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# A Conversation on the Need for Women to Successfully Manage their Multiple Identity Dimensions in Order to Persist in the Doctoral Process

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# Overview

This conversation focuses on challenges specific to female doctoral students given their multiple dimensions of identity (e.g., wife, mother, daughter, professional, emerging scholar) and the tensions they experience as they intersect these dimensions across the varied stages of the doctoral journey. This discussion is prompted by research indicating many women fail to successfully negotiate these tensions and consequently choose not to begin or cease to persist in a doctoral program. In this session we discuss (a) tensions women face in the doctoral process, (b) a theoretical foundation for female identity, and (c) strategies for successfully intersecting multiple identity dimensions, leading to doctoral persistence.

# Introductions

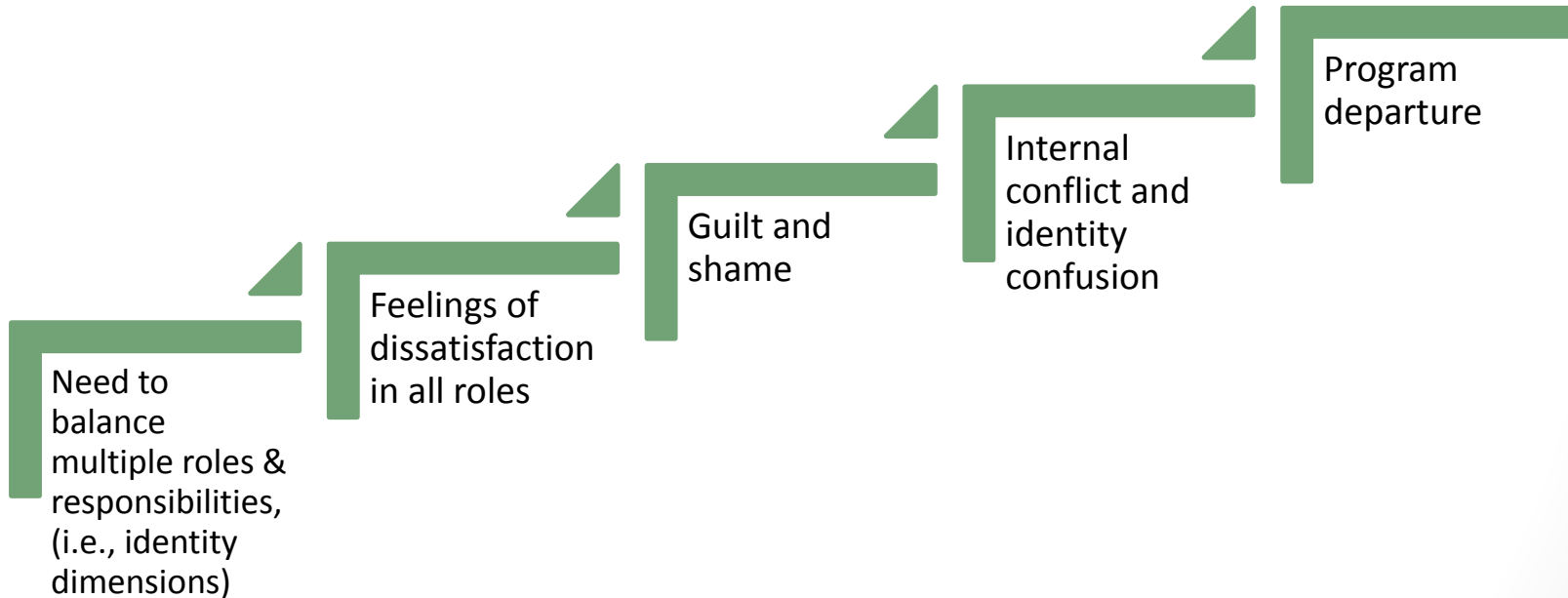
- Presenters
- Audience Survey



# Practical Impetus: Females & Higher Education

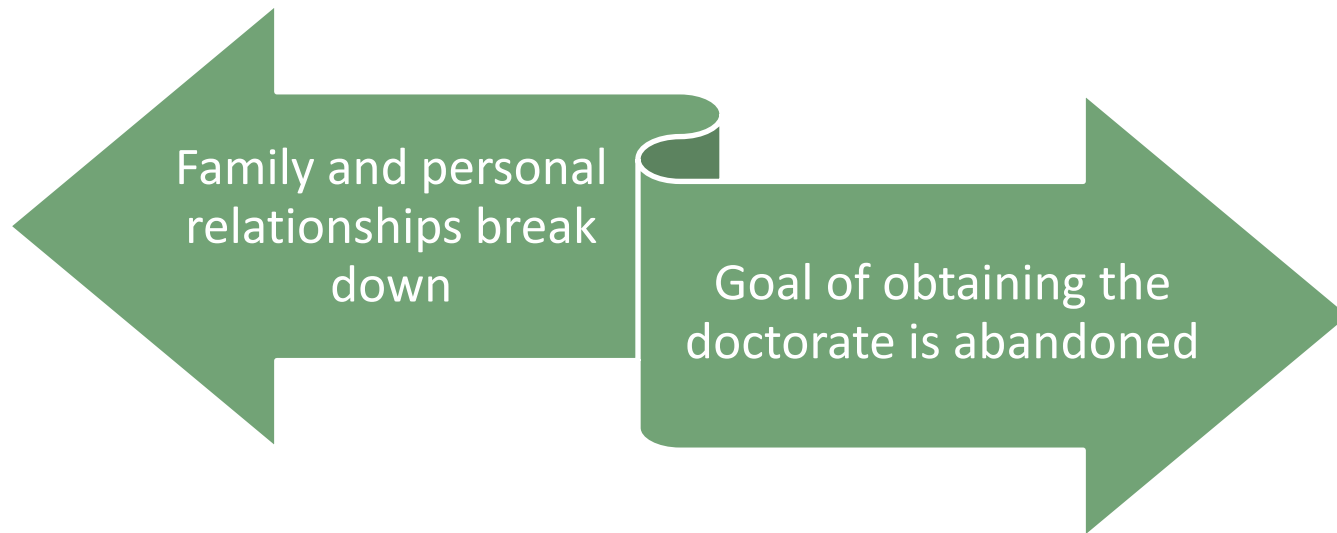
- Doctoral attrition rates remain perennially high across decades and disciplines (40 – 70%)(NSF, 2012).
- Women are more likely than men to withdraw or be late completers (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009).
- A documented “unfriendliness” toward females in academia (Moyer, Salovey, & Casey-Cannon, 1999).
- Limited role models; females are underrepresented in tenured positions (Monroe, Ozyurt, Wrigley, & Alexander, 2008).

# Practical Impetus: The Female Doctoral Experience



# Practical Impetus: The Breaking Point

- Failure to successfully intersect identity dimensions results in conflict.



