/6/18)

of shame and sadness that came with it; however, it also represents a sign of hope that developed that night. In a self-interview I reflected back on my decision that night:

> And I don't know if that's what I had been doing, but that was the first time I decided that's what it was going to be, and it became my motto. But that night that's when that became my motto: you can stay in the dark, just keep your eyes on the light. And I don't know if that's what I had been doing, but that was the first time I decided that's what it was going to be.

A few days later I was working on a conference proposal that was due for class and created a PowerPoint to share my proposal for my class presentation. A few weeks later in class in front of all my colleagues, friends, and professor I presented my second wave positive psychology piece with the picture from that night as the last slide. I did not explain to them the significance of that picture was then, but it was a big first step in sharing that night. The second time I would attempt to share was in the summer in [course] for a group presentation on autoethnography and for my part I was going include and explain the purpose of the photo. A journal entry shares the nervousness that I had leading up to that moment and what the picture actually meant:

> 7/23/19 – My section of the presentation, well here we go. I will be preparing and discussing the true core of why we are here and my god I don’t think I can get through it, but I have to. I am going to make it through this journey, I have to be able to share so that I can start and be able to share with committee members and others.

An important piece to embracing the dark side was expressed with coming to terms with death and my own mortality. Near the end of August, I receive the phone call that my grandfather passed away after a long battle and the two days before he passed my mom called so that I could have the chance to say my final words to him. In a journal entry I share the details from that

phone call:

> 8/29/19 – I was not sad but more relieved, he was in no more pain. Sunday night the 25th I talked to Grandma and she asked if I hand anything to say to him that I didn't want her to hear. I did and my mom put the phone to his ear so I could talk. That's between me and him.

In his final days he could not speak or set up, but he could listen. In that moment talking to him was in a way a chance to say what I needed to for myself. In a self-interview I shared how driving the six hours back home I was able to reflect on that moment. I thought about writing my own obituary and how I got a chance to tell my grandfather what I had done and that was the moment when I told myself that, "I'm done. I'm not going to do it. I have got to find a different answer." I was just very, very surreal feeling.

The process of embracing the dark side was not just the simple acceptance of dark thoughts and experiences but is expressed through an arduous questioning of deep self-awareness and self-reflection. This arduous process of engaging the dark side is expressed throughout several journal entries:

> 9/13/19 –The dark is a lonely place.
>
> 9/22/19 – I want to return to the dark. An island, a place, a path of one. If there is light even in the dark then why not go back. It is just that I let myself get happy and it always turns bad. As bad as last year was, I want to go back. It sounds bad but I don't really want to drag anyone else in.

Embracing the dark side of life is the choice that I made to confront and embrace all that was happening with me and confront the defensive mechanisms that were clouding my awareness. Saying that I could stay in the dark but I had to keep my eyes on the light was the recognition

that I allowed myself to go to deep, and that I needed to embrace everything that was happening if I was going to move forward.

Connection to Transformative Learning. As a category, *connection to transformative learning* is a continuation with embracing the dark side in hopes of a transformative emergence. The essence of this category is found in the poem by Mark Strand's (1994) Dark Harbor #10 that was first introduced in a final paper for [course] in the Fall 2019. The poem reads:

> *It is a dreadful cry that rises up,*
> *Hoping to be heard, that comes to you*
> *As you wake, so your day will be spent*
>
> *In the futile correction of a distant longing.*
> *All those voices calling from the depths of elsewhere,*
> *From the abyss of an August night, from the misery*
>
> *Of a northern winter, from a ship going down in the Baltic,*
> *From heartache, from wherever you wish, calling to be saved.*
> *And you have no choice but to follow their prompting,*
>
> *Saving something of that sound, urging the harsh syllables*
> *Of disaster into music. You stare out the window,*
> *Watching the build-up of clouds, and the wind whipping*
>
> *The branches of a willow, sending rain of leaves*
> *To the ground. How do you turn pain*
> *Into its own memorial, how do you write it down,*
>
> *Turning it into itself as witnessed*
> *Through pleasure, so it can be known, even loved,*
> *As it lives in what it could not be.* (Strand, 1994, p. 12)

Depending on my mood or required class readings, I often grabbed a book on the way out of the door to my second job to read during my breaks. One day I took with me a book of poetry that consisted of numerous works from various authors and styles. During my lunch break, I opened the book to the *paper towel* bookmark that I made from the previous reading. On that specific day, I came across a small section chosen from Mark Strand's (1994) Dark Harbor #10, and with

my head down I read it again and again, not noticing at first a few tears running down my face. The past year had been full of so much pain and sadness, and this poem just struck me in a way and showed me a glimpse of light along a dark path. Strand's poem made me think about how to write about my pain and turn my struggles into a proper academic memorial. This category is expressed by the engagement and connections I was making with transformative learning. I talked about how I began making connections between my current struggles with transformative learning research:

> Had one class that was really, really demanding. That's when I started looking at the emotions and transformative learning. That's where I really, with this research, I started looking at it and that's where the whole autoethnography came from. I think one thing I was doing is I was, I wasn't going to class for therapy. I was looking through the literature, through all the things we were looking at. So it was in that space, in those classrooms, in the office that I was doing all this really, when I was at home is when things would get just so bad emotionally and all these different things going on. The journal was such a thing because I'd be taping in pictures and taping in lyrics and different things and drawing and it was things that I couldn't say or talk about there. That became an avenue for me to express that.

Throughout the personal narrative the connection to transformative learning were highlighted with experiences of critical self-reflection, critical discourse, and frustration with recognition. These engagements of critical self-reflection and discourse were often difficult and strenuous encounters throughout the entire transformative journey. I expressed in journal entries the strenuous and important engagements with critical reflection and discourse:

> 10/6/19 – Well it might be time to go. Why do you put yourself through all of this, we may never know? But you asked a while back to be on the path alone, I think we have it. There is no reason to be sad anymore, if you don't let anyone in, well no sadness. This time a year ago you felt this, remember the drive home? The next four months were dark but you hurt no one. You longed for no one, just let it be. Find out who you are. You are a smoke screen. Quick sarcasms and jokes, serious to weird and out of left field, most people won't get close. Every conversation is methodical and serves a purpose.
>
> 1/9/21 – Just had a meeting with [faculty], things seem so in the light now. If I am going to use [theory] is going to be a way that strips down at my subjectivity. They had a complaint about my paper which is so true. They felt that I was writing from an outsider's perspective. I did not go deep enough or critically.

I was expressing frustration with the transformative learning process during this time, especially with stage of recognition of one's discontent. I expressed frustration in journal entries with some of my first few attempts at sharing my struggles with others who had similar experiences or thoughts and not receiving the same in return:

> 9/20/19 – We all met for a night out. I was excited for a calm and low night. Within five minutes I got anxious, because we were going deep. They just ask question after question and then it turns to me. I did not want a therapy session. There were questions that I did not want and things I didn't want to hear. I was so uncomfortable.
>
> 9/22/19 – Look at the other night. I feel like I am, no I refuse to move past Mezirow's recognition of discontent. You want critical reflection; all I think about is returning to the dark. I tried last night and it did not suit me.

Embracing the dark side first appeared during Spring 2019 but it wasn't till the Fall 2019 that the merging of dark side and transformative learning began to blossom through academic discovery. At a professional conference after my presentation, I had an important conversation with a transformative learning scholar that gave me inspiration on how to continue and advance my research. In the self-interview I discussed the importance of this conversation:

> [Scholar] and I spoke after their presentation and they were great. They mentioned how I should really think about looking at non-western perspectives within the dark side for help. They mentioned how I should really be thinking about discussing other perspectives within the dark side and suggested that I look at a certain chapter out of a Transformative Learning handbook for guidance. I thanked them for their advice and as I walked away I felt like I finally found a way to blend that light and the dark academically. Keeping them separated caused a great deal of damage I did to myself and I couldn't keep them separated anymore. I felt like a member of something again. And the experience from that [conference], I just felt in rhythm and I wasn't afraid to discuss anything anymore. Because I went through those battles and so I was ready to talk about it from a research perspective.

A journal entry gives a glimpse of the continued process of traveling through the dark to a transformative emergence:

> 5/23/20 – I have been focused on everyone else for so long that I have kept my own progress in the dark. I don't feel like this has been bad because helping [peers and friends] in their journeys has been so important for me. It has helped me know that I am still important and with some healing, my scars are my greatest attributes. I am in love

with my dark side metaphors but for so long I have only used them on others. Well, I have seen a flash of light.

Traveling through the dark to a transformative emergence represents a messy and difficult journey, but one that can result in the emergence of new meaning and discovery. Traveling through the dark is the continued effort to better understand experiences, emotions, and behaviors.

Theme Four: Discovering Compassion

The fourth theme that emerged from the personal narrative is *discovering compassion.* This theme is embodied in the Figure 4.10 that was the backdrop for a new slide I created to discuss suffering and compassion during a dark side presentation for a professional conference in the Spring 2020. This discussion resulted in two individuals openly questioning certain pieces of the presentation. Fortunately, the questions and conversations I had in previous conferences prepared me for these interactions, and it only reassured me of the strength and importance of compassion and suffering. Figure 4.10 illustrates the essence of this theme as when someone feels they are in a dark and difficult place, the engagement of compassion, shared suffering, and aesthetic appreciation can open up opportunities to discover new sources of light. I expressed in a self-interview the meaning of the picture and how it represented my perspective:

> It makes me feel strong, it made me, gave me strength, strength as a traveler of the dark. And in the darkest of dark... If you've lost the light and the darkest of dark, you can, if you just keep your eyes or yourself open to it, something can give you light, a flash of light. It could be a conversation with a person. It could be a poem. It could be a new friendship. It can be enough as something you come across in a song that gives you some, a source of light to help guide you. And once you find those lights, for me, no matter how

Figure 4.10

Darkness to Light (1/30/29)

> small a light or how quick of a flash, helps me develop the eyes for more light. This happened for me because it gave me some light and next thing you know my eyes; they can see light again.

This theme includes the categories of *compassion through shared suffering* and *aesthetic appreciation*. The theme and categories offer findings to how I was continually engaging emotions and navigating the transformative learning process through my own personal and academic experiences.

Compassion Through Shared Suffering. The category of *Compassion through shared suffering* is important for this theme because it highlights the two important aspects of developing compassion and that suffering is ok. Throughout the personal narrative the category was expressed through the aspects of relationship building, giving and getting respect, giving others healthy space, understanding others life situations, compassion found in sharing struggles, suffering is ok, sharing vulnerabilities and triumphs. At a professional conference in Fall 2019, two interactions would be highly influential in the discovery and engagement of compassion through shared suffering:

> The [scholar] didn't feed their questions to me, but they kind of made a critical comment. I was like oh man, but I think I answered it well. As we got done there were about four people were in line, one of them was crying. You're like "oh no." But they were so great because when you get in that moment, somebody shares something with you. If you're in a place for it, they just wanted to share back to me what they had been going through. Loss of a father, their own struggles. And that is, I think one of the awesome things was that was part of my presentation was that shared suffering was a good thing.

Shortly after the presentation I had a conversation with a member of field whom I never met before, and they wanted to discuss my use of compassion in my presentation:

> 10/10/19 – They wanted to know how to develop compassion while in the dark. They brought up a great point about me using langue such as using the term ‘make sense’ and why do you need to make sense of it. I agreed that you don’t need to make sense, at least don’t get caught up in wording to make sense of it.

The category of *compassion through shared suffering* is important because if highlights the importance of relationship building, compassion found in sharing struggles, and sharing vulnerabilities and triumphs. Sharing my suffering and vulnerabilities was not an easy process in the beginning. A journal entry illustrates some of the early struggles I had with sharing my experiences:

> 8/24/19 – Coffee with [friend]. We met at coffee shop and began going over the research. We go on for an hour and I start talking about my research and my picture (Figure 4.7). They asked why it’s an artifact and I am building up to it, I notice their eyes and hand covering their face, I show it and explain it. They sat back in chair and listened and was so understanding but I could see something more. I am struck with instant regret.

The interaction above shows my first attempts to being vulnerable with my suffering. More importantly it illuminates that compassion through shared suffering is not a quick and easy process but is a gradual building of trust and respect. Two journal entries show how this process of sharing suffering and compassion:

> 10/16/19 – I met [friend] who was interested in my research. They set down and asked how can I help? I just explained certain areas of my research and so we just began

talking. They shared about their loss due to suicide. I feel their pain and an enormous sense of guilt from my own past and thoughts.

10/17/19 – We set in room in library for another three hours. They talked in such detail about the past three months. I just listened, they were so vulnerable in telling their experiences that it gave me a chance to, it was just the sharing in that moment. It was a gateway and I felt like I was walking with them in that dark moment and given a chance to see their light.

I discussed how it was not just one interaction or friendship that allowed for the discovery of compassion, but the entire culture and community in the Fall 2019 that made it possible:

I walk into my first class and bunch of new faces. And I got a chance to meet new people and be with old friends that were going to become some of my best friends and share time and experience them. And those friendships made me realize that it, made me realize what it was like to feel compassion for difference, it made me feel love, being exact opposites but having love from a different...just a general love. That along with me finally going, this is what I want to study. This is how I want to look at it. That embracing the dark side book that kept me going. I found my thing here's how you do this. Here's how you do that. Why not look at the good and the negative at the same time? Why not really dive into the negative? It's okay, as long as you have a safety net. Yeah, that was my whole thing. And with the relationships that developed, friendships that developed from the end of the summer to the fall, really let me just turn myself inward and look at, I had been living two lives and that fall really represents is when the lives came back together is when I became my research. My research became me. To share with somebody, to tell somebody you wrote letters to people. I was planning on taking my life

and I was just going to write these notes to these people. If you have a good friend, it's a very great thing to hear their reaction to that.

