Critical Connections: Meaningful Mentoring Relationships Between Women Doctoral Students and Their Dissertation Chairpersons.

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CRITICAL CONNECTIONS: MEANINGFUL MENTORING
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN WOMEN DOCTORAL STUDENTS
AND THEIR DISSERTATION CHAIRPERSONS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
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by

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Writing this text signifies the end of a long, but very worthwhile, journey. With every step taken throughout this venture, I have grown both professionally and personally. Along the way, there are many individuals who have nurtured, assisted, counseled, and mentored me. Without their dedication this work would not have been possible.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to explore meaningful mentoring relationships between women doctoral students and their advisors. Specifically, this study examines how graduate women and their advisors navigate and perceive their mentoring relationships during the doctoral program of study. Although research in higher education has addressed the lived experiences of women doctoral students, few have examined the doctoral student/advisor mentoring dynamic from both the student and advisor perspectives.

This study provides an understanding of the mentoring experiences of women doctoral students and advisors through qualitative conversation. The participants in the study are 6 women post-doctoral students and their advisors, 4 female and 2 male, from Louisiana State University, a Research I university located in the South. Through a feminist phenomenological qualitative approach, the following research questions are answered: How do graduate women and their advisors enter into mentoring relationships? What do graduate women and their advisors desire from doctoral advising relationships and how do they perceive each other’s needs and roles? And, what do advisors and graduate women perceive to be the benefits and problems that resulted from their mentoring experience?

Through analysis of the data, nine themes are identified under three categories of understanding: participants’ needs and desires, benefits, and problems. Finally, participant perspectives on age and gender differences are explored. Three themes that emerge from participants’ needs and desires are matching of personality, dedication,
and support. Each of these themes is important for both women graduates in the study and their advisors. Two themes categorized as benefits, satisfaction and professional growth, are important factors in building the foundation for the mentoring relationships that formed. The third, persistence and completion of the Ph.D., was obviously the ultimate goal for all the participants. Finally, problems addressed within this study are communication/differing perspectives, time, and negotiating friendship.

What may come from this study is an understanding of the meanings that women graduate students and their advisors ascribe to the doctoral process and to the mentoring relationships that support that process.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This dissertation study began to develop when I attended a symposium at the annual conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE). During the presentation, which was about women of color in college, a woman spoke out from the audience about the great difficulties that she and other women in her department had faced in completing their doctoral degrees because of the lack of faculty support and guidance. She had succeeded, but the pain of remembering the struggle she had encountered was evident—in her voice, in her face, and in her tears. As others in the audience voiced similar experiences, I looked around the room at the women who were in my doctoral program. Would all of us succeed? Would we have to face what these other women had faced? If we failed—or succeeded—could we endure the scars?

Later, as I thought about the stories told by the women in that session, I began to reflect on my early doctoral experiences. Through my reflection I realized that I, too, had been on a painful path similar to the one mentioned during the symposium. Upon beginning my course work, I was assigned a departmental advisor, but I learned my first semester of classes that if I wanted to know something about the doctoral process, I would have to ask other classmates. When I approached my advisor with angst, not knowing what forms to fill out, what deadlines I had to meet, or what rules I needed to follow, he would just smile and say, “Don’t worry about it.” I soon became envious of

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more seasoned students whose advisor offered Saturday advising sessions, returned phone calls, and appeared to care about the progression of his students.

Fortunately for me during the following semester, my department hired a feminist professor and assigned her to teach one of my classes. Although I knew nothing about feminism, I became intrigued on the first day of class when my professor described her attention to students as "teaching with care." Throughout the semester, she proved she cared through her actions as well as her teaching and learning sessions. Also, because of her efforts, a large portion of that class formed a cohort that continues to support one another.

As a result of the many mentoring interactions that my professor and I engaged in that semester, I chose her as the chair of my dissertation committee. Consequently, I believe that the mentoring relationship that has developed between my advisor and me has greatly enhanced my educational experiences as both a student and a researcher. This is not surprising, given that Roberta Hall and Bernice Sandler (1983) found several studies that "indicate that women students can benefit immeasurably from a close working relationship with a faculty member, and that women consider individual faculty encouragement and support to be more important than men do" (p. 2).

Certainly, the women at the ASHE symposium believed that faculty guidance and support are extremely important in doctoral persistence. One woman, although eventually obtaining her doctoral degree in spite of the hardships, bemoaned the fact that other equally deserving women in her discipline failed to complete their degrees largely because of the absence of a supportive faculty member. Within my own
department, I have observed many doctoral students at various stages of study. Some of my classmates, who in the beginning vowed not to become dropouts, have seemingly faded away.

At first, when fellow doctoral students and I noticed that someone disappeared without finishing her course work, completing general examinations, or proposing a dissertation, we would naively ask ourselves, "How can she just quit?" Now, after finishing my course work and having been cast out into the world to complete the dissertation, I understand the dangers of not having the structure, deadlines, and classroom communities to help keep my educational focus from being distracted by the complexities of daily living.

Because my advisor keeps me involved with academic life, helps me grapple with the ideas I have, and gives me support and advice, I am able to continue on my quest for my doctoral degree. Although it has sometimes been a rough journey, other students in my department also persist through the help and guidance they have received from my advisor. As described by Laurent Daloz (1999), my advisor, as well as others like her, is a contributor to the "holding environment" (p. 184) of the program.

The holding environment, a term first coined by Winnicott, is described in terms of mother/child. The best holding environment would be "neither so supportive that there is no motivation to leave it nor so harsh that if the child does, she wishes she hadn't. To provide a 'good enough' environment, Winnicott says, parents must be neither negligent nor perfect" (Daloz, 1999, p. 185).
I imagine that, in many ways, a doctoral chair's holding power can be more complicated to manage than a parent's—especially when the chair has a large number of individuals to accommodate at once. This holding theory suggests, at least for some students, that a successful doctoral journey demands more than just instruction and general advising—it takes mentoring.

Although there are multiple definitions of mentoring and its components, most include common elements, suggesting that support, nurturing, insightfulness, guidance, protectiveness, and friendship are essential to any mentoring relationship. Over the past 20 years several studies have examined the many facets of mentoring in higher education. These studies have sought to answer questions such as: What is mentoring and what are its key components in higher education settings (Dunn & Moody, 1995; Gaffney, 1995; Peper, 1994; Terrell, Hassell, & Duggar, 1992; Valadez & Duran, 1991)? How are students being mentored, and to what degree (Anderson, Dey, Gray, & Thomas, 1995; Krueger, Blackwell, & Knight, 1992; Monaghan, 1993)? Does mentoring have a positive impact on student success within and beyond collegiate environments (Collins, Kamya, & Tourse, 1997; Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996; Leon, 1993; Welch, 1996)? And recently, what are the implications of mentoring women and minorities in academic settings (Dickey, 1996; Ervin, 1995; Garner, 1994; Heinrich, 1995; Johnsrud, 1991)?

Many researchers agree that students who are mentored have more satisfying educational experiences than those who are not (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Daloz, 1999; Ervin, 1995; Johnsrud, 1991). For example, in doctoral programs major
professors function as mentors by “identifying and developing the scholarly potential of students as well as coaching them to learn ‘the rules of the game’ in attaining graduate fellowships, grants, tenure, promotions and benefits” (Johnsrud, 1991, p. 7). Most importantly, though, advisors and committee members establish the “rules of the game” and ultimately have the power to decide who wins the game and enters the world of academia. Unfortunately, chairing a dissertation committee, as only one small part of a professorship, does not receive as much merit as research or publishing. It is unfortunate, then, that an advisor’s mentoring, which plays a powerful role in doctoral persistence, has little influence on a professor’s journey to tenure.

This incongruence provides one explanation of why many doctoral students are not mentored and eventually become part of the ABD (all but dissertation) phenomena (Williams, 1997). Chris Golde (2000), in her exploration of doctoral student attrition, states:

Paradoxically, the most academically capable, most academically successful, most stringently evaluated, and most carefully selected students in the entire higher education system—doctoral students—are the least likely to complete their chosen academic goals (p. 199).

She, along with David Damrosch (1995), estimate that approximately 40 to 50 percent of all students attempting the doctoral degree will be unsuccessful in completing the degree. Further, Golde contends that a large amount of these high attrition rates may be in large part a result of negative or non-existent advisor/student relationships.

For women, the absence of mentoring in their academic lives may explain why their participation and educational attainment levels have not been the same as men’s.
It has been documented that fewer women than men complete doctorates and that women generally take longer than men to finish the degree (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1999). This is despite estimates that women demonstrate equal, if not superior, performance levels on virtually every objective measure (Smith, 1995). The proportion of doctorates awarded to women in the United States was 15.1 percent in 1920, but declined to 13.0 percent in 1940, the year that marked the 103rd year of women's participation in higher education. The 1920 percentage was not achieved again until 1972 (Chamberlain, 1991). In the mid-1980s, women represented about one-third of earned doctorates. By 1992, of the 38,814 doctorates awarded in that year, only 37% were awarded to women (Smith, 1995). In 1996, this proportion increased to 40% (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1999). Although the 1990s have marked only slight increases in women's doctoral degree attainment, it has been estimated that the percentage of women receiving doctorates will not surpass 41% throughout the next 10 years (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1999). This is despite estimations that male undergraduate college enrollments will continually decline.

Faced with the disparaging literature regarding women in graduate education, I began thinking about my research questions. Because the dialogue about women doctoral student participation is presently sparse, I decided to enter the conversation with questions that arose from my own experiences, as well as those that were left unanswered in previous literature. My experiences, thus far, have led me to believe that a very powerful factor in doctoral student persistence is the building and maintaining of mentoring relationships.
Themes that shape previous research regarding the importance of mentoring graduates, as well as other students, furthers my need to engage in this study. First, as stated earlier, most studies report that students who are mentored have better educational experiences than those who are not (Anderson, Dey, Gray, & Thomas, 1995; Bizzari, 1995; Johnsrud, 1991). Next, studies focusing on gender differences in mentoring report that men are mentored more often and are receiving greater benefits in mentoring relationships than women (Bizzari, 1995; Johnsrud, 1991). These studies generally assert that this phenomenon is attributed to the fact that women’s developmental needs call for mentoring relationships that are shaped differently from those of men. Scholars of women’s developmental theory posit that women’s lives are oriented toward the relationships in which they engage (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982). Finally, June Williams (1997) contends, “It is impossible to view the dissertation process without attending to this very important aspect” (p. 6).

Recent literature focuses on the impact that mentoring has on women. This literature raises questions such as: Are women being mentored? How do mentoring relationships differ for men and women? How are women hurt/helped by mentoring? And, should women be mentored at all? These questions have been asked and answered for men. However, the conversation about women’s mentoring experiences are just beginning.

**Purpose**

My purpose in this dissertation is to explore meaningful mentoring relationships between women doctoral students and their advisors. In this study,
meaningful mentoring relationships are ones where mentors had a significant impact on the quality of students' doctoral education. Researchers who have studied women participating in general education settings (Anderson, Dey, Gray, & Thomas, 1995; Bruce, 1995), in higher education faculty and other career roles (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Bizzari, 1995), and as doctoral students (Heinrich, 1995; Johnsrud, 1991; Lees, 1996) have learned that women often attribute their successes to mentors. Repeatedly, mentoring becomes an important theme in studies about women's success.

In completing this study, I explain how 6 graduate women and their advisors navigate and perceive their relationships. There are many studies on the benefits and problems with mentoring in higher education; however, within this research only a small number of studies have examined the perspectives of women doctoral students who obtained a degree. Further, I found no studies that specifically examined meaningful mentoring relationships of women graduate students by advisors from both the student's and advisor's perspectives. What may come from this study is an understanding of the meanings that women graduate students and their advisors ascribe to the doctoral process, and more specifically, to the mentoring relationships that support that process.

A feminist perspective is useful in this analysis because it draws attention to ways women and other groups are marginalized and, therefore, experience their collegiate environments differently. Feminism also works to draw attention to women's strengths and to their contributions to society. Through feminist phenomenology, I have work to “document the lives and activities of women,
understand the experience of women from their point of view, and conceptualize women’s behavior as an expression of social contexts” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 51).

In keeping with this agenda, I provide insight and participant perceptsives regarding the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do graduate women and their advisors enter into mentoring relationships?

RQ 2: What do graduate women and their advisors desire from doctoral advising relationships and how do they perceive each other’s needs and roles?

RQ 3: What do advisors and graduate women perceive to be the benefits and problems that result from their mentoring experiences?

In seeking answers to the above questions, I explore mentoring as I understand it from the literature and my own experiences, and then allow the multiple voices that are included in the study to re-frame my answers through their stories. In doing so, I hoped to “create sites where voices can hear themselves and one another fruitfully” (Lather, 1994, p. 46).

**Framing the Study**

I introduce here the remaining chapters in my study and how they inform and shape this research. Throughout Chapter Two I explore mentoring and its value in the academe and specifically in the doctoral process. Further, I provide a discussion on the pairing of mentors with mentees, information about what mentors and mentee need
and receive from mentoring, and the problems that arise from mentoring relationships. Finally, I discuss mentoring as it relates to advisors who mentor doctoral students.

Chapter 3 provides a discussion of both the methods and methodology that I employ in carrying out the study. The chapter begins with an introduction of the research design and theory. Within this body of text I describe the tenets of qualitative, feminist, and phenomenological research that are useful in this study. Further, I explain the methods I used in finding the participants in my study, as well as the tools that proved useful throughout the interview process.

Chapter 4 contains demographic and descriptive background on the women graduate students and advisors in my study. I begin with individual descriptions about participant lives and the interview process, and then weave the stories about each pair’s mentoring interactions together. Next, I discuss the interview process and the power dynamics that resulted from the research process.

Chapter 5 presents the perspectives and insight that I learn about the meanings that women graduate students and their advisors ascribe to their mentoring experiences. Through analysis of the data, I identify nine themes that are introduced throughout the first three of four categories of understanding: 1) participants’ needs and desires, 2) benefits, and 3) problems. The fourth category, difference, explores participant’s perspectives on age and gender differences. The categories and themes serve as tools for understanding the meanings participants ascribed to their relationships.
Finally, Chapter 6 presents the summary, conclusions and recommendations that result from the research process. Although I do not attempt to find the "entire and complete" picture of mentoring through my research I believe that interpretations of women's stories, within this research agenda, are useful for both women and faculty members who want to engage in meaningful mentoring relationships.
CHAPTER 2
RELATED LITERATURE

The review of related literature provides a framework for this study through an exploration of the concept and definition of mentoring, its value in the academy, and its importance in the doctoral process. In addition, subsequent sections in this review show what other researchers have found regarding the questions that are answered in my study. These sections include: a) a discussion on the pairing of mentor/mentees; b) information about what mentees desire and receive from mentoring relationships; c) a discussion on what mentors need and receive from mentoring relationships; and, d) a summary of problems that may arise in mentor/mentee relationships.

