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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Cynthia Dulane Webb entitled "A Phenomenological Investigation of Doctoral Students' Experiences with Their Dissertation Committees." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

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**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF
DOCTORAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH THEIR
DISSERTATION COMMITTEES**

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Cynthia Dulane Webb

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This dissertation is dedicated to the late William D. Robinson, who instilled in me a zeal for learning and the belief that if you give the world the best you have, the best will come back to you.

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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to understand doctoral students' lived experiences with their dissertation committees, interviews were conducted with thirteen doctoral students enrolled in either clinical or counseling psychology programs. Traditional phenomenological methods were used to analyze interview data to identify emergent themes.

Three themes emerged from a qualitative analysis of interview data : (1) Process, (2) Relationships, and (3) Issues. These three themes, implicit in all the protocols, comprise the basic structure of the experience these doctoral students had with their dissertation committees.

The results are discussed in relation to the existing literature on the dissertation. Suggestions are offered for doctoral students being supervised by dissertation committees. The implications for faculty providing dissertation supervision are also addressed. Finally, suggestions for future research are included.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*In the education and training of applied psychologists at most institutions of higher education, the scientist-practitioner or scientist-professional model is endorsed as the basic training model in the field. The scientist-practitioner model involves two distinct areas of training where students learn to be scientists as well as professional practitioners. Gelso and Fretz (1992) describe the scientist-practitioner model as " a model of training requiring that professionals master both the helping, practitioner roles and the methods of investigative science" (p. 44) .

Thus, the graduate student in applied psychology programs is prepared along two major dimensions where education and training involves the development of competencies in both counseling practice and scientific research under supervision.

The development of competency in counseling practice is typically accomplished by practica and traditionally, a full-time, year-long internship, in which the student receives in-depth supervised training in counseling practice in a service setting (e.g. a university counseling center, community mental health center, or medical hospital (Gelso & Fretz, 1992)).

The dissertation is the primary means by which a student develops competency in scientific research. A student completes a dissertation as the final requirement for completion of graduate study for the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) or Doctor of Education (Ed.D) degree in applied psychology programs. The dissertation has a dual role: to make a positive, original and significant contribution to knowledge and to provide training in scientific research (APA, 1959). Porter and Wolfe (1975) evaluated the utility of the doctoral dissertation in terms of effectiveness in teaching research techniques and found the dissertation "to be generally satisfactory but not of outstanding value in imparting research competency, (p. 1059)". Shakow (1976) noted the importance of the dissertation in graduate education and research training: "Of all

the opportunities the Ph.D. program affords to test out a student, the dissertation is the best single device for indicating what kind of person he/she is intellectually and in research ability" (p. 558).

Sternberg (1981) describes a dissertation as "a thesis which requires (1) exhaustive library review/survey of related literature; (2) construction of a researchable problem, and related hypotheses, which makes some original contribution to the field; (3) experimental work and/or fieldwork with subjects and/or groups; (4) an elaborate methodology for analyzing the data collected; (5) a lengthy, literary write-up, analysis and discussion of the results of such experimental work or fieldwork; and (6) a formal, oral defense of the dissertation before a committee" (p. 11).

The dissertation committee typically consists of a chairperson (usually the student's advisor or major professor) and an additional number of faculty approved by the Graduate School to chair or serve on doctoral dissertations. The members of the dissertation committee also typically represent the student's department, supporting emphasis, and cognate area

(Council of Graduate Schools, 1990).

The dissertation committee is the primary means by which a student's dissertation research is supervised. The committee serves through the proposal stage to the final defense of the dissertation and has important functions. Mauch and Birch (1983) note that the committee functions to provide both supervision to oversee the quality of the student's work and evaluation to ultimately decide whether the dissertation is acceptable for the doctoral degree.

To reiterate, the dissertation provides training in scientific research, and is thereby an essential component of the scientist-practitioner model of training for applied psychologists in keeping with the scientist aspect of the model. Blanton (1983) notes, "the dissertation is a critical element in doctoral training. It can be one of the most satisfying and educational parts of a program, yet, too often the process is painful and tedious for both faculty and students" (p. 74). Gelso and Fretz (1992) note that "both individual and environmental factors can work against the dissertation being a positive professional development experience" (p. 569).

The dissertation committee is also a crucial element in research training because it functions to provide supervision and approval of the student's dissertation research. Mahoney (1976) in observing how dissertation committees should function to enhance research training noted that "when the dissertation committee functions in the true spirit of graduate education with generous encouragement, constructive suggestions, and substantial personal contact-the student may find himself in a uniquely stimulating and satisfying experience" (p.55).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Although the dissertation committee's potential to effect the doctoral student's dissertation experience has been recognized, little attention has been paid to doctoral students' lived experiences with their dissertation committees. Consequently, this emerges as an area in need of additional investigation.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The goal of the current study is to describe the essential structure/thematic structure of doctoral students' subjective experiences with their dissertation committees. No hypotheses will be stated or tested as this is a phenomenological investigation.

A review of the literature on the dissertation and dissertation supervision is in Chapter II. Chapter III includes a discussion of phenomenological research in psychology and the specific methodology used in the current study. Chapter IV describes the participants' experiences with their dissertation committees. The final chapter is a discussion of the results and suggestions/implications based on the study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE DISSERTATION

* A number of books and manuals have been written on the dissertation to assist students. Topics include designing, preparing, writing and researching the dissertation (Allen, 1973; Balian, 1982; Boling & Condry, 1990; Davis & Parker, 1979; Quarles & Roney, 1986; Shaffer, 1967; Turabian, 1987) and using strategies for success with the dissertation and survival of the dissertation process (Adams, 1993; Barnes, 1992; Cortada & Winkler, 1979; Dukelow, 1980; Gall & Borg, 1989; Krathwohl, 1988; Madsen, 1983; Mauch & Birch, 1989; Moore, 1985; Pedron & Evans, 1992; Rudestan & Newton, 1992; Sternberg, 1981) and developing and defending a dissertation proposal (Castetter, 1980; Doty, 1992; Gardner & Beatty, 1989; Locke, Spirduso & Silverman, 1987; Locke, 1993; Martin, 1980). Several books have been written to target specific readers such as women (Vartuli, 1982), minorities (Adams, 1992; Adams, 1993) and individuals

writing dissertations in the behavioral sciences (Cone & Foster, 1993; Lehmann, 1990; Long, Convey, & Chwalek, 1985).

There appears to be a number of books and manuals written on the dissertation. Although the information is presented in various formats, one of the things that most of these books and manuals address is the importance of the relationship between the doctoral student and the dissertation committee. Considering the power and influence the dissertation committee has over the process and completion of the dissertation, the selection of the committee is viewed as crucial.

Sternberg (1981) contends that "even though less than sanguine relationships with faculty can rarely defeat a highly competent thesis, strained relationships with one or more members can definitely delay completion and make the project period very unpleasant, just as good relationships with advisers and members can expedite and lessen the emotional burden of writing" (p.59). Davis, Parker and Clyde (1979) assert that maintaining diplomatic relations with the committee members is one of the things necessary to complete a dissertation.

Long, Convey, and Chwalek (1985) contend that the dissertation director and the committee can make the difference in the ease of producing the dissertation and its success. Mauch and Birch (1983) also addressed the extraordinary importance of the relationship between the doctoral student and the dissertation committee.

Empirical research on the dissertation consists of a diversity of topics. Researchers have looked at the dissertation process in general from the purpose of the dissertation, dissertation policies, practices, and problems (Berelson, 1960; Council of Graduate Schools, 1990; Gelso, 1979; Gelso & Fretz, 1992; Magoon & Holland, 1984; Sanchez-Hucles & Cash, 1992), the role of the dissertation and its utility as a research training technique (Issac, 1992; Porter & Wolfle, 1975), redefining, restructuring and redesigning the dissertation process (Beeler, 1993; Katz, 1995; Malott, 1992; Marshall, 1993; Sollod, 1979; Wendel, 1992). Several researchers have done follow-up studies of doctoral graduates and program directors to monitor and evaluate the dissertation process (Loadman &

Holcomb, 1984; Peters & Peterson, 1987; Washington, 1990).

Besides such general interest regarding the dissertation, there have been studies addressing more specific issues. One area which has received attention in the research on the dissertation has been the ABD (all but dissertation) phenomenon. The literature discusses the ABD phenomenon in reference to those students who drop out after they complete all the academic requirements except their doctoral dissertation. Garcia, Mallot, and Brethower (1988) found that nearly a quarter of the students who drop out of graduate school do so after they have completed all the requirements except the dissertation.

Some authors investigating attrition have focused on why some doctoral candidates do not complete their dissertations. Several significant factors have appeared in the results of studies addressing attrition.

Simpson (1986) noted a combination of inadequate preparation and a misperception of the nature of the process of original research contributed to candidates' inability to complete their dissertations. Wright

(1991) noted full time teaching as a barrier to completion of the dissertation. Hassan-Shahriari (1983) found that ABD students generally had more financial problems and claimed personal pressures rather than academic pressures as a reason for discontinuing doctoral study. Huguley (1988) found that full-time employment and a lack of structure of the dissertation phase were the obstacles to completion of the dissertation. Gemerth (1990) noted that respondents cited more frequently the pressures and demands of employment as the greatest obstacle to dissertation completion. In addition, results indicated that students involved in quantitative research struggled more with topic selection, data collection and interpretation, and viewed their advisors as more supportive than those who conducted qualitative research and women appeared significantly more likely to let perfectionism interfere with dissertation completion and experienced more difficulty in topic selection than men.

Mallinckrodt, Gelso, and Royalty (1990) found that Holland personality types were significantly related to research interests and also related to delays in the

completion of research requirements: Students with investigative and investigative-artistic personality types have a higher interest in research and students with enterprising personality types had lower levels of research interest and a delay in completing training.

Garcia et al. (1988) suggest that the failure to complete the thesis is related to a lack of supervision and effective incentives. Jacks (1983) noted that doctoral candidates who left graduate study indicated that several factors were involved. These included relationships with advisors and/or committees, financial difficulties, personal problems, family demands, employment, and research problems. Shultz (1983) found that lack of motivation and time and some degree of difficulty with the major professor or department were significant obstacles in the completion of the doctoral program. Benkin (1984) noted that the two variables that differentiated ABDs from doctoral recipients were their reports of financial assistance and their reported relationships with their faculty members.