Compassion through shared suffering highlights the need to engage and understand that suffering is ok and that compassion starts from within and has the ability to connect with others. Exploring suffering and compassion are important for healing, reflection, and emotional awareness.

Aesthetic Appreciation. The category *aesthetic appreciation* represents the appreciation or finding inspiration in the beauty of life. This category is important because it is about finding something positive or beautiful in the darkest of times. Appreciating the beauty of life represents that when times are at their worst and when all direction is lost, I was still able to find beauty in the chaos. Aesthetic appreciation and inspiration have been shared throughout the findings so far in this chapter. This is represented by the pictures, drawings, lyrics, and poems that I used to illuminate the inner story of my emotional and academic experiences. Figures 4.6 (p. 167) and 4.7 (p. 170) were taken during the nights that suicide was contemplated and planned, and even in those dark moments the images demonstrate beauty in the darkest of times. As these moments share some of my most chaotic experiences, they also capture the appreciation for the little things in life:

> 10/5/18 – I'm on the road. Further down the road I saw a farmer's general store. I pulled in walked to the barn build, on the way in walked under the covered porch. I touched pumpkins and corn stalks. So many jars of vegetable and pickles, fresh meat, I love this place. Got a jar of honey and this stop made me feel good. I saw the sign and knew I had to stop, Darlington Motor Speedway. I think the best part is the secondary highway I took, two lanes. Just gave an amazing view to the heart of South Carolina. Just beautiful sky, clouds, fields, and trees. Makes you enjoy life. Ashville was kind of a nightmare

with traffic but the sun was crossing the mountains. This drive was exactly what I needed.

9/15/18 – I woke up today and jumped to cleaning the apartment. I feel so good after the apartment is clean, the radio is on, and it's time to read. There is something about this apartment that the sunlight just creates such a great space to be in.

10/10/19 – I loved the cocktail bar and being able to work on my paper, and after walking down to the arch (Figure 4.11). It was so cool and made me feel, well I don't know, in awe.

Aesthetic appreciation represents finding beauty and inspiration in the dark and chaos. These experiences included places, events, nature, music, film, and so on, but more importantly they became artifacts that hold important emotions, memories, and reflections.

Confirmation from Peers

This section of the dissertation is a continuation of research findings and confirmations from two peer interviews. The inclusion of this type of information was important to this study because its added context, confirmation, and contrast to the autoethnographer's personal narrative. Familiarity with the autoethnographer's personal narrative added important layers of context, and the external perspectives offered important pieces to deepen the experiences being told in the personal narrative. The section begins with brief narrative introductions of the two peers to better understand how each participant was a friend to the autoethnographer and how they were uniquely positioned to add perspectives to the autoethnographer's personal narrative. Findings from the interviews are presented in relation to the major findings of the personal narrative.

Figure 4.11

Arch

Narrative Introductions of the Study Participants

Joe. Joe was a peer of the researcher, who had been a doctoral student at the same university during the same period, Fall 2017 through Spring 2021. Joe had an established rapport and knowledge of the researcher's emotional experiences as a doctoral student. Joe was from a different program but had taken classes with Adam. Joe was present during the courses where Adam made his first disclosures of the emotional struggles he had been experiencing. As the friendship developed, Adam and Joe shared their struggles with each other. This gave Joe full disclosure of Adam's journey over the past four years.

Jay. Jay was a peer of the researcher, who had been a doctoral student at the same university during the same period, Fall 2017 through Spring 2021. Jay had an established rapport and knowledge of the Adam's emotional experiences as a doctoral student and was from the same program as Adam. Jay was one of the few people aware of the circumstances surrounding Adam's disorienting dilemma and the events that followed. Jay remained a close friend over the next four years sharing in personal and academic experiences.

Confirmation of Themes

The first theme that emerged from the personal narrative was *academic discovery and responsibilities.* The theme includes the categories of love and dedication to adult learning, professional development and engagement, and interest in qualitative research. As a theme, academic discovery and responsibilities, addresses the constant academic engagements that were maintained throughout the highs and lows of the doctoral journey. These experiences were detailed throughout with discussions on academic responsibilities, building an academic community with peers and scholars, and critically questioning research and practice throughout the field. Joe confirmed the importance of academic community through the of building rapport

and classroom engagement as they detailed their growing experiences with Adam. Joe was an outsider to the program in the Summer of 2018 when they first met Adam:

> We also took a [course] together that same summer. That was an online class, and because I had known Adam face to face from the other class that summer, we did, I think a couple of times maybe get into breakout rooms and things together. We had a rapport, so that was good. Again, we didn't really interact much, but we knew each other…the next summer would have been a qualitative research course. In that class, Adam and I really got to hang out quite a bit. We were in groups together. We partnered up together for some activities in class. We had to do a large field project together, and mind you, over the course of a very, very short summer term, a very compressed timeline. We saw each other a lot within a short span of time, so a very concentrated span of time. I remember you and I just, we gradually would give each other grief in class and just pick on each other. We did get to talk quite a bit and started to really dig into each other's research and get to know more about each other personally. That was fun. Spent many, many times at the [observation location] where we were doing our field project, so that was fun.

From their outsider perspectives both Jay and Joe acknowledged Adam's academic commitments and responsibilities. Jay acknowledged the dedication and commitment that Adam for adult learning, "You're super passionate about classes and learning and writing and research and publication and presenting. You push yourself in all those areas." Joe shared similar thoughts on the dedication that they saw in Adam with handling the various responsibilities throughout the doctoral journey:

> Just to me, the thing that really has jumped out at me is just how much you work. The thing that's always, it stresses me out, and I'm not you, is the fact that you had to juggle different responsibilities. To juggle working different jobs and, let's face it, a PhD is a job in its own. Having to juggle those responsibilities has been tricky for you, I know.

Joe continued to expresses similar thoughts on the importance of critically questioning research and practice throughout the field. Joe recognized Adam's interest and commitment to qualitative research and sharing that with other in his academic community:

> Let me just say first, you seemed to be the most comfortable with your research of anybody in the class. By that, you were able to give advice and insight to people as they were talking about their own research and me in particular, you really got me on to critical theory, so that was very helpful.

The second theme that emerged from the personal narrative was *you can only breathe because I let you.* You can only breathe because I let you as a theme represents the two lives I was living as a doctoral student. One life was in the *light,* where I continued as a graduate student going to campus and classes interacting with my friends, peers, and professors. The other life was in the *dark,* that was full of emotional chaos and struggle. Jay acknowledged how the felt Adam was keeping space and distance from them, and trying to keep things buried:

> Yeah. You started talking to me again that semester. Not in a bad way, but just you had to get your distance because you were going through so much. I remember you got super into positive psych. And then it was like you were going through all that divorce stuff. But you didn't say a lot about it until it was kind of almost done. I feel like I would get bits and pieces. Because I think you kept that pretty well buried. That part of it. But I do

> remember talking to you about it and wanting you to go talk to someone. I saw like red flags throughout it, but I didn't know that it was potentially that bad.

Joe discussed that during the Summer 2019 class that they felt like Adam was beginning to share more but they were not fully aware of the circumstances to what Adam was going through. “I felt like, honestly, I just felt like you were trusting me with more information. I didn't get, at the moment, I didn't really think much of it. I probably wasn't very observant.”

The third theme, *traveling through the dark to a transformative emergence*, represents my efforts to blend together the two lives I had been living and brining focus to my experiences to better understand and transform from them. The fourth theme, *discovering compassion*, details an important piece to the continued growth of my transformative learning process. I was making efforts to turn my personal struggles into academic work. Jay and Joe were outsiders because they only knew of my struggles from what I shared with them. As I began pulling more of my story into academic research both would become companions in my process of turning difficulties into triumphs. Jay and I partnered up in the Fall 2020 to present research at a professional conference with a special focus on the understanding of emotions and feelings throughout the graduate school journey. We shared our stories to explore how the process can help individuals engage in meaning making during life-event crisis and expand one’s capacity to share their own story. Joe recalled an important moment in class when Adam shared his recent research:

> Now, I do remember, and this is going to be one of the moments I think back on years later when I think about my PhD program. That is that when you were presenting, it was one of the last class sessions we had, and you were presenting on your research. People were just around, just eating and laughing and having side conversations and just being

> disrespectful. Then you get to a point in your presentation where you shared the sunset slide (Figure 4.7, p. 170). Where people finally, there was somebody eating and they just froze. You were talking about your struggle with depression and the moment that summer, not weeks earlier, where you had contemplated, and you shared this openly, contemplated taking your own life. I remember thinking, "Oh, my God." My wife and I, we had just, my first semester of my doc program, had buried her little brother, who had committed suicide and was in his early twenties. Oh my god my brother in law who was in his early twenties had just completed suicide I thought, "Wow. That's going to get people's attention." Sure enough, people had stopped having side conversations and finally paid attention. I thought, you have somebody who's being raw and vulnerable, and sharing most impactful research.

Both Jay and Joe both expressed the importance of showing respect, understanding another's life situations, building compassion through sharing in each other's struggles, and sharing each other's vulnerabilities and triumphs. The inclusion of Jay and Joe's perspectives was important because every small piece added confirmation and layers of context to deepen the experiences being told from the autoethnographer's personal narrative.

Chapter Summary

This chapter included a review of the study's data collection and analysis followed by a brief re-introduction of the autoethnographer/participant of the study. The introduction provided an overview of the subjectivity statement given in Chapter Three, important aspects leading up to the start of the doctoral program, and events that occurred during Fall 2017. This provided a deeper understanding of the autoethnographer's culture as they entered the doctoral environment. Next, the main themes of the study were introduced. The four themes included academic

discovery and responsibilities, you can only breathe because I let you, traveling through the dark to a transformative emergence, and discovering compassion. Academic discovery and responsibilities represent the love and excitement brought into the doctoral program and the continued commitment to learning, research, and practice. Categories included love and dedication to adult learning, professional development and engagement, and interest in qualitative research. You can only breathe because I let you as a theme represents growing emotional chaos and growing darkness that occurred while I was trying to stay committed to my academic responsibilities. Categories included emotional chaos, exposing negative layers of self, and contemplation with suicide. Traveling through the dark to a transformative emergence represents navigation through extremely difficult feelings and experiences in hopes of learning and transforming from them. Categories included embracing the dark side of life and connection to transformative learning. The last theme, discovering compassion represents how during dark and difficult times the engagement of compassion, shared suffering, and aesthetic appreciation can open up opportunities to discovery and transformation. Categories in this theme included compassion through shared suffering and aesthetic appreciation. Then, the chapter provided examples of each of the four themes and categories. Lastly, findings from the peer interviews were given to provide further context and confirmation with the autoethnographer's personal narrative findings.

Chapter Five will provide discussions on the research findings related to the three research questions as well as implications for practice and future research. Lastly, this chapter will close with a conclusion.

Chapter Five

Discussion, Implications, and Conclusions

This doctoral dissertation focused on having a better understanding of how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience. Conducting this autoethnography provided me the avenue to illustrate my personal experiences as the narrative to better understand my cultural context, provide intimate and explicit insider knowledge to personal and cultural experiences, and connect with others. The final chapter of this doctoral dissertation begins with a summary of the study followed by discussions on the research findings related to the three research questions. Next, the chapter discusses study implications for practice and future research. Lastly, this chapter ends with a conclusion of the study.

Summary of the Study

Adult learning in graduate education presents complex environments full of individuals with complex backgrounds, experiences, emotions, and cognitive beliefs (Cranton, 2016; Hegarty, 2013; Hubball et al., 2010; Kasworm, 2008; Kasworm & Bowles, 2012). Due to the various elements and factors of adults learning in higher education, researchers and adult educators have looked to Transformative Learning Theory to provide a process for adult learners to examine and question previous experiences, assumptions, and understandings concerning themselves and the world around them as they encounter new learning experiences (Mezirow, 2000). This process of examining previous experiences places the emotional experiences of learners as a key issue within the learning process (Dirkx, 2012). The problem is that there has been a lack of research with focus on the difficulty of the transformative learning journey. Currently, there is a lack of scholarly research concerning the difficulties and contradictions on

the factors that make an individual decide to engage in the critical reflection process that leads to a transformative experience, or the emotional depth individuals need to make meaning with their disorienting dilemmas. Chapter One provided a background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, and research questions to be answered. Chapter Two provided a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to this study to aid the reader in understanding the complexities of adult learning, Transformative Learning Theory, and emotions within the landscape of adult graduate education.

As a reminder, the purpose of this autoethnographic dissertation was to have a better understanding of how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience at an R1 institution in the southeastern region of the United States. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How does the cultural context of a doctoral student shape the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience in graduate education?
2. How does the doctoral student engage emotions resulting from a disorienting dilemma?
3. In what ways does the doctoral student navigate the transformative learning process while attending a doctoral program?