How History Shaped Our Thoughts and Understandings of Mentoring

Throughout history, the concept of mentoring has taken many different forms in many cultures. From the most primitive to the most advanced societies, young members have learned survival and advancement skills from those who have had prior experiences. Although the concept of mentoring has been around since the beginning of time, the word mentor is thought to be derived from Greek mythology. In Homer’s *Iliad*, Odysseus asks Athena, the goddess of wisdom and skill, to care for and nurture his son, Telemacus. To accomplish this task, Athena comes to earth in the image of a mortal man named Mentor. Mentor is charged with directing every facet of the son’s life: physical, intellectual, spiritual, and social development. Through Mentor’s guidance, Telemacus becomes a powerful leader (Clawson, 1980; Garner, 1994; Scott, 1992). The legend of Mentor has resulted in modern society’s use of the term mentor.
as "a wise and trusted teacher or counselor" (Webster's II New University Dictionary, 1988) and the term mentoring as "the development of a leader through an individually delivered and intentional process that is supportive, nurturing, insightful and protective" (Bey & Holmes, 1990, p. 2).

In higher education, scholars report that mentoring is often an important factor in the academic and professional success of students. Studies show that students who interact frequently with faculty and other university personnel are more satisfied with their collegiate experiences than those who do not "connect" with faculty and staff (Anderson, Dey, Gray, & Thomas, 1995; Endo & Harpel, 1982). Such satisfaction is experienced by individuals fortunate enough to acquire a mentor to guide their efforts at crucial points in their academic development. Specifically, mentoring is credited for forging essential connections for many students, thereby influencing academic persistence, satisfaction, and completion of a degree. Daniel Levinson (1978) posits:

Poor mentoring in early adulthood is the equivalent of poor parenting in childhood: without adequate mentoring a young man’s entry into the adult world is greatly hampered. Some degree of emotional support, guidance and sponsorship is needed to smooth the way and make the journey worthwhile (p. 338).

Many professionals agree that mentoring relationships they participated in as students provided them with the necessary tools and continued connections that helped them advance in their fields.

In doctoral programs, graduate students learn that relationships with their major professors and committee members are important for progression into the ranks of academia. It is often very apparent that students who make connections with their
teachers/advisors receive assistantships and fellowships, help in publishing and presenting at conferences, and recommendations needed to advance throughout their profession. Most important in graduate student progression, perhaps, is the support received throughout the dissertation process.

Committee members serve as gatekeepers to the academic community in that they have the final power in deciding which students will eventually join their ranks. Among the committee members, students choose a major professor whose function is to serve, in many ways, as a mentor. Although not all doctoral advising experiences result in mentoring relationships, studies show that those relations that develop into mentoring are more rewarding to both students and their advisors (Hall & Sandler, 1983; Johnsrud, 1991).

In her study of doctoral student attrition, Chris Golde (2000) learned that supportive advising relationships are important in a student’s progress toward the degree. She indicates that problematic advising relationships can lead to attrition or “derail a student’s degree aspirations” (p. 219). Golde contends that most faculty and universities attribute reasons for attrition principally with the student. In doing so, they fail to recognize the shared responsibility of attrition.

David Damrosch (1995) illustrates how the link between doctoral students and their advisors, as well as their advisory committees, becomes an integral part in the completion of the Ph.D. He explains that, for 16 years of a student’s life, elementary and secondary education put a heavy emphasis on group learning and support. However, as students progress through higher education the emphasis becomes that of
individuality and solidarity. This disruption of socialized academic emphasis could explain why large numbers of Ph.D. candidates are not able to obtain the degree. In his discussion, Damrosch brings to our attention that even the best schools, and the best students in general, achieve Ph.D. completion rates of little better than 50 percent in the humanities and social sciences. The implications of his work are that as long as Ph.D. programs continue to require the completion of a comprehensive and individualized body of research, students' academic connections may be the most important determinants in their ability to complete the degree.

Although mentoring may not be the sole means through which a doctoral degree may be obtained, the literature provides evidence that the doctoral process is not a journey that can easily be accomplished alone. Indeed, the components of the doctoral process require the student to work closely with at least one member of his/her program's faculty. Satisfying advising relationships in higher education settings can begin both inside or outside the classroom setting. Besides developing an interest in faculty members based on faculty interactions within the classroom, the bond may be formed through outside contact. Outside development of the mentoring relationship can form when students: hold graduate assistantships working with faculty members (Stephen Scott, 1999); work closely with professors doing research; and collaboratively publish and present with their teachers.

In her study of women doctoral students, Kathleen Heinrich (1991) reports "several studies showed that both male and female students’ satisfaction with doctoral programs, particularly with the dissertation experience, was directly related to

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satisfaction with advisement relationships” (p. 515). Just as in any close working relationship, compatibility and cooperation between individuals working together often make the journey more successful and worthwhile.

**Pairing of Mentors and Mentees**

Mentoring relationships can develop either informally or formally. The main difference between informal and formal mentoring relationships lies in the formation of the mentoring pair. Informal relationships evolve through natural interaction between two individuals in work, social, or educational environments. Formal mentoring relationships involve deliberate matching of less experienced individuals with those who are more experienced in the environment being navigated. These relationships, whether informal or formal, require that both the mentor and mentee have a mutual desire to form the bond.

Unfortunately, women in higher education have historically been excluded from mentoring relationships which generally develop informally through student and faculty interactions (Heinrich, 1995; Johnsrud, 1991; Smith, 1995). Studies show that male faculty, who are greater in number and have more authority and connections than female faculty, tend to choose male students to mentor (Hall & Sandler, 1983). In addition, Kathleen Hulbert (1994) notes that in traditional mentoring, mentors select protégés who are “clearly among the ‘best and brightest,’ attractive as protégés because of demonstrated abilities, skills, personality characteristics, and often connections” (p. 248). She further explains:
Thus, the person with unrealized or untapped potential will not be selected. The same is true of the person who has had limited opportunity for visibility—to be seen, heard, and taken seriously—in other words, not only in today’s society but in almost all historical societies, most women and minorities (pp. 249-250).

Similarly, the Pew Higher Education Research Program (1991) notes that the changing demographic of college students causes concern about the future of higher education. Whereas student demographics once closely corresponded with those of faculty—predominantly male, largely white, largely middle class—the increasing attendance of previously underrepresented groups in higher education contributes to a sense of unease and discomfort among faculty members. The Pew Reports indicates that faculty members often report their experiences with students who are “different” as not fulfilling because they are “just not like me” (p. 2A).

Furthermore, Raymond Noe (1988) identifies six barriers that explain why female students may not be chosen for mentoring. These barriers include: lack of access to information networks, tokenism, stereotyping, socialization practices, norms regarding cross-gender relationships, and reliance on inappropriate power bases. Also, Karen Fleming (1991) reported that the decision to mentor someone involves a process of selection. She discusses four factors that mentors use, knowingly or unknowingly, in selecting potential mentees. The four factors are fit (the degree to which the potential mentee matches the organization); risk (potential harm that may accrue to the mentor as a result of identification with the mentee); predictability (feeling of assurance that the mentee’s actions and reactions will fall within an acceptable range); and pay-off (the potential gain or benefit that accures to the mentor as a result of the relationship.
with the mentee). Unfortunately, Fleming reports that women are not often selected as mentees because of fit and risk factors.

A feminist perspective tells us that men and women have unequal mentoring opportunities because, just as in society, they do not enter the university gates on equal playing fields. These unequal playing fields that help perpetuate the oppression of women in institutions of higher education are evidenced by "the concentration of women in a limited number of fields and at lower levels, fewer women at high academic ranks, women receiving lower salaries, and fewer women than men being tenured" (Sandler, 1993, pp. 175-176).

Mentoring has been identified as one subtle way that women can still be oppressed in institutions of higher education. Male professors take other male students "under their wing" and allow them to learn about the informal rules and connections that allow them to progress more easily through the degree process. Even when women are chosen for mentoring, studies suggest that they are more likely to receive advice and guidance rather than sponsorship (Kronik, 1990).

Although the solution for the female students may be to find other women as mentors so that they can experience the same "natural connection" that men experience, this goal is often unobtainable. Despite the fact that there are increasingly more females in faculty roles, the faculty ranks are still overwhelmingly male. At the doctoral level, where faculty status (department, tenure, rank, etc.) plays an integral part in committee selection, fewer women may hold the rank necessary to direct a
dissertation committee. This problem is exacerbated in male-dominated fields such as business, engineering, and science.

Lack of available female mentors is not the only problem. Roberta Hall and Bernice Sandler (1983) explain:

Ironically, the problem of numbers is often exacerbated because women faculty frequently find themselves simultaneously sought out by increasing numbers of women students and junior faculty, appointed to innumerable committees which need representation from women and assigned heavier course loads than men... In addition to the problems noted above, many women’s personal orientation toward influencing others may make it less likely that they themselves will actively choose mentees. Though women professors often spend more time with students, one recent study found that women faculty are much less likely than men to initiate “traditional” one-on-one mentoring relationships with them (p. 4).

Hall and Sandler (1983) also point out that women’s mentoring relationships may fall short because of women’s lack of confidence and lack of understanding regarding those relationships.

From the beginning, it seems that women may face great difficulty in making mentoring connections. Because of this, women often find different avenues of support. However, some researchers report that those women who are finding meaningful mentoring relationships can reap the same benefits as men do in their relationships (Heinrich, 1991; Johnsrud, 1991). Also, others have found that advisor behavior, not gender, distinguished mentoring (Heinrich, 1991).

In this study, I explore the relationships of graduate students and advisors who identify themselves as participating in a mentoring relationship. In many doctoral programs, the advisee/advisor relationship is usually pursued by students because they
are allowed to choose and, if desired, replace their own advisors and committee members. Because the literature reveals that women have less opportunity for meaningful mentoring experiences, I want to discover the conditions that led to the initiation of the mentoring relationships for those in my study and how the relationships developed.

**Mentees and the Mentoring Relationship**

Although mentoring is considered a potential tool for success in educational settings and beyond, it is not easy to categorize the concept of mentoring into distinct components. This is because mentoring has multiple meanings that are dependent upon the context in which they occur. Also, mentoring participants occupy multiple roles that can not easily be measured. John Kronik (1990) states:

> In the academic environment, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, mentoring of some sort is at the core of the system. But the role of the mentor — who, if not a favorite teacher, may be the person commonly called “advisor,” “major professor,” “supervisor,” “director,” “chairman,” or “chair” — varies greatly in the degree and nature of the involvement with the student (p. 23).

Further, Daniel Levinson and his colleagues (1978) stress that mentoring is not defined in terms of formal roles but in terms of the character of the relationship and the functions it serves.

> The uncertainty of the character and function of mentoring relationships continually leads researchers on a great search for “true mentoring relationships.” What is often found on the journey is that mentoring is similar to a maze in which the path twists and turns and no one knows how the relationship will end until it is over.
Although the formula for successful mentoring has yet to be found, many researchers have gathered tentative depictions of mentoring moments. In doing so, many have relied on and agreed with, to some extent, with Kathy Kram’s (1985) findings. In her study of both same sex and cross-gender mentoring relationships in work environments, Kram identifies two broad categories of mentoring functions that enhance an individual’s growth and advancement. Career functions allow the individual to learn the ropes and prepare for advancement in an organization, whereas psycho-social functions help the individual develop a sense of competence, clarity of identity, and effectiveness in a professional role. Career functions include elements of sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments. Psycho-social functions include role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling, and friendship. To illustrate how Kram’s functions are employed in a doctoral mentoring process, I provided examples throughout the discussion of each function.

**Career Functions**

**Sponsoring**

Sponsorship is public support that occurs through formal and informal discussions. The mentor “vouches” for, or gives, as Kram states, “good press” (p. 25) about the potential and competence of an individual. Kram employs Kanter’s idea of “reflected power” as being gained by individuals from their mentors. She suggests: “It is not only what a sponsor says about an individual, but the knowledge that he or she is a sponsor that empowers the less experienced person and creates opportunities for
movement and advancement” (p. 26). Kram also notes that sponsorship becomes more important as one climbs the organizational ladder because the “political processes inherent in promotion decisions are pervasive” (p. 26).

For a doctoral student, sponsorship is one of the most important components of the mentoring process. Mentors give their doctoral students “good press” by speaking favorably of students to other faculty members, especially those on a student’s committee who may not have worked as closely with the student. Also, mentors give recommendations to other colleagues so that their students may receive scholarships, fellowships, assistantships, and upon graduation, employment opportunities.

**Exposure and Visibility**

Mentors expose their protégés to future opportunities by assigning responsibilities that others in authority will observe. Kram explains: “Exposure and visibility serves as a socializing force; it prepares an individual for a position of greater responsibility and authority, and it introduces her to others so that she becomes a viable candidate” (p. 27). Mentors in the doctoral process provide exposure and visibility to their students by encouraging them to participate in research that is presented in professional settings and allowing them to enter into professional circles that other students may not have the opportunity in which to participate.

**Coaching**

Coaching involves teaching individuals how to navigate their environment. This entails providing an experienced perspective as well as access to information that is only available through informal connections with mentors. Coaching doctoral
students can be in the form of explaining the “unwritten” rules to a student or teaching them the tools needed to be successful in their chosen career paths.

Protection

Just as a parent protects a child, mentors protect their protégés from “negative publicity” (Kram, 1977, p. 29). However, Kram warns that protection can smother an individual by not allowing her to have exposure-and-visibility. In a cross-gender relationship, Kram asserts that the protection function is often seen as either inappropriate or, on the other end of the spectrum, non-existent. She states that it is hard to achieve a balance in cross-gender relationships.

Protection in doctoral relationships may take the form of the mentor shielding a student from other faculty members that may create potential problems. At times, mentors may help to alleviate problems or barriers faced by students during committee meetings. However, just as in Kram’s work settings, a mentor’s protection in advising situations may be seen as inappropriate by colleagues.

Challenging Assignments

By allowing the protégé to work on challenging assignments, the mentor provides “technical training and ongoing performance feedback, enables the junior manager to develop specific competencies and to experience a sense of accomplishment in a professional role” (Kram, 1985, p. 31). These assignments, which in doctoral programs are usually in the form of research, help the protégé prepare for greater responsibility and authority.
Psycho-social Functions

Role Modeling

In her study, Kram reports that role modeling is the most frequently reported psycho-social function. The protégé looks up to the mentor and strives to emulate the behavior and work ethic of the mentor. With role modeling, Kram suggests that an emotional attachment is formed that can be problematic in cross-gender relationships. She states:

The limitations of a cross-gender relationship are most apparent in this function; not only does the female manager lack an adequate model in the senior manager, but the male senior manager is less likely to identify and to see parts of himself in the young woman (p. 34).