Hanson (1992) found one of the greatest barriers to the completion of the dissertation to be the

relationship between the doctoral student and advisors or committees. Several other researchers have suggested that ABD status might be reduced by enhancing the advisor-student relationship (Alvarado, 1988; Daniels-Nelson, 1984). Skudlarek (1992) found a significant relationship between the completion of the program requirements and the support given to students by dissertation committee members and other faculty. This was in addition to motivation, age at admission, and satisfaction with the program of study. Mah (1986) found that attrition involved the time to work on the dissertation, sustained motivation to complete the doctorate, and being prepared to conduct and report research to the satisfaction of the committee. Grissom (1985) reported that completers have high motivation and receive high support for dissertation efforts from spouse, family, friends, major professor, and the doctoral committee.

Smith (1993) reflected that two of the critical variables contributing to successfully completing the dissertation included the committee makeup and communication between the student and faculty. Karolyi

(1994) found that candidate persistence, the professional relationship between the candidate and the director and full time job responsibility were designated most frequently by alumni and ABDs as influential factors related to dissertation completion. Lentz (1995) in her study of factors affecting dissertation completion for non-traditional aged women found that completers were enabled by a stimulating exciting topic, a caring advisor, and family and peer support. Miller (1995) found that leaving a doctoral program before degree completion was due to the student's relationship with the advisor, and financial and personal problems.

DISSERTATION SUPERVISION

Some researchers have given attention to dissertation supervision specifically. Seeman (1973) considered ways in which the research supervision process could be enhanced. He advocated the creation of an optimal learning climate for the student where "(a) the learning climate is designed to foster conditions of creativity, (b) research learning is seen as a task

related to the development of personal effectiveness and personal goals, and (c) explicit provisions are made to foster growth toward autonomy and professional maturity" (p.902).

Blanton (1983) noted "unfortunately, many faculty, even those who are good classroom teachers, are not prepared to supervise dissertations effectively.. skilled midwifery by the faculty member can make the process much easier" (p.74). She looked at problems that arise in dissertation supervision by separating the dissertation process into five stages: planning, beginning, data gathering, writing ,and finishing,and providing strategies faculty might use to address the problems that arise in each stage. Terry, Dillon and Malott (1988) also addressed problems that sometimes arise in supervising theses and dissertations and ways of preventing or solving them.

D'Onofrio, Lawler, O'Malley and Wilhite (1993) explored alternative approaches to dissertation supervision, noting that the traditional expert/novice model of dissertation supervision may be inappropriate for graduate students who are already established professionals. The alternative strategies they proposed

included focusing on teaching styles and learning styles of both professors and students, student cognitions and collaborative inquiry. Some researchers, in looking at alternate ways of supervising doctoral students, have suggested that the process can be a stimulating experience if supervisors allow students more creativity (Bargar & Duncan, 1982 ; Kiely, 1982).

Other researchers, in noting that only a few students do any research or go on to have a career in research after completing their dissertations, have suggested that the nature of the dissertation supervision experience influences students' future research productivity (Blanton, 1983; Gelso, 1979; Magoon & Holland, 1984; Seeman, 1973; Wallerstein, 1971). Gelso (1979) in addressing the problem of low scientific productivity of psychology graduates, suggested that the most useful way of improving scientific productivity "is through deliberate and systematic attention to the training situation" (p.26). Gelso proposed ten ingredients of effective research training to enhance motivation and reduce the anxiety associated with research.

Researchers have looked at various other issues related to dissertation supervision. Smith (1979) looked at faculty time expenditures for dissertation committee activities. Zaporozhetz (1987) surveyed faculty to determine how they prepare students for the literature review portion of the dissertation. Shemberg, Keeley, & Blum (1989) surveyed clinical training directors' attitudes toward traditional and nontraditional dissertation research. Respondents reported that many more of their colleagues would support traditional methods (experimental and correlational) and a small but meaningful number of respondents would support nontraditional approaches (phenomenological studies, surveys, library research, and case histories).

Research on the dissertation from the doctoral students' perspective has involved studies focusing on students' writing skills (Thoresen, 1979), emotional problems such as anxiety and writer's block (Arnkoff, Glass, & Robinson, 1992; Behr, 1992; Lah & Rosenberg, 1986; Lowenberg, 1969), self-discovery and personal development (Clark, 1980; Patch, 1978; Warren, 1985). A few researchers have looked at ways students can cope

with the pressures of dissertation writing such as dissertation seminars, support groups, dissertation partners and counseling interventions (Franek, 1982; Katz, 1995; Monsour & Michael, 1991; Stalker, 1991), or research supervisory systems designed to provide for a higher level of supervision to help students complete their dissertations (Garcia, 1987; Garcia et al., 1988). Some researchers have looked at students' dissertation topic selection (Gelso & Fretz, 1992; Issac, 1989; Magoon & Holland, 1984).

Researchers have also surveyed doctoral students' attitudes about the dissertation experience. Cheatham, Edwards, and Erickson (1982) found generally favorable attitudes towards the dissertation experience, but suggested that the quality and quantity of interaction between candidates and their committees as an area for possible change. Miller and Husmann (1993) found that a positive aspect of the dissertation experience was the opportunity to focus on learning and friendships with other graduate students. A negative aspect of the experience was the realization that graduate students were expected to enter into an "indentured servant" relationship with an advisor. Smith (1993) identified

common attributes that may contribute to a successful dissertation experience which include, training experiences, perseverance, committee makeup and communication. Beeler (1993) suggested that in light of the shifts in demography of graduate students, including more women, more older students, and more minority students, one change to enhance the dissertation experience could include improved faculty relationships with students.

Role expectations of dissertation advisors and doctoral candidates and the relationship between the doctoral student and the dissertation committee surfaced as factors and led to unfavorable attitudes towards the dissertation experience when these factors were viewed as obstacles (Alvarado, 1988; Huguley, 1989; Testa, 1986). McMichael (1992) found that expectations of students' roles were problematic with both faculty and students mentioning an enabling approach and not allowing student ownership of their own project which raised the question of the need to balance students' needs with the aims of faculty.

A few studies have focused specifically on the relationship between doctoral students and dissertation committee members. Katz and Hartnett (1976) surveyed graduate students to assess the importance of supervisory relationships for students and found that "graduate students relations with members of faculty are regarded by most graduate students as the single most important aspect of the quality of their graduate experience; unfortunately, many also report that it is the single most disappointing aspect of their graduate experience" (p. 261). Magoon and Holland (1984) stated that "it is clearly advantageous for students to establish close positive relationships with one or more faculty. This experience leads to more satisfaction with this important aspect of graduate study. It should also enhance research identification and productivity" (p. 707).

Daniels-Nelson (1984) surveyed student perceptions of advisor-advisee relationships and found that enhancement of the relationship was needed. Goulden (1991) also surveyed student and faculty perceptions about the dissertation advisor-advisee relationship. In looking at roles, nature of the relationship and its

effect on communication between the advisor, advisee, and committee members, she found that conflicting expectations about feedback from faculty and advisor-advisee role perceptions were areas of dissatisfaction which influence the completion of the dissertation.

Adams (1992) looked at the mentoring relationship between the doctoral student and his/her major professor/dissertation advisor. Conflicts with supervisory style and contrasting perceptions of the mentoring process were found.

Andersen (1986) used a phenomenological study to investigate students' perceptions of the relationships between doctoral candidates in nursing/nursing education and their dissertation committee chairperson. Results indicated that relationships were viewed positively when chairpersons gave adequate support, clear direction, feedback and chairpersons were viewed negatively when they did not.

Summary

The impression after this review is that the literature on the dissertation has focused on several areas, including the technical aspects of planning and writing a dissertation, dissertation policies and

practices, the "all but dissertation" (ABD) phenomenon and issues in research training and dissertation supervision from the perspective of both students and faculty involved in the dissertation process. However, the basic issue of doctoral students' experiences with their dissertation committees has received little consideration in the research and emerges as an area in need of additional investigation. The experiences doctoral students have with their dissertation committees lends itself well to a qualitative approach, specifically a phenomenological investigation. The phenomenological approach will allow exploration of the subjective experiences of doctoral students and furthermore lead to understanding the meanings the students give to their experiences.

The current study using a phenomenological approach, seeks to address the ways in which doctoral students view their experiences and in so doing, it is hoped that a better understanding of this experience may be gained.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The following chapter begins with a discussion of phenomenological research in psychology. This discussion will be followed by the specific procedures used in the current study.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Traditional psychological research involves creating and testing hypotheses to identify and explain the relationship between the independent and dependent variable(s) which are observable and measurable. However, due to the difficulty of studying subjective experiences with traditional methodologies, implementation of other methodologies have been advocated (Gelso, 1988; Hoshmand, 1989; Hycner, 1985 Patton, 1989). Goldman (1976) suggested that traditional research methods produce results that are not beneficial in understanding the abstract nature of human behavior.

The phenomenological approach as a means of studying the human experience of a phenomenon through the world of the person who experiences it, has been recommended by several researchers (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1975). Phenomenological researchers seek to set aside theoretical presuppositions and understand the phenomenon from the first person perspective of the participants who are viewed as the experts. Understanding of an experience is gained by objective observation of the phenomenon described by those who have lived it.

DATA COLLECTION

Participants. Participants were students enrolled in either clinical or counseling psychology programs at five institutions located in four southeastern states. The participants were at various stages in the dissertation process and were currently being supervised by a dissertation committee. No controls for demographic variables within the chosen population were established. No incentive was offered for participation. The participants were chosen based on

the following criteria: 1) the individual was completing a doctoral degree in either clinical or counseling psychology; 2) the individual was being supervised by a doctoral committee; 3) the individual was willing/able to describe his/her experience.

Thirteen participants, seven females and six males were interviewed for this study. The number of participants to be interviewed was based on a survey of similar phenomenological studies, where the number of participants ranged from twelve to twenty. In many phenomenological studies, the number of participants to be interviewed is decided by interviewing until no new themes emerge, and then obtaining a few more interviews. The researcher is confident that thirteen interviews was sufficient to obtain the necessary data.