This study's focus was on the lived experiences and cultural context of a doctoral student during the period of late Fall 2017 through Spring 2021 of their doctoral studies at an R1 institution using Transformative Learning Theory. Based on this epistemological stance, subjectivism was the appropriate epistemological paradigm because it seeks to understand meaning behind action, knowledge, interests, purposes, and the values of individuals (Schwandt, 1994). For this study's theoretical framework, I utilized an interpretivist perspective and the critical perspective of

Transformative Learning Theory to guide this research. Interpretive researchers believe that the social world is constructed by people, and the research seeks to investigate how people make sense out of the world (Scotland, 2012). An interpretive perspective helped focus on the in-depth examination of emotions during the transformative learning process, build more insight and understandings of behavior, and look beyond observable and measurable reality to interpret and explain actions from the participant's perspective (Scotland, 2012). The type of research within this study is not concerned with cause and effect, but in understanding and discovery (Cranton & Merriam, 2015). As a critical perspective, Transformative Learning Theory's essential dimension is the explicit recognition of the foundational process involving critical assessment of epistemic assumptions (Dirkx et al., 2006). It is this critical perspective of Transformative Learning Theory that was important for this study in that it is grounded in looking at past experiences to change frames of reference that are more inclusive, differentiating, permeable, critically reflective, and integrative of experience through critical reflection, dialogue, and taking action (Mezirow, 1981; Taylor, 2008).

The research topic and qualitative methodology were built around the concept of experiential understanding with emotions felt throughout the transformative learning process (Stake, 2010). To engage in the phenomenon of emotions within a transformative learning experience, an evocative autoethnographic personal narrative approach was taken to provide raw and rich insight into exploring in-depth an individual's personal experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Taking an evocative approach was based on Ellis and Bochner (2000) beliefs that evocative can help infuse social science with the emotions and person of the researcher.

Data collected for this study was from the time period from late Fall semester 2017 and ending in Spring 2021. The primary source of data for this dissertation came from the

researcher's journal beginning in the Fall 2018. A secondary source of data for this dissertation was in the collection of verbal data in the form of one semi-structured, 60–120-minute, autoethnographic self-interview; and one unstructured, 60–120-minute, autoethnographic self-interview. Both autoethnographic self-interviews were completed in my home and used zoom and audio recordings to provide another layer to data collection trustworthiness. A third source of data came from two external participant interviews. Convenience sampling approach was used to conduct semi-structured interviews during a face-to-face, 60–120-minute session with two peers of the researcher who have been doctoral students at the same university during the same period, Fall 2017 through Spring 2021. Interview locations were negotiated between the researcher and participants to determine a quiet and confidential location. Audio recordings were utilized for both interviews and sent within two hours after the interviews to a paid, confidential transcription service, Rev.com. A fourth source of data included artifacts from the researcher's doctoral experiences in the form of academic assigned papers, peer reviewed publications, and peer reviewed conference presentations from Fall 2017 through Spring 2021.

An evocative autoethnographic approach was taken using a personal narrative seeking to have a better understanding on how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience. Thematic narrative analysis was used to analyze the data based on the study's subjectivist epistemology, interpretivist perspective and critical perspective of Transformative Learning Theory, and the importance of the personal narrative (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Using thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008), along with the structure of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase thematic analysis process, allowed for rich description that is suitable for the many kinds of data that was collected. Using thematic narrative analysis on the personal narrative helped align findings with the research questions.

Next, I discussed how the three quality markers of transparency, reflexivity, and trustworthiness were used in the study to promote qualitative rigor. I also utilized triangulation, advisor debriefing, member checks, thick description, and interweaving my researcher's subjectivity to help maintain credibility and trustworthiness. Lastly, I discussed limitations with the study.

Chapter Four provided an autoethnographic introduction of the researcher as the single participant to the study, findings were presented highlighting themes and categories, and examples were provided for of each of the four themes and categories and the context leading up the researcher beginning the doctoral program. The last section of the chapter included narrative introductions of two peers of the researcher and how they are uniquely positioned to the autoethnographer. The findings from the interviews were then presented in relation to the four major themes to add further context, confirmation, and contrast to the researcher's personal narrative. The next section of Chapter Five presents a discussion on the study's findings in relation to the research questions with the inclusion of relevant literature.

Discussion

The purpose of this autoethnographic dissertation was to have a better understanding of how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience at an R1 institution in the southeastern region of the United States. The research questions were: How does the cultural context of a doctoral student shape the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience in graduate education? How does the doctoral student engage emotions resulting from a disorienting dilemma? In what ways does the doctoral student navigate the transformative learning process while attending a doctoral program? I discuss the study's major findings in relation to each research question and include

relevant literature. The discussion is organized by each research question and sub headings highlighting important threads found within the findings regarding the research questions.

Research Question One

The first research question was: How does the cultural context of a doctoral student shape the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience in graduate education? The intent of this question was to focus on an individual's unique cultural context so that it could be explored in-depth and intensely on the life circumstances and decisions to engage in the phenomenon of emotions within a transformative learning experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). An important line written in my notes during analysis can be used to define the essence of this research question, it reads: *don't assume my experience is your experience, we are not experiencing the same thing*. Each adult learner is unique and it is vital that adult educators continue building understanding on adult development and how adults learn and continue to build understanding on who adult learners are. Autoethnographers place value on the personal within a larger context and culture, and their experiences as an exploration within a specific aspect of social life (Adams et al., 2015). The value of the personal experiences within this study adds to previous autoethnographic explorations and attempts to "insert what is unique about a person back into the human sciences…highlighting subjectivity, feeling, empathy, authenticity, intimacy, death and dying, and everything involved with finding meaning in life" (Bochner, 2013, p. 51). As the researcher, I took an active, scientific, and systematic view of my own personal experiences in relation to cultural and social groups that I identified as similar and different to myself (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). The findings in relation to this research question represent this through an autoethnographic account of a doctoral student's experiences

to better understand the dynamic transformative process and how it has been shaped by cultural contexts (Nogueiras et al., 2019; Taylor & Cranton, 2012).

The experience of a life crisis, disorienting dilemma, can be different to each person and this brings subjective nature and context as an important focus within research. The findings of the study illustrate how the academic, social, and emotional components of a doctoral student's culture shape the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience. Transformative learning in graduate adult education is important because higher education serves as a naturalistic landscape for transformative learning to occur and graduate level adult learning environments sometimes can "challenge individuals to move beyond their comfort zone of the known, of self and others" (Kasworm & Bowles, 2012, p. 389). I shared how even when I was getting to a bad place, I would keep reading and going to class and it made me reflect on what I was going through. The findings on cultural context and emotions supports research on how adult graduate education offers various learning environments and experiences that adult learners may view as a life-changing, make a deep connection with some aspect with their personal lives or other learners, or view the experience as boring and useless (Dirkx, 2001). The new learning and educational experiences were not isolated from my previous lived experiences, but were intertwined and connected to previous experiences, and within these experiences lie a core of complex emotions (Goleman, 1997). Experiences of emotions are found throughout the various threads and aspects that make up my cultural context as doctoral student and individual being, thus the cultural context of being a doctoral student shaped the role of emotions in my transformative learning process because I came to recognize pieces of life valuable to me, and who and what I am (Dirkx, 2006). However, exploring emotional experiences can often reveal "a

multiplistic, contradictory self" (Dirkx, 2001, p. 65), that needs to be looked at deeper within the transformative learning process to better understand the role of emotion.

This study supports literature on transformative learning in adult graduate education, as it describes individuals facing an arduous and complex journey between academic and personal responsibilities (Roberts, 2010). Transformative Learning Theory is grounded in looking at past experiences to describe how adults question assumptions, beliefs, and values (Mezirow, 2003), and adults bring with them previous experiences full of emotions and cognitive beliefs (Kasworm, 2008). When faced with a disorienting dilemma, an individual learner can be presented with challenges that can vary, and at times, can force one to question deep personal values and question one's sense of self (Mezirow, 1991). The role of experience combined with the variety of contexts with which adult learning takes place demonstrates the critical roles that emotions and feelings have with the sense of self and in the processes of adult learning seen as both very personal and deeply social, engaging the learner in collaborations with others (Dirkx, 2001). The findings support transformative learning research that involves an individual in a profound meaning-making process, reflects the person's relationship with both the self and their sociocultural context (Taylor, 1998).

This study demonstrates that the cultural context of a doctoral student not only explores pre-existing cultural influences but also examines cultural aspects surrounding the development of identity, reflected on how to be successful in the classroom, and mentally managed various circumstances surrounding my personal life (Kasworm, 2008; Nogueiras et al., 2019). The findings illuminate that learning happens throughout one's entire multi-faceted life, and that there is a direct connection between the social context of learning and an individual's acquisition of it (Illeris, 2004; Jarvis, 1992). This contributes to the research on adult learning in higher and

graduate education by examining an adult learner's interactions with varied cognitive, sociocultural, and emotional challenges within their educational experiences and personal life that have helped unify or fracture the growth and development of the learner (Kasworm, 2008; Kasworm & Bowles, 2012). Important threads found throughout research question one include *academic discovery*, *academic community*, and *qualitative research*.

Academic Discovery. The first thread within research question one is *academic discovery*. My cultural context as a doctoral student was brought to light to have a better understanding with who I was before I became a doctoral student and how that shaped my values, beliefs, meanings, customs, ideas, language, and norms during my time in a doctoral program. These aspects were first introduced in my subjectivity statement in Chapter Three and introduction of autoethnographer in Chapter Four. I shared important experiences in my early life and the life crisis I faced with leaving a previous career that pushed me towards continuing my educational journey. I returned to school to get my master's and adult education helped me embrace my struggles and transform them to create a new life. The findings from the first theme *academic discovery and responsibilities* illuminate the love, excitement, and sense of responsibility that I brought with me into the doctoral program, and when faced with a new disorienting dilemma as a doctoral student, I found comfort in my academic program and looked to education and research for understanding, reflection, and hope. I shared that adult learning had given me a chance to find myself and make new discoveries. This study supports Kasworm's (2008) research on the challenges that adults returning to higher education face from multiple worlds when developing successful student identities. Kasworm (2008) describes learning as an act of hope for adult learners. Adult learners can be a part of the educational experience and view educational experiences as a "purposeful choice for a new and different future, a future of hope

and possibilities" (Kasworm, 2008, p. 27). For adults, the entry to college is to succeed but does not always separate from past worlds and there is constant renegotiation (Kasworm, 2008).

Academic Community. A second thread within the first research question is *academic community*. An important thread found throughout research question one is the academic community as it allows for a doctoral student to step outside of their social comfort zone to interact with others and participate in other cultures. I expressed throughout the findings how the doctoral program offered vital interactions with peers and faculty, allowing for opportunities to build a new community and relationships. The findings point to the importance of peer conversations, group work, and reflecting on each other's research as vital contributions to an individual's culture in graduate education. An important finding from this study within the first theme is the category *professional development and engagement*. Professional conferences became crucial opportunities to engage with members of the field and present my transformative learning research. Speaking with fellow graduate students, scholars, and researchers from the field provided feedback, dialogue, reflection, a sense of accomplishment, renewed excitement, and a sense of belonging as a member in the field of adult learning. These findings support the literature on the advanced study and understanding of adult learning to help individuals within the field of adult education position themselves with values and assumptions when developing guidelines for decision making, curriculum, instruction, facilitation of interpersonal communication, contributing to the field, and advance the professional field of practice (Merriam & Brockett, 2007).

Qualitative Research. A third thread within research question one is *qualitative research*. In the first theme academic *discovery and responsibilities* is the category *interest in qualitative research.* Throughout the personal narrative I shared thoughts, feelings, identities,

and experiences that created interest and tension with how I was identifying who I was in relation to others and the world around me. The findings support the use of qualitative research with providing researchers an interesting and engaging approach to studying the interactions and phenomena of the way people experience the world around them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, Given, 2016). Looking at research methodologies encourages learners to "explore their personal issues and asked to make meaning of new and complex conceptual distinctions that they had to apply" (Nogueiras et al., 2019, p. 88). My engagement in qualitative research highlights important pieces of seeking to understand epistemological understanding, reflexivity, critical thinking, and subjectivity as a researcher. My decision to take on an autoethnographic project was made as I continued to encounter my disorienting dilemma and felt the need to further explore the emotions from the dilemma. This decision brought my cultural context to the fore front of my research in transformative learning. Within the personal narrative I shared how I was questioning my choice of methodology and that I would need to ask myself who I really am and why my story is important. The findings on qualitative research contribute to the importance of autoethnographic research to provide avenues for researchers to include the role of personal experience, illustrate the personal to better understand cultural, life, and decision-making of with one's research (Jones et al., 2013).