However, there is value in any junior/senior relationship because both the junior and senior individuals discover valued parts of themselves.

In the higher education arena, there are many ways that a mentor can be a role model. These include setting example on how to: perform research, do fieldwork, teach, publish, present at conferences, interact as a faculty member, and be a mentor. Also, role modeling behaviors vary in importance among disciplines.

Acceptance and Confirmation

The mentor and protégé both receive “psychological nurturance” through acceptance and confirmation (Kram, 1985, p. 35). The protégé becomes confident and competent because of the mentor’s encouragement and support. Through expressing approval of the graduate student’s work, mainly the dissertation, a mentor builds confidence in her abilities.
Counseling

The counseling component adds a more personal tone to the relationship. The mentor helps the protégé with issues of self, career, and family. In other words, the senior person becomes a confidant to the protégé. In doctoral programs, mentors may counsel a student when she is experiencing personal and/or professional dilemmas.

Friendship

The friendship function involves informal social interactions which the mentor and protégé enjoy doing together. This function allows the protégé to begin to feel like a peer, rather than being subordinate to the mentor. Kram asserts, though, that the friendship function is limited in cross-gender relationships because of “anxiety about one-on-one informal encounters, as well as the external scrutiny of the relationships by other organization members” (p. 39). Finally, with doctoral mentoring relationships, the mentor and her student may experience friendship and collegiality, especially after the completion of the degree.

Women Mentees

The early work of Kram (1985), Levinson and his colleagues (1978), as well as others (Johnsrud, 1991; Lees, 1996), reveals the potential for promising and powerful mentoring relationships. However, even in those early studies many of the researchers warned “this just might not work out for women because...” In reality, for many women, doctoral relationships that seemed promising at the start have failed in the end (Johnsrud, 1991). Scholars studying this phenomenon report that failed doctoral
mentoring relationships may be a result of differences in developmental processes of men and women.

Some researchers employ women's developmental theory as a means for explaining why traditional mentoring models are not always successful for women. Pioneers of women's development theories (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1987) document the developmental stages of women as being different than men. They suggest that women should not be examined through traditional developmental theory models which are based on studies of men. Further, women's developmental studies work to dispel early developmental theory claims that women's development usually results in what Freud calls "women's developmental failure" (Gilligan, 1987, p. 59).

Findings from women's developmental studies that may explain differences in the mentoring experiences of men and women are: men define themselves in terms of separation and autonomy, whereas women define themselves through connection and relatedness (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986); men are oriented toward an ethic of rights and justice, whereas women exhibit an ethic of care and responsibility (Gilligan, 1987); and, both women and men are socialized to these orientations (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1987).

In my mind, each of the above conclusions derived from the studies of women may help explain and open up new lines of questioning regarding the shape and definition of mentoring relationships. First, if women tend to define themselves through connection and relatedness, they may actually benefit more from the support
that positive mentoring relationships can offer. In fact, in their study of 3,900 college students, Amaury Nora and his colleagues (1996) found that “for females only, the most significant positive effect on college persistence came from mentoring experiences in the form of nonclassroom interactions with faculty” (p. 427).

Further, Martha Christiansen and her colleagues (1989) assert that mentoring is an important step toward ensuring that a greater proportion of female students pursue academic careers and enlarge the representation of women in traditionally male dominated fields and within universities in general. Her study included 188 females who had successfully completed the doctoral degree and were faculty at a large midwestern university. Due to lack of mentors early in their academic experiences, a majority of the women did not decide to enter academic areas until late in their educational preparation. Many felt that having encouragement from a mentor would have made a difference in their professional development. Relatedly, Janice Bizarri (1995) provided a synthesis of several studies that examined mentoring relationships with women. She contends that women, in the studies she explored, consistently identified mentors who were important in helping them reach their goals. Those mentors who were most helpful insisted that the women could succeed against all odds and demonstrated how it could be done.

A second question that arises from developmental theory findings is—do mentoring relationships that have been traditionally defined by men operate around the goal of separation and autonomy rather than connectedness? In their study of the life
cycle of men, Levinson and his colleagues (1978) describe the ending of a mentoring relationship:

Mentoring is best understood as a form of love relationship. It is difficult to terminate in a reasonable, civil manner. Sometimes it comes to a natural end, and after a cooling-off period, the pair form a warm but modest friendship. Most often, however, an intense mentor relationship ends with strong conflict and bad feelings on both sides.

Levinson additionally reports that the end of the relationship does not put an end to its meaning. Eventually, the younger man may take the admired qualities of the mentor more fully into himself. If this is so, do men find value and meaning in their mentoring relationships even when they end badly because they are socialized to accept separation as being natural? And, if many mentoring relationships end in the way that Levinson and his colleagues suggest, then it may make sense that women are left with feelings of resentment and failure because they place more value in the connectedness of the relationship than just the outcomes.

Carol Gilligan (1987) points us to findings from Lever which suggest that the shape and intent of mentoring relationships may need to be approached differently for men and women. Although Lever studied boys and girls at play, she posited in her research that the socialization learned at play is reconstructed in our adult lives and relationships. Lever, who considered play to be a major activity of socialization for young children that is carried on throughout adulthood, studied the organization and structure of boys' and girls' playtime activities. She found that boys' games were more competitive and seemed to last longer than girls' games. Also, boys played games with elaborate rules, which often led to greater disputes that had to be negotiated. She
noticed that boys enjoyed the negotiation process and its quest for justice, whereas when a dispute erupted among girls, they tended to end the game. She asserts that girls direct their efforts toward “sustaining affective ties” (Gilligan, 1987, p. 62). In her findings, Lever contends that male models of play better prepare boys for success in modern corporate life. Gilligan states, “Lever clearly implies that, given the realities of adult life, if a girl does not want to be dependent on men, she will have to play like a boy” (p. 62).

If mentoring relationships are male oriented, then what happens to women? Statistics show that women doctoral students are clearly not achieving at the same rates as men (Chamberlain, 1991; Smith, 1995). Is this because women stop playing the game when the rules generate conflict? In their study, Women of Academe: Outsiders in the Sacred Grove, Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) describe one woman’s confusion and frustration with the “rules of the game” when her advisor added his name to an article based on her research:

Faced with a potential conflict, the woman deferred to male power, not out of a willing collusion with power to publish an article but because she did not know what might happen if she protested. What are her rights? Her professor’s rights? What court of appeal has she? And, finally, of course, what power has he over her? All this being unknown—partly because women do not know the rules of the game, partly because it is unclear how the rules apply to women—the doctoral candidate finds it safest to withdraw from the dispute (p. 73).

Several researchers who identify mentoring relationships as being oriented toward a male perspective offer possible alternatives for women. These alternatives include networking and forming peer groups. Although networking and peer groups
may be helpful in the doctoral process, I believe that advisor mentoring can be a much more powerful tool for success. As such, learning about mentoring from a female perspective may lend to understandings that academic mentors can consider when approaching those relationships.

A few researchers who studied mentoring processes for women in educational environments adopted Kram’s elements of professional development, psycho-social support, and role modeling in defining the key elements in the relationships they explored. Mary Bruce (1995) conducted a qualitative study that focused on in-depth interviews with two women doctoral students. The themes that emerged that proved important for the women in her research were: encouragement and support, role models, professional development, and peer-interactions. Both women studied were able to find female faculty role models and believed that having them was one of the most rewarding and memorable components of their mentor relationships.

Olga Welch (1996) conducted an extensive review of literature and identified a series of career and psycho-social functions for mentors. Career functions involved sponsoring, coaching, giving exposure, and protecting the individual. Psycho-social functions include serving as a role model, counselor, and friend. Welch found from her review of studies that mentoring does affect graduate student progress by providing students with professional and personal assistance. However, she stressed that few African American and women scholars enjoy meaningful mentor-protégé relationships.

While the above researchers work to identify specific elements of mentoring, others posit that the exploration of power relations in those relationships can offer new
insights for women. Linda Johnsrud (1991) asserts that academic women are being warned to beware of the mentoring relationships that have provided enormous benefit to their male colleagues. However, she contends that dangers in the traditional mentoring model are not gender-related, but a function of the imbalance of power within the relationship. The power inherent in mentoring relationships can be used to empower or enable as readily as it can be used to dominate or control. Johnsrud presents a model of mentoring that moves beyond male-oriented models of adult development. Her model includes the values of affiliation, caring, and interdependence.

Johnsrud’s (1991) model suggests that graduate women’s mentoring relationships develop through three stages: dependent stage, independent stage, and interdependent stage. In the dependent stage the mentee is defined primarily by the relationship. During this stage, the mentor “must resist being fused with the relationship and insist on recognizing the protégé as distinct while still acknowledging the value of closeness” (p. 13). This involves providing opportunities for the protégé to work independently. The growth of this phase can be difficult because “the protégé may feel she’s being shoved out of the nest, and the mentor may feel she is no longer needed or valued” (p. 13).

The independent stage is marked by the protégé’s development of a sense of self as authority. This stage usually begins during the dissertation or early into the protégé’s career. Distinctiveness and autonomy are now valued by the mentee, and the self is differentiated from the mentor and the mentoring relationship.
Johnsrud (1991) claims that the final stage, interdependence, is rare within the academy. At this stage, individuals have the ability to fulfill for one another the yearning for connectedness and the yearning for self-identity (p. 15). Roles of mentor and protégé are not forgotten but have the potential to evolve into reciprocal roles of supportive colleagues.

Finally, Johnsrud (1991) asserts that instead of discouraging mentoring relationships for women, academic communities must recognize the integrity and maturity required for mutually healthy and productive relationships. Moreover, she asserts, “the values of collaboration, connectedness and caring are not only essential to quality mentoring but they are also essential to an academic institution that is genuinely a ‘community’ of scholars” (p. 16).

Another researcher who focuses on power relations, Kathleen Heinrich (1995), conducted a study of the meanings of power that twenty-two women ascribed to within their mentoring relationships with dissertation committee advisors. Three themes related to power emerged from Heinrich’s study: power with, power over, and power disowned. Two types of power that she addressed are personal power and legitimate power. Personal power was defined as power from within, that both advisors and advisees had by virtue of being human. Heinrich asserts that only advisors have legitimate power that is vested in them by their educational institution in the form of professorial rank and status within the university.

In Heinrich’s (1995) study, “power with” relationships were described as relationships between professional friend advisors and colleague advisees. “Power
with" advisors owned their legitimate power, shared power with advisees, and negotiated conflict openly and directly with advisees. This was the optimal advising relationship in the study. Women called these advisors mentors who advised in a “gender sensitive” manner that optimally balanced task and interpersonal dimensions of advisement relationships (Heinrich, 1995).

“Power over” mentoring relationships were characterized as relationships between iron maiden advisors and handmaiden advisees. Doctoral students who gave up their personal power often ended up in mentoring relationships in which control, authority, domination, concern for being objective and fair, and strength in the form of force were central issues (Heinrich, 1995, p. 453). These relationships were hierarchical and task oriented. These advisors often played by patriarchal rules and used their legitimate power for their own reward.

“Power disowned” relationships were illustrated as relationships between negative mother advisors and good daughter advisees or between inadequate advisors and over-adequate advisees. In these relationships, advisors disowned their legitimate power. In relationships described as negative mother/good daughter, the advisor focused more on the interpersonal dimensions of the relationship to the detriment of the task dimension. Also, these advisors did not advocate or support the individual during conflict. In these situations, advisees did not confront the advisor so as not to hurt her feelings. Inadequate advisor/over-adequate advisee relationships were the same as negative mother/good daughter except that the previous group of advisees recognized their advisors’ inadequacies.
Finally, Heinrich (1995) reports that we need to continue to study mentoring relationships between women to learn more about how female advisors own their legitimate power, share power, and negotiate differences to nurture the professional growth of advisees. The sharing of female advisees’ and advisors’ stories can help to “re-envision” the advisement process.

A final study addressing power in doctoral relationships focused on four interviews with women who were either doctoral students or had completed their doctoral degree. Elizabeth Ervin (1995) explored how the women in her study perceived and conceptualized their mentoring experiences and how those perspectives corresponded to institutional perspectives on mentoring. She found that each of the four women redefined mentoring in their own terms that were often different than traditional definitions of mentoring. The definitions assigned to mentoring were tentative and fluctuating based on the women’s experiences at particular times. Also, the experiences and definitions that the women assigned to their mentoring roles did not always match those of the university. In actuality, university documentation on mentoring worked to silence the women in Ervin’s study by not acknowledging the negative experiences that these women had at times.

The implications from the review of literature regarding the mentoring of women graduate students are that women can be effectively mentored; women who are mentored believe that it can be very helpful in their progression; and women’s constructions of mentoring may need to be different than those of men. Those who have succeeded in finding meaningful mentoring relationships have reaped the benefits
of "individual recognition and encouragement; honest criticism and informal feedback; knowledge of the informal rules for advancement; opportunity for publishing; and much more" (Hall and Sandler, 1983, p. 3). However, women involved in the mentoring process need to know how to maintain meaningful mentoring relationships.

**Mentors of Women**

From the review of literature, I have learned that the art of mentoring is not an easy task. This task faces specific difficulties in doctoral education as advisors must know how and when to be attentive, caring, provide guidance, offer advice, and much more—and, all of that on top of teaching, research, committee work, and personal lives.

Cronan-Hillix and colleagues (1986) report the general characteristics for mentors as being interested, supportive, competent, sharing, unexploitive, positive in attitudes toward students, and involved in research. The most important of these characteristics is commitment, trust, and the willingness to invest time, energy, and self. Further, Levinson and his colleagues (1978) found, based on the men in their study, that the most crucial function of the mentor is the commitment to “support and facilitate the realization of the Dream” (p. 98).

Although research on doctoral students has shown that mentoring relationships can either “make or break” their academic career, this is not true of the faculty advisors who mentor. In fact, most departments offer no reward or incentive to faculty members who effectively mentor. As stated earlier, it is unfortunate that one of the most important elements of a student’s persistence, mentoring, is not valued in the faculty tenure process. If mentoring is only one small piece of a faculty member’s duties, what
makes some faculty members strive for and succeed in meaningful mentoring relationships?

Hall and Sandler (1983) report that although the main focus of mentoring is the development of the mentee, mentors do receive benefits from the process. Some of these include:

the satisfaction of helping in the development of another person who may carry on his or her own work; ideas for and feedback about his or her own projects from a junior person who is eager to learn and committed to the project’s success; a network of former mentees at other institutions who can collaborate on projects and help place students — thus increasing the mentor’s power and visibility; and becoming part of an expanded network of colleagues (Hall and Sandler, 1983, p. 3).