The Interview. Prior to beginning the interviews, the participants were given a written description of the study (See Appendix A), informed consent (See Appendix B) and permission to reprint (See Appendix F) forms to review and sign. The primary researcher interviewed each participant face-to-face and the interviews lasted from approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

All interviews were audiotaped for verbatim transcription. During the interviews, the participants were asked to talk about their experiences with their dissertation committees. Typically, the interview will begin with the request that the participant "tell me about your experiences of the supervisory relationship with your dissertation committee". The participants were asked to "discuss any other experiences with your dissertation committee" to obtain other descriptions. The format and context of a phenomenological interview described by Thompson, Locander and Pollio (1989, 1990) served as a guide in the current study. The focus of the interview was on the participants' actual descriptions of their experiences with the research topic as suggested by Kvale (1983). Theoretical discussions and participants personal opinions about the research topic were avoided as the participants were asked to describe specific situations in their lives. The interviews were unstructured and the guiding principle was to gain a complete understanding of the participants' experiences as they lived it and as they wished to describe it.

Appropriate measures were taken to protect the confidentiality of the participants in this study. Only the primary researcher knows the identity of the participants. The audiotapes were coded prior to their release to the transcriptionist and she signed a written pledge of confidentiality (See Appendix D). Members of the research analysis team were also asked to sign a similar document (See Appendix E).

Bracketing. The phenomenological analysis process involves the bracketing of assumptions of the researcher in regard to the research topic (Hycner, 1985). Bracketing is done to promote more rigor within the research by identifying any presuppositions the researcher might have about the research topic. The researcher is to be aware of those presuppositions throughout the study and to set these presuppositions aside as much as possible to limit their influence on the analysis of interview data.

Analysis Team. The phenomenological method of data analysis involves the use of an analysis team. Not only does the analysis team interpret the data, an analysis team helps to control researcher bias and

is advocated by Hill (1981). A team composed of the primary investigator, her advisor (co-investigator), and two other individuals cognizant of phenomenological methodology analyzed the interview protocols to understand the meaning of the participant's experiences. Giorgi (1975) asserts that "if any other researcher assumes the attitude described by the researcher, then he should be able to perceive and understand the same meaning" (p. 79).

ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

The procedure proposed by Colaizzi (1978) was used as the means for analyzing the interview protocols:

1. Sense of the Whole - The analysis team read each protocol to "acquire a feeling...(make) sense out of them" (p. 59).
2. Extracting Significant Statements - From each protocol the analysis team extracted statements that were directly related to the phenomenon under study.
3. Formulating meanings - The analysis team assigned meaning to the extracted significant

statements, deriving meanings that "should never sever all connection with the original protocol..." (p. 59).

4. Clustering Themes - The analysis team organized the formulated meanings into clusters of themes and validated them by referring back to the original protocols to ensure their existence.

5. Exhaustive Description - The emergent themes were compiled into an exhaustive description of the investigated phenomenon as the analysis team attempted to achieve..." as unequivocal a statement of identification of its fundamental structure as possible..." (p. 61).

6. Final Validation - The investigator invited the participants in the study to review the exhaustive description to verify whether or not it was congruent with their experience. Any corrections, addition, and deletions that the participants indicated were needed, were made. Each participant was provided an explanation of the thematic structure derived from the interview protocols.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

The researcher is required to ensure the reliability and validity of a study throughout the process of the study. The manner in which phenomenologist address these issues is as follows:

Reliability

Giorgi (1975) claimed that a consensus among researchers about given data is not an intrinsic demand of the phenomenological method. He asserts that "if any other researcher assumes the same attitude described by the researcher, then he should be able to perceive and understand the same meaning...One does not have to necessarily agree but must understand what he is disagreeing about..." (p.78). With phenomenological methodology, reliability could only be meaningful if the researcher's perspective is made explicit and shared by others. Goodrich (1988) interpreted the criterion for reliability in phenomenological research as the extent to which it can be shown that a description is true to the experience.

In establishing fidelity to the experience, the researcher creates a trusting atmosphere with the participants to allow them to openly share their experiences by explaining the purpose of the study, the manner in which confidentiality will be protected and having the participants sign for permission to reprint excerpts of their interviews. In addition, participants are asked to review the summaries and provide feedback as to whether it fits their experience. Also, to ensure that the structure emerges from the data, a determination should be made as to whether there is anything contained in the original protocols that isn't accounted for in the themes, and whether the themes propose anything not implied in the original protocols (Colaizzi, 1978). The research analysis team serves to determine that the themes do indeed emerge from the data.

Validity

Wertz (1984) proposes that the issue of validity in phenomenological research "has to do with the extent that the researcher actualizes the potential of

her data for expressing the original organization of the experience" (p.41). Thus, validity involves producing results which are faithful to the phenomenon as it is lived. Polkinghorne(1989) noted that the degree of validity of a study is dependent on whether a person reading the data experiences the data as accurate and revealing and is able to follow and accept as valid the thought processes that led to the conclusions.

Bracketing of the researchers' assumptions is one means of promoting validity. Another means of validation is the follow-up done with participants where they were sent their interview transcripts and asked to check for accuracy of the data in relation to their experiences. In addition to getting feedback from the participants, continual checking of the interview protocols by the research analysis team provides more validation. Still another means of validation is careful selection of participants who have had the experience.

In summary, the phenomenological researcher approaches a study with a philosophical basis and a specific methodology. In addition, he/she maintains a

consideration of validity and reliability throughout the process of determining the thematic structure.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this investigation was to describe the thematic structure of doctoral students' experiences with their dissertation committees. Analysis of interview data produced a group of themes describing the structure of the participants' experiences. This structure was found to consist of three themes: Process, Relationships, and Issues.

In the following sections, descriptions of the themes will be given. Excerpts from interview transcripts will be used to illustrate the themes. In the interviews, the focus moved back and forth between all three themes. An interaction among the themes should be readily apparent.

The themes, described by participants in positive or negative terms, emerged as figural throughout the protocols and were cast against the ground of time. A diagram schematizing the overall structure of the participants' experiences is provided as Figure 1.

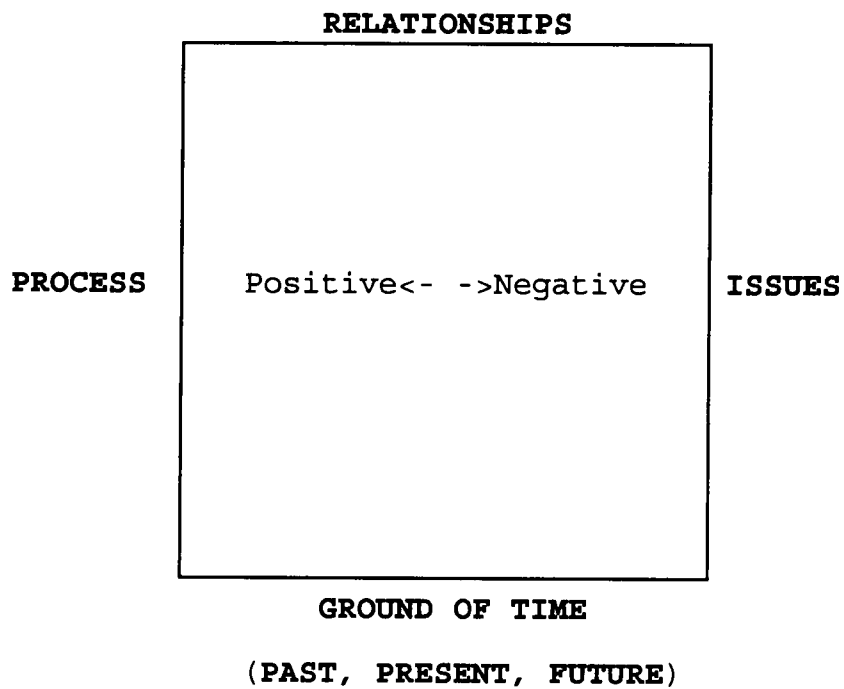


Figure 1. Thematic Structure of Doctoral Students' Experiences With Their Dissertation Committees.

THE GROUND OF THE EXPERIENCE

In all the protocols, the participants described their experiences with their dissertation committees against the ground of time. The ground of time was manifested in the traditional experience of time: past, present, and future. Participants described their experiences in terms of the past. For example, the following statements were made by several participants:

...For several months, I didn't do anything. I pushed my dissertation to the side and just sat there. In terms of time, I feel I lost a lot of time...

...Choosing one of my committee members was a mistake, but I didn't know it at the time...

...My major professor was helpful during that time...when I was looking at what instruments to use...

...Some of the anger in the past was not only because I felt I was being jerked around but it was also because it was not getting me anywhere...

...There was a period of time when I was re-evaluating and I was kind of stuck...

The participants also described their experiences in the context of the present as they discussed their present situation:

...I'm sitting here stuck.. I've got piles of information stacked in a corner but I haven't done anything with it..So I haven't done anything on my dissertation in six months...

...I'm wondering even now ...there is a sense that perhaps I've done something incorrectly or left something out...

...I'm talking to my major professor a little more now...Somehow he seems more friendly...

The participants also described their experiences in terms of the future:

...There is a future worry when I write the results. Will it make any sense? Will my committee approve it? What kind of reactions are they going to have?...

...I don't know what's going to happen when I defend. I've seen some people come back to defend their dissertation and have some real problems..To be honest, I'm not looking forward to my defense...

...I hope to God they will not get a case of the guilts in the next six months and decide they have not been invested enough and run me ragged to show how invested they are...

Emerging against the ground of time were the experiential themes which formed the thematic structure of the participants' experiences with their dissertation committees. The three experiential themes of Process, Relationships, and Issues describe the basic structure of the participants' experiences. The themes may also be considered existential because they illuminate the meaning of the lived experiences given by participants.

The participants gave rich descriptions of their experiences, sometimes employing metaphors to describe their experiences. Within each theme, participants' experiences existed on a continuum, from positive to negative. The interrelatedness of the themes should be apparent throughout this discussion. A description of the themes and excerpts from the interview protocols that illustrate the themes are presented in the following pages.

PROCESS

The process theme was described in terms of the participants' views of the dissertation process in general and their discussion about specific parts of the dissertation process which included forming their committees, the basis for selecting their committee members, changing committee members, choosing their topics, and meeting with their committees.

The Process In General

The participants provided descriptions of their individual reactions to the dissertation process in general. The following excerpt describes several participants' experiences of the dissertation process in general:

...I don't have any horror stories to talk about in terms of the process..the process has been easy because the faculty tends to be very consistent and very supportive...

Other participants made the following statements about the general process:

...But from the beginning, I have not understood the social process of the whole thing and how it's supposed to be done..I was just not understanding the whole dissertation process--whether you are supposed to work collaboratively or all alone, whether you are supposed to prove that you can do all this stuff by yourself. I just don't understand this process...