Research Question Two

The second research question was: How does the doctoral student engage emotions resulting from a disorienting dilemma? The intent of this question was to focus on my unique cultural context as a doctoral student so that it could be explored in-depth and intensely on the life circumstances and decisions to engage in the phenomenon of emotions within a transformative learning experience. This question highlights the struggles and challenges that

existed throughout the first three phases of the transformative learning process that include a disorienting dilemma, self-examination with feelings and emotions, and the critical assessment of assumptions (Mezirow, 2000). This study provides a window to the raw, unfiltered, messy, chaotic, emotional roller coaster that occurred from my disorienting dilemma and beyond (MacKeracher, 2012). Findings from the personal narrative illustrate a disorienting dilemma that started within my marriage, which led to accusations of infidelity, months of arguing, distrust, failed counseling, abandonment, financial hardships, struggle with alcohol, and severe emotional distress. My disorienting dilemma forced me to question everything about my life and who I was. The interaction with my disorienting dilemma confirms Cranton's (2016) discussion on how this level of questioning can contain very complex and powerful emotions as learners question their belief systems, who they are, how they see the world, interpret what happens to them, and consider multiple points of view to verify one's truth and reality. Exploring this level of questioning can result in some complex and powerful emotions during the transformative learning process that can present a daunting journey that is void of understanding with no ending in sight (Daloz, 2012; Mälkki & Green, 2014). The findings confirm that disorienting dilemmas can bring emotions to the fore front of the transformative learning process, placing an individual's emotions as a key issue within the transformative learning process (Dirkx, 2014; Nogueiras et al., 2019). Two important threads within research question two include *emotional chaos* and *embracing the dark side*.

Emotional Chaos. The first thread within research question two is *emotional chaos*. An important finding is the emotional chaos that can occur from a disorienting dilemma and throughout the transformative learning journey (Kasworm, 2008). This acknowledges the concern for those adult students who are experiencing a life crisis and displaying emotional

chaos as they attempt to develop identity, reflect on how to be successful in the classroom, and mentally manage circumstances surrounding their life (Kasworm, 2008; Nogueiras et al., 2019). An important discussion within this finding is on shame that was expressed throughout the personal narrative. Walker's (2017) research on shame and transformation in adult education attempted to bridge the gap between emotions and transformative learning. Shame is described as a collective human experience that, at times individuals feel damaged, inadequate, and lacking (Walker, 2017). I expressed in the personal narrative that for periods of time all I could feel is shame from the circumstances in my social life and I would carry all of this with me into the classroom. I would worry that those in my academic community could see the negative that was happening in my life and see me as a joke, and this process spiraled into further shame, guilt, and developing a comfort zone that was full of negative coping mechanisms. This finding adds to Walker's (2017) research that shame is important to transformative learning because it is manifested in social interactions and an attempt to understand ourselves through engagement with others (Mezirow, 1991; Walker, 2017).

The findings focusing on emotional chaos add to the research concerning the concepts of liminality, comfort zone, and edge-emotions that captures the intertwinement of emotion and cognition in a way that offers an understanding of the challenges to reflection during the transformative learning process (Green, 2012; Mälkki, 2010, 2012, 2019; Mälkki & Green, 2014, 2018). This study acknowledges Mälkki and Green's (2014, 2018) research on the value of emotions as a part of our assumptions, which determines that to critically reflect on one's assumptions, one must acknowledge and accept edge-emotions. They value emotions as the pathway to assumption, and to reach your assumptions you must "acknowledge and accept edge emotions" (Mälkki & Green, 2014, p. 15). They believe that if an individual is free to move

throughout the liminal zone to engage edge-emotions experienced from a disorienting dilemma, then one can understand them fully and use them to develop deeper meaning-making within the transformative learning process (Mälkki & Green, 2014, 2018). The results and findings from the study confirm the research from Nogueiras et al. (2019) on the importance of how the educational context can become an avenue for a student to express their emotional vulnerability, thus allowing them to step outside of an experience beyond their comfort zone.

This study adds a perspective on the emotions and meanings unique to my own individual perception and for outsiders there is no classification or straight forward meaning behind someone else's experience. The perspective from this study highlights a doctoral student experiencing emotional chaos and the dangers that can exist when moving within the transitional zone between two ways of being. When stepping away from my comfort zone and attempting to engage my edge emotions I was met with varying conscious, unconscious, and subconscious defense mechanisms (Dirkx, 2001; Ivtzan et al., 2016). In this state of chaos, I was not able to fully recognize my state of mind that was becoming a deepening crisis from what I interpreted as normal actions. I was unable to see how deep I was in crisis and lost the ability to see just how far I would let myself go. The findings from the second theme *you can only breath because I let you* illuminate the concerns and care that must be taken by those within educational contexts when exploring and fostering transformative learning. Special care needs to be taken on discussions concerning learners stepping away from comfort zones and engaging edge emotions. Findings from the second theme illustrate the two lives I was living and the dangerous path I was heading down. The first life I was living was in the *light,* which consisted of working my second job, maintaining my graduate student responsibilities, and staying engaged in my academic community. The second life I was living was in the *dark*, a place that developed due to the

circumstances of my disorienting dilemma and spiraled into exposing negative layers of myself and reached the point of contemplating taking my own life. These findings support the research by Ivtzan et al. (2016) and their concerns on the *dark side* of self-awareness that can occur and how this judgmental engagement can cause intense discomfort which frequently lead to someone choosing easier options to avoid, reject, and escape discomfort. These findings represent the stress, struggle, and depression that can weigh down someone as they navigate through life and graduate school, and the balance that exists between the personal and academic life.

Embracing a Perspective With the Dark Side. The second thread found within research question two is *embracing a perspective with the dark side*. The findings from theme two *you can only breathe because I let you* confirm the concerns that exist with individuals' engaging emotional chaos and edge emotions during the transformative learning process. However, embracing a perspective the *dark side* is a major finding that adds a new lens for individuals to view and engage emotions from a disorienting dilemma. Transformative learning researchers have looked to other disciplines to bring insights and make connections with their discussions on transformative learning (Dirkx, 2006; O'Sullivan, 1999; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006). Dirkx's (2006) work on depth psychology emphasizes focusing on the inner world and during this learning process allows for deeper exploration and expression of the inner unconscious self. This study builds on Dirkx's (2006) depth psychology and adds a new lens to transformative learning research with the inclusion of second wave *dark side* positive psychology as it relates to the meaning of life that discusses challenging experiences, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Ivtzan et al., 2016). The *dark side* approach attempts to pull the mythical, unconscious, and symbolic ways of knowing to the *light,* to be critically questioned and engage in critical meaning making through discourse (Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2012). The

integration of second wave positive psychology within the transformative learning process offers new concepts to help acknowledge and embrace emotions, build depth of meaning, and create an openness that is needed when facing disorienting dilemmas. The findings demonstrate how the interweaving of second wave *dark side* positive psychology helped appreciate the nuances of the whole spectrum of emotional experience, which appreciates how emotions have binary opposites. Embracing the aspects of life that appear to be the *dark side* of one's life is not focused on rejecting what is deemed negative to someone but looking for redeeming qualities within negative (Ivtzan et al., 2016). "The aim is not to argue that black is white and turn these negative into unalloyed goods but to show that we may find unanticipated value in these unexpected places" (Ivtzan et al., 2016, p. 13). By incorporating the dialectics of emotions, it allows perceived negative emotions to be a part of experiences. In doing this we are able to understand that "specific mental states inherently involve complex, intertwined shades of light and dark," thus we can be more accepting and reflective of the emotions that we experience (Ivtzan et al., 2016, p. 19). These findings add to discussions on how the conflict learners have with emotions throughout the transformative learning process can be used to create intense levels of reflection and learning, and embracing the *dark side* offers enhanced discourse and reflection on the dialectic nature of emotions experienced during the transformative learning process (Cranton, 2016; Dirkx, 2006, 2008). Exploring the dialectics of emotions offers a different lens to helping an individual create an internal dialogue that will be needed to move into a liminal space so that they may explore their comfort zones and edge emotions. Engaging this *dark side* approach for those in chaos can help develop navigational references throughout the emotional and transformative journey. These navigational references can include but not limited to theoretical and methodological guidelines, mentors, peers, family, friendships, personal artifacts,

pets, art, and music. These references can help someone face and navigate the difficulties within the transformative journey that are often neglected (Mälkki & Green, 2016).

Findings throughout the personal narrative illuminate an important discussion with the concept of *dark side* that is not just the simple acceptance of dark thoughts and experiences to produce a positive transformation, embracing the dark entails an arduous journey of questioning one's deep self-awareness and critical reflection. This perspective sees a crisis, disorienting dilemma, as not just a singular event but a continuous process. I expressed moments during the journey that I wanted to retreat back to my dark place to be alone and questioned why I would allow myself to be happy because it always seems to turn bad. These moments of regression in the process support research by Hadfield (2013) and Ivtzan et al. (2016) and the need to place value on cultivating a strategic pessimistic mindset. This mindset helps focus on circumstances that someone personally has the power to affect, thus cultivating proactive coping and reflection. *Embracing a perspective with the dark side* provides a first-hand look at the roller coaster of emotions I experienced throughout my transformative journey. Second wave appreciates how there is a discourse on the tension that occurs between positive (light) and negative (dark) emotions because it is "difficult to characterize particular emotions as either positive or negative because appraisal depends on context" (Ivtzan et al., 2016, p. 19). This discourse on the dialectics of emotions gives individuals the freedom to explore and reflect on their own emotions within their own context free from popular characterizations and expectations. I shared how embracing the *dark side* in my life was fully engaging in the fear, pain, distress, and confusion that was occurring throughout my academic and personal life. Embracing the *dark side* of life is expressed throughout my personal narrative with phrases and ideas that included bringing my

two lives together, finding inspiration and light in the darkest of times, and keeping my eyes on the light.

Research Question Three

The third research question was: In what ways does the doctoral student navigate the transformative learning process while attending a doctoral program? The intent of this question recognizes the need to embrace the difficulties that can occur within a journey in hopes of bringing extremely difficult feelings and experiences to the light, in hopes of learning and transforming from them. This question highlights findings that share the challenges and achievements that can exist throughout the later seven phases of transformative learning process that include recognition of discontent, exploring new roles and relationships, planning a course of action acquiring new knowledge and skills needed for new courses of action, trying new roles, building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships, and reintegration into one's life with new perspective (Mezirow, 2000). The question was developed to add value and further discussions on the difficulty of the transformative learning journey (Daloz, 2012; MacKeracher, 2012; Mälkki, 2012; Mälkki & Green, 2014). The results and findings from this study demonstrate how the transformative learning journey can present "challenging experiences, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors which trigger discomfort in us as our lives develop and change, and how this discomfort is frequently avoided as it carries an engagement with fear, pain, distress, uncertainty of what is happening" (Ivtzan et al., 2016, p. 31). This study supports that engaging in the difficult and challenging holds great potential for growth, healing, and insight within the transformative journey (Ivtzan et al., 2016).

The third theme from the analysis, *traveling through the dark to a transformative emergence,* represents findings in this study that add important ideas and discussion on the

continued efforts to develop better understanding how an adult learner in graduate education facing a disorienting dilemma, navigates the various cultural and personal experiences, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors throughout the transformative learning journey. The autoethnographic personal narrative shares experiences throughout my journey in hopes of offering reflection, insight, and hope to readers and audiences who might have had similar experiences or who might be interested in the mental health of individuals within academia (Jones et al., 2013). Two important threads within research question three include *you can stay in the dark, just keep your eyes on the light* and *compassion and suffering*.

You Can Stay in the Dark, Just Keep Your Eyes on the Light. The first thread found within research question three is *you can stay in the dark, just keep your eyes on the light*. Traveling through the dark is a difficult journey and navigating that journey begins with an individual being authentic when engaging the dark, embracing aspects in life they deem negative (dark) so that they may develop the ability to reflect and learn on it and begin to see a conceivable path forward. Traveling through the dark can help reveal multiple layers to a dilemma and help understand how to regulate the tension between the good (light) and negative (dark). I shared that in the personal narrative that I didn't know if that's the process I had been doing, but that was the first time I decided that embracing the negative was what I was going to do, and it became my motto: *you can stay in the dark, just keep your eyes on the light*. This exploration for new action thus became my plan to navigate the aspects of life I deemed dark and along the way I would reflect on experiences to develop new knowledge to help continue my journey (Mezirow, 2000). Interwoven throughout the findings are experiences and pieces that represent traveling through the dark and understanding the need to embrace the negative and confusion to better understand and transform from them. The findings provide further insight for

an individual who is facing difficulties and contradictions within their transformative learning process and how they can navigate a difficult journey.

The findings shed light on the factors that make an individual decide to engage in the critical reflection process that leads to a transformative experience and the emotional depth individuals needed to make meaning (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). When faced with the difficulties of the transformative learning, one can use second wave positive psychology to help with the alignment of one's current sources of meaning with one's theoretical framework (Ivtzan et. al, 2016). Through the dark side lens, connections between my current struggles and my transformative learning research were being made throughout the personal narrative as I began looking at emotions and transformative learning. I was using the literature, journal, class papers and presentations as avenues to examine the phases/stages of the transformative learning process in relation to second wave positive psychology as a lens to explore emotions within the transformative learning framework, allowing me to focus deeply on the emotional chaos I was experiencing in life. Using transformative learning as a theoretical framework helped focus on how each individual brings a highly unique background and context that must be examined by themselves first in order to seek out meaning and social interactions (Ivtzan et. al, 2016).

The findings confirm that Ivtzan et al.'s (2016) research that when embracing the dark side, developing a new depth of meaning begins with the deep self, which can grow and gradually reach an integrative level. These interactions with a deep self can encourage adversity, resilience, and growth that focuses on the positive outcomes that can come from engaging the *dark side*. I shared in the personal narrative important moments of coming to terms with death and my own mortality. In the moment I spoke to my grandfather on his deathbed I came face to face with my own mortality. The death of a loved one forced me to face my own mortality and

thoughts I had with ending my own life. This experience adds to the discussion on how we deal with our own thoughts and emotions concerning death, and how critical self-reflection can occur when one contemplates mortality. There is no glorification with this process, but death can be viewed and discussed in a constructive, positive, and creative way (Ivtzan et al., 2016).