Also, Olson and Ashton-Jones (1994) state that some mentors “have been relieved by mentees of some of the more mundane burdens of research, scholarship, and teaching” (p. 233). For example, mentors have often relied on their graduate students to teach undergraduate courses and to help with their own research projects. Finally, Luna and Cullen (1995) posit that in successful mentoring relationships mentors “feel renewed through the sharing of power and advocacy of collegiality” (p. iv).

Even though the mentoring dynamic may not have been studied from the perspective of both graduate women and their advisors, some researchers have offered insights based on their own past mentoring experiences. Victoria Parker and Kathy Kram (1993) posit that the potential benefits of women connecting with other women are substantial, but there are many barriers that work against these alliances. These barriers include the difficulty of discussing central identity issues, the dynamics of tokenism, the impenetrable glass ceiling, junior and senior women’s authority, self-
esteem, prospects for advancement, the collusion of men in maintaining
disconnections, and "the role of organizational culture and systems in shaping what
kind of mentoring occurs" (p. 48). Although the barriers that women face has led to
legislation aimed to eliminate discrimination, more work is needed.

For example, to help break down barriers of inequality in salary, promotion,
and educational opportunity, the Feminist Movement was successful in convincing
Congress to pass Title IX of the Higher Education Amendments Act in 1972. Although
this legislation has resulted in great strides for women in the academe, the perpetuation
of oppression of women still exists today, but in subtler forms. Bernice Sandler (1993),
a woman instrumental in the legislation that resulted in Title IX states:

Although the door to academe is now open and many obvious barriers have
fallen, a host of subtle personal and social barriers still remain. These are
barriers that laws alone cannot remedy; often they are part and parcel of our
usual ways of relating to each other as men and women, and are so "normal"
that they may not even be noticed (p. 176).

What has been noticed and voiced through feminist struggle is that "the playing field is
not yet level for faculty women, who fare better in obtaining entry level positions than
in being equitably compensated or earning tenure" (Glazer-Raymo, 1999, p. 65).

Glazer-Raymo further comments:

It is ironic but perhaps not coincidental that as more women earn doctorates
and enter the academic profession, the barriers are being raised, the criteria are
being altered, and...part-time and non-tenure-track positions are more prevalent
(p. 65).

Parker and Kram (1993) offer strategies to counteract these barriers:
Increase self-awareness. Both senior and junior women interested in creating alliances must increase their self-awareness, particularly of the projections they make about each other and the likely effects of those on each other.

Make Undermining Dynamics Discussible. Mentors and mentees should both work toward increasing the level of intimacy in mentoring relationships. These relationships should not be limited to task-related coaching and discussions of organizational politics but should also have personal elements.

Challenge Untested Assumptions. Mentors and protégés should not allow untested assumptions about needs, availability, and expectations of potential alliances limit opportunities.

Build Multiple Relationships. Parker and Kram support the idea of individuals having multiple mentoring relationships. However, this may potentially lead to a situation where women are sought for friendship and support and males are chosen for sponsorship and career opportunities.

Create a Supportive Culture. Organizations can create a mentoring culture through supporting and educating individuals on the benefits of mentoring.

Parker and Kram state that the systematic forces that keep women disconnected should continually be analyzed and addressed. This task of addressing and remedying the difficulties women face should not be left to women alone.

Cross-Gender Mentoring Relationships

In the discussion of mentoring women, two questions that are frequently asked about mentors are: Can men effectively mentor women? And, is it important for
mentors and protégés to come from the same racial group? While some researchers (Collins, Kamya, Tourge, 1997; Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991) report that matching mentors and mentees by race and/or gender is not necessary, others have found that cross-gender and cross-racial mentoring relationships can be problematic (Bowman, Hatley, & Bowman, 1995; Bruce, 1995; Dickey, 1996; Fant, Betz, & Leftwich, 1996; Leon, 1996).

Along with her mentoring functions, Kram (1985) provides additional insight into cross-gender mentoring. She states that males and females have generally been uncomfortable in mentoring roles with the opposite sex. She believes that much of this discomfort stems from both men and women’s “collusion in stereotypical roles” (p. 108). These roles can take on the form of: “father” and “pet;” “chivalrous knight” and “helpless maiden;” “tough warrior” and “nurturant mother;” and, “macho” and “seductress.” Kram warns that these roles usually work to diminish the value of the protégé and make mentors become overprotective. Also, the collusion of stereotypical roles can lead to discrimination and sexual harassment. On an individual level, Kram states that mentors can help reduce the barriers in cross-gender relationships through self-reflection. Further, on an organizational level, more women need to be accepted into positions of greater authority and power so that they may help other women navigate those environments.

In her discussion on four types of mentoring relationships (male-to-male, female-to-female, male-to-female, and female-to-male), Hulbert (1994) states that there is limited data about male-to-female and female-to-male relationships. She states
that many male-to-female accounts emphasize difficulties or negative aspects. Hulbert also implies that male-to-female relationships differ in quality from male-to-male relationships. This difference can be attributed to an “effort to maintain a professional distance or reserve” (p. 258) or to the fact that male professors view women as having different goals and aspirations than men. Finally, in her discussion of female-to-male mentoring, Hulbert points out that there is virtually no literature on this topic and, in reality, these relationships rarely exist. Through her personal experiences and discussions with colleagues, Hulbert reports that many male graduate students are “concerned with maintaining the hierarchical nature of [the] relationship” (p. 259). This deference of male graduate students is often discomforting to female faculty.

Ellen Hansen and her colleagues (1995) support Kram’s and Hullbert’s findings through their discussion of power relations. They argue that women in educational settings potentially face sexual discrimination and harassment because the two are deeply “rooted in the unequal power relations of gender” (p. 309). Because of these unequal power relations, women are often counseled to lower career aspirations and are excluded from the collegiality and critical networks that many men participate in through connections with their mentor.

Although difficulties and barriers have been found to exist within cross-gender mentoring relationships, several scholars have worked to find ways to counteract those problems. Many of the suggestions have come from those who have been mentors. In his article entitled, “On Men Mentoring Women: Then and Now,” Kronik (1991) discusses his experiences as a mentor of women. Kronik’s experiences remind us that
many men in the academy probably do not realize that they mentor women differently than other men. When first asked to write about the subject of men mentoring women he stated, "I can’t do that! There’s no difference in advising men and women! I’m always the same" (p. 22). After careful thought though, he realized that it was not true. He pulled letters of recommendation that he had written in the late 1960s for women that he had mentored. In them he mainly discussed the women in terms of their attractiveness and demeanor and even said of one woman, "She would be a most capable graduate student and assistant, though long-range she may be a professional risk and is likely to opt for a family" (p. 22).

Kronik’s mentoring practices have changed immensely over the years, yet he contends that mentoring women has been and will always be very challenging. He discusses his former female mentees and talks about how they have achieved, but not in the same way as his male mentees. He attributes this to the fact that men and women have different goals and orientations. Kronik suggests that mentors of women should “know how to handle the woman’s social reality.” This requires:

the ability to listen; a sense of the other; a willingness to cast aside one’s own prejudices, temperament, and immediate obligations and interest — from the specific functions that vary with the sex of the mentee. It’s extremely difficult to transplant yourself into the psyche of the other and dangerous to determine what might be best for someone whose gender sensitivities and obligations aren’t the same as yours (p. 25).

Kronik also warns against the power relations that come into play in cross-gender relationships. He posits that successful mentoring relationships are ones that contain a mutual respect that allows for a subtle and beneficial exercise of power.
Although discussions of cross-gender mentoring usually focus on male mentors and female mentees, some researchers and practitioners have noticed that men rarely choose women as mentors (Kronik, 1990; Wood, 1997). Kronik states that investigators in 1981 found that:

young men and women have differing motives in selecting their mentors: men, who choose men almost exclusively, seek promoters of their careers and role models for involvement in the professions; women want mentors who seem to represent a rewarding combination of professional and family life, that is, a total life-style, and therefore search out women who have attained that balance (p. 24).

He warns, however, that these findings may legitimize for men that it is natural to provide different mentoring functions for women than those they provide for men.

Even though men have historically not chosen women to mentor them, researchers have posited that these types of relationships could have potential value. Maureen Wood (1997) tells us that female mentors of men may receive greater benefits from psycho-social functions. From an organizational perspective, individuals will benefit from a more “equally balanced hierarchy, both in terms of gender and approaches to management” (p. 31). Further, Levinson and his colleagues (1978) posit:

Men need women as colleagues, bosses and mentors. These relationships enable them to form richer identities, to live out more aspects of the self, and to reduce the burdens created by the excessive masculinization of work. Changes of this kind will also free women from the constraints imposed by the discrimination that restricts their participation in most of our institutions (p. 338).

Cross-Racial Mentoring Relationships

Another dynamic that has been researched recently is cross-racial mentoring. Although many of the findings about cross-racial mentoring do not contemplate the
interplay of race and gender, it has been noted that women of color are often doubly discriminated against because of their race and gender. Carter, Pearson, and Shavlik (as quoted in Dickey, 1996) state:

At the intersection of race and gender stand women of color, torn by the lines of bias that currently divide white from nonwhite in our society, and male from female. The worlds these women negotiate demand different and often wrenching allegiances. As a result, women of color face significant obstacles to their full participation in and contribution to higher education (p. 7).

To counteract these barriers, Corrine Dickey suggests that universities promote mentoring relationships that not only provide the “usual” mentoring benefits, but go beyond that to create a culturally validating psycho-social atmosphere.

Similarly, in Mentoring Minorities in Higher Education: Passing the Torch, David Leon (1997) discusses the implications of mentoring minorities throughout their entire educational experience. Within this discussion he elaborates on issues regarding graduate students. Leon states:

All graduate students, especially minorities, should meet regularly with graduate faculty members, formally and informally, to learn about their profession. They should be placed in situations where the parties talk about themselves, their lives, and aspirations, where a common culture based on academic interests can develop (p. 27).

The author states that all graduate students need advisors who offer broad guidance and support throughout their program; however, faculty should be alert to the needs of minority students who are not receiving the support and socialization they need.

**Drawbacks and Negative Effects of Mentoring Women**

Some researchers identified drawbacks and negative effects that are possible threats to women students in mentoring relationships. These included sexual
involvement and harassment, discrimination, advisor plagiarism of doctoral students’ work, and advisors unethically using students to work on their own projects. These are all issues that should be addressed by institutions of higher education because of their very existence. Although men may face similar negative effects, women may be in greater danger of experiencing them. The negative effects of mentoring could weigh heavily on women doctoral student persistence. If these issues could be worked through, more women could possibly succeed in the completion of the doctoral degree.

Conclusion

From the research I reviewed regarding female students in higher education, it is apparent that women want and need good mentoring relationships but are in danger of not achieving these goals. The studies described in this chapter have explored the impact of connected mentoring relationships for women. A participant in Aisenberg and Harrington’s (1988) study described her thoughts on the importance of mentoring:

If I were a dean or president of a university, I would make sure all women got an extra amount of attention — because I think that’s what keeps women in graduate schools. The idea of the mentor, the idea of the pusher is important in almost every woman’s life who’s ever accomplished anything. The slightest discouragement can reinforce the ambivalence many women feel and they drop out (p. 167).

Relatedly, a major theme that came out of most of these studies is that women need encouragement and support that “consists of words or actions that convey to woman that she is being taken seriously” (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988, p. 48). The prior studies on women who are or have been graduate students leads me to believe that
women may need mentors to not only provide the support necessary to complete a
doctoral degree but also to counteract barriers they face in being the “other.”

Because prior research has not studied mentoring relationships from both the
student and mentor perspectives, we are not seeing the entire picture. Mentoring is a
two-sided experience, and we may learn more by listening to both participants in this
complicated dynamic. Through my research, I hope to provide the stories of women
doctoral students and their advisors who are participating in meaningful mentoring
relationships. In doing so, we may learn from those experiences.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study provides an understanding of the mentoring experiences of women doctoral students and advisors through qualitative conversation. The participants in the study are 6 women post-doctoral students and their advisors, 4 female and 2 male, from Louisiana State University, a Research I university located in the south. The research took place in the Spring and Fall, 2000 semesters.

Through a feminist phenomenological qualitative approach, I answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do graduate women and their advisors enter into mentoring relationships?

RQ 2: What do graduate women and their advisors desire from doctoral advising relationships and how do they perceive each other’s needs and roles?

RQ 3: What do advisors and graduate women perceive to be the benefits and problems that resulted from their mentoring experience?

Research Design and Theory

Unlike quantitative studies that search for answers in numbers, qualitative researchers “stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 8). Further, Bogdan and Biklen (1982) identify five features of qualitative research.
These characteristics are:

1. Naturalistic—Qualitative researchers believe that a situation can be understood best in the setting and context in which it occurs.

2. Descriptive Data—The data collected take the form of words or pictures rather than numbers.

3. Concern with Process—Qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products. How do people negotiate meaning? How do certain terms and labels come to be applied? How do certain notions come to be taken as part of what we know as “common sense”?

4. Inductive—Qualitative researchers seek to find answers to their questions, not to either prove or disprove hypotheses.

5. Meaning—Obtaining participant perspectives to better understand how they make meaning of their lives (pp. 4-7).

Further, Eisner (1991) offers six features of qualitative study that somewhat mirror those of Bogdan and Biklen. Eisner’s six features are that qualitative research: is field focused; relates to the self as a subjective instrument; has an interpretive character; calls for the use of expressive language and the presence of voice in text; pays attention to the particulars from which the data were originally secured; and becomes believable because of its coherence, insight, and instrumental utility (1991, pp. 32-40). The works of Bogdan and Biklen (1982) and Eisner (1991) not only provide description of the different nuances of qualitative research but also embody the basic
foundations from which many feminist scholars carry out their qualitative research agendas.

I believe that qualitative research is useful to this study because it provides a means for insight, reflection, and discovery of how women can support one another throughout an often difficult journey. In higher education, a qualitative study about women's doctoral mentoring relationships gives the academic community information on what is important to women graduate students and their advisors throughout the doctoral process. Attention to how others negotiate meaningful mentoring relationships may result in more rewarding and satisfying doctoral experiences for both women graduate students and their advisors.

**Feminist Research**

In this section, I first define feminism and feminist research as it has been explained in the literature. Next, I present tenets of feminist research that are in current dialogue about mentoring. These tenets help paint a picture of the tools and processes that feminist researchers engage in while carrying out their research. Finally, I discuss problems, possibilities, and ethical dilemmas encountered in feminist research.