...It seemed like it was part of some process where there was a certain amount of time I was expected to work on it, a certain amount of suffering that I needed to do, more than just a certain level of quality that needed to be reached.. suffering felt like a part of the process, it felt like the goal at times...

...Unfortunately the department is really changing and the folks that are real respectful of students are being replaced by ones that are into power

and making you go through some horrible initiation process that they went through, making you squirm and enjoying it...

... The process is like some sense of rites of passage. I don't know whether it's that way in all programs or that it needs to be that way...

...It's all about jumping hoops, the whole process...

...It's just a formality...it's just for them to say he's gone through the dissertation process and now it's our turn to say yes, sign the forms, submit it to the college of education and now he's a Ph.D....

...It's a political game...you have to be careful.

One participant gave a rich description of his reaction to the dissertation process:

...It's a matter of going through the performance, the show. It's an act, Act I, Scene I. My dissertation is going to be Act IV, Scene IV. Now I'm collecting my data and that's Act III, Scene III. I'm the protagonist and the committee members are the characters. Without them, there is no act, no play. But without me, no protagonist, there is no show either. I need them but I know I run the show, at least indirectly I do. I have to be respectful of authority, power, but I feel like I am in charge and that's because I have to. I do not feel safe relinquishing all that control over to five people because it's my Ph.D. I do them. I need them to finish this play called Dissertation... It's a play. For example, when I finished my prospectus defense, they clapped. You expect them to say something nice, but they clapped. It's an act. You've got to put in your performance...

In addition to discussing their reactions to the dissertation process in general, participants talked about their experiences of specific aspects of the dissertation process. These include forming the committee, the basis on which the committee members were selected, changing committee members, and selecting a topic.

Forming The Committee

Participants described their experiences of forming their committees as ranging from easy to very difficult. Several participants talked about the ease of forming a committee:

...Forming my committee was the easy part. Each person that I asked agreed to do it without much hesitation...

...I really had no problems putting together a committee. It was never a big deal in terms of finding people. The committee is composed of people I knew and had worked with and was comfortable working with...

...Forming your committee can get kind of funky depending on how well you've gotten along with people in your department. I had not had much trouble with folks so it was pretty easy for me to form my committee...

...I picked them all pretty well and avoided any people I thought I might have problems with. I didn't have to choose my committee until my third year...

...I know in other programs you have to form your committee very early but in mine I had several years to get to know people before I formed a committee. It takes time to see who matches. It felt good that I had the freedom to have the time to pick who I wanted on my committee...

Some participants experienced some difficulty in forming a committee:

...I was a little limited. In my area of research there are not a lot of people in my

department who do that. So I was kind of limited in trying to get five people. I guess I was kind of lucky to get the five I needed who were there and accessible...

...I was somewhat limited in choosing. No one is really doing anything exactly related to what I'm doing. In what we have available in the department I had to choose...

...It was a little difficult to do because you had just started the program and didn't know people well...there is no formal structure for getting to know potential committee members. You just had to go out there and find them by taking classes and stuff like that...

Other participants experienced great difficulty in forming a committee:

...I had problems forming one... There was one person who I asked that was kind of snobby and she refused...I left her a message

asking whether or not she wanted to be on my committee. She got real irate about being asked by mail instead of me asking her personally, so she refused to be on it because of my impropriety...

...So with a qualitative study in mind, I went about trying to find a committee. It was very difficult. The people I asked said they didn't really understand my research...

Basis of Selecting Committee Members

Participants discussed the basis on which they selected their committee members. Different patterns emerged in terms of the way in which the participants chose their committees. For several participants, input from other students served as their guide for selecting committee members:

...A lot of talking went on between students. Whenever we could we would talk to people who had already had those people and ask those students

about their styles. The student grapevine really saved us and kept us from feeling really lost...

...I talked with other students. It's like yea, I had that experience with that faculty person, this person is super nice or you'd have to be insane to put that person on your committee...

For several participants, selecting committee members was a political decision:

...I chose my chair because it was a political move. He was the chair of my program committee and I didn't want to step on his toes by not inviting him to continue as my dissertation chair...

...The decision became political. I ended up choosing a professor because I felt it would be politically astute to put him on my committee because of his connections to the dean's office...

...I was really kind of cognizant of the fact that I didn't want people on the committee who could not work well together because I didn't want to get caught up in any kind of politics and whatever else that might be going on that had absolutely nothing to do with my dissertation...

...It takes time to figure out the politics of the department and to find out from upperclassmen who works with who and who doesn't...

Some participants selected committee members based on previous experiences and/or interactions with them:

...I talked to other students and I talked to my chair about how an individual would work with another. That helped. I learned a lot. But mostly it was my experience with them, my working with them and how they treated me...

...There are certain people you want to invite and certain people you want to avoid based on your

experiences or your personal interactions with them...

There were several other reasons given by participants for selecting committee members, which included race, gender and personal preferences:

...I wanted to make my committee as multiracial as possible...

...There was a lot of pre-selecting. I was real cautious as to whom to invite on my committee. I chose people because of my area of research, for gender balance, because I liked and respected them and I chose my chair because I had heard from other students that he lets you do what you want and that was appealing...

...I wanted people on the committee who I had some sort of relationship with. I also wanted people on the committee who weren't just going to sign off. I wanted them to read and give me feedback...

...It was more like who I didn't want on my committee...

...They told us in the beginning to think about chemistry, how people might work together. I kind of kept this in mind but I was more intent on finding people that I could live with...

Changing Committee Members

The participants also talked about making changes in terms of committee members. Sometimes the changes were necessitated by factors beyond the participants' control such as committee members leaving the university due to sabbaticals or resignations. A couple of participants made the following statements:

...I had to switch out one of the professors from my department who took a sabbatical"

...One of my committee members left the university. He kind of left without warning so I was left to find a new committee member to take his place...

One participant's decision to change her chairperson resulted from a conflictual relationship between the two of them:

...I realized it was not a healthy process, it was just she and I going back and forth...I finally became aware that it was not a matter of if I stick with a person long enough, we'll be able to get through it together. Something was not working in our relationship, so I switched to a major professor that I felt comfortable working with...

Another participant who was experiencing conflict with her chair, considered switching but opted to not do so:

...We have another professor who is good at getting people through the program and I thought about switching to her. But my major professor is somebody I know, like she's a personality type that I know, that I'm used to. I may be wrong but I feel I can handle my major professor's hot and

cold personality more than I can handle this other professor's passive-aggressive personality. So I made the choice that I'd rather be with this witchy mother figure than this other thing...

Several participants admitted they had thought about changing committee members but did not because of possible political repercussions. Two excerpts serve as examples:

...I wouldn't have wanted to put someone on and pissed them off by taking them off when it didn't work. Politically it's not a good thing to do...

...I thought about it but it would have to be pretty bad for me to replace a committee member since it's not a good move politically...

Choosing the Dissertation Topic

Choosing a research topic was another aspect of the dissertation process that participants discussed. Participants experienced topic selection as either easy

or difficult depending on the level of agreement between the participants and their chairpersons regarding the nature of the research. Descriptions by several participants reflect easy experiences with choosing a topic:

...My chair and I developed the idea together...We thought it would be interesting to develop...We pretty quickly came up with something to do...

...I decided it better be an area that I really had an interest in. So I just said I'm going to do this and it turns out my chair agreed and this is the really great thing about my chair...I know of other people who would not encourage a person to pursue a topic that they knew nothing about or that they really had no interest or experience in...

...I never felt any pressure from my chair in choosing a topic..Everybody else was sweating bullets...

Several participants talked about the difficulty of topic selection:

...The only frustrating part has been proposing a topic. There were some issues of territoriality with my co-principal investigator in terms of what I could study and what I couldn't, so I had to take that into consideration when deciding on a topic...

...In the beginning it was hard because my major professor was trying to get me to do the study he wanted me to do...But that made it more difficult for me because I wanted to do my study...

Meetings With the Committee

Participants expressed their reactions to meetings with their dissertation committees. Some participants talked about meetings that they experienced as going

smooth where they felt supported and they received helpful feedback:

...My proposal meeting went pretty smooth. It was really kind of easy. I was much more anxious than I needed to be and much more prepared than I needed to be...

...At the meeting I had the opportunity to be with all my committee except one professor. They were tough but supportive while being tough. It felt okay. On a scale of one to ten, it was probably an eight. I'm hoping for more of the same...

...The meeting with my committee went well. They were supportive of my idea and didn't have a lot of changes to make. Their suggestions or the feedback I got at the meeting didn't seem to be out of some need to be critical or picky or anything like that. Their suggestions really seemed to be useful and helpful to my study to make it a better study...

Other participants discussed negative experiences in the meetings with their dissertation committees. Negative experiences involved participants feeling like they didn't get enough direction or time to discuss everything they needed to discuss, feeling like they were personally attacked, and participants feeling frustrated by the difficulty they had in scheduling meetings.

The following excerpts provide good examples of participants experiences of receiving too little direction or time in their proposal meetings:

...The proposal meeting was odd. I felt as if I didn't get enough direction. The meeting was forty-five minutes. One person was in a hurry to catch a plane so we were in a hurry to get through it. We didn't have enough time to get through all parts of my proposal. I would have liked to have gotten more feedback about my the statistics and other parts of my dissertation...

...The meeting was supposed to be an hour and a half. My major professor had something else to

do so it could only be forty-five minutes. So it just felt rubber-stamped to me...

...The issues raised at the meeting weren't just methodological issues that can be addressed. They were kind of conceptual concerns, so it was really hard to take those issues and make them concrete and specific. They were kind of vague and theoretical...

A couple of participants described meetings which they experienced as personal attacks:

...During the meeting he was playing devil's advocate. He would raise a few issues...they were kind of theoretical concerns but not real major things. He kept raising these small issues and getting into very minute details. I would answer and he'd throw something back and pick out another little detail. I'd address that and he'd pick out another detail. I thought he was being argumentative just for the sake of intellectual bantering. Basically I was sitting there high and

dry just arguing about these really minute points and taking it personally...

...My proposal meeting was a nightmare. The questions one committee member asked had to do with approaching the research from a quantitative perspective that I really couldn't answer because my methodology was qualitative. I had to argue every detail. It was horrible. It was awful. It was probably the worst experience I've had in graduate school. It was just horrible. None of the other committee members would make eye contact. I felt like I had farted in public or something...It wasn't the kind of experience I wanted it to be...the meeting left me feeling so disrespected so it was a fairly obnoxious experience...

