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

Lucinda S. Spaulding, Liberty University
Amanda J Rockinson-Szapkiw, Liberty University
Maria T Spaulding, Liberty University
A Conversation on the Need for Women to Successfully Manage their Multiple Identity Dimensions in Order to Persist in the Doctoral Process

Lucinda S. Spaulding, PhD
Amanda J. Rockinson-Szapkiw, EdD, LPC
Maria T. Spaulding, MEd

Liberty University
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

Need to balance multiple roles & responsibilities, (i.e., identity dimensions)

Feelings of dissatisfaction in all roles

Guilt and shame

Internal conflict and identity confusion

Program departure

See: Bulosan, Citty, & Grant-Harris, 2012; Brown & Watson, 2010; Johnson, Greaves, & Repta, 2007; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000
Practical Impetus: The Breaking Point

- Failure to successfully intersect identity dimensions results in conflict.

Family and personal relationships break down

Goal of obtaining the doctorate is abandoned
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).

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


Haynes, C., Bulosan, M., Citty, J., & Grant-Harris, M. (2012). My world is not my doctoral program...or is it?: Female students’ perceptions of well-being. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 7*(1), 1-17.


Contact Information

- Lucinda Spaulding  
  • lsspaulding@liberty.edu

- Amanda Rockinson-Szapkiw  
  • aszapkiw@liberty.edu

- Maria Spaulding  
  • mtlauta@liberty.edu