Although the concept of feminism takes many shapes, feminist theory generally draws attention to the fact that women, as well as other groups, do not experience life in the same way as men. The critique of institutional practices and culture leads researchers to the conclusion that men as a group are privileged by existing gender inequalities (Bryson, 1992). Further, because hierarchies are deeply ingrained in all areas of society, many women and other minority groups experience lives that are
"confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction" (Frye, 1983, p. 4). Thus, feminists agree that change is needed so that women may gain more access and power in the institutions and society that encompass their lives.

Although all feminists agree on the need for change and the need to actively organize for it, diverse strands of feminism offer significantly different ways to achieve justice for women and others (Adamson, 1988). Within this body of research, I engage in the perspective of liberal feminism. Unlike radical and socialist feminists, who oppose the institutions and ideas of society, liberal feminists "focus their efforts on winning rights and equal opportunity for women within the existing structures (Adamson, 1988; pp. 174-175). I believe, like Adamson, that "women are excluded from access to power within existing structures" (p. 175). For women to gain more access and power in educational institutions, change is needed. Many feminists believe that this change can materialize through research, education, and transformation of current educational practices and ways of thinking (Fine, 1994; Lather, 1994; Ropers-Huilman, 1998).

Feminist researchers strive to discover and re-frame human conditions and experiences through women’s perspectives. By capturing these experiences, researchers make others aware of conditions that exist, but are not seen. The hope of feminist research is that by allowing individuals to see things not previously imaginable or to see things in a different light, action will be taken that eventually will...
lead to transformation. Through feminist research, scholars work to "denaturalize what appears so natural" (Fine, 1994, p.25). This entails lifting "androcentric blinders" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 51) that will allow us to see women as full members of their worlds.

**What Does Feminist Research Look Like?**

Through reflection of their research practices, some feminist scholars (Bloom, 1998; Kirsch, 1999; Ropers-Huilman, 2000) have identified methods and practices that feminist researchers employ while carrying out their work. Becky Ropers-Huilman (2000) contends that:

Feminist research, by definition, is committed to considering the possibility—and probability—that gender is having some effect on the phenomenon of interest. When conducting qualitative research, though, feminists do not approach their research with "the answer" already in mind. Instead, they recognize that because they live and work in a society that tends to privilege men's viewpoints, they may not necessarily hear and see the realities of women's lives unless they are specifically looking for them (p. 5).

Therefore, feminists believe that it is important to seek out women's stories and experiences so that attention can be given to how they make sense of and negotiate their lives.

While striving to bring about change, feminist scholars are engaged in "the dual purposes of building up and deconstructing knowledge" (Ropers-Huilman, 2000). In gaining knowledge about women's experiences, feminists have learned that they cannot always employ traditional ways of testing and traditional theory in understanding and interpreting women's lives because these tools reveal "truth" and have been established through a masculine lens.
In an effort to gain an understanding of feminist research Leslie Bloom (1998), before beginning her own research on women’s lives, identified some tenets of feminism that she gathered in her search of feminist methodology:

1. Feminist methodology should break down the one-way hierarchical framework of traditional interviewing techniques. Feminist interviews should be engaged, interactive, and open-ended. Feminist interviews should strive for intimacy from which long-lasting relationships may develop. Feminist interviews are dialogic in that both the researcher and respondent reveal themselves and reflect on these disclosures.

2. Feminist researchers give focused attention to an non-judgmental validation of respondents’ personal narratives.

3. Feminist researchers assume that what the respondents tell is true and that their participation is grounded in a sincere desire to explore their experiences.

4. In feminist methodology, the traditional "stranger-friend" continuum may be lengthened to be a "stranger-friend-surrogate family" continuum, which can allow the connection between women to be a source of both intellectual and personal knowledge.

5. Identification with respondents enhances researchers’ interpretive abilities, rather than jeopardizes validity.
6. Through working closely with another woman, particularly a feminist, a
sense of identification with her may emerge that can be a powerful source
of insight.

7. Feminist researchers strive for egalitarian relationships with their
respondents by making space for them to narrate their stories as they desire;
by focusing on issues that are important to respondents; by returning
transcripts to the respondents so they can participate in interpretation; and
by respecting the editorial wishes of the respondents regarding the final
product or text (pp. 18-19).

In addition, Gesa Kirsh (1999) provided an overview of feminist principles,
which included:

asking research questions which acknowledge and validate women's
experiences; collaborating with participants; analyzing how social, historical,
and cultural factors shape the research site as well as participants' goals,
values, and experiences; analyzing how the researchers' identity, experience,
training, and theoretical framework shape the research agenda, data analysis,
and findings; correcting androcentric norms by calling into question what has
been considered "normal" and what has been regarded as "deviant"; taking the
responsibility for the representation of others in research reports by assessing
probable and actual effects on different audiences; and acknowledging the
limitations of and contradictions inherent in research data, as well as alternative
interpretations of that data (pp. 4-5).

Although feminist researchers provide other scholars with tools useful in carrying out
feminist projects, there are no universal guidelines that must be followed or tools that
must be used. Instead feminist scholars often do "what makes sense." In doing feminist
studies, researchers should continually evaluate the process so that they can determine
if their research plans need to be revised or redirected.
Problems and Possibilities of Feminist Research

As many feminist researchers report—engaging in purposeful and useful research is not always an easy task. In her book, Bloom (1998) states that her methods and interactions with research participants sometimes contradicted the "ideals of feminist methodology" that she learned before embarking on her study. Also, other scholars urge researchers to not only consider the tools of research that are chosen, but to also reflect on how those tools and methods affect participants and the outcomes.

For example, Michele Fine (1994) reminds us that just saying that we allow voices to be heard is not enough. She quotes Shulamit Reinharz (as cited in Fine, 1994) to best describe how researchers need to think about voices:

By dealing in voices, we are affecting power relations. To listen to people is to empower them. But if you want to hear it, you have to go hear it, in their space, or in a safe space. Before you can expect to hear anything worth hearing, you have to examine the power dynamics of the space and the social actors. Second, you have to be the person someone else can talk to, and you have to be able to create a context where the person can speak and you can listen. That means we have to study who we are and who we are in relation to those we study. Third, you have to be willing to hear what someone is saying even when it violates your expectations or threatens our interests. In other words, if you want someone to tell it like it is, you have to hear it like it is (p. 20).

To really hear voices often means that they may not fall into neat categories that can be easily described and written about. Three issues that Fine (1994) identifies regarding researchers' responsibilities are: few researchers reveal how they carve out pieces of narrative evidence that they select, edit, and deploy to border their arguments; researchers often rely on individual voices to produce social interpretations of group behavior; and, some researchers engage in the popular romancing of the voices of...
women in poverty (p. 22). To avoid these dilemmas, researchers should make explicit the politics and issues involved in the research processes in which they are engaged.

Further, while exploring women's lives and stories through a feminist lens, researchers have wrestled with the uncertainty of how to rename and re-frame dominant narratives. For example, in her study of women teachers, Petra Munro (1998) states:

"Listening to and interpreting women's lives has been central to the feminist reconstruction of the world (Personal Narrative Group 1989). That 'gender' is crucial to this understanding is the very contribution of feminism. Yet, the notion of woman, positioned within language as a 'subject', is a masculinist construction of an essentialized self, which feminists have sought to disrupt (Butler, 1990). If there is no such category as 'woman', since gendered 'identity' is a construction of masculinist binary thought (Cixous 1981; Irigaray, 1985), what becomes of the subject, traditionally thought necessary for resistance (p. 1)?"

Also, at the end of her collaborative work with women teachers, Munro contends that her study did not lead her "to new definitions or methods for establishing truth, be it partial, absolute, multiple or situated" (p. 133). She states:

"The dilemmas discussed here present no easy resolutions, if, in fact, there are solutions at all. The questions of representation, self-reflexivity and subjectivity in the collaborative process are ongoing. Will degree of reflexivity or subjectivity or mode of representation provide 'better' criteria for establishing 'truth'? What about the goal of feminist research to be emancipatory or empowering? What criteria will be established to assess this? Again, I believe we are posing the wrong questions if we seek only to replace one form of measurement with another, for we are still trapped within an essentialist notion of truth (p. 132).

So then, what is gained by feminist research that may not provide the "answers" or the "truth?" Munro (1988) and others believe that feminist projects provide powerful
opportunities to gain deeper understandings of "the multiple ways we create, negotiate and make sense of the power relationships in our lives" (p. 132).

In summary, feminist research is important in gaining knowledge about women’s experiences. This is important because, as Ropers-Huilman (2000) reports, "Much of the knowledge already constructed in any given area may omit women’s experiences altogether or, at least, women’s own interpretations of their experiences" (p. 7), and that "women have not been asked to author their own experiences" (p. 8). Also, "the methods that have been created and valued in social science research were generally not developed to represent the ways that women tend to learn and understand their worlds" (p. 10). Although feminist research does not provide future researchers with a set of guiding "rules," it offers a means of exploring the ways that women make sense of their lives.

**Phenomenological Research and Its Intersections with Feminism**

Phenomenology focuses on "ways that the life world—that is, the experiential world every person takes for granted—is produced and experienced by members" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 138). Denzin and Lincoln further explain:

We assume that others experience the world basically in the way we do, and that we can therefore understand one another in our dealings in and with the world. We take our subjectivity for granted, overlooking its constitutive character, presuming that we intersubjectively share the same reality (p. 140).

Further, phenomenological research "attempts to understand the meaning of events and interactions of ordinary people in particular situations" (Bogden & Biklen, 1998, p. 23).
Phenomenology begins with silence and then grasps for understanding:

This silence is an attempt to grasp what it is they [researchers] are studying. What phenomenologists emphasize, then, is the subjective aspects of people's behavior. They attempt to gain entry into the conceptual world of their subjects (Geertz, 1973) in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives (Bogden & Biklen, 1998, p. 23).

In studying mentoring relationships between women doctoral students and their advisors, phenomenology offers a way to gain understanding about ways that participants—students and advisors—in the doctoral mentoring dynamic make sense of their relationship.

In educational research, phenomenology tries to "ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would rule-govern the research project" (van Manen, 1990, p. 29). van Manen discussed research activities through a phenomenological perspective:

1. turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. manipulating a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; and
6. balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (pp. 30-31).

Feminist researchers (Bloom, 1998; Rose, 1993) have found value in coupling phenomenology and feminism in carrying out their research projects. The two
perspectives are useful together because they both draw attention to the need to explore knowledge and lived experience through different methods—than scientific research—so that more diverse voices can be heard. These methods help fill in the gaps with insight and experiences about individuals whose stories have not been told. In addition, feminism offers a transformative quality to research which critics of phenomenology report to be its weakness. Feminist phenomenological research has the power to transform the researcher, the researched, as well as those who read the research.

Although feminism and phenomenology have been united in research about women (Bloom, 1998; Lees, 1996), some contradictions and/or problems result from weaving the two perspectives together. In her book, Leslie Bloom (1998) discusses the "important contradiction between feminist methodology’s call for conversational interviewing as a grounds for friendship building (Oakley, 1981) and feminist phenomenology’s call for researcher restraint" (p. 19). She further expands:

Feminist methodology, we recall, encourages interviews to be more like conversations between friends, and it encourages the researcher to give both focused attention to the respondents and non-judgmental validation of their experiences. Feminist phenomenological methodology asks researchers to be restrained and to listen carefully, constructing questions from what the respondents narrate (p. 20).

Bloom described one participant’s discomfort with her lack of contribution the conversation during her first visit. On the next visit, Bloom asked her participant, Olivia, "Would it be more natural or more comfortable if I talked more" (p. 21)? Olivia expressed that discussing Leslie’s experiences allowed her think more about her own experiences.
Another concern with coupling feminism and phenomenology involves the notion of essentialism. In his discussion on the powerful potential of phenomenology, Max van Manen explains:

I am interested in the evidential quality of texts that permits us to recognize reflectively, as it were, a certain human experience—that may indeed be relative to certain historical contexts, life conditions, and circumstances but that only ask to be understood as 'possible human experience.' Some critical commentators unfairly see all variations of phenomenological inquiry as contaminated by the idealist philosophy of essentialism. Essentialism states that everything in nature has a nature, an immutable essence. Essentialists assume that once we know the eidos or true being of things then we can give a moral assessment to what extent something falls short of its unrealized potential. In other words, an accurate determination of the essence of childhood, womanhood, or manhood would tell us what is proper to a child, a woman, a man. It is easy to guess why essentialist assumptions may lead to dangerous dogmas. But, in my conceptualization phenomenology does not produce dogmas or even 'theories' in a strong sense of the term. Phenomenology merely shows us what various ranges of human experiences are possible, what worlds people inhabit, how these experiences may be described, and how language (if we give it its full value) has powers to disclose the worlds in which we dwell as fathers, mothers, teachers, students, and so forth. Of course, we can choose not to value these experiences. The point is, however, that we may enrich our lives by the recognition that these possible experiences could be or become our own actual experiences (p. 56).

Although van Manen is not discussing the merging of feminism and phenomenology, the conclusion of his thought illustrates that the two perspectives share similar goals. Coupled with feminism, phenomenological research emphasizes lived experiences rather than objective evidence in the quest for knowledge. In doing so, feminist phenomenologist continually pay attention to the role that gender plays in their interactions with others. I believe that qualitative inquiry conducted through a feminist lens provides an understanding of the experiences and lived truths and realities of women graduate students and their advisors.
Positioning Myself

In beginning my feminist research, I sought out tools, methods, and literature that would be useful in my study. I wanted to learn the "steps" that I would have to take to do the "right" job. However, after careful reflection, I realize that trying to fit my research agenda into a "step by step" process is not what feminist phenomenological research is about. Feminist phenomenological researchers concern themselves about the phenomenon, situation, or context at hand rather than making sure that scientific steps are followed to yield the most reliable and valid conclusions. In addition, feminist scholars urge other researchers who engage in feminist dialogue to think about how their position as researcher will affect the process as well as the participants in the study.

In keeping with this agenda, I am a white woman who was born, raised, and educated in the South. I am a first generation college student, meaning neither one of my parents completed postsecondary education. The total of my grandparents' children and grandchildren reaches over 35. However, of these family members only about five of us have completed a bachelor's degree. I am the only member of this family to receive a master's degree and to attempt a Ph.D.

Unlike my friends, whose parents forbid them to think of any other plans besides college, my parents did not care either way. From early childhood, I dreamed of becoming a teacher. However, when I enrolled in college, I was advised by my family to seek a degree in accounting because getting a degree in education was a waste—teachers did not make enough money. As my undergraduate experience came to
an end, I realized that I did not want to be an accountant. Not knowing what to do, I decided to get a master’s degree in business administration.