Compassion and Suffering. The second thread found within research question three is *compassion and suffering*. Important findings from the third theme, *traveling through the dark to a transformative emergence,* and fourth theme, *discovering compassion,* discuss the need to engage and understand that suffering is ok and that compassion starts from within and has the ability to connect with others. These findings represent my exploration with new roles, engaging in compassion, and developing new relationships as I reintegrated into my life with my new perspectives (Mezirow, 2000). These findings add to the value of acknowledging suffering and how it can be used to develop compassion and engagement with others to help create a safety net and open a door to help understand the importance of suffering (Ivtzan et al., 2016). Exploring suffering, compassion, and interconnectedness provides a means for one to focus on self, which can draw out important pieces of emotional awareness in our meaning making process (Ivtzan et al., 2016).

Highlights from the findings support focusing on suffering and how engaging with compassion involves opening up to the *dark side* can lead to connecting with other people's suffering, and thus creates opportunities for discourse and empathy (Ivtzan et al., 2016). I expressed how a professional conference offered two highly influential experiences with suffering and compassion. The first occurred when I was presenting on my research and I shared about the night I was going to take my own life. There were participants in the room that waited afterwards to talk with me. We shared tears and laughs as they talked about some of the difficult

times they had recently encountered and they just wanted to share with me how they felt and thanked me for sharing. Later that day a random colleague asked me how someone can develop compassion when in the dark, and they expressed their frustration with me for getting caught up trying to make sense of compassion. These experiences highlight Ivtzan et al. (2016) belief that compassion is an important aspect and needs to be explored further. My engagement with compassion and concept for wellbeing is "fundamentally an intersubjective phenomenon that happens 'in between' individual selves" (Ivtzan et al., 2016, p. 144). It is this deep, self-engagement with compassion that must be done so that it is able to grow and become inter-connected with a larger group, culture, or world (Ivtzan et al., 2016).

The findings demonstrate that the showing of compassion, sharing suffering and vulnerabilities are not an easy process but is a gradual building of trust and respect, and that there is a *dark side* to this process as well. I expressed frustration with the transformative learning process during this time as I was trying new roles and found myself at a crossroads with the fourth stage of the transformative learning process involving the recognition of one's discontent (Mezirow, 2000). I expressed frustration with my first few attempts at sharing my struggles with others and not receiving the same in return and resulted in myself making negative judgements and assessments concerning my transformative process. This demonstrates that the sharing of experiences with others does not equal recognition of one's discontent. Recognition allows someone to share their process of transformation with others; however, when choosing to share one must recognize that others may not always be receptive or have experienced a similar change (Cranton, 2016; Mezirow, 2000). This study confirms that the transformative learning process is not linear and several aspects of the learning process can be revisited as new roles, actions, knowledge, and dilemmas are encountered (Cranton, 2016). The use of second wave *dark side*

positive psychology in relation to the process of recognition of one's discontent focuses on the continuous process of building individual depth of meaning, self-awareness, and gradually engage in the reflection process needed to reach an integrative level (Ivtzan et al., 2016).

The use of the *dark side* can also help protect someone when they engage in the relationships within their culture and develop a plan with sharing suffering and vulnerabilities. Over sharing experiences and vulnerabilities can lead to others seeing this as weakness, but it can also lead to compromises in academic ideas and research. Ivtzan et al. (2016) believe that individuals need to place value on cultivating a strategic pessimistic process with sharing of emotional experiences and being vulnerable. A strategic pessimistic process reminds individuals that there is good and bad, and using this process encourages critical self-reflection and critical reflection on all aspects of one's culture while remaining motivated by curiosity, epistemic interest, and open to experience can lead to building trust and healthy relationships (Ivtzan et al., 2016). The findings highlight the importance of this perspective of compassion growing from within so that it can build confidence and be more receptive to others. I shared how it was not just one interaction or friendship that allowed me to engage in compassion, but the engagement with my entire culture and academic community. The findings show that some relationships were needed throughout the entire journey, some relationships were important but did not offer the depth or meaning for transformative growth, and some relationships were unhealthy. Through the continuous critical self-reflections on compassion and wellbeing I came to understand that each interaction was vital to building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships (Mezirow, 2000). It was new friendships that made me feel compassion for difference and love. These relationships and roles gave me confidence to continue my personal growth and academic research.

Implications for Practice

This doctoral dissertation focused on having a better understanding of how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience. The research allowed for a single perspective to write through painful, confusing, and chaotic experiences, in hopes that they may offer compassion and insight to others who are having similar experiences to feel they are not alone and can help make life better in some way (Jones et al, 2013). As an adult educator, this study contributes to my own practice by showing my dedication to celebrating the experiences of others, focusing on the humanness along with a greater sense of moral and ethical concerns, encouraging empathy and compassion, and allowing all voices to share and discover meaning from their own life experiences (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Ellis, 1999). This interaction as an educator is fundamental because I must remain vigilant to not generalize or minimize interactions with others in terms of understanding how my own actions can impact and influence others (Anderson & Brockett, 2008). From this study I see three major implications concerning the practice within the field of adult and higher education that includes: 1) discussion on mental health, 2) creating a safety net, and 3) the practical implications of integrating the *dark side* perspective within adult learning.

The first implication from this study on emotions within the transformative learning process offers awareness and insight on wellness practices and mental health of graduate students. This study hopes to shine a light on mental health in higher education and offer insight for learners, faculty, counselors, advisors, and peers to better understand how to share and listen. It also reminds us that through all the dynamics of power and positionality in higher education it must be brought back to the forefront that no one knows an individual's story better than the individual. Each adult learner is shaped by unique personal and social factors and Cranton (2016)

believed that given the proper fostering environments and skills, individuals can reach an intense level of reflection that could not otherwise be fully understood. For adult graduate education, faculty, staff, and student affairs programs need to have better understanding on the mental health needs of adult learners to assist in their academic journeys and success. It is vital that learners, educators, and staff working within academia understand this process and continue to develop environments that allow enhanced discourse and reflection on the dialectic nature of emotions.

Ivtzan et al. (2016) stated that their journey of the *dark side* was done so that others may interpret and use it in their own way. By incorporating the dialectics of emotions, it allows for perceived negative emotions to become a part of one's experiences. To assist in this process, journaling needs to remain an important tool in helping adult learners in the self-expression process (Cranton, 2016). In doing this, learners are able to build an understanding with their specific mental states and be reflective with their emotional awareness (Ivtzan et al., 2016; Nogueiras et al., 2019). Journal writing can help "stimulate critical self-reflection and self-knowledge, and this process can help "emphasize the articulation of assumptions, thoughts, and feelings about issues and the consideration of alternatives" (Cranton, 2016, p. 114). This can help individuals explore their unique backgrounds, cultural context, assumptions, ideas, and feelings as they seek out meaning and social interactions.

The second implication that exists in adult learning in graduate education is the need to help learners take inspiration from the *dark side* perspective to create their own safety net and navigational references needed throughout their academic journey. This safety net is created from elements of an individual's various sociocultural contexts that can include but not limited to family, friends, mentors, peers, therapist, counselors, artifacts, personal elements, research,

theoretical, and methodological guidelines. This safety net is made up of elements that serve as navigational references that can help an individual determine progress and also provides mental support for a learner throughout the triumphs, challenges, and difficulties during their journey. Determining navigational references requires authenticity and critical reflection by a learner in order to recognize assumptions, bias, compassion, humility, vulnerabilities, and confidence that exist within themselves to determine what they deem is important and healthy. This safety net must be balanced between the various cultures of the individual with attention given to the tension between the negative and positive within their lives (Ivtzan et al, 2016). Tension must be used to cultivate a strategic pessimistic process with sharing of emotional experiences and being vulnerable (Ivtzan et al., 2016). Engaging the tension between negative and positive is also important because of the dangers involving the misinterpretations and misunderstandings of liminality as a simple process of stepping out of a comfort zone and engaging edge emotions. Liminality is a complex process of transitioning between two ways of being and needs to be approached with caution. Without restriction, critical questioning and relationships can be misused at times when the ability to conceptualize a clear path is gone.

Building this safety net within an educational context is important because it balances between academic encouragement, academic regulations, self-efficacy, and self-awareness (Anderson & Brockett, 2008). The inclusion of a *dark side* inspired safety net acknowledges the tension between the negative and positive that exist in faculty relationships and mentorships. Faculty relationships become important in the continued effort to create healthy graduate supervision and mentorships that place importance on both the learner and educator being open and respectful for each individual to share their stories (Chapman & Sork, 2001). It is important to understand “some of the dialogue will center on feelings of discomfort, annoyance, and

difference from the other" (Chapman & Sork, 2001, p. 94); however, these experiences can be vital to better understanding power influences and epistemological differences. An important implication of faculty and mentor relationships is that an individual must embrace both the positive and the negative that will occur throughout these relationships. This must be done because these faculty relationships are only a piece to creating a safety net and relying too much on a faculty member can threaten or damage the responsibilities within the relationship, and influence power dynamics (Chapman & Sork, 2001). Based on their different life experiences, sensitivity and compassion are needed from both the student/educator and mentor/mentee to remain reflexive on issues of power, sociocultural identities, positionality, and epistemological and ontological differences and respect (Chapman & Sork, 2001; Misawa & McClain, 2019). Reflective dialogue is needed to build and continue rapport through the engagement of active listening, sharing appropriate personal experiences, maintaining confidentiality, and demonstrating empathy. This reflective dialogue will help create self-awareness and empathy between mentor and mentee (Taylor & Cranton, 2016). Doing so allows a mentor and mentee to critically evaluate actions and influences on each other's academic and personal lives (Misawa & McClain, 2019).

The third area of implication focuses on the opportunities that exist with the integration of second wave positive psychology within adult learning classrooms. This study argues for further understanding for adult educators as they can continue to shape supportive learning applications and environments to promote critical reflection and learning. Implications highlight efforts to create learning environments that encourage learners to ask questions and express their individual perspectives so that open and non-judgmental, meaningful dialogue can occur. Applying second wave positive psychology can offer expanded opportunities when exploring

various developmental, theoretical, and conceptual perspectives within adult learning. A vital practice for individuals within the field of adult education is the exploration of theories and concepts that influence their theoretical and philosophical positioning. Having a philosophy of education serves as a "conceptual framework embodying certain values and principles that renders the educational process meaningful" (Merriam & Brockett, 2007, p. 28). Adult education theories and philosophies provide the ability to intersect views from other educational philosophies and Ivtzan et al.'s (2016) application of the *dark side* lens offers an application for learners to explore as they define their own theoretical and philosophical positioning within the field of adult education. An example of this is Ivtzan et al. (2016) focus on four developmental theories to explore the tensions between positive and negative pieces of development that forced one to look at what is known compared to what is not known. They found that directly acknowledging this tension and engaging in what is unknown is vital for growth and development (Ivtzan et al., 2016).

This study offers another example of how second wave positive psychology was integrated within Transformative Learning Theory to focus on emotions throughout a transformative learning journey. Ivtzan et al. (2016) discuss how the practical use of literature and film offers adult educators a method to introduce second wave positive psychology to learners, allowing them to engage in the *dark side* of a journey, and build further understanding. Their specific use of a hero's journey provides the stages of a journey and uses famous literature and film to illustrate the stages so that learners can reflect on the journey in relation to their own (Ivtzan et al., 2016). The use of a hero's journey brings to life second wave *dark side* positive psychology in a way that readers and viewers can imagine and project themselves within the stories. These tools can help learners make connections with other stories if they may not be able

to fully engage and explore their own experiences and challenges, giving them energy and vitality to engage their own story (Ivtzan et al, 2016). This process can be encouraged through autoethnographic tools and writing within a curriculum that include literature and film comparisons, creativity, snapshots, artifacts, poetry, and metaphors to help in creating and re-presenting an individual's journey. Using these strategies and avenues can be used for learners to "find a style and voice of their own that might metamorphose into a poem or a picture, a story or a drama or a film, allowing access to their inner story that cannot be told by other more conventional means" (Muncey, 2010, p. 56). These writings and reflections can become a navigational reference and an important piece to one's safety net.

Implications for Future Research

This study is one example of the need for further exploratory qualitative research that Taylor and Cranton (2016) see as directions that need to be taken to further build the research on transformative learning. The purpose of this autoethnographic dissertation was to have a better understanding of how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience. This research briefly touches the complexity of transformative learning and second wave *dark side* positive psychology. Further research needs to be done to explore a multitude of voices and experiences within varied cognitive, sociocultural, and emotional challenges to gather various educational experiences and personal lives regarding the emotional well-being of graduate students. This research highlights the need to continue to gather the experiences from individuals across various positionalities to build further discourse and understanding on mental health in graduate education. Continued research is needed to better understand how to create environments that make the discussion of mental

health safe for everyone that balances between encouragement, academic regulations, and self-efficacy (Anderson & Brockett, 2008).