Several participants talked about problems in scheduling meetings with their committees:

...The only beef I have is the difficulty in planning meetings because everyone's schedule is

so varied and it is sometimes very hard to coordinate a time and place where everyone can meet. So logistics is a problem....

...Getting a meeting scheduled was kind of a problem because people had different schedules.

...Getting at least four of my committee members to agree on a time and a place was as challenging as writing the prospectus. There were some power struggles, some "I don't like that building, can we do it in our building, what about the other person?" There were quite a lot of little things that were quite annoying...

RELATIONSHIPS

This theme involved the interpersonal aspect of the participants' experiences with their chairperson, committee members and their committee as a whole. Participants described relationships in positive terms when there was mutual respect, collaboration, support and helpful feedback. In relationships participants

described in negative terms, they experienced conflict, lack of respect, lack of support, and unmet expectations of roles.

Several participants reported they had positive relationships with their committee chair, in some cases stating the chair was a father figure, mentor, or friend.

...The relationship with my chairperson has been quite good. She gives me a lot of good feedback and very specific changes. She has been great. I feel like I can go to her about any concerns I have about anything...

...She was real supportive and had good ideas...really laid out some suggestions that were really concrete and that I found helpful. She's been helpful, real supportive.

...It feels more collaborative. We're working together on this and he has my best interest in mind...

...I've heard horror stories about other students and I think it has a lot to do with who your chair is. I feel very fortunate because my chair person is very reliable, very efficient. You can really count on her to do things when she tells you she's going to do them. She moves you along instead of holding you back like I hear from other people that some chairs do. The kind of feedback she gives is straightforward, not vague in a way that you don't know how to change things. I got lucky when I chose her...

One participant used the following metaphor to describe the relationship with her major professor:

...We have more than a student-professor relationship. It's mentor-mentee. He's my friend. He's my father figure. I like the way we compromise. It's been a good experience and one relationship that I will cherish for the rest of my life...

In contrast, another participant gave the following description of his relationship with his major professor:

...One way the relationship with my major professor felt like was there was a point where it reminded me of kind of like a hostage and a captor relationship where I felt trapped because it seemed like whatever I would try to do, I was not moving forward...It also felt like a sick relationship at times. I don't know what her motives were at times but it felt like her motivation was to see me suffer. It felt like an abusive relationship...

The following excerpts are other examples of the negative aspects of some participants' relationships with their chairpersons:

...I thought he was a picky s.o.b. at times...

...When asking my major professor for guidance, she uses phrases like hand-holding...I've got a

lot of experience with her that says she can turn on a dime. She can be very warm, supportive, and helpful and then on a bad day throw it all back in your face...I really do have a lot of difficulty with my major professor...I really am intimidated by her and I am mistrustful of her...the way she runs hot and cold, her boot camp mentality, sink or swim...

...My chair lacks leadership skills. He's passive at times and he's easily intimidated by other committee members. I've been really disappointed with my chair...

...My major professor, my chairperson, is a real distant sort of person and has not ever shown very much investment in me or in what I'm doing...When I met with him, I usually had the feeling he wished I would hurry up, that I was taking up valuable time when he could be elsewhere...It's very hard to get him by phone. He doesn't return phone calls. He doesn't

listen to his voice mail. He's not real responsive and he's not real invested in me...

Relationships with Individual Committee Members

In their discussion of relationships with individual committee members, the same patterns emerged in terms of participants describing experiences with committee members in positive terms when they were supportive, helpful and in negative terms when they not.

Several participants made the following statements about their relationships with individual committee members:

...I haven't had a bad experience at all with any of my committee members. They are supportive, helpful...

...Regarding my relationship with my other committee members, there has been one other committee member who at times I have been able to get some sort of reality testing about the process

...so that was a real helpful role that this committee member served...

...One committee member has given me several hours of her time to help me with methodological issues. She's been very, very supportive...

...My methodologist helped me out a lot. She's a very bright woman and she really knows her stuff. She doesn't spoon feed you and she tells you things to try to get you to challenge yourself. She has been real helpful, real supportive.

...This one committee member sees me as her protege and I see her as my mentor...

The following excerpts exemplify some participants relationships with individual committee members that were described in negative terms:

...All along I had a pretty good relationship with everybody except one committee member. What I think really happened with this one member was

that she wanted to be powerful in the department...I felt like she was giving me a hard time to make a statement. I wish she had chosen to do it in a way that didn't use me...

...I am somewhat disappointed in my stats person... My statistician was becoming more vague...I was feeling, needing more guidance and I wasn't getting that from him...statistics certainly isn't my strong point...

...This person had first agreed but then later said she didn't want to be on my committee. I remember being in her office with my proposal in hand to give her and she said she didn't want to do it. I burst into tears. So then she agreed to do it. I supposed because the tears had been shed she felt sorry enough for me to do it...

Relationships with the Committee as a Whole

Participants discussed their relationships with the committee as a whole. Participants described their relationship with their committee as a whole in

positive terms when the committee was viewed as supportive, invested, collegial and in negative terms when the committee was viewed as distant, disrespectful, and unsupportive.

Several participants made the following statements about their committee as a whole:

...I'd say they are generally pretty supportive, positive and they are excited about my project. Supportive and excited I think best describes my committee. My committee is excited and that's good. The more excited my committee gets, the more excited I get. I am supposed to be excited but when they get excited it's wonderful...

...I feel really good about my committee. There's mutual respect...They respect me and each other and they work well as a group. They have different styles but they compliment each other. I feel really lucky. I think the stars aligned or something...

...I'm a collaborator and that's one thing I like about my committee. My chair and the other members, we collaborate. They give me suggestions and I throw out suggestions of my own and together we come up with stuff. That's how I work best. It's real collaborative and that suits me...

...They have been very, very encouraging, very supportive...It's been a positive collaborative experience. I believe if you choose your committee members right, the collaboration is going to happen automatically...

...I feel really supported by the four professors I'm working with. With two, it's more moral support and with the other two I'm getting moral support but also direction which is really important...

...My relationship with my committee is positive, working as a team, encouraging. I don't feel like they are out to stop me. I don't feel like

they are an obstacle at all but more of an alliance...

...From the start, everyone has been very supportive. Everybody has been real available to discuss ideas and give me relevant suggestions. I don't have any problems with my committee members. I've heard nightmare stories about some committee members and no one strikes me like that...

...I love my committee. It's a good committee...real easy, mutually respectful. I feel appreciated as a professional. It's a good group...

...As a whole, I would describe my committee as supportive. I feel they are very invested. It's collegial. I'm treated like a peer. My overall experience with them has been positive...

The following statements made by participants are in direct contrast to the ones mentioned previously:

...They are judge and jury. Every interaction I have with them, whether it's calling them to set up a meeting or calling to cancel a meeting, is an opportunity for me to put myself in front of this judge and jury. They evaluate me, innocent or guilty, about where I am and what I'm doing on my dissertation... I feel like a defendant, defending myself as a person. Sometimes I feel like I'm not measuring up to someone else's standards.

...The committee as a whole is distant... in terms of what I'm getting from them in terms of intellectual or emotional support. When I say intellectually distant, it's primarily that I didn't get the guidance I wanted. They gave me a roadmap and I have to figure out the best ticket and the best plane to fly. It would have been more helpful if I had asked for more direction or

they had given me more direction. It's been hard having no sense of direction...

...The first word that comes to mind to describe my relationship with my committee is betrayal. The impression I kept getting from them is that they thought I was taking the easy way out because I was doing a qualitative study which was not true. In addition to betrayal, the word abuse fits my experience, the fact that basically my department and committee were abusive to me. I think the issue was that a lot of this was directed at my chair...it was old politics...people didn't like him...So I think I got tangled up in that whole mess...

ISSUES

This theme emerged from participants discussions that centered on two issues: quantitative versus qualitative research and clinician versus researcher. Participants discussed their choice of a particular

research method, their views about it, and problems that resulted from their choices.

One participant in explaining his choice of a quantitative study said:

... I know I didn't want to do a qualitative study. I had done one for my thesis and I did not want to do a qualitative study again. For my Ph.D. I wanted to do something more traditional...

Another participant talked about why she chose a qualitative study over a quantitative one:

...By the time you get a large number of people and get little bits of data that is an average and has nothing to do with an individual, then for me it loses its usefulness...So I knew I didn't want to do another quantitative study... I did for my masters because I knew if I didn't, I'd never get out of graduate school... Luckily my advisor has been interested in qualitative research for years...he valued the kind of questions you can

address using qualitative research that will be relevant to psychotherapy...

Participants also discussed difficulties with their choice of methodology. One participant, doing a qualitative study, talked about difficulty which was related to an external factor, specifically pressure from her chair to use a different research method:

...I wanted to do the study I wanted to do..I understand qualitative research better than my chair.. I want to approach this study qualitatively and to have a discussion with him where he is pressuring for a quantitative study is hard.. I have a big problem when someone has to come through and be a pioneer because they want to do a pure qualitative study, a good study and professors are telling them that it's no good, there needs to be a quantitative component. Having this kind of discussion pisses me off...

My sense is that those of us doing qualitative research will be held to a higher standard than those doing a quantitative study...

Another participant doing a quantitative study talked about experiencing internal difficulty with her heretofore choice of research method:

...I think the more I've looked at the philosophy ...and the underlying assumptions to do this kind of research, I believe less and less..the use of putting people in groups and using fixed statistics and pretending like we are coming up with answers. I think the idea of observing something changes what you are looking at. I think that particularly when you try to take something like a developmental thing or a social thing and bring it into a lab and put it in some kind of term that can be quantified and measured, that by the time you have done that, what you've got is so much less interesting than what you originally wanted to know about...

The second issue participants talked about was their comfort with the roles of clinician and/or researcher. Some were comfortable in the role of

clinicians but not researchers. Others were comfortable in the role of both clinician and researcher.

The following statements made by several participants reflect their comfort with the role of clinician but discomfort with the role of researcher:

...I definitely believe in myself as a clinician..but I don't see myself as a researcher. I feel so negative when it comes to research...As I've gone through the program, I've learned that I really don't like doing research. I came into my program saying, you have to, that I really enjoyed research. You know, the whole Boulder model. The scientist-practitioner model is real important so I knew I needed to say it...even though I knew what I wanted is to be a clinician...the Boulder model does say 50-50 and the one 50% I've done great at. Not to be a researcher looks like a failure to some people, so sometimes I feel like I'm not measuring up to someone else's standards. They are not mine...