When I was near completion of the master’s, I obtained a job teaching accounting and computer skills to adults. Shortly after starting the job, I realized that I needed a Ph.D. to be able to teach or work in an administrative capacity in the university environment that I had grown to love throughout my collegiate experience. Therefore, I enrolled at Louisiana State University in the Educational Leadership and Research Ph.D. program, with a concentration in higher education. Because of my undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral training, which included learning the research and publication process, I obtained my current position of Assistant Professor of General Business at my undergraduate university.

Because of my experiences as a doctoral student, as well as the stories I heard about other women, I decided to pursue this dissertation study about meaningful mentoring relationships. The goal of my work is to learn about the ways that women doctoral students negotiate and make sense of their environments. The reasons for pursuing this goal are threefold: First, I want to make sense of my own process of completing my dissertation work. Second, I want to obtain a deeper understanding of the mentoring process from both student and advisor perspectives so that I may negotiate meaningful mentoring relationships with my female students. Third, I believe that my work can contribute to the current literature about women’s lived experiences.
The definition of feminism that I have formulated is: thought and action by individuals and groups that work to change the condition of women by allowing them more access and power in the institutional structures of society so that their voices can be heard and valued. I believe that re-framings of reality are most useful in the social sciences because we each live and communicate through our own individual perceptions and realities that are in constant flux. Through feminist research agendas we can "unsettle questions, texts, and collective struggles; to challenge what is, incite what could be, and help imagine a world that is not yet imagined. That is what makes the struggle worthwhile" (Fine, 1994).

Finally, I hope, through my feminist phenomenological research that I can learn from women student and advisor perspectives on meaningful mentoring experiences. I also hope that my research participants can learn more about mentoring through reflecting about the process and seeing it from their mentoring partner's perspective. Finally, I hope that my work will be transformative in that it teaches women students and mentors of women students about engaging in the process of mentoring.

Participants

The participants in this study are six women graduate students from various fields and six major advisors from Louisiana State University. Initially, I planned to interview only women graduate students who had women advisors. Because my

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1 The women who I refer to as graduate students have all graduated and are now Ph.D.'s. However, to make a distinction between the two groups, I refer to them in this paper as women doctoral students.
research was focused on women doctoral students' meaningful mentoring relationships, rather than the female to female dynamic, my committee and I decided that my participants could have either male or female advisors, as long as they defined their relationship as meaningful. The sampling technique that I employ is purposive sampling. Purposive sampling involves choosing participants because of specific characteristics they possess that are relevant to the study (Bogden & Biklen, 1992).

In keeping with this agenda, I found women doctoral students who: (a) had recently completed the doctorate, (b) defined their relationship with their major professor as a mentoring relationship, and, (c) had major professors who were willing to participate in the study. Because I wanted to obtain the perspectives of both students and advisors, I first identified a pool of students and then determined if their advisor was willing to participate in the study.

Finding the women doctoral students who are included in this study was not an easy task. I initially contacted the Graduate School for information on recent women graduates. From there I was directed to the Bursar’s Office where I requested a list of women doctoral graduates within the past three years. While I waited several weeks for the list to be constructed, I obtained information on graduates for the Fall 1999 and Spring 2000 semesters by browsing the university’s on-line calendar of Doctoral Dissertation defenses. I then went to the on-line directory for LSU and was able to find the listed e-mail addresses and phone numbers for 20 of the women.

Of these 20 women, I was able to contact three through e-mail and two by phone. Two of the women were now living out of state, and one reported that she had
not had a meaningful relationship with her professor. However, from this initial population, I was able to find two women who reported that they were in mentoring relationships with their advisors and were willing to participate in my study. One student was from the Human Ecology Department and the other from the Department of Oceanography and Coastal Studies. Both of their male professors also agreed to participate in the study.

Meanwhile, the Bursar’s Office listing of women doctoral graduates included only the name, social security number, address, and phone number of the individuals. From the initial list of over 200 women, I compiled a list of 98 women who had local addresses. Because these women had already graduated, their LSU directory information, which included their departmental information, had been purged from the on-line system. So that I could select women from different fields, I had to search Webspires Dissertation Abstracts to obtain the department and major advisor’s name for each student.

As I composed my final list, I grouped the women by department and began making phone calls. The first problem to arise was that many of the phone numbers were no longer in service. Also, I called several phone numbers on more than one occasion that were not answered and there was no answering machine; therefore, I was not able to determine if the phone number was correct.

Of the students who remained in the South Louisiana area after graduation, I found the population of women to be divided amongst only a few fields. The majority of women were from English, Vocational Education, and Curriculum and Instruction.
There were a few from Engineering, Chemistry, and Veterinary Science; however, each of the women I contacted in these fields were either too busy to participate in my study or reported not having meaningful mentoring relationships with their professor. It was quite difficult and uncomfortable at times, when a woman reported that her relationship had not been meaningful. I could hear a variety of emotions—bitter, angry, and sad—in their voices when they revealed that they had not had a mentoring relationship.

I eventually contacted seven women, all having graduated within the past two years, who agreed to participate in my study. One of the women informed me that her advisor was on sabbatical and would not return until August, 2000. I agreed to interview her and to contact her professor at a later date. Throughout the interview, I wondered repeatedly how this woman could have identified her professor as a mentor. Some statements that made me question the relationship included the fact that: the student knew nothing personal about her professor, her professor gave her a “form letter” for recommendations and made it clear that she did not want to write any more; and finally, the student stated that she wished her advisor had helped her choose the classes she needed and her committee because she had problems doing this on her own. I had to remind myself that, even though she disrupted my definition of a mentor, she believed that her professor filled that role. She kept telling me how much she respected her advisor and modeled her professional life after her. Over the next few days, I began to realize that this was the point of my study. I was there to listen and tell the stories of these women whose realities were that they had meaningful mentoring
relationships with their advisors. Although I learned a valuable lesson from this interview, it is one that does not appear in this dissertation because the woman’s advisor never returned my telephone calls or repeated e-mails, requesting that she participate in my study.

**Data Collection**

Feminist phenomenological research should be more concerned with outcome than process. However, I knew that there needed to be a set of questions that would not necessarily guide the research, but lead to more insight and understanding of the mentoring process. Therefore, I found a set of interview questions that had been prepared by Kimberly Lees (1996). Lees phenomenological study of women doctoral students was conducted through survey profiles and semi-structured interviews. She had two instruments because she only interviewed women doctoral students. For my study, I developed four data collection instruments that would obtain information from both doctoral students and advisors (see Appendix A).

Once the participants in the study were selected, the data collection procedures that I followed were: 1) provided an informed consent contract (see Appendix B), a letter introducing the research, and the Profile Questionnaire to both graduate women and their advisors; 2) conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with graduate women and their advisors, 3) held follow-up e-mail conversations; 4) e-mailed conversation transcripts for verification and feedback; and 5) allowed participants to read, edit, and comment on the text I wrote about their experiences.
Before the research began, my committee and I discussed the possibility of interviewing the mentoring pairs together, if necessary. After completing the first phase of interviews, I decided not to interview the participants together for two reasons. First, three of my student participants were in the process of relocating at the time of our initial interview. It would have been impossible to bring those pairs together. Second, although I may have heard more stories about interactions between the mentoring pairs, I do not think that I would have gained much by interviewing the pairs together. If the women would have still been in the doctoral process, attending their committee meetings and observing the pairs together would have potentially yielded powerful insight. However, all of the pairs in my study were reflecting on past interactions and experiences. Although I decided not to interview the pairs together, I did contact a few for additional questions and clarification after the initial interview.

In the final phase of my data analysis, I allowed the research participants to review a copy of the text I wrote about their mentoring process. This not only satisfies the qualitative suggestion of member checks as a mean of establishing credibility, but also satisfies the feminist tenet of allowing participants to have a say in the authoring of their own texts. Member checks (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) allow participants to critique and validate their interview transcripts. Nine participants, 6 graduate students and 3 advisors returned their texts with comments. I discuss participant comments regarding their texts in Chapter 4.
Profile Questionnaires for Graduate Women and Advisors

The Profile Questionnaires for both graduate women and advisors provide a means of collecting demographic data about the participants. The Graduate Profile Questionnaire (GPQ) was originally developed by Clark, Hartnett, and Baird (1976) and modified by Lees (1996). In this study, I utilized Lees’ GPQ, but added specific questions that dealt with mentoring functions. I also omitted the questions about the students’ advisors. Because Lees did not interview dissertation chairs, she asked the graduate women to provide demographic information about their chair. Those questions about advisors that were omitted from the GPQ were used in the Advisor Profile Questionnaire (APQ). Both of these instruments provided general information about the participants that did not have to be covered during the in-depth interview session.

In-depth, Semi-structured Interviews

The in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in a environment that was chosen by each participant. The initial interviews, which ranged from 30 minutes to 2 hours in length, were audio taped. At the beginning of the session, I had each participant sign the informed consent contract and complete the Profile Questionnaire. I then gave a brief introduction of the study.

The interviews were informal and consisted mostly of open-ended questions. At the start of the interview, the participants were asked to describe their personal and professional lives as related to the doctoral process. Seidman (1991) explains why participants’ life stories are important:
People's behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them. Without context there is little possibility of exploring the meaning of and experience [Patton, 1989] (p. 10).

Next, the participants were asked to describe their interactions with their doctoral chairperson. After the participant finished these accounts, we engaged in conversation about different aspects of the mentoring process. I referred to my interview sheets to ask questions about the process that I believed would be helpful in my understanding. For each participant, the interview questions were asked in places where they seemed to fit with the conversation. Therefore, the questions were not asked of participants in the same order, nor were all of the questions asked of each participant.

**Data Analysis**

The data collected in this study was analyzed through a constant comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Under this method, Judith Glazer (as cited by Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) identified the steps in the constant comparative method: 1) Begin collecting data. 2) Look for key issues, recurrent events, or activities in the data that become categories of focus. 3) Collect data that provide many incidents of the categories of focus, with an eye to seeing the diversity of the dimensions under the categories. 4) Write about the categories you are exploring attempting to describe, and account for all the incidents you have in your data while continually searching for new incidents. 5) Work with the data and emerging model to discover basic social processes and relationships. And, 6) Engage in sampling, coding, and writing as the analysis focuses on the core categories.
In my study, each of these steps was an on-going process. I analyzed my data throughout. I also wrote brief narratives about the context of and my thoughts regarding some of the interviews. From this careful analysis, I identified categories of themes that help provide an understanding of the meanings women ascribe to their mentoring experiences.
CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANTS AND THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Introduction

This chapter provides background information on the graduate students in my study and their dissertation chairpersons. After the demographic profiles are described, the section becomes sub-divided into the six mentoring pairs. These sub-divisions provide the reader with background information on the interviews, information about study participants and their interactions as pairs, and participant answers to the first research question: How do graduate women and their advisors enter into mentoring relationships? Finally, I summarize the research process as it relates to the power dynamics that were a result of the process.

Participant Profiles

Twelve participants were interviewed for the study. Three pairs did not believe that obscuring their department was necessary. Those departments named in the study are: Communication Sciences and Disorders; Human Food and Nutrition; and Oceanography and Coastal Studies. Three participants did not want their department revealed. They are in a social science field, an education field, and a humanities field. The general demographic profile of the 6 graduate women (see Table 1) consisted of age groups ranging from 29-55. Four students were between the ages of 26-35, one student was between 36-45, and one student was between the ages of 46-55. Three of the participants were married, one lived with her partner, one married in the last year of her dissertation, and one was single while completing her Ph.D. Additionally, two
of the women were raising children during the dissertation process. With the exception of one Hispanic participant, all of the female students were Caucasian.

Table 1

General Demographic Profile of Women Doctoral Graduates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with partner</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Children in the Home:</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While completing the doctoral degree, four of the students worked between 31-40 hours per week, one worked between 21-30 hours per week, and one worked between 11-20 hours per week. Four held Graduate or Research Assistantships, while two worked off campus (see Table 2). All but one of the graduate graduates had done
graduate work at another university besides LSU. Two women expressed that they had financial hardships during the dissertation process, whereas the other four did not. Finally, at the time of the interviews four students obtained positions in their targeted field, whereas two did not.

**Table 2**

**School Information Profile of Women Doctoral Graduates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hours Worked During Completion of Dissertation:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Position:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate assistantship</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research assistantship</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off campus work related to field of study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off campus work not related to field of study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Hardships During Dissertation:</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtained Targeted Position After Graduation:</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The general demographic profile of the 6 advisors (see Table 3) consisted of age groups ranging from 36 to over 65. Three of the advisors were between the ages of 36
to 45, two were between 46 to 55, and one was over 65. Two of the advisors were men and four were women.

Table 3

**General Demographic Profile of Advisors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 65</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Faculty Position:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three professors had been faculty members between 6-10 years, one between 11-15 years, and two had been faculty members for over 20 years. All of the faculty members were tenured, with all six at the rank of Associate Professor. All were Caucasian. In
addition, all of the professors had either chaired or served as committee members to over 20 students, with the exception of one, who had only chaired 2 dissertation committees and was a member of 2 other dissertation committees.

Table four ties together information about the women students and advisors as pairs. Two of the pairs were male to female and four were female to female. Also, all but one mentoring pair consisted of advisors who were older than the student.

**Table 4**

**Mentoring Pairs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pairs by Department or Field</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Food and Nutrition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian (advisor)</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceanography and Coastal Studies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashlyn</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad (advisor)</td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science Field</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mattie</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah (advisor)</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities Field</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth (advisor)</td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications and Science Disorders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasey</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heidi (advisor)</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Field</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christy</td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope (advisor)</td>
<td>over 65</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lauren and Christian

Lauren²

Lauren was the first Ph.D. student that I contacted who agreed to participate in my study. She is a single Hispanic in her late 20s. For the past three years, Lauren held a research assistantship in the Food and Nutrition Department where she completed her graduate studies. Earlier in the semester, she had successfully defended her dissertation proposal and was now preparing for graduation and job interviews.

When I originally contacted her, Lauren seemed excited about being a participant, but expressed concerns about her time constraints over the next few weeks. We set a tentative appointment which she explained would possibly have to be changed depending on laboratory outcomes. I did not hear from her about a cancellation, so I arrived at her departmental building fifteen minutes before the appointment time. I went to the second floor and found the room number that I had written down as the meeting place. To my surprise, I found myself standing in front of two locked double doors. The doors were covered in signs that read “Bio-Hazzard,” “Radiation,” and “Keep Doors Locked At All Times.” When there was no response to my knock, I sat at a table across the hall and waited.

After 30 minutes had passed, I began to speculate that Lauren had to leave to check on an experiment at the last minute. I decided to wait a few minutes longer. In that time, I began to wonder about the nature of her experiments. I realized that I did not even know the purpose of Lauren’s department. I made a mental note to explore

²Names changed for confidentiality.
the fields of future study participants so that I could possibly gain more insight on their perspectives. Twenty minutes past the appointment, I asked a woman approaching me in a lab coat if she knew where I could find Lauren. I immediately became panicked and nervous when she explained that Lauren was probably in the graduate student office on the third floor.