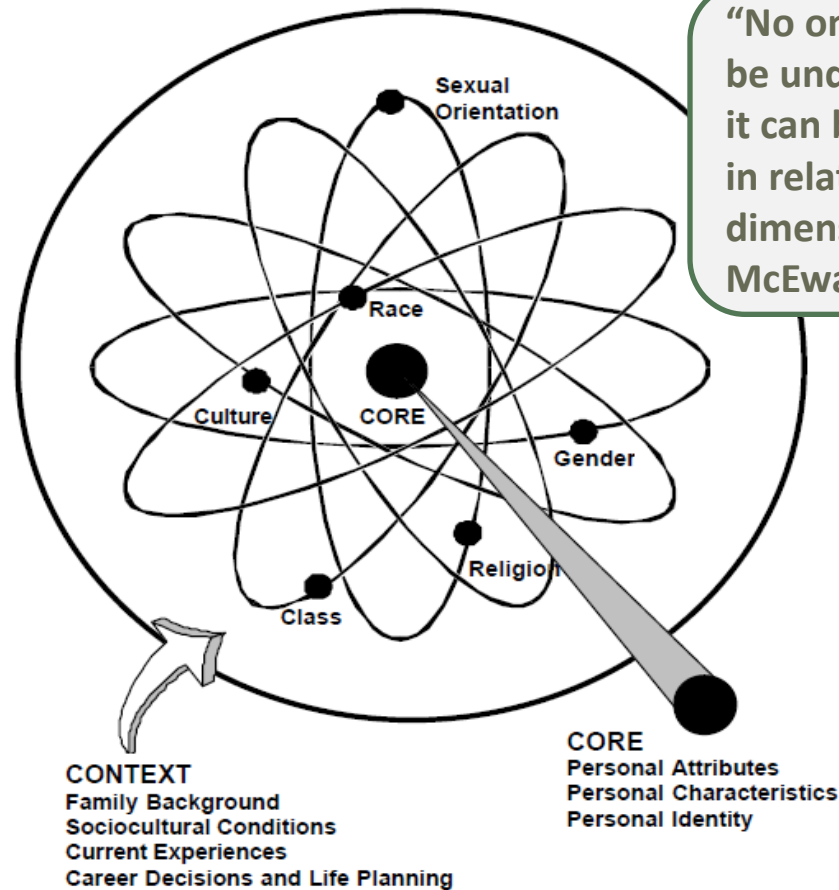
# Framework: Female Identity

Adapted from Jones & McEwan, 2000

- Each female has multiple roles and identity dimensions:
  - **Roles:** daughter, wife, mother, working professional, doctoral student
  - **Dimensions:** gender, ethnicity, religion, family of origin, life experiences
- One's **core sense of self** (e.g., personal identity) is at the center.
- Identity dimensions **intersect** the core.



# Framework: Intersectionality



“No one dimension may be understood singularly; it can be understood only in relation to other dimensions” (Jones & McEwan, 2000, p. 410).

FIGURE 1.

Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity

Jones, S. R. & McEwan, M. K. (2000). A conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity. *Journal of College Student Development*, 41(4), 405-414.

# Research Study

**Research purpose:** The purpose of this study was to generate a theoretical model explaining the process in which female doctoral students come to develop and understand their multiple identities, which ultimately gives rise to their choice to persist unto doctoral candidacy and degree completion while in an online, doctoral program with second generation characteristics.

# Methods

- **Design:** Grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015)
- **Participants:** Theoretical sample of 11 doctoral candidates from a Southeastern university with a blended EdD program.
  - Criteria:
    - reached candidacy (completed coursework and passed comprehensive exam)
    - current enrollment in the dissertation coursework
    - currently pregnant, have children in the home, or a desire to have children
    - evidence of scholarship (article published, submitted, desire to publish)
- **Data collection:** (1) Online questionnaire, (2) Life map, (3) Interview
- **Data analysis:** Constant comparative process— reflection, memos, verbatim transcriptions, open/initial coding, in vivo coding, axial/focused coding, theoretical (conceptual) coding, theory/model development (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Saldana, 2013)

# Sample

Case	Ethnicity	Marital status	Age	Occupation	Type of employment	Primary reason for pursuing the doctorate degree	Primary reason for persistence	Have children	Number of children	Children live in the home
1	Caucasian	Married	30-39	Faculty in higher education	Part time	Vocational requirement	Personal determination	No	0	n/a
2	Caucasian	Divorced	20-29	Course Developer	Full time	Vocational advancement	Personal determination	Yes	1	Yes
3	Caucasian	Married	40-49	Faculty in higher education	Full time	Personal goal	Vocational requirement	Yes	4	Yes
4	Caucasian	Married	30-39	Administrator in K-12	Full time	Personal goal	Personal determination	Yes	1	Yes
5	Hispanic	Married	40-49	Adjunct in higher education	Full time	Personal goal	Personal determination	Yes	2	Yes
6	Caucasian	Married	50-59	Faculty in higher education	Full time	Vocational requirement	Vocational requirement	Yes	6	Yes
7	Caucasian	Married	30-39	Teacher in K-12	Full time student	Personal goal	Personal determination	Yes	1	Yes
8	Caucasian	Divorced	50-59	Teacher in K-12	Full time	Personal goal	Personal determination	Yes	2	Yes
9	Caucasian	Married	30-39	Administrator in K-12	Full time	Financial advancement	Personal determination	Yes	2	Yes
10	Hispanic	Married	20-29	Faculty in higher education	Full time	Personal goal	Personal determination	No	0	n/a
11	African American	Divorced	30-39	Teacher in K-12	Full time	Financial	Financial	Yes	2	Yes