For the field of transformative learning, there has been moderate discussion on the factors that make specific individuals decide to engage in the critical reflection process that may lead to a transformative experience, or the emotional depth that individuals need to have in order to make meaning during emotionally chaotic times (Mälkki, 2012, 2019; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Ivtzan et al. (2016) stated early on that their journey of the *dark side* was done so that others may interpret and use it in their own way. By incorporating the dialectics of emotions, it allows perceived negative emotions to be a part of one's experiences. This study exposed one perspective of emotions and further research needs to explore how to better build such an emotional dialect. Further research needs to explore the benefits of how second wave *dark side* positive psychology can help better understand, engage, and navigate emotions throughout a transformative learning process. Using second wave positive psychology as a lens to explore transformative learning will allow researchers to focus deeply on the emotional experiences from life's different disorienting dilemmas. Using transformative learning as the theoretical framework helps focus on how each individual brings a highly unique background and context that must be examined by themselves first in order to seek out meaning and social interactions. Compassion and empathy are relevant areas that deserves more attention to better understand awareness within social and academic interactions (Ivtzan et al., 2016; Taylor & Cranton, 2012).

It would be beneficial to focus research more in-depth on specific phases of Mezirow's (2000) ten phases of transformative learning in relation to aspects of second wave positive psychology. Second wave *dark side* positive psychology highlights aspects concerning theories of development, meaning in life, mortality, spirituality, well-being, self-awareness, and

influential journeys of others, I see a multitude of opportunities to explore these areas to build understanding and make connections to transformative learning research. Meaning making, spirituality, and well-being are areas of focus that are receiving a large amount of attention in current research, thus offering research opportunities to build the integration of second wave positive psychology within the field of transformative learning and beyond. I believe international transformative learning scholars and researchers producing work on crisis, spirituality, and cultural context holds very promising opportunities for new partnerships and research across disciplines.

I would also recommend continued research efforts to explore the use of second wave positive psychology in the field of adult education. The research on positive psychology in relation to adult education (Anderson & Brockett, 2008) and self-directed learning (Brockett, 2006; Teal, Vess, & Ambrose, 2015) have provided important articles along with various dissertations that have built a foundation for second wave positive psychology to expand previous findings and explore new aspects throughout adult education. The researchers of second wave positive psychology developed the *dark side* lens so that others could use it within their own frameworks and theories. The perspective can help others make connections with their current sources of meaning within a theoretical framework (Ivtzan et. al, 2016). The possibilities for research in adult learning offer various theories and concepts of learning and development to incorporate the lens of second wave positive psychology to focus on areas of possible tension and growth.

Implications for Autoethnographic Research

I do not highlight this autoethnography as an attempt give others voice or be a source of healing power in an attempt to avoid concerns with validity and qualitative rigor (Riessman,

2008). An important implication for qualitative research with this study is the use of autoethnography as a doctoral dissertation. The growing popularity of autoethnography as a method and its use throughout several academic fields has helped create a very diverse methodology. Ellis and Bochner (2000) have concerns for graduate students interested in conducting self-questioning autoethnographic dissertations due to the type of reflection that comes with it. “Honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and self-doubts and emotional pain. Then there is the vulnerability of revealing yourself, and the ethical issues involving others” (Ellis, 1999, p. 672). The use of autoethnography in this study for a doctoral student in an adult learning program offers an example of how the methodology can be used within the academic guidelines of the dissertation process. This study highlights the importance of a theoretical framework created within adult learning that provides the needed reflective lens on one’s experiences in hopes of getting the most honest reflections heightened self-reflexivity and increased focus on emotions (Anderson, 2006; Ellis, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 2004).

Debates regarding the use of a personal narrative in an autoethnography are focused on whether the personal narrative text is different from the context the narrative was constructed in. The primary source of the data in this study comes from the journal of the researcher as an archived snapshot that holds the original context from which it was told. A major implication from this study is on truth and what is considered truth in autoethnographic research. Ellis (1999) argues language is not transparent and that in all research we can never fully capture the experience and that every story is partial and situated. “There’s no single standard of truth. You might also judge validity by whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers or even your own” (Ellis, 1999, p. 673).

This study was conducted in hopes of capturing my individual experiences and to tell a story as truthful as it could be (Denzin, 2014). Chapman and Sork (2001) discuss how adult educators have embraced the learners' use of personal narrative to enhance reflection and further inquiry. Even with growing research, they discuss concerns with the use of narrative, and call on researchers to ensure rigor when using narrative (Chapman & Sork, 2001). This study was conducted to allow for the exploration of an individual's personal experience in depth while following a standard of qualitative methodological factors, trustworthiness, and rigor. Following qualitative standards in building this autoethnography was an attempt to "insert what is unique about a person back into the human sciences…highlighting subjectivity, feeling, empathy, authenticity, intimacy, death and dying, and everything involved with finding meaning in life" (Bochner, 2013, p. 51). This study exposes the concerns of this kind of research by placing the researcher as the primary voice and source of data; however, no autoethnography exists in a vacuum (Ellis, 1999). Through the use of advisor debriefings and using friends/peers of the researcher as data sources and member checking allowed me to remain vigilant throughout the research so that my personal world is part of a larger social world that involves others. For autoethnographic research the important aspects of reflexivity and vulnerability must be used throughout to maintain a relationally responsible approach that is collaborative, committed, and reciprocal and safeguard those who are a part of the research (Adams et al., 2015). An autoethnographer must understand that to remain ethical and protect others, pieces and events from your story may not be able to be included in the research.

An advantage of writing an autoethnography is the researcher writing close to the time of their chosen event as it can help them access emotions within that experience, but this can also be a disadvantage due to being so involved emotionally and can hinder the researcher's ability to

move out to analyze the experience from a culture perspective. Yet it is this moving in to the personal and out to cultural that is needed for an effective autoethnography (Adams et al., 2015; Ellis, 1999; Jones et al., 2013). To do this, multiple aspects of a qualitative research can be used in the designs of future autoethnographic research. For this study, special attention was given to the reflexive dialogue before, during, and after the analytic process regarding the researcher's theoretical positioning and research questions throughout the design of research. Implications for autoethnographic research and the development of trustworthiness from this research include developing research questions that provide boundaries and flexibility, designing a congruent methodology and methods, detailed and organized collection of data with an analysis designed to create rich and detailed findings, triangulation, advisor debriefing, member checking, and thick description. This study shows how triangulation can be met through the collection of various forms of autoethnographic data ranging from the journal of the researcher, researcher self-interviews, external participant interviews, researcher's academic papers and conference presentations, images, and various other artifacts (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Chang, 2016; Muncey, 2010). The various forms of data helped create a more holistic picture of the autoethnographic focus, and building triangulation represents quality and rigor with the data (Freeman et al., 2007). Dates of journal entries were provided throughout the findings chapter with the original journal was also scanned to provide a binder copy that allowed for coding to be done by hand.

Conclusion of the Study

The purpose of this autoethnographic dissertation was to have a better understanding of how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience at an R1 institution in the southeastern region of the United States. Conducting this autoethnography provided me the avenues to engage in the phenomenon of

emotions within a transformative learning experience so that I could share my own journey in that it may offer reflection, insight, empathy, compassion, and hope to others who might have had similar experiences and provide continued dialogue and understanding on mental health in graduate education (Jones et al., 2013).

This study contributes to the literature by expanding on how the cultural context of a doctoral student not only explores pre-existing cultural influences but also examines cultural aspects surrounding the development of identity, reflected on how to be successful in the classroom, and mentally managed various circumstances surrounding my personal life (Kasworm, 2008; Nogueiras et al., 2019). This study expands the literature on emotional chaos and the concepts of liminality, comfort zone, and edge-emotions during the transformative learning process (Green, 2012; Mälkki, 2010, 2012, 2019; Mälkki & Green, 2014, 2018). This methodology allowed me to add a perspective of a doctoral student experiencing emotional chaos and the dangers that can exist when moving within the transitional zone between two ways of being. The study adds a new lens to transformative learning research with the inclusion of second wave *dark side* positive psychology. The perspective of embracing the *dark side* is not just the simple acceptance of dark thoughts and experiences to engage in a positive transformation but embracing the dark entails an arduous journey of questioning one's deep self-awareness and critical self-reflection. The integration of second wave positive psychology within the transformative learning process offers new concepts to help acknowledge and embrace emotions, build depth of meaning, and create an openness that is needed when facing disorienting dilemmas (Ivtzan et al., 2016).

This study has implications concerning practice within the field of adult and higher education that includes awareness and insight on the mental health of graduate students, the need

for learners to create their own safety net and navigational references needed throughout their academic journey, and the practical implications of integrating the *dark side* within adult learning. The implications concerning a learner creating their own safety net and navigational references illustrates the importance of balance and tension between the negative and positive within their lives. Building healthy relationships and mentorships is needed to protect a learner as they share their experiences and keep ideas and possible research protected.

This study has implications for research and the need to gather experiences from individuals across various positionalities and cultural contexts to build further discourse and understanding on mental health in graduate education. Further research needs to explore the benefits of second wave *dark side* positive psychology in relation to the phases of Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning to help better understand, engage, and navigate emotions throughout a transformative learning process. This study also has implications on the practice and research of autoethnography in adult learning that include the need to increase strategies for helping learners develop their own style and voice by accessing their inner stories. Through the continued use of autoethnographic research, adult learning can further explore the role of personal experience, illustrate cultural life, provide intimate and explicit insider knowledge to personal and cultural experiences that might be difficult to obtain through traditional methods, and connect to others (Adams et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2013). The decision to fully commit to an autoethnography was made the day I chose Strand's (1994) Dark Harbor as my inspiration to moving forward academically. Embracing the dark side gave me the strength to be a traveler in the dark and develop the eyes to find the light. This process has not been without failures and sacrifice, and I hope those that I may have hurt and let down can one day forgive me. To find my own forgiveness, I understand now that I must try to help spread the light (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1

Spread the Light, Be the Lighthouse

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Appendices

Appendix A

IRB Approval Form

December 09, 2021
Adam Lehr McClain
UTK - Coll of Education, Hlth, & Human - Educational Psych and Couns

Re: UTK IRB-21-06693-XM
Study Title: Embracing the Dark:
An Autoethnogrpahic Approach on the Role of Emotions in the Transformative Learning Process

Dear Adam Lehr McClain:
The Human Research Protections Program (HRPP) reviewed your application for the above referenced project and determined that your application is eligible for **exempt** review under 45 CFR 46.101, Category 2: Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if the information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.
Your application has been determined to comply with proper consideration for the rights and welfare of human subjects and the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects. Therefore, this letter constitutes full approval of your application (version 1.1) as submitted, including the following documents that have been dated and stamped IRB approved:

- Self-Interview Informed Consent v 1.0
- Informed Consent- McClain v 1.1
- External Interview Guide_McClain v 1.0
- Self-Interview Unstructured Guide_ McClain v 1.0
- Self-Interview Semi-structured Guide_McClain v 1.0

You are approved to enroll a maximum of 3 participants. Approval of this study will be valid from 12/09/2021.

Any revisions in the approved application, consent forms, instruments, recruitment materials, etc., must be submitted to and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. In addition, you are responsible for reporting any unanticipated serious adverse events or other problems involving risks to subjects or others in the manner required by the local IRB policy.

Approval of this study is valid for three years. If a Study Update Form is not submitted in iMedRIS and approved by the IRB prior to 12/08/2024, the study will be automatically closed by the IRB and no further study activity will be permitted until a Study Update Form is received. Please be sure to also submit a Study Closure Request (Form 7) when all research activity, including data analysis, has been completed.

Sincerely,

Lora Beebe, Ph.D., PMHNP-BC, FAAN
Chair

Appendix B

IRB Self-Informed Consent

Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title: An Autoethnographic Study on the Role of Emotions in Transformative Learning

Researcher(s): Adam McClain, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Dr. Mitsunori Misawa, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

This is an autoethnographic research study and I am the focus.

What is this research study about?

The purpose of this autoethnographic dissertation is to have a better understanding of how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience at an R1 institution in the southeastern region of the United States.

How long will I be in the research study?

If you agree to be in the study, your participation will last for approximately 60–120 minutes.

What will happen if I say "Yes, I want to be in this research study"?

If you agree to be in this study, you will participate in a self-interview for 60–120-minutes that will be zoom and audio recorded. You will be asked about:

- Your experiences as a doctoral student.
- Your emotional experiences as a doctoral student.

What happens if I say "No, I do not want to be in this research study"?

Being in this study is up to you. You can say no now or leave the study later. Either way, your decision won't affect your grades, your relationship with your instructors, or your relationship with the researchers or the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

What happens if I say "Yes" but change my mind later?

Even if you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time. If you decide to stop before the study is completed, you can let us know you would no longer like to be a part of the interview. If this happens during an interview, we will stop and the recording and it will be deleted right away. If you decide following your interview that you no longer want to be in the study, we will delete the recording and not transcribe any information. After the interview is transcribed, the researchers will provide the transcription to you via e-mail for you review. You will have seven days to review and approve the use of your interview transcript in the study. If researchers do not hear from you within the seven-day time frame, researchers will interpret this as you giving consent for your transcript to be used in the study.

Are there any possible risks to me?

It is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but we believe this risk is small because of the procedures we use to protect your information. These procedures are described later in this form.

Are there any benefits to being in this research study?

We do not expect you to benefit from being in this study. Your participation may help us to learn more about the research and practice of transformative learning in adult education and continue to build understanding on who adult learners are and the complexities that each individual brings with them in higher and graduate education. We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?