When I arrived at Lauren's office, I apologized about being late because I had been waiting in the wrong location. She looked at her calendar and said, “You’re not late. I have our appointment time down for 1:30.” When she told me that the location that I had been waiting was Christian’s office (her advisor), I realized that I had confused her appointment time and location with Christian’s. As a result of the mistake I had made, not to mention the fact that this was my first interview, I was very nervous when I began the interview. However, Lauren’s calm and welcoming demeanor soon helped me relax.

Lauren began by discussing her personal and educational background. She was born and raised in Honduras. After her high school graduation, she decided to attend school in the United States so that she could go to medical school. She received her undergraduate degree in microbiology and applied to medical school. After obtaining her undergraduate degree, Lauren worked for a year while her medical school application was pending. It was in that year that Lauren began to have doubts about becoming a medical doctor. When I asked her to elaborate on why she decided against medical school, I was surprised to learn that Lauren’s career path, much like my own, seemed to have “just happened” rather than having been planned. Lauren explained,
It's really hard to tell you when or why I decided that medical school was not for me. Once I decided that's not what I wanted to do, nutrition came to me and I don't know how I even decided that. But I knew that being in nutrition would allow me to stay in the area of science and do the things that I wanted to do. I've always wanted to teach and I really enjoy doing research. So it would provide me with the science, teaching and research opportunities that I want.

Having made the decision not to go to medical school, Lauren decided to enter a Master's program in human nutrition and chose a female advisor in her area of research interest.

After completing the Master's degree, Lauren decided to pursue a Ph.D. so that she could realize her dream to become a teacher and researcher. Initially, Lauren planned to work with the same advisor for her Ph.D. as she had with her master's. However, Lauren's master's advisor moved out of state. When Lauren learned that her chair would be gone during a crucial part of her doctoral process she decided to ask Christian, the only male professor in her department, to co-chair her committee. Because of the limited assistance her original chair could offer, Lauren eventually developed a strong mentoring relationship with Christian.

Christian

I originally met Christian on the day that I interviewed Lauren. During our interview, he peered into Lauren's office to set a meeting time to review lab results. She had already spoken with Christian about my study and he had readily agreed to participate. After meeting him informally, I began to look forward to our impending meeting. I watched the gentle and friendly way that he spoke with Lauren and was glad that he would be my first faculty interview.
Two days later I approached the big double doors with the danger signs where I had mistakenly gone to meet Lauren. That day, the doors were wide open and Christian was sitting in the lab awaiting my arrival. While I was setting up my recorder Christian stepped into his office, which was a small room off to the side of the lab, to find his vita just in case he needed it to answer a question. I looked around the laboratory and realized that this is where scientists in the department do their life’s work. I began to wonder if people like Lauren and Christian would think that my work was insignificant when compared to theirs. However, I later realized that Christian did think that my work was important. As evidence, he initially suggested that we conduct our interview in the lab so that the never-ending telephone calls would not interrupt our interview, he gave me undivided attention during our talk, and he answered each question that I asked him with perceived honesty and sincerity.

I learned that Christian was in his late 40s and was originally from Illinois. Christian described his strong religious background as well as his professional career as marked by a process of continual discovery and re-negotiation of paths. He was always interested in science and decided to obtain his undergraduate degree in chemistry because “the chemistry department was more dynamic than the biology department at [university attended] in 1970.” During college Christian had worked as a janitor and coached grade school basketball as a volunteer. After college, he participated in an exchange program. When his exchange program ended he returned to his hometown to teach junior high school science for three years.
Christian offered three light-hearted reasons for his decision to attend graduate school: he was not satisfied with teaching junior high school; his wife told him that she did not want to be married to a junior high teacher and coach; and he enjoys seeking knowledge. In 1977, Christian began graduate school in nutrition at the University of Illinois-Urbana. He continued on with his education and received his Ph.D. in 1984. Christian was awarded a post-doctoral position for two years after his graduation. Finally, in 1986 he moved to his current position at LSU where he teaches, conducts research, and works with graduate students.

Christian believes that mentoring is very important, especially in his field. He perceives his department as providing more guidance to students than other areas of science:

In our department, sometimes we may be easier by holding the students hand more than other departments like Animal Science. There are some who let [students] on their own so much that you have to almost have a certain personality to survive that.

Further, Christian talked about his own experiences as a graduate student and how they shaped his perceptions about the importance of mentoring in graduate student lives:

I had kind of an odd situation. We had a very old guy who let us do whatever we wanted. He had lots of money. We all got mentoring from a postdoc that was from Australia. So it was ideal in that we had all the money we could ever want, which is really unusual. But the guy that was supposed to mentor us didn’t do a good job. So other people stepped in. It was a very awkward situation because other faculty members were very jealous of the money this guy had and they didn’t respect the postdoc. They didn’t respect the fact that he wasn’t a faculty member. It was very awkward. And I think I needed a lot of mentoring, understanding, and guidance at that time. I’ve learned from that. So I’ve given a lot of guidance and mentoring.
Christian reminisced about mentoring that he received from the post doctoral student, including the long talks that they had and social interactions that made his graduate days more meaningful.

Lauren and Christian

According to Christian, his advising relationship with Lauren developed by “chance.” He explained,

In Lauren’s case in particular, the two of us are both Catholic, so we had both gone to Christ the King for mass at 11:45. Then, she was working with [chair of committee]. We were just talking about the things I was doing in the rat studies and she said, “I would like to work with you in this study you are talking about.” That’s how we started working together. I didn’t really ask her to. She wanted to stay for a Ph.D. and I had figured she was going to work with [Master’s chair]. In fact, that made her advisor upset.

Lauren explained that she had not had a chance to get to know Christian before beginning the Ph.D. because her research had previously encompassed a different area of study.

Consequently, when Lauren began the doctoral process she hoped that she would find “just some type of general guidance into the direction that I was supposed to be heading. Advice as far as things to do or not to do. Somebody who would pass on the skills he or she had on to a student.” From his explanation, Christian approached his advising relationship with Lauren in ways similar to those he had with other graduate students:

I operate by suggestion. We just talk about it and I say, “I think we ought to do this,”—and then I’m a good listener. I think I’m reasonable. If they say, “I don’t think so because...,” we discuss it. I’m not autocratic. I know some professors who are. So I’m pretty much a discussant. They just have to know my style, and
that if I suggest something, they should do it unless we keep talking and they convince me otherwise.

In addition, Christian stated that he has to feel comfortable with students in order to work with them. He explained that mentoring relationships require that he put a lot of energy into a person and that he is only willing to do so if the student is self-motivated:

What I really like in a student is someone who is self-motivated because I cannot push people. I cannot motivate people to do something they don’t want to do. So I’ve been very fortunate that most students I’ve had, like Lauren, are self-motivated. So you can discuss something, and they’re going to do it because they are interested in doing it. It’s when you have to push someone that it’s no fun.

Christian recounted an experience of working with a student who he did not feel comfortable with:

I had a student one time who I was told by the department chair was a great student and that I better not mess up. We did a study and the first experiment of the study didn’t work out. She looked at me and said, “I’ll never graduate.” I thought, I’m in trouble. We got her out, but that was uncomfortable because I felt a lot of pressure.

Because of her self-motivation and the comfort level experienced between Lauren and Christian’s advising relationship, their interactions soon developed into a mentoring relationship.

Lauren talked about some of the interactions that she had with Christian that led to the development of a mentoring relationship. She explained:

I think he made it a very rewarding experience because he was always available and always willing to help. He was always there to advise me and that really helped because sometimes [other professors] are not really around that often or they don’t have the time to help you. But I think overall, he did a great job of just being there if you needed something or you just wanted to talk about your project.
Christian’s willingness to expend his energy towards his and Lauren’s mentoring relationship did not go unnoticed:

He would spend extra time. I’ve talked to other professors who are on my committee and they realized how much time he spent trying to make sure [everything was fine]. I’ve seen him do it with other graduate students as well. Even if it meant staying longer at school or coming in during the weekends if we had to run analysis to get me started. Some chairs might not do that, might just hold you responsible without really training you throughout the process.

From my conversations with Lauren and Christian, I learned that they both valued the other’s willingness to work hard and to just “be there” when needed.

Christian discussed Lauren’s dedication to the program and to the individuals in the program:

Lauren and I have worked very closely together on her dissertation and her paper and she is also a teaching assistant for the course I teach. She’s a hard worker and she’s always there. So we just naturally communicate. Sometimes on a daily basis. I tremendously respect her because she is so talented and eager to learn and eager to help. She’s a leader. She helps all the other graduate students. We’ll miss her when she leaves here.

As a result of Lauren’s dedication, Christian was able to learn and benefit from his mentoring interactions with her. He complimented Lauren’s talent with computer software and credited her for helping him with the computer because “I get frazzled sometimes with trying to learn new things.”

Lauren and Christian’s strong mentoring relationship proved helpful during both professional and personal difficulties that they faced. Christian recounted a particular experience with Lauren:

I really wanted her to write her dissertation as a series of papers for publication. She said, “I don’t want to do it that way. I did my master’s this way and I still wrote the [final] paper.” We have trouble sometimes because students leave and...
don’t write their paper. Then we get backlogged trying to write their papers. But, her argument was, "I like writing it the regular way. For my master’s thesis I wrote the paper and I promise I’ll write the paper this time." So myself and other committee members agreed that it would be fine.

Through this experience Christian showed that he was willing to negotiate with and trust Lauren regarding decisions that she made about her work. Further, Lauren discussed personal problems that almost caused her to leave the program. "I got to the point where I was having some medical problems, and I was fed up with school. You get to a point where you get frustrated. I considered [dropping out], it did cross my mind." She attributes her ability and motivation to continue with the program to Christian. Lauren stated:

I think that having him as a mentor really made it worthwhile and made me want to keep going. If I would have been advised by someone else—not to put other people in a bad light—I don’t think they would have spent as much time as he has with me. I know that he is really interested in helping me. I can tell that it’s an honest, genuine type of interaction.

In addition to Lauren’s particular professional and personal conflicts, Christian explained the uncertainty and frustration that can arise when doing scientific research. “Research is tough. In biological sciences you grow tissue and culture cells and they could all get contaminated and die in the middle of the experiment. You can go on two or three years and then find your study didn’t work. It’s a long haul.” In his work with Lauren he explained: “Lauren and I are the same religion. We have very similar personalities. We spend a lot of time talking about life. What does it all mean? Why are we doing this? Because it’s a struggle. Master’s is one thing, but getting a Ph.D. is another.”
Ashlyn and Chad

Ashlyn

I met Ashlyn at an obscure building on the edge of campus. The building was basically one room that had been converted into several small cubicle offices. While I waited for her to finish a phone conversation, I read an article that Ashlyn had posted outside her cubicle. The article, which was about cruelty to young calves, provided us with the opportunity to establish a rapport. As we walked to the conference room where the interview would be held, Ashlyn told me about visiting farms that tortured baby calves so that their meat would remain tender for veal production. We spoke a little about cruelty to animals and found that we were both animal lovers.

Once our conversation about her experiences began, I soon learned that Ashlyn’s career, much like Lauren’s and mine, took different paths than originally planned. Ashlyn received her bachelor’s in communication from the University of Knoxville in Tennessee. She worked for almost two years in advertising and then decided to return to school.

I majored in advertising communications, and I basically hated it. I worked at [retail company] doing their catalog and advertising. It’s just selling useless things to people. I realized that unless I was going to move to New York that I was never going to have a great career or make any money. There just wasn’t any job satisfaction so I decided to go back to school. I was unsure about what I wanted to do with my life. I was going to go to physical therapy school, and then I was going to go to pharmacy school. Then, I decided to pursue a master’s degree in Biology when the opportunity arose. I really enjoyed it. From there I went to my Ph.D. program.

Throughout her master’s program, Ashlyn studied a field in oceanography and coastal studies. She decided that she wanted to continue her Ph.D. in the field and chose LSU
because the department she wanted to complete her work in is home to some of the leading scientists in the field.

Ashlyn made her decision to attend LSU based on her e-mail and telephone conversations with the director of the institute and with Chad, her advisor. The director directed Ashlyn to Chad because he was beginning a new project and needed a student to work with him. Ashlyn stated that she and Chad decided that their future plans would fit well together. Consequently, she packed up and moved to Louisiana to begin her four years of study.

Ashlyn was in her late 20s when she moved to LSU. She was surprised and delighted to find that approximately half of the students beginning with her were women.

Actually, of the people I started with, at least half were women. My office mate was a woman. Right now, I’m graduating with at least four of my friends who are women. There are a lot of women students in our department. It’s not typical of the science field, which is mainly male dominated.

However, Ashlyn did point out that this was not true of the professors in her field:

They’re mostly all males. In our department there is only one female. I haven’t had one female member on any of my committees for my master’s or Ph.D. I really wish there were more women. I just had an interview with the head of the department and told him my feelings about that. I think they need more women. He said they are working on it, but it’s hard. There are more women coming into this field but it is still mostly males. That reflects the history of science.

Ashlyn said that her master’s chair was male and that she was comfortable with having a male Ph.D. advisor. She stated, “I don’t know if I really thought about it. I was kind of nervous overall about whether I would be able to do the Ph.D. Was I smart enough? I didn’t really think about the relationship.”
Chad

When I initially made contact with Chad by telephone, he asked several questions about my study before he agreed to participate. With my previous three interviews, I offered an explanation of my study at the start of the interview. However, with Chad, I was immediately bombarded with questions that I knew he probably had been thinking about prior to our meeting. I felt a little uneasy at first, but then remembered something that Ashlyn had told me about Chad. She had said that he is from the North and his tone of voice sometimes seems gruff, but it is not his intention to come across in that way.

As our interview progressed, I began to develop a great respect for Chad. He had started his Ph.D. later in life because he could not decide on a career path.

I started as an undergraduate in marine biology at a small private school. I decided that if I was going to be a marine biologist that I was going to have to get a Ph.D. and go to graduate school, and I wasn’t interested in doing that. So, I matriculated into a forestry program and got my bachelor’s and master’s in forestry. I worked between my bachelor’s and master’s and again after my master’s degree. There was no clear cut plan when I was 21 that I wanted to be a professor [in an oceanography and coastal studies department].

Chad said that while completing his master’s degree he anticipated getting his Ph.D. because he developed an interest in science and teaching. He stated his opinion of his academic career, “It’s just been a random walk so to speak.”