# Findings

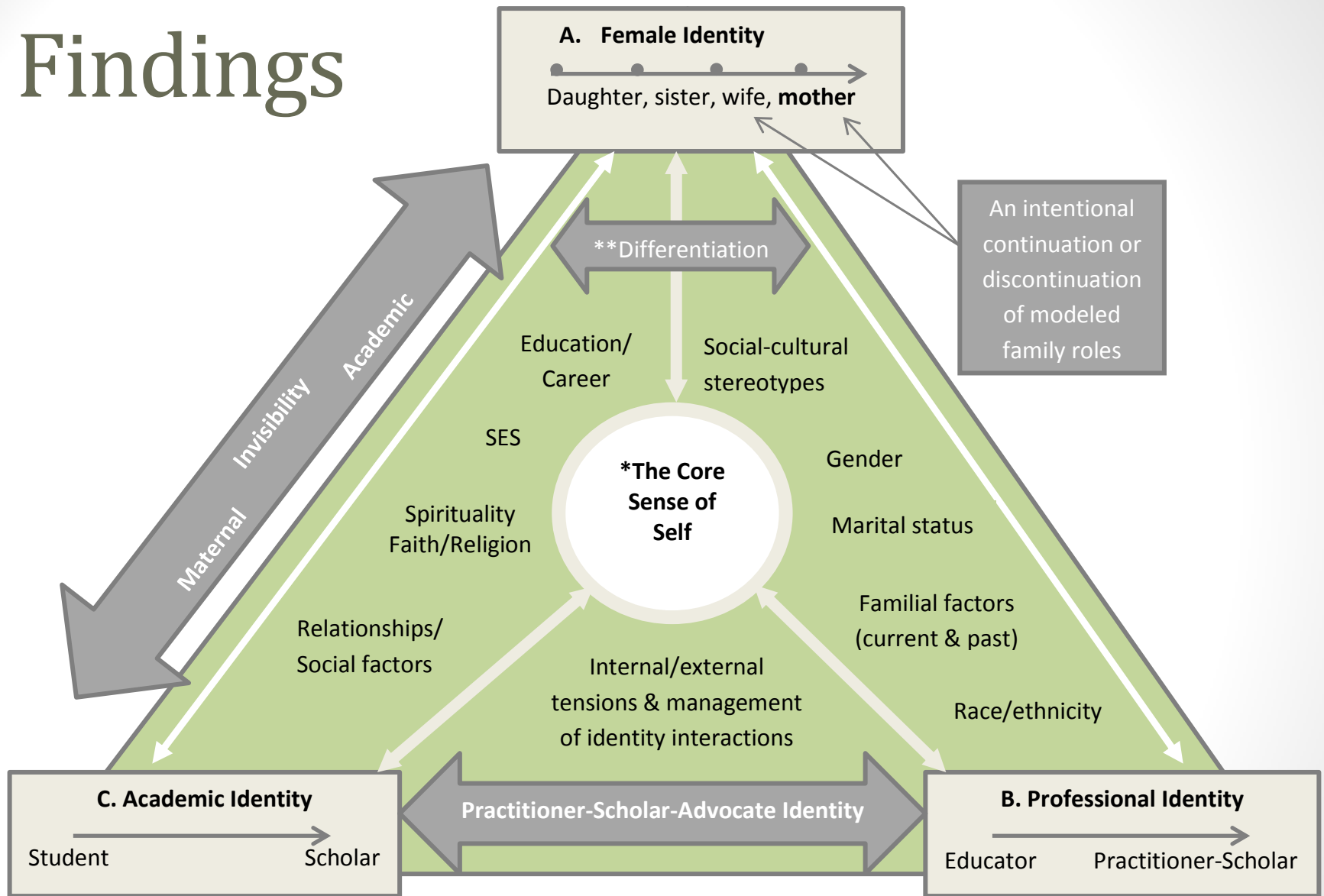


Figure 1. Female Doctoral Student Multiple Identity Model (adapted from Jones & McEwan, 2000). \*An individual's values and most valued attributes and characteristics. \*\*Balance between individuality and togetherness in the family unit.