...I had been in clinical practice for years and that's what I came back to school for. It was not to do research. I wanted to get better clinically...I'm not a researcher...

...I don't see myself as a researcher. I feel so negative when it comes to research... I want to get my degree and practice...

The following excerpts illustrate participants' comfort in the role of both clinician and researcher:

...I like research. and I like clinical work. But I can see a person who doesn't like research and who wants to do only clinical work, find it very hard to self-motivate to do dissertation research...

...I like the program. I mean it's a lot of work because they put a lot of emphasis on both research and clinical experience. So we have to do both and I like both...

In summary, three themes emerged from participants' descriptions of their experiences with their dissertation committees: Process, Relationships, and Issues. These themes occurred across participants' experiences and had particular importance to the participants. The themes indicate that participants' experiences are complex and are characterized by the interplay among and between the themes which combine to make the overall experience.

The following excerpts capture the participants' overall experiences with their dissertation committees. The first statement exemplifies participants' positive experiences and the second statement exemplifies participants' negative experiences with their dissertation committees:

...It has been a positive experience...a positive, collaborative experience...They are supportive, helpful...I think that makes a big difference. You hear from other people and it's terrible for them. The job itself is a big job and if you don't have somebody supporting you, God, I can't imagine...

...It has been a wrenching experience. This (the experience) has been so aversive...There is nothing I'm going to do in this process that's going to change their opinion of me as reluctant, reticent, fearful or intimidated or having difficulty with the whole thing...

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The primary aim of this study was to gain a better understanding of doctoral students' experiences with their dissertation committees. The themes of Process, Relationships, and Issues emerged to form the structure of their experiences. In this chapter, the thematic structure found will be discussed in relation to prior research in the area of the dissertation and dissertation supervision. This will be followed by implications for doctoral students and faculty involved in the dissertation process and suggestions for future research.

The themes of Process, Relationships, and Issues occurred across experiences and were described in either positive or negative terms. The interrelatedness of the themes should be apparent throughout the discussion.

PROCESS

Participants in the current study described their experiences with the dissertation process in general. In addition, they described their experiences with specific aspects of the dissertation process which included forming the committee, basis for choosing the committee members, making changes to the committee, selecting a dissertation topic, and meeting with the committee.

In regards to the dissertation process in general, participants discussed their perceptions and expectations about the nature of the process. Some participants discussed the dissertation process in terms of understanding it and finding it easy, implying that the process met their expectations. Another participant discussed not understanding what was expected in the dissertation process in regard to whether it involved working collaboratively or independently.

One participant began the dissertation process thinking the dissertation was similar to writing a term paper, but later became aware that this was not the

case. Several participants' perceived the process as jumping hoops, a rite of passage, just a formality or a political game, which suggests they saw the dissertation as another hurdle with no real value in terms of a learning experience or a mechanism for research training.

The expectations and perceptions of these participants seem to fit well with the literature. Krathwohl (1988) provided suggestions and insights for students facing the doctoral dissertation to "create an awareness of the dissertation process so that one can make it a positive experience" (p.230). He contends that students doing a dissertation only vaguely understand the process and many want mainly to complete a requirement and get through. He advised students that writing the dissertation is quite different from writing a term paper because it is larger and more complex and the dissertation process is radically different from the courses of the regular curriculum, where the student once dependent on the instructor must now be independent.

Students' views of the dissertation process being some kind of initiation was captured clearly by

Sternberg (1981) who, in addressing the attitudes about the initiation-like quality and function of the dissertation suggested that "the dissertation may be looked upon like marines see boot-camp at Paris Island: a hell and brimstone initiation into the corps" (p.20). He further suggests transcending this attitude.

The view of the dissertation as just one last big hurdle to undergo has been supported by previous research (Blanton, 1983; Sollod, 1979). Blanton (1983) noted that "In some cases, the dissertation is seen merely as a hurdle, an annoyance to be gotten out of the way as soon as possible" (p.75).

Some participants' experiences of the process in general involved misperceptions and unclear expectations. Blanton (1983) who postulated that clarification of rights, obligations, and expectations early on can save much confusion and conflict later appears to be right on target.

Participants also discussed their experiences with specific elements of the process in which some participants found positive, some negative. The specific elements of the process discussed by participants included forming the committee, their

basis for choosing particular individuals to serve on the committee, changing the makeup of the committee, selecting a dissertation topic, and meeting with the committee.

Forming a committee was experienced as positive when the faculty the participants asked agreed to be on the committee and when the participants felt they had enough time in the program to get to know and feel comfortable with faculty. Participants' negative experiences with forming a committee involved faculty refusing when asked to serve on the committee because of lack of interest in the students' area of research or planned research methodology or conflicts with other proposed committee members.

The participants in choosing committee members appeared to be very much aware of the potential for either positive or negative experiences based on their selection of committee members. This awareness was fostered by previous interactions with faculty either personally or as recounted by other students, the participants' knowledge of departmental politics or participants' need for compatibility in terms of personality, race and/or gender.

An awareness of the extraordinary importance of the committee has been well documented in the literature (Cone & Foster, 1993; Gemeroth, 1990; Long, Convey & Chwalek, 1985; Smith, 1993; Madsen, 1983; Pedron & Evans, 1992; Sternberg, 1981). The manner in which participants formed committees or selected committee members indicated they were aware of this fact. In addition, the procedures they used to do so had remarkable resemblance to the procedures recommended in the literature. Mauch and Birch (1989) recommended that students "try to assess prospective committee members ...consult your advisor, fellow students, graduates of the department's program; talk to a number of faculty about your proposed statement of problem to see if they are interested in or knowledgeable about it. Ask for advice and suggestions from those with who you can talk. Carefully weigh the reception, the consultation, the expressions of interest, and the quality and direction of advice you receive...the early selection of appropriate committee members can save a great deal of time, effort, and frustration later and will certainly enhance the quality of the final product" (p.97). Some of the

selection procedures used by participants in the current study mirror these recommendations.

Changing committee members was experienced less negatively by the participants when the change was necessitated because of factors that were beyond the control of the participants i.e. committee members resigning or going on sabbatical. Replacing committee members due to a conflictual relationship was experienced as negative by the participants even though it appeared to be in the best interest of the participant.

In regards to topic selection, some participants described positive experiences which involved the participants having the freedom to choose their topic with no pressure from the chairpersons, participants and chairpersons developing the topic together or chairpersons supporting the participants' choice of a topic even when the area of interest was different from the participants area of interest. Negative experiences described by the participants involved not being permitted to do research in the chairpersons' area of research and feeling pressured to do the study the chairpersons suggested.

Researchers have looked at factors in topic selection (Gelso and Fretz, 1992; Magoon & Holland, 1984; Miller & Husmann, 1993; Isaac, 1989). Magoon and Holland (1984) suggests that "the optimal role of the supervisor is to encourage the students's own ideas and to lean over backward to ensure that the student does not feel constrained to select any supervisor-suggested topic. In the event that none of the student's ideas seems to develop, the next optimal role of the supervisor involves sharing his or her ideas for researchable topics that meet the first criterion. We emphasize the supervisor's sensitivity to the student's free choice of topics to ensure that the selection represents a genuine interest that will sustain the student during the trials and tribulations of research. There is probably no more important single enhancer to subsequent research behavior than the student's sustained personal interest" (p.701).

Positive and negative experiences of meetings with committee members were also described by participants. Participants experienced meetings with committees as positive when they felt a sense of support, they received helpful, constructive feedback and they felt

they were allotted sufficient time to discuss all the issues. Negative experiences were reported due to a lack of direction or feedback, time constraints, and when they felt unsupported and in some instances personally attacked. All the participants expressed frustration with the difficulty in scheduling meetings with committees in terms of arranging a time and place when all committee members could be present.

Magoon and Holland (1984) considered the optimal research committee meeting: "(1) faculty as well as the student have a shared knowledge in the topic; (2) the purpose, at the time of approving the proposal, is to elicit from each member any ways of strengthening the proposal, notably by offering suggestions regarding alternative methodologies, subjects, and analyses; (3) there is sufficient time to explore and follow up proposed issues; (4) the climate encourages observations of related issues, problems, and added research ideas and concepts; (5) the high significance of the event contributes to raising the quality of the contributions of many if not all participants; and (6) rarely if ever will the student again encounter such single-minded and prepared attention to his or her

graduate work" (p.701). Katz and Harnett (1976) noted that the above conditions may be what graduate students have expected but seldom found in graduate study. In the current study, some participants appeared to have not found these conditions.

RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships was another theme of the participants' experiences with their dissertation committees. Participants were aware of facilitative relationships and some were aware of interpersonally conflictual relationships with their chairpersons, individual committee members and their committee as a whole.

In regards to their chairpersons, some participants experienced their chair as mentors, friends who they perceived as supervising them with supportive, collaborative, and helpful efforts. For some participants, their chairperson was their key source of support, helping them feel confident and secure by displaying effective leadership and being an important ally in their dealings with other committee

members. Participants also described negative interactions and negative perceptions of their chairpersons, citing lack of support, involvement, investment and failure to live up to the expected role of leader. Negative interactions with their chairpersons created feelings of mistrust, intimidation and anger in these participants. Participants' negative perceptions of chairpersons included characterizations of the chairpersons as disrespectful, cold, and abusive.

Participants' experiences with individual committee members were described in positive terms, when they found committee members to be supportive, helpful, challenging, knowledgeable and willing to give their time. Committee members who were perceived as disrespectful, argumentative and providing little guidance were experienced negatively by participants.

Descriptions of the committee as a whole indicated that participants experienced their committees as a whole positively when they felt there was good feedback, active participation, teamwork, mutual trust, respect and confidence in the participants' ability. Conversely, the absence of support, mutual respect,

collaboration, encouragement, guidance and appreciation of the participants as professionals contributed to participants' negative experiences with Committees as a whole.

Research has focused on the relationships between the student and major advisor/chairperson and committee members in the literature on the dissertation and dissertation supervision. The importance of these relationships has been well documented (Davis, Parker & Clyde, 1979; Long, Convey & Chwalek, 1985; Katz & Harnett, 1976; Mahoney, 1976; Mauch & Birch, 1983; Sternberg, 1981).