We will protect the confidentiality of your information by storing research records (e.g., consent documents and interview transcriptions) in separate folders on a secure University of Tennessee server that is only shared between researchers. Keeping transcriptions and informed consent documents separate will ensure there cannot be links made between transcription and interviewee. Interviewees will use a pseudonym during the interview and all identifiable locations or references to specific institutions will be anonymized. Interviews will be transcribed within seven days of recording, and immediately deleted.

If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information or what information came from you. Although it is unlikely, there are times when others may need to see the information we collect about you. These include:

- People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who oversee research to make sure it is conducted properly.
- Government agencies (such as the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and others responsible for watching over the safety, effectiveness, and conduct of the research.
- If a law or court requires us to share the information, we would have to follow that law or final court ruling.

What will happen to my information after this study is over?

We will keep your information to use for future research purposes about the research and practice of transformative learning and adult learning in doctoral education. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be kept secure and stored separately from your research data collected as part of the study.

Will I be paid for being in this research study?

You will not be paid for being in this study.

Will it cost me anything to be in this research study?

It will not cost you anything to be in this study.

What else do I need to know?

About 3 will take part in this study. The information you and other participants will provide is essential to understanding how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience. Because of the small number of participants in this study, it is possible that someone could identify you based on the information we collected from you.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researchers, Adam McClain, amccla10@vol.utk.edu, 252-903-6042 or Dr. Mitsunori Misawa, mmisawa@utk.edu, 865-974-5400. For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
1534 White Avenue
Blount Hall, Room 408
Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
Phone: 865-974-7697
E-mail: utkirb@utk.edu

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read this form and the research study. I agree to be audio and zoom recorded as part of this study. If I have questions, I will contact my advisor. By signing this document, I am agreeing to be the focus of this study.

Name of Adult Participant/Researcher	Signature of Adult Participant/Researcher	Date

Appendix C

IRB Peer Informed Consent

Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title: An Autoethnographic Study on the Role of Emotions in Transformative Learning

Researcher(s): Adam McClain, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Dr. Mitsunori Misawa, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

We are asking you to be in this research study because you are a friend and peer of the researcher at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville.

What is this research study about?

The purpose of this autoethnographic dissertation is to have a better understanding of how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience at an R1 institution in the southeastern region of the United States.

How long will I be in the research study?

If you agree to be in the study, your participation will last for approximately 60–120 minutes.

What will happen if I say "Yes, I want to be in this research study"?

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview for 60–120-minutes that will be audio recorded. You will be asked about:

- Your knowledge of the researcher's experiences as a doctoral student.
- Your knowledge of the researcher's emotional experiences as a doctoral student.

What happens if I say "No, I do not want to be in this research study"?

Being in this study is up to you. You can say no now or leave the study later. Either way, your decision won't affect your grades, your relationship with your instructors, or your relationship with the researchers or the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

What happens if I say "Yes" but change my mind later?

Even if you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time. If you decide to stop before the study is completed, you can let us know you would no longer like to be a part of the interview. If this happens during an interview, we will stop and the recording and it will be deleted right away. If you decide following your interview that you no longer want to be in the study, we will delete the recording and not transcribe any information. After the interview is transcribed the researchers will provide the transcription to you via e-mail for you review. You will have seven days to review and approve the use of your interview

transcript in the study. If researchers do not hear from you within the seven-day time frame, researchers will interpret this as you giving consent for your transcript to be used in the study.

Are there any possible risks to me?

It is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but we believe this risk is small because of the procedures we use to protect your information. These procedures are described later in this form.

Are there any benefits to being in this research study?

We do not expect you to benefit from being in this study. Your participation may help us to learn more about the research and practice of transformative learning in adult education and continue to build understanding on who adult learners are and the complexities that each individual brings with them in higher and graduate education. We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?

We will protect the confidentiality of your information by storing research records (e.g., consent documents and interview transcriptions) in separate folders on a secure University of Tennessee server that is only shared between researchers. Keeping transcriptions and informed consent documents separate will ensure there cannot be links made between transcription and interviewee. Interviewees will use a pseudonym during the interview and all identifiable locations or references to specific institutions will be anonymized. Interviews will be transcribed within seven days of recording, and immediately deleted.

If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information or what information came from you. Although it is unlikely, there are times when others may need to see the information we collect about you. These include:

- People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who oversee research to make sure it is conducted properly.
- Government agencies (such as the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and others responsible for watching over the safety, effectiveness, and conduct of the research.
- If a law or court requires us to share the information, we would have to follow that law or final court ruling.

What will happen to my information after this study is over?

We will keep your information to use for future research purposes about the research and practice of transformative learning and adult learning in doctoral education. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be kept secure and stored separately from your research data collected as part of the study.

Will I be paid for being in this research study?

You will not be paid for being in this study.

Will it cost me anything to be in this research study?

It will not cost you anything to be in this study.

What else do I need to know?

About 3 will take part in this study. The information you and other participants will provide is essential to understanding how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience. Because of the small number of participants in this study, it is possible that someone could identify you based on the information we collected from you.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researchers, Adam McClain, amccla10@vol.utk.edu, 252-903-6042 or Dr. Mitsunori Misawa, mmisawa@utk.edu, 865-974-5400. For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
1534 White Avenue
Blount Hall, Room 408
Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
Phone: 865-974-7697
E-mail: utkirb@utk.edu

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I agree to be audio recorded as part of this study. I have been given the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. By signing this document, I am agreeing to be in this study. I will receive a copy of this document after I sign it.

Name of Adult Participant	Signature of Adult Participant	Date

Researcher Signature (to be completed at time of informed consent)

I have explained the study to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to be in the study.

Name of Research Team Member	Signature of Research Team Member	Date

Appendix D

Autoethnographic Self-Interview Semi-Structured Protocol

INTERVIEW GUIDE

An Autoethnographic Approach on the Role of Emotions in the Transformative Learning Process

PURPOSE STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this autoethnographic dissertation is to have a better understanding of how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience at an R1 institution in the southeastern region of the United States. The research questions that will guide this study are:

4. How does the cultural context of a doctoral student shape the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience?
5. How does the doctoral student engage emotions resulting from a disorienting dilemma?
6. In what ways does the doctoral student navigate the transformative learning process while attending a doctoral program?

PRE-INTERVIEW

1. Test Equipment (Zoom Recording, Digital Recorder).
2. Set up designated interview time.
3. Sign Consent Form.

INTERVIEW

1. Set up audio equipment (*Have two recording devices*).
2. Have field journal.

SCRIPT

For this dissertation, a semi-structured, 60–90-minute self-interview will be conducted. This self-interview will be a semi-structured interview that follows the researcher's timeline as a doctoral student. The semi-structured, self-interview guide will use questions regarding significant milestones, events, and experiences of the doctoral journey. These questions will serve as landmarks, thus allowing the researcher to delve into various events and experiences within their doctoral journey and serve as a safety net with the exploration of experiences. This will allow the researcher to reconstruct scenes from their lived experiences as a doctoral student (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2012; Chang, 2008). The interview will be audio recorded and zoom recorded.

RECORDING

(Turn on Recorders)

(Date)(Time)

(*Adam*) I am taking the time to conduct this self-interview. This self-interview is based on the willingness to share my emotional experiences as a doctoral student. I hope to use the information from this study to further develop understanding on the role of emotions during the transformative learning process while in a doctoral program, and if it becomes too uncomfortable, I will stop the recording.

Any researcher questions or concerns with the self-interview at this point?

Q1. Can you tell me about the context you becoming a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee?

Q2. Could you share the events leading up to Christmas 2017 and how this impacted your doctoral journey?

Q3. Can you share some of the events regarding Fall semester 2018?

Q4. Can you talk about events of February 2019?

Q5. Can you discuss Easter 2019?

Q5.1. What did the impact of your classes have during this time?

Q6. Can you share with me some important events during the Summer 2019?

Q7. What was the importance of AAACE conference in St. Louis for you?

Q8. How do you think the Fall semester of 2020 impacted your academic journey?

END OF INTERVIEW

(*Turn off Recorder*)

Appendix E

Autoethnographic Self-Interview Unstructured Protocol

INTERVIEW GUIDE

An Autoethnographic Study on the Role of Emotions in Transformative Learning

PURPOSE STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this autoethnographic dissertation is to have a better understanding of how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience at an R1 institution in the southeastern region of the United States. The research questions that will guide this study are:

1. How does the cultural context of a doctoral student shape the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience?
2. How does the doctoral student engage emotions resulting from a disorienting dilemma?
3. In what ways does the doctoral student navigate the transformative learning process while attending a doctoral program?

PRE-INTERVIEW

4. Test Equipment (Zoom Recording, Digital Recorder).
5. Set up designated interview time.
6. Sign Consent Form.

INTERVIEW

1. Set up audio equipment (*Have two recording devices*).
2. Have field journal.

SCRIPT

This self-interview will follow an unstructured format as I read through my personal/researcher journal. The journal offered a space for raw and unfiltered reflections and thoughts, and this self-interview will allow the opportunity to recall emotions with past and present experiences considering on-going doctoral student experiences. This self-interview will last 60–120-minutes and will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim to as accurately as possible within 48 hours of interview.

RECORDING

(Turn on Recorders)

(Date)(Time),

(*Adam*) I am taking the time to conduct this self-interview and is based on my willingness as a researcher to share my emotional experiences as a doctoral student. I hope to use the information from this study to further develop understanding on the role of emotions during the transformative learning process while in a doctoral program. If it becomes too uncomfortable, I will stop the recording.

(*Open up journal*)

END OF INTERVIEW

(*Turn off Recorder*)

Appendix F

External Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW GUIDE

An Autoethnographic Study on the Role of Emotions in Transformative Learning

PURPOSE STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this autoethnographic dissertation is to have a better understanding of how the cultural context of a doctoral student shapes the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience at an R1 institution in the southeastern region of the United States. The research questions that will guide this study are:

1. How does the cultural context of a doctoral student shape the role of emotions within a transformative learning experience?
2. How does the doctoral student engage emotions resulting from a disorienting dilemma?
3. In what ways does the doctoral student navigate the transformative learning process while attending a doctoral program?

PRE-INTERVIEW

1. Test Equipment (Zoom Recording, Digital Recorder).
2. Set up meeting time and place in agreeance with participant.
3. Email confirmation date and time, along with Interview Guide and Consent Form

INTERVIEW

1. Have two hard copies of consent form and interview guide to sign and for participant to keep.
2. Set up audio equipment (*Have two recording devices*).
3. Have field journal.

4. Engage in informal conversation leading up to interview and use this time to determine participant's desired pseudonym.

SCRIPT

(*Participant-Pseudonym*), thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. I really appreciate your willingness to share your experiences as a friend and peer of the researcher, concerning your knowledge and perspective of the researcher's emotional experiences as a doctoral student. I hope to use the information from this study to further develop understanding on the role of emotions during the transformative learning process while in a doctoral program. The interview will last 60–120 minutes, and I want to remind you that it is voluntary. If you become uncomfortable or wish to stop, you can do so at any time. I have a few questions designed to help us explore your experiences regarding the researcher to reconstruct scenes from their lived experiences as a doctoral student. I want to remind you that the interview will be recorded and transcribed verbatim to share your story as accurately as possible. At times I might be taking a few notes and I want to assure you that the notes are not in response to your experiences and opinions, rather will be used to relate aspects of your story to my own understandings. I also have a notepad for you or encourage you to send a follow up email if something comes to you that you would like to discuss later or keep for your own records. Just a reminder that confidentiality is very important. Any notes that I take will be processed immediately into a password protected document on my personal computer and the paper copies will be shredded.

Do you have any questions or concerns at this point?

If you are ready, I will turn on the recorders and we can start.

(*Turn on Recorders*)

RECORDING

(*Date*)(*Time*), I am here with (*Participant-Pseudonym*), and they are going to share their experiences as a friend and peer of the researcher, concerning their knowledge and perspective of the researcher's emotional experiences as a doctoral student.

Q1. Can you tell me about the context surrounding how you first met Adam as a doctoral student?

Q2. Could you share the events leading up to Christmas 2017 and how this impacted your relationship with the Adam?

Q3. Can you share some of the experiences or thoughts you might have had during classes on Adam's work or research focus?

Q4. Can you share with me your experiences and perspectives surrounding the Spring of 2019?

Q4.1. The events surrounding the last session and dinner for the seminar class?

Q5. Can you share what kind of contact and communication you had with Adam during the during the Summer 2019?

Q.6. As a friend, did you ever have any concerns about Adam's well-being and safety?

Q.6.1. Did you ever find yourself concerned with personal choices he was making?

Q7. Can you share how you felt Adam was as a student and his future in academics?

Q7.1. As a colleague and peer, what academic challenges and difficulties did you notice Adam was having?

END OF INTERVIEW

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences as a doctoral student regarding the researcher. I really appreciate your openness. If we were stopped short by time and you have more that you

would like to discuss, a secondary interview or follow up can be planned. Once this interview is transcribed, I will send you a copy of the interview transcriptions and notes for you to look over and provide any thoughts, concerns, and feedback.