# Propositions

1. Few females desire or feel they can successfully honor or intersect all identities concurrently: some honored identity of mother first (delay doctorate); some honored professional and academic identities first (delay motherhood); some stepped away from profession to balance female and academic identities. Central theme: “pick the right season.”
2. Selecting a primarily DE program maximized opportunities to further their professional identity (remain in their profession) and dimensions of their female identity (not uproot children or move from loved ones [e.g., parents] needing their care).
3. The choice to honor academic identity by starting the doctorate was motivated by family (financial provision, security, or expanded opportunities for children) or profession (to “advocate”, “gain knowledge,” to “contribute,” “to serve,” to “make a difference”).
4. The female EdD candidate seeks to integrate her professional identity into her academic identity (evidenced by dissertation topics) and seeks to integrate her academic identity into her profession (the practitioner-scholar-advocate).
5. Though there is a tendency to hide academic identity in outer social circles (colleagues, boyfriends, initially), within close friends and family, the candidate’s academic visibility serves as a motivator for others to continue their own education.
6. Identities are formed in relationship with others, are dependent on differentiation within the relationships, and there are seasons where one identity needs to “take center stage” for healthy relationships (e.g., mother/child; husband/wife, daughter/parents) and optimal identity formation.

Additions or modifications  
for the model?

What do women need to  
understand before beginning  
a doctorate?



# Strategies For Doctoral Students

1. Timing: “Pick the right season”
2. Manage expectations
  - “Slow down”
  - Have realistic expectations
  - Self-talk
3. Learn to honor and embrace each identity
  - Develop a schedule
  - Compartmentalize
    - being “present” with children during waking hours; minimizing exposure of academic identity to young children (e.g., in the p.m. or a.m. when they are sleeping)
    - being a role model for older children – valuing family and demonstrating working hard.
    - “Get away”
4. Allow identities to intersect
  - Apply values and strengths from one identity to another
    - “mother as one who nurtures and the detail and the pride that I take in my role as a mother I think I transfer that to academia as well”
    - Commitment in professional roles motivates dissertation scholarship
5. Develop a support system
  - spouse, children – sharing or assuming greater household roles
  - military wives, friends, neighbors, parents – providing childcare
  - work colleagues – professional support, understanding, encouragement
  - doctoral peers – support, encouragement, accountability, sharing resources
  - faculty mentors – acculturation to the doctoral process, research and scholarship, and the socio-cultural context of higher education

How can universities better support females in their programs?

# Strategies for Administrators & Faculty

1. Orient, acculturate, and socialize students to the doctoral process, research and scholarship, and the socio-cultural context of higher education
  - Foster the transition from autonomous learner (student) to self-directed learner (scholar)
2. Provide opportunities to foster relationship between candidates and their peers and candidates and faculty
3. Provide practical supports
  - Flexible course offerings
  - Online, asynchronous
  - Childcare for intensives
  - Opportunities for financial integration: grants, scholarships, fellowships, assistantships
4. Recognize the need for female role models in higher education
  - Recruit and hire female faculty members with developed female, professional, and academic/scholar identities
  - Support female faculty members
    - Offer flexible work hours and teaching schedules
    - Extend time to earn tenure/promotion
  - Encourage and model maternal visibility in female faculty members (and paternal visibility in males!)
5. Harness the motivation of the Practitioner-Scholar-Advocate
  - Design coursework to intersect with professional goals and practices
  - Support dissertation research that is applied to problems in practice (second generation EdD model)

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