The nature of the relationships between students and advisors/committee members has been found by researchers to be a factor in the "all but dissertation" ABD phenomenon (Alvarado, 1988; Benkin, 1984; Daniels-Nelson, 1984; Gemeroth, 1990; Grissom, 1985; Hanson, 1992; Jacks, 1988; Karolyi, 1994; Lentz, 1995; Miller, 1995; Shultz, 1983; Simpson, 1986; Skudlarek, 1992; Smith, 1993; Sternberg, 1981; and research productivity (Blanton, 1983; Gelso, 1979; Katz & Harnett, 1976; Magoon & Holland; Seeman, 1973; Wallerstein, 1971).

It is not clear in the current study if participants' experiences of relationships with their dissertation committees has or will affect their ABD status or research productivity. However it is clear in the present study that participants' experiences of relationships with the committees are consistent with those reported in other studies.

In her study of students' perceptions of relationships between doctoral candidates and their dissertation chairperson, Andersen (1986) presented results similar to the experiences of participants in the current study: relationships were more satisfying and productive when the chairpersons were seen as role models or mentors who were experienced in the system, gave clear feedback and direction and enhanced students' self-esteem. Relationships were viewed as negative when the student experienced unclear expectations, feedback, and direction, too little or too much support, a negative self-concept and low self esteem.

In addition, the findings in this study included several of the factors noted by Goulden (1991). She reported conflicting expectations about faculty

feedback and committee members roles as areas of dissatisfaction in students' perceptions of their relationships with their chair and committee members.

ISSUES

Participants in the current study raised two issues that have been and continue to be controversial in the field of psychology: quantitative versus qualitative research and the role of clinician versus researcher (scientist-practitioner). As in the other themes, participants' discussions of these issues were in positive or negative terms.

Participants were either more positively wedded to quantitative research and less so with qualitative research or vice versa. They discussed their preferred choice of research methodology and most experienced support and freedom in their choice of methodology. However, a few participants talked about negative experiences of internal or external pressure in regards to their choice of methodology. Internal pressure involved the participants themselves questioning their choice of methodology. External pressures involved a

lack of support for the participants' choice of methodology by the chairperson and/or committee members and in these instances, participants experienced a lack of support to conduct qualitative research.

These participants' experiences were also reported by Gemberoth (1990) who found that students involved in quantitative research viewed their advisors as more supportive than those who conducted qualitative research.

Shemberg et al (1989) found more support for traditional methods and less for nontraditional approaches among clinical training directors. This is consistent with participants' experiences in the current study.

With the issue of clinician versus researcher, most participants viewed themselves positively in the role of clinician but negatively in the role of researcher. Only a few participants discussed experiencing themselves positively in both roles.

The participants' experiences echo Gelso and Fretz (1992) who noted that "the majority of graduate students entering counseling, clinical, and school psychology programs are motivated primarily by their

interest in becoming professional helpers. Only a small percentage of students enter these specialties with the primary motivation of becoming scientists" (p.45).

Gelso (1979) had addressed the clinician versus researcher issue previously and noted that "most students enter our graduate training programs with great excitement about becoming practitioners but with a deep sense of ambivalence about the interest value and usefulness of research/science in their future careers" (p.26). He went on to say "during the graduate training process, it is important to help each student find his or her place on the science-service continuum...most students will be largely service oriented and it is important to convey that this is not shameful" (p.27).

There is one last aspect of the current study in need of discussion. This aspect is the participants' reactions to the current study.

All of the participants thanked the researcher for the opportunity to discuss their experiences with their dissertation committees. Many commented that the interview was cathartic, allowing them the opportunity to unload feelings, clarify emotions, reflect on the

process, move forward. One participant said, "It's been good to reflect on the whole process and how it all took shape". Another participant said, "It has helped so much to talk about this, to get it all out, let it go. Maybe now I can become unstuck". Still another said, "It's been fun. I didn't realize it but I had a lot of energy around this and it has felt pretty good to discharge it. This has been cathartic, therapeutic. This is your life for a couple of years and that committee has so much power". Consequently, an advantage of the phenomenological method appears to be that participants not only benefitted from, but enjoyed participating in the research.

CONCLUSION

Participants in the current study described their experiences with their dissertation committees. Three integrated themes, Process, Relationships and Issues form the basic structure of their experiences.

Participants reported their experiences in positive or negative terms. The critical finding of this study is that students who reported positive

experiences appeared to be provided a higher level of support by their chairperson and/or committees.

The current study illuminated certain aspects of doctoral students' experiences with their dissertation committees. Their descriptions provide a valuable addition to the research on the dissertation and dissertation supervision. Hopefully, both doctoral students and faculty will be in a better position to make the experience as positive as possible.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DOCTORAL STUDENTS

A better awareness and well defined expectations of the dissertation process would have been helpful to prevent doctoral students' misunderstandings and misperceptions. Students need to discuss their expectations of the process with faculty and others having gone through the process.

Although it may seem trite to point out to doctoral students the importance of choosing their committees with care, this factor cannot be overestimated. Students should listen to other students, understand departmental politics and interact with faculty as much

as possible before selecting committee members. Ultimately, students should look for congruence between their styles and the styles of the chairperson and committee members. If students encounter unsurmountable problems with committee members they may want to consider making changes to their committees.

If additional support is needed, students may want to look for support from a dissertation partner or a support group. Students having significant difficulties either internally or from external sources may need to seek counseling.

Students should choose topics and research methods that represent their interest. Writing a dissertation is a long arduous process which may be made more difficult if a student has little or no interest in their topic and/or research methodology.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FACULTY

Faculty engaged in dissertation supervision should ensure that students have clear expectations of the dissertation process. One way to accomplish this would be for faculty to engage in a dialogue about the

process at the time they agree to serve on the committee.

Individual faculty may want to review their own interactions with students and become more aware of their supervisory styles. Faculty may need to create a climate that makes the process more positively reinforcing.

Faculty may need to recognize individual differences in students in terms of who needs more support, feedback, interaction, and encouragement. Faculty may also need to recognize students' differences in terms of interests and provide more freedom in topic selection and research methodology.

Faculty may want to create more structured supervisory systems to facilitate students' progress on the dissertation. In addition, faculty could encourage, even mandate, students' participation in dissertation support groups or with dissertation partners or set up sessions where students can talk about their dissertation experiences.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The attempt to gain a better understanding of doctoral students' experiences with their dissertation committees was deemed appropriate considering the relative paucity of research in this area. It was hoped that a phenomenological investigation would provide experiential understanding from which other research investigating doctoral students experiences could be developed.

The phenomenological research method helps provide a foundation for the experiential understanding of human experience. It is suggested that the phenomenological research method be used in other studies related to doctoral students' experiences. Some possibilities for future research emerging from the current study are as follows:

As the current study involved participants from psychology programs, one suggestion for future research is that a similar research method to the one in this study be used to interview doctoral students in other disciplines, (i.e. technical fields). The experiences of doctoral students at different stages, such as

recent dissertation completers or those having finished their dissertations several years ago may also be investigated. These studies would allow for comparison of the experiences of doctoral students in different situations.

In addition the relationship between the experiences of doctoral students with their dissertation committees and the time it took them to complete their dissertations could be investigated since that did not emerge clearly in the present study. Of particular interest would be an investigation of the coping processes used by doctoral students when they have negative experiences with their dissertation committees.

Additional research could focus on both doctoral students and their dissertation committees and their experience of their common relationship. Finally, a follow-up study at a later date with the participants in the current study regarding their research productivity to determine if having a positive or negative experience affected research productivity.

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candidates. Unpublished Dissertation, University of Oregon.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Study Description and Solicitation to Participate

My name is Cynthia Webb. I am a fifth year doctoral student in Counseling Psychology at the University of Tennessee, and I am currently preparing to collect data for research purposes.

The research I am doing is a study of doctoral students' experiences with their dissertation committees. In order to study this phenomenon, I need the assistance of people who are willing to share information concerning their experience.

I am asking for volunteers who would be willing to participate in this research. Your part would involve participating in confidential interview which would last approximately sixty to ninety minutes. You will be asked to share only those experiences related to the research topic that you feel comfortable discussing. The interview will be audio-taped, and later transcribed for review of thematic content. At no time will your identity, or that of any person you might mention during the interview be revealed to anyone other than myself. Your confidentiality will be

maintained when the tape is transcribed as I will remove your name and any identifying information you might give during the interview. Your tape will be erased at the end of the study. At a later time, I will schedule a brief session with you to summarize your interview and share the results of the study.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time you may wish. Your participation will be greatly appreciated.

If you are interested in participating, please call me at 910-378-0132. If I am not available at the time you call, please leave your name and number with the receptionist. Thank you for consideration and I look forward to discussing this further with you.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Webb

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

You have been invited to participate in a study of doctoral students' experiences with their dissertation committees. Your part in this study will consist of participating in a confidential interview in which you will describe your experience. This interview will be audio-taped and the entire process will last approximately sixty to ninety minutes.

Since your participation in this research involves only a confidential interview between you and your researcher, there should be no risk or discomfort on your part. In the event that you should experience any discomfort when discussing your experience, appropriate referral to a qualified counselor will be made. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Your sharing of information about your experience can be valuable to the social sciences field in gaining a better understanding of the dissertation process. It may offer you an opportunity to clarify and understand the experience for yourself.

Your identity will never be revealed to anyone except the researcher. The researcher will conduct all interviews, remove your name from and code your audio-tape before they are transcribed to maintain your confidentiality. Any identifying information given during the interview will be disguised on the transcript. Your tape will be erased once the study is completed. This consent form will remain in a locked file cabinet in the Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology, Claxton Education Building, Room 113, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Upon completion of the study, the researcher will explain the findings. Any questions you may have concerning this study or your participation in it may be answered by contacting Cynthia Webb (910-378-0132) or Dr. William Poppen at (615-974-5131), 108 Claxton Education Building, The Main Campus of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

I have read and understood this explanation of the research project and have had any questions regarding this research or my participation in it answered completely. I voluntarily agreed to participate.

Name

Date

Signature

Appendix C

Sample Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about your experiences with your dissertation committee, talking about whatever you wish.
2. Please discuss any other experiences with your dissertation committee.

Appendix D

Transcriber's Pledge of Confidentiality

As the transcribing typist of this research project, I will be hearing tapes of confidential interviews. I understand that I have an ethical responsibility to honor the research subjects' confidentiality, and I hereby agree not to share any information on these tapes with anyone with the exception of the primary researcher of this project (Cynthia Webb) or her dissertation committee chair (Dr. William Poppen).