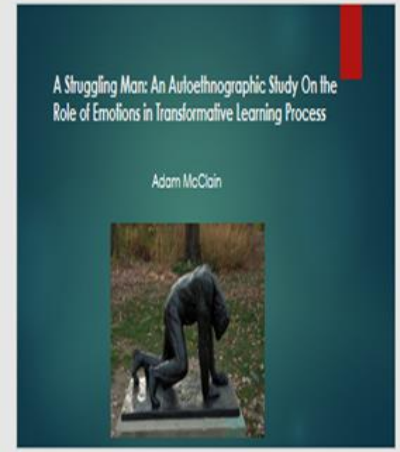
As you are reflecting over the interview and/or looking over the transcriptions and feel that you may not be ready or willing to have your experiences be a part of this study, all information will be destroyed immediately.

Thank you so much for sharing your story with me.

(*Turn off Recorder*)

Appendix G

Autoethnography on Role of Emotions in Transformative Learning – Class Presentation Spring 2018



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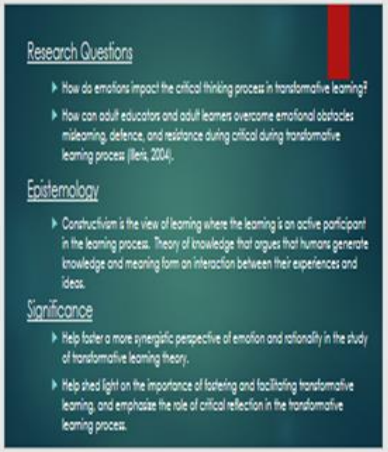

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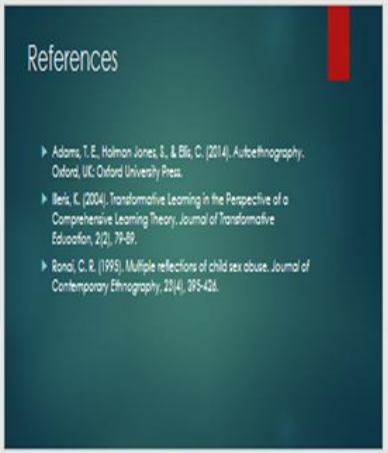

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Appendix H

Life in Chaos – Class Interview Paper Fall 2018

Life in Chaos: How Emotions Experienced from A Life-Event Crisis Influence the Transformative Learning Process of a Female Non-traditional Adult Learner

Adam McClain

EDPY 559 Intro to Qualitative Research Fall 2018

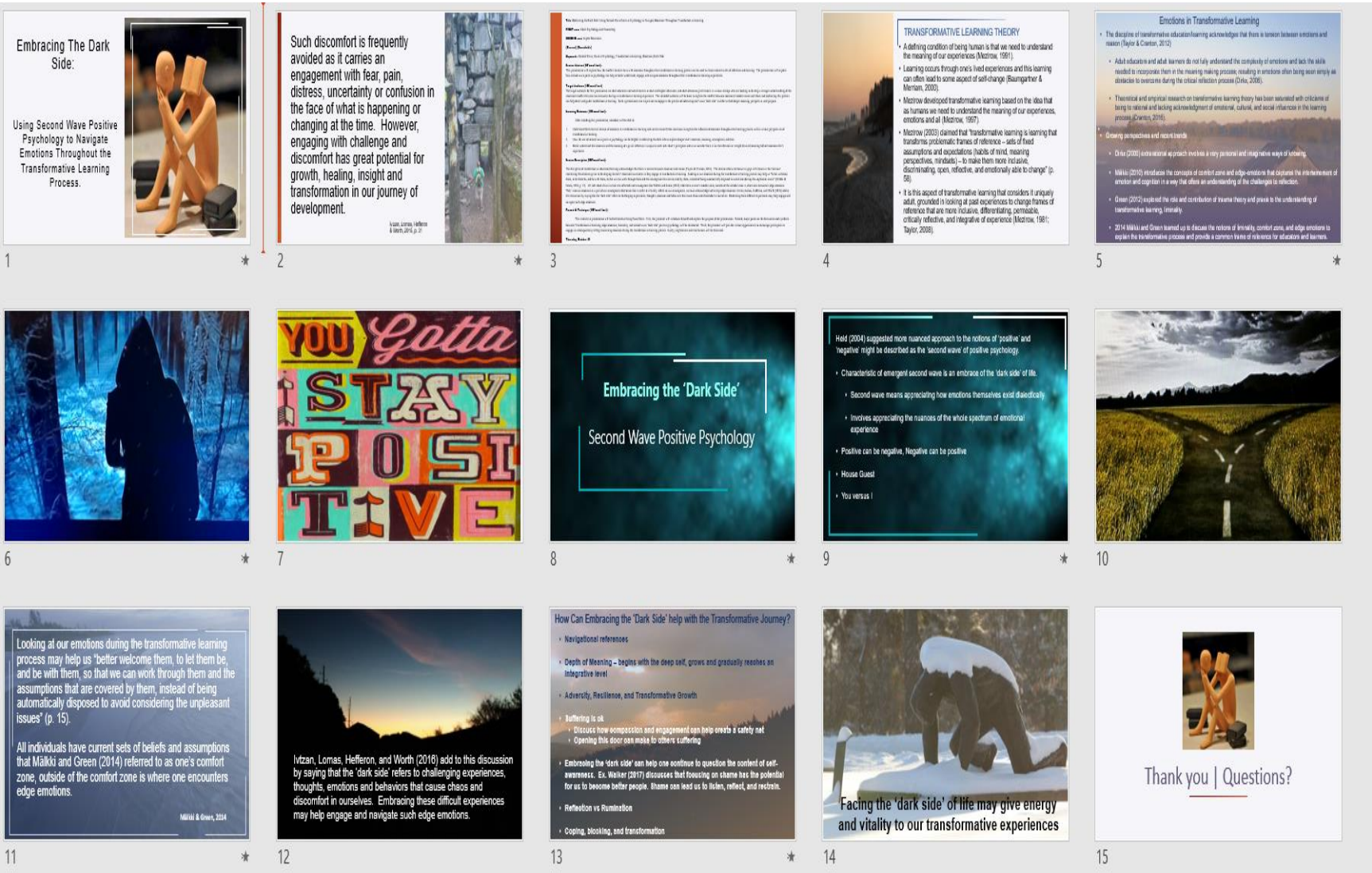
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

Appendix I

Transformative Learning Theory and Emotions – Class Presentation Fall 2018

Appendix J

Dark Side/Emotional Chaos – Class Presentation Spring 2019



Appendix K

Creator of Panel Proposal During Spring 2019 for AAACE Fall 2019

Title: Our Brand is Chaos: Life as Doctoral Graduate Students

FIRST area: Graduate Student Education

SECOND area: Higher Education

Keywords: Graduate Students, Non-Traditional Adult Learners, Shared Dialogue

Session Abstract (50-word limit).
This panel will allow a group of non-traditional adult learners to share and discuss experiences as doctoral graduate students. The goal is to have a positively motivated conversation that builds on the growing perspective and understanding of adult learner graduate student experiences.

Target Audience (100 word limit)
The target audience for this presentation are students, educators, and practitioners in the various areas of adult education, who wish to engage in a respectful dialogue regarding the demands, struggles, and triumphs of the nontraditional adult doctoral student. The members of the panel seek to share their narratives and provide a platform for attendees to engage in conversation.

Learning Outcomes (100 word limit).
The main learning outcome of this panel is to provide a first-hand understanding of the demands that current nontraditional adult learners face while attending a doctoral program. Another learning outcome of this panel is to better understand how to create a shared space and dialogue to promote the well-being of graduate students.

Session Description (200-word limit).

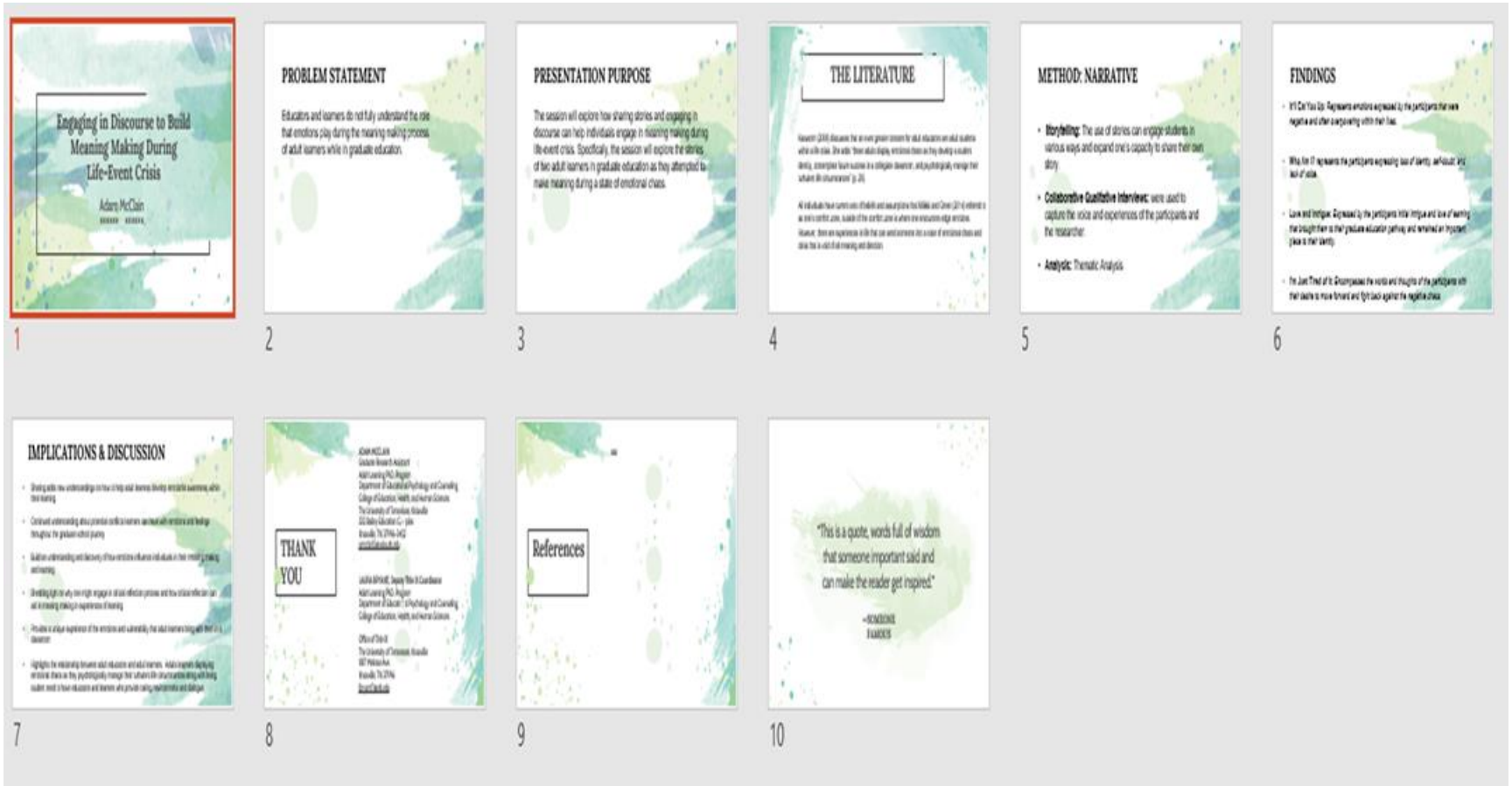
No one adult learner brings with them the same set of circumstances and/or lived experiences into a learning environment. Kasworm (2008) discusses that an even greater concern for adult educators are adult students within a life crisis. She adds "these adults display emotional chaos as they develop a student identity, contemplate future success in a collegiate classroom, and psychologically manage their turbulent life circumstances" (p. 28). As a doctoral student, what does it mean to manage the chaos of life with the demands of an academic program? The doctoral journey can be an exciting; however, it requires many demands such as publishing, researching, providing a form of academic service, teaching, and attending classes. However, the chaos begins when these demands are mixed in with the multiple challenges of life outside of the classroom. Whether it be work, family, or relationships, various demands add to the stress of balancing life and school. In order to weather the chaos, we engage in shared dialogue to create meaning and better understanding of our experiences (Paulus, Woodside, and Ziegler, 2010).

Format & Technique (100-word limit).

A member of the panel presentation will serve as a mediator and introduce the purpose of the panel. Then, other members of the panel will provide brief introductions. The mediator will present pre-determined questions to guide the conversation and the process. Finally, the panel

Appendix L

Doctoral Student Discourse in a Life-Event Crisis AAACE Presentation Fall 2020



Vita

Adam Lehr McClain was born to Bill and Cathy McClain on December 30, 1980, in Danville, Indiana. He earned his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science for Wittenberg University, Ohio in 2003. He earned his Master of Science Degree in Adult Education from Indiana University, Bloomington in 2014. Adam's prior professional experience includes eight years as a college football coach, and during his time at Grand Valley State University in Michigan, Adam was introduced to a graduate level course on the adult learner. The experiences form this class is where Adam first fell in love with adult education. While earning his master's Adam worked full-time in retail management where he was able to incorporate aspects from adult learning into his responsibilities as a trainer and mentor. Adam continued to working while pursuing his Ph.D. and also held several graduate research assistantships that included research on adult learning in graduate education and school based mental health. Adam will graduate with a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology and Research with a concentration in Adult Learning in May 2022.