Transcribing Typist

Date

Cynthia Webb, Primary Researcher

Appendix E

Research Team Member's Pledge of Confidentiality

As a member of this project's research team, I will be reading transcriptions of confidential interviews. I understand that I have an ethical responsibility to honor the research subjects' confidentiality, and I hereby agree not to share any information in these transcriptions with anyone except the primary researcher of this project (Cynthia Webb) or her dissertation committee chair (Dr. William Poppen).

Research Team Member

Date

Cynthia Webb, Primary Researcher

Appendix F

Reprinting Release Form

As co-participant in this research, I understand that some of my statements may be used to clarify the researcher's explanations of the phenomenon being examined. I am aware that total confidentiality will be maintained in doing so. I also understand that if any statement I made in the interview is reprinted, it will be done in such a manner as to maintain my complete anonymity and also that of any person I may have discussed in the interview. I also understand that any identifying information will be removed prior to its release.

I hereby consent to portions of my interview being reprinted, as the researcher deems appropriate.

Name

Date

Appendix G
Summary Consent Form

As I mentioned to you at the time of your interview, I am interested in using part or all of your interview in my dissertation. Excerpts from the interview may be used in the body of the text to give specific examples of the way you described your experience with your dissertation committee. The entire interview might be included in the appendix to give the reader full access to the data of the dissertation.

Enclosed is a copy of your interview transcript. I have deleted identifying information, questions and comments and parts of the interview not directly related to the phenomenon under study.

I hope this is an accurate account of your interview. Please let me know if there are any changes that need to be made. It is important that the transcript is accurate in your eyes.

If you are comfortable with your interview transcript in its present form, please sign below and return this form to me as soon as possible. If not, please contact me at (910) 378-0132 so we can discuss

any questions or problems you may have with the transcript.

Again thank you for being a participant in my research project. I enjoyed meeting with you.

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix H

Illustrative Verbatim Transcript

(P=participant, R=researcher)

R: Would you tell me about your experiences with your dissertation committee, talking about whatever you wish?

P: Well, my proposal meeting was pretty smooth. I had most of the members for my comps and prelims for my dissertation also, so that I was kind of familiar with them. No changes except for one new member. In our department, four people are typically from the department and one has to be from outside the department. The one from outside the department-it's an interesting dynamic. She is young, a very new faculty member and the expert in my area. I was kind of concerned because she was the expert and I didn't know if they were just going to kind of nod and defer to her or because she was so young they were going to challenge her. Actually as it worked out, they pretty much deferred to her most of the time although it seemed that when they made a couple of comments, she gave in pretty easily. I can understand that happening.

I had one bad experience relatively speaking. I guess the worst experience was one faculty member tends to be argumentative just for the sake of intellectual bantering and he did this for my comps too. He would just kind of raise an issue and discuss it just to play devil's advocate. I love that and I challenge that. He did that. I felt he was doing that when he raised a few issues during my dissertation proposal meeting. They were kind of theoretical concerns but not real major things. He pressed a few of them. One thing in particular was he wrapped up the end with saying he wasn't that impressed with studies that use a large "N"-I have 170 subjects- and he said you have all this power and you're going to get results no matter what you do. That was basically the last thing he threw in and it was almost a last hit where he basically was saying, yes you presented this entire dissertation proposal but I'm not impressed with it. Which was difficult, I was kind of shocked. Fortunately another committee member jumped in and said, "I'm not concerned with him using such a large "N". In fact, I was going to recommend he raise it because

he's got so many different questions he's asking, he's going to need more predictive power". But before the question of the large "N", he just kept raising these small issues, like whether the test was measuring what it was supposed to be measuring and got into very minute details. I would answer, "I share your concern but I'm looking at this" and he would throw something back and pick out another little detail. I'd address that and he'd pick out another detail. I finally said, "this is kind of reminiscent of comps. I thought that you were playing devil's advocate to some of these things. But these don't seem like major things-I didn't say major things- I said you're playing devil's advocate". Someone else jumped in, one of the professors, and said "I'm not real concerned with those things" and went to bat for me. Basically I was sitting there high and dry just arguing about these really minute points and taking it personally. That was about the worse thing. A couple of months later when I was trying to touch base with each of my committee members to let them know what changes I had made to my pilot work, he had forgotten he was

on my committee. I guess he was on a lot of committees at that point. Other than that it hasn't been that bad.

R: Tell me about other experiences with your committee.

P: My relationship with my chairperson has been quite good. She gives me a lot of good feedback, very, very specific changes. She just doesn't say this has to be reworked, she tells me how to rework it. She prepared me for the committee meeting. For the dissertation she wasn't kind of holding my hand as she did for my masters thesis. Probably because she thought I could handle it. But she has been great. I feel like I can go to her about any concerns I have about anything. She said herself after the proposal meeting that it was the weirdest committee meeting she had ever seen in her life.

R: In reference to the committee member asking about minute details?

P: Not just him, but in general because the issues that were raised weren't just methodological issues that can be addressed. They were kind of conceptual concerns regarding how you can interpret the

results. So most of the feedback I received was about how I was going to write my discussion, what I'm going to do after I get my results and how I'm going to interpret different things. So it was really hard to take those issues and make them concrete and specific and make changes in the proposal. They were kind of vague and theoretical.

R: If you had to describe your relationship with your committee, what would that be?

P: First thing that comes to mind is positive, but that's kind of void of anything interesting. I'd say they are generally pretty supportive and they are excited about my project. Supportive and excited I think best describes my committee. My committee is excited and that's really good. The more excited my committee gets the more excited I get. I'm supposed to be excited but when my committee gets excited it's wonderful.

R: Are there any other experiences you want to talk about?

P: Right now, I'm trying to picture each committee member. One of my committee members is not a clinical faculty member. Well actually two are not

clinical faculty members and one of these approaches things from rather a unique perspective. Sometimes it seems like he just comes out of left field which is good in that it helps you look at things differently. I think it's too easy to get caught up in the way your professors have taught you and the way everything in the clinical literature is written in an area. Having someone come from left field, from a different perspective, like cognitive or something, can change how you think and is real stimulating. But on the other hand, sometimes you just don't know what to do with the feedback. I got most of that from him before the actual committee meeting. He raised the issues he wanted to address and he was very good about it. After reading my proposal there were some minor points he wanted to go over that he didn't feel was necessary to bring up in the committee meeting and he gave me my proposal back with some notes on it and we sat down and went over these things. So other than coming from left field, he handled his concerns appropriately. He didn't take his things and push them.

R: What about other members, your experiences with them?

P: One of the members I respect the most is the fifth faculty member. She knows her stuff. She doesn't mess around. She doesn't try to give you a hard time. Her whole idea of this process is to try to keep things simple, try to keep it manageable, try to get something that is going to allow you to get out without having to take ten years to finish your dissertation. She went up to bat for me a couple of times during the meeting. I have a lot of respect for her because of that. She wasn't the chair but she was jumping in the proposal meeting. I purposely did that. I just didn't pick people who I thought would just contribute to my dissertation but I purposely picked people who I knew could work together. I wouldn't have picked two people who were very knowledgeable about the area but couldn't get along. I'd rather get one person who was knowledgeable and just get somebody in there who was just a good thinker and a nice person, a reasonable person.

R: How did you know who got along?

P: Oh you get the scoop from other students beforehand.

I asked other students who works well together and who doesn't. I also had experience from my masters thesis. It's a relatively small department and I knew who got along. You have a good feeling for where the power struggles exist and what faculty members you have to avoid putting together. Also my chair had input.

R: Your chair gave you input into who went on your committee?

P: She had input but it was whatever I wanted to do. She wouldn't have let me make a mistake and put people together that she thought wouldn't get along. Unless I was insisted on it. She didn't for my dissertation, but for my thesis she made strong recommendations for who I should have and who I shouldn't. This time she made a few suggestions of who she thought would be a good idea. I gave her my suggestions and she was perfectly fine with them. She was more hands-off but I know if I had pushed for it she would have been more hands-on. But I think I'm more independent after four years of

graduate school. I pretty much know a lot about the ropes.

R: It seems that this allowed you to find choosing committee members easier.

P: I was a little limited. In my area of research there are not a lot of people in my department who do that. So I was kind of limited in trying to get five people. I guess I was kind of lucky to get the five I need who were there and accessible.

R: It sounds like you are satisfied with your committee.

P: I am. I say that now but maybe I should wait to my defense. The only real concern I have about the defense is the same thing, how far does the devil's advocate stuff get taken. I feel that once you have your data in hand, you can take it as far as you want. I feel that once I have my data in hand I'll be on much firmer ground. Yet I've thought about the professor who likes to play devil's advocate and I've thought a few times about replacing him before now.

R: So you've thought about replacing him?

P: I think that it would have to get pretty bad for me to do that since it is not a good move politically. Because everyone has a say in whether you graduate or not and it's not a good move to lop someone off like that.

R: Any other experiences with your committee you'd like to talk about?

P: No, I'm just kind of dry.

R: Well, thanks for the interview. How has this been for you?

P: It has been a real positive experience. It's been real exciting. I don't think I realized how positive my experience with my dissertation committee has been until right now doing this interview. My committee has been very, very encouraging very supportive. When you think about it, your chair usually doesn't let you do research that's too far off from what they do in terms of research area or research method. My research area is completely off and is not consistent with what my chair or anyone else on the committee does. They have just been really, really supportive of it. So it's been a positive, collaborative experience. I believe if

you choose your committee members right, the
collaboration is going to happen automatically.

VITA

Cynthia D. Webb was born in Delco, North Carolina to James and Thelma Webb on August 13, 1951. She was educated in the public schools of Columbus County, North Carolina. She graduated from Armour High School in 1969. She received a Bachelor of Science degree , Magna Cum Laude, from Western Carolina University in 1977 with a major in Psychology. In 1979, she received a Master of Arts degree in School Psychology from Western Carolina University.

In 1989 she entered the graduate school in the College of Education in the Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She will receive her Doctor of Philosophy degree with a major in education and a concentration in counseling psychology in 1996.

Her professional work experience includes school psychologist in the Vance County Schools (NC), program director, Outreach to Aging-Knoxville, (TN), clinical specialist for Guilford County Department of Mental Health (NC), and consultant to the Center for Creative Leadership, Greensboro, North Carolina.