Chad stated that he chose his Ph.D. professor because he was a well-respected scientist in his field and friends with Chad’s supervisor at the time. I asked Chad if he had a mentoring relationship with his chair. He returned my question with a question of his own. “As far as I define mentoring? No.” He further explained:
My major professor was perfect for me because I started a little later in college life. I didn’t just get my master’s and go straight through. I already had a family. I was already established in the profession. He was the perfect major professor because he took a very hands off approach, and I got to do what I wanted to do when I wanted to do it as long as I met certain goals, and I would say that I generally take that approach with my students too. I don’t think that I try to overcompensate. I think that’s a good approach for a Ph.D. student.

I asked Chad how he would define mentoring and he stated:

I think I would define it as a relationship where a more experienced person guides the less experienced person and provides in some ways, protection and greater support at several levels of the relationship, rather than just as a business relationship. I see it as more expansive in different areas—emotional and maybe even financial.

More specifically related to his field, Chad explained that he believes students want him to guide them scientifically and to teach them about rules and regulations of the department and, “all that I know about the science that they are studying.”

Chad believes that mentoring relationships almost always develop spontaneously. He spoke of Ashlyn in his explanation:

It’s not like I picked somebody like Ashlyn and said, “This is the person I’m going to be a mentor to.” To me it’s just something that develops in time. I think a lot of that just depends on the student because, generally, whatever they ask of me, I try to give. If they require that role of me in their life at the time, I’m happy to try to achieve that. If they don’t really require that mentor at that point in time in their lives then I don’t think it’s going to happen.

Chad expressed the opinion that the nature of a mentoring relationship is “one that is unique and doesn’t happen with every Ph.D. student.” However, he believes that he had formed a mentoring relationship with both of the students he advised at the doctoral level thus far because “that’s just the way it worked out.”
Ashlyn and Chad

As stated earlier, Ashlyn and Chad’s commitment to work together developed through telephone and e-mail conversations. Neither Ashlyn nor Chad approached the relationship with mentoring in mind. Chad believed that the mentoring relationship developed spontaneously. He emphasized Ashlyn’s personality traits in examining how their relationship evolved:

When I first met her, she was an easy person to like. She is very friendly and very honest. That’s what I like in people. I don’t like people who are duplicitous or scheming in any way. I don’t see Ashlyn in that vein at all. Also, because she has been such a hard worker, she has always taken it upon herself to do whatever is necessary. I admire that in people. I like that in myself and hope to see it in people around me. So, when you see that kind of initiative and desire in people it makes it a lot easier to reach out and take whatever steps are necessary to develop that further step in the relationship.

Ashlyn explained that her mentoring relationship with Chad developed because of his availability and support. She discussed how much working with Chad affected her doctoral studies:

It has affected it a lot. If I hadn’t had such a good relationship with Chad I think it would have affected me in many ways. In my development as a scientist and the amount of effort that I’ve put into the program—even with feelings about myself. Chad has been very supportive. He always tells me I’m doing a good job. If I have doubts, I go to him and he helps me.

Ashlyn believes that Chad has helped her grow as a person. She mentioned several times that he was responsible for giving her self-confidence. She also discussed how Chad helped her grow professionally:

He has encouraged me to go to meetings and present papers. He’s encouraged me to work on journal articles. He’s encouraged me to think for myself and come up with new projects and to take the research that we’ve outlined and pursue my own interests—just encouraged me to think for myself.
Ashlyn said that she is different than when she started the doctoral program. She has finally found her place in the professional world and, thanks to Chad, feels comfortable and competent enough to move on alone.

Although Ashlyn and Chad’s advising relationship developed into a very meaningful mentoring relationship, things were not easy in the beginning. Ashlyn spoke about trouble that she and Chad had at the start of her graduate career:

When I first started, he was always very nice, but kind of sarcastic to me. Finally, one day I went to him and told him that I didn’t like the way that he was talking to me. It just made me feel bad. I don’t remember exactly what I said, but I expressed to him that I didn’t like the way he was communicating with me. He changed immediately. He said that he didn’t realize that he was doing it. I remember him saying that this is the way that his family communicated with him when he was growing up. He changed after that, and it’s been wonderful ever since.

Chad did not mention this incident specifically, but discussed Ashlyn’s openness and honesty as being important in their relationship:

I guess [our relationship] was sealed when she felt comfortable enough to talk to me when things weren’t going very well. Not necessarily personally, but either in the lab or other things that were going on. I guess I was able to help her with some of that. I think that you develop that comfortableness that you feel like you can talk about things. I’m that way. I try to be open with people. I can tell when someone is uncomfortable or something is wrong. I try not to just let it go. I try to bring the scientific or logical side to it and say, “Okay, we’ve got a problem. Let’s analyze it and fix it.” The male part of me says, “We’ve got to fix it.”

Ashlyn and Chad were able to work through their misunderstandings because they each possessed traits that the other found important. Chad respected Ashlyn’s willingness to honestly express any problems that she was experiencing. On the other hand, Ashlyn appreciated Chad’s willingness to consciously change a personality trait.
that he had been socialized to throughout his early years. Ashlyn expressed her gratitude in having Chad’s support:

I think the best thing that Chad has done for me is to be very supportive. I am a different person now than when I started the Ph.D. program. I’m a lot more confident in my abilities and in my role as a scientist. When I first started, I wasn’t that confident. I didn’t know if I should be in a Ph.D. program. All along the way, Chad has told me how impressed he is of me and what a great job I was doing. I think for me, the most important thing has been his support.

Mattie and Hannah

Mattie

Because Mattie’s workplace was nearer my home, we decided to meet there instead of at LSU. When I arrived, Mattie sat me in her office and asked me to wait because she was having an unscheduled conference with parents who were upset. As I waited, I could hear muffled voices coming from the room next door. Finally, the door opened and I could hear someone tell Mattie that they appreciated her help with their problems. Mattie soon returned to the office, apologized for holding me up and then seemed to file the troubles she had just had away with the folder she placed in her desk.

Mattie sat down and immediately turned to the matter at hand. I could tell that she had spent some time thinking about her mentoring experiences since our initial conversation. She did not reveal much about her personal background, but I did learn that she was in her late 20s and is an only child. Mattie was born in Louisiana, adopted at birth, and raised in a very small town. She attended college at LSU and, after
receiving her bachelor’s degree, applied to both medical school and graduate school in a social science field.

Mattie accepted an invitation to become a graduate student in her department. In her transition to graduate school, Mattie experienced change in her personal life as well change in her professional focus:

I got married after I finished the master’s degree. So that was a transitional period as well—getting married at the same time as starting the Ph.D. I taught classes at LSU. As soon as I graduated with my undergraduate, I got a job at Our Lady of the Lake. I worked there throughout school. Part of that job influenced the area of [social science field] that I was interested in.

After completing the doctoral degree, Mattie obtained her current job working with developmentally disabled individuals in a state mental health institution.

Hannah

Hannah completed her undergraduate degree in Virginia, her home state. After receiving her bachelor’s degree, she completed her graduate training at the University of Georgia in Athens. Upon completion of the Ph.D., she moved to Louisiana where she obtained a faculty position in the [social science department] at LSU. Hannah has been at LSU since 1990.

I had been looking forward to my interview with Hannah because it was my first with a female professor. When I walked into Hannah’s office, she asked that I take a seat and wait until she could wrap up the work she was trying to complete. From my interview with Mattie, I remembered her mentioning how busy Hannah always seemed. When Hannah made a comment about not having enough time to do get things done, I immediately felt embarrassed about taking up more of her time.
As the interview started, I was a little uneasy. At first, she seemed a little agitated about the questions I was asking and hurried with her answers to those questions. I quickly began to wish that the interview would end before I suffered too much embarrassment. I skipped through a few of the same questions that I had asked other professors because I felt that she would think they were stupid and redundant.

When I finally came to the conclusion of my questions, I asked Hannah if she had anything to add. She thought for a moment and said, “The only question that you didn’t ask that I think is relevant is matching of personalities or matching of temperament.” I quickly realized that matching of personality styles had come up in my other interviews, not through direct questions, but through explanations that professors and students gave about their relationships. Regardless, this marked a turning point in our conversation. From there, Hannah and I continued our talk for some time. She became more relaxed and even went back and provided more explanation to some of the previous questions that I had asked her. By the end of the interview, I had gained some critical insight on mentoring. I felt really good about her and, like the others I had interviewed, felt that if I were in her department, I would enjoy working with Hannah.

Mattie and Hannah

Mattie knew from the start of her graduate career that she wanted to work with Hannah. She had taken Hannah’s classes and worked on research with her throughout three of her undergraduate years. Mattie discussed reasons why she chose Hannah:
I think probably when I first decided to do research as an undergraduate I was interested in [the social science field]. I think, at that time, I decided to work with her rather than some of the other male professors. She was young and had just gotten out of a Ph.D. program. I was interested in working with a female who was younger just to get an idea of someone coming out of a Ph.D. program—someone new in the working world—so that I could see what types of struggles and issues she had rather than someone who had been there for 20 or 30 years. Because in our program, it was either very young or very old professors. There was a difference in the way that they would handle their working relationship with you.

Mattie believed that her relationship with Hannah was unique. She explained:

She was young, and I was one of the first Ph.D. students that actually started and finished with her. Before me, she had taken on other people whose relationship didn't work out with their first chairperson so they went to her to finish. But I was actually the first one that she started out with and then finished all the way through. I think that was really a neat thing for her and me both.

Hannah told me that her decision to chair Mattie's dissertation committee followed the usual protocol in her department:

Whom you select to work in your lab or whom you admit into the program is kind of a promise that four years later you will be serving as their dissertation advisor. Up front, when you pick somebody for the program it's a statement that you believe that they will be in your lab the whole time. At least that's how we do it in [my department].

More specifically regarding Mattie, Hannah commented:

She had me for a statistics class and must have been interested in what I was doing. That following summer, she wanted to do a project with me and I agreed. She has been involved in a number of projects in my lab. We initially did a lot of basic research, and she took a year off between undergraduate and coming back. I was delighted to have her come into my lab. She has been an outstanding student, a very good student.

Because Mattie completed her master's studies in the same department, she was able to
develop an understanding and appreciation of Hannah’s guidance. Also, Hannah was able to examine the scholarly potential of Mattie.

Both Mattie and Hannah described their relationship and the important factors of that relationship in ways that seemed to fit together. Their definition and perceptions about mentoring were similar. Mattie expressed her insights on mentoring:

I think mentoring is a combination of a personal and professional relationship combined. I think that your mentor is going to give you guidance in a professional movement that you’re heading toward. However, mixed with that I think you end up learning about character, patience, handling people, and about ways of dealing with difficult positions.

Relatedly, Hannah defined mentoring as “passing on to the next generation knowledge and skills of how to relate in any one particular content area.” She distinguished between mentoring and advising, “Advising is providing a specific piece of information to answer one specific question. Whereas mentoring is more of a training, a reshaping, a molding of how to address professional challenges in a certain area.”

Further, Hannah explained that in order for a mentoring relationship to develop it is important to her that a student’s personality and temperament match her own. She stated:

Not everyone can work with me. There have been students that have come and gone, and it just doesn’t click. I can’t teach everybody. I can only really train and mentor well students who can follow my guidance and direction in the way that I give it to them.

Mattie and Hannah’s relationship “clicked” from early on. Hannah talked about one of the most important traits that she appreciated in Mattie:

The students who are most uncomfortable with uncertainty do not work well with me at all. Students who don’t know what’s coming next but understand that
everything will work out eventually seem to do well with me. Because I usually figure things out one step at a time. It’s not always easy for me to explain in words exactly how something is going to work. I just usually know that it will. One of the best things about Mattie is that she always trusted my judgement. We would be in the middle of something and have no earthly idea how it was going to resolve. It didn’t bother her because she knew that we would figure it out and get it done. We always manage to get things done. She had a very high tolerance for uncertainty. That worked well.

Further, Hannah discussed how important it is for her students to be independent. She explained:

Independence is another important thing. I like to sketch out the big picture. This is what we are looking for, now go make it happen however you want. I like to give my students a lot of leeway for doing things their own way. As long as the end product is what we are looking for. The particulars don’t matter to me as much. If they have another way of doing it, but come up with the same final product, that’s fine.

All of the traits that Hannah appreciated in Mattie were ones that Mattie believed Hannah had taught her. Mattie described how much Hannah’s interactions affected her satisfaction with the doctoral process:

I had worked with her for so long that it flowed from her being very involved and very influential in decisions that I made, the things that I did, and the ways that I did them into more of a relationship where I did most of the work and made most of the decisions myself, and she just validated those or gave me suggestions. I think very slowly over time it became more of a relationship where we were more like colleagues working together, and she was supporting me in what I was deciding. She was allowing me to make more choices and to make decisions about things than earlier in the relationship.

Hannah talked about the reasons that it is important for her students to become independent. She commented:

I want [students] to feel free enough to put their own signature on things. Because being an academic is about producing knowledge and producing things. That’s what we do. If you are not able to come up with an idea, plan, or produce on your own you are not going to be a good academic. When it comes to creating
a dissertation that’s your own product, you have to be able to draw from what’s inside and put forth this great academic product that is really your own thing.

Mattie believed that Hannah’s guidance was a powerful help in not only completing the degree, but also in becoming a professional. She talked about watching and respecting Hannah’s work with in committee meetings, at conferences, and in other professional settings. Mattie believed that Hannah was a role model for her and had been throughout her educational experiences with her.

However, Hannah did not believe that other students would see her as a role model. When I asked her if she thought they did, she replied:

Not right now. They will in a couple of years. But, I think right now, they see me more as someone who helps them get through the program or project they are working on. I might be wrong; you would have to ask my kids. I don’t really think they see me as a role model because it’s too far developmentally remote for them to envision themselves as a professor. That’s too hard.

On the other hand, Mattie discussed several actions and stances that Hannah took that led to admiration and respect. Hannah took “her kids” to conferences, to community meetings, and to dinner to practice interview skills.

Hannah stressed that her dinner meetings with students were only to practice in a real life setting. She stated:

I’ve taken them out to practice what an interview is like and what it’s like to interact with colleagues. That’s not a social visit. They don’t come over to my home. I just don’t do that while they’re in the program because there needs to be that distance.

Hannah struggled with friendship issues because she had experienced a major professor who became too involved in her personal life. In fact, Mattie shared with me
that she would have enjoyed being involved with Hannah on a deeper personal level.

However, she understood Hannah’s hesitation to this:

She had a mentor that was very involved with her professionally and personally and maybe too involved in her personal relationships and issues and problems. So, I think because of that, she made a clear decision to try and not be so involved in my personal life. She made an effort not to be too involved personally. Through the years, she finally said that some of that was because of her relationship with her mentor.

Despite Hannah’s hesitation to deep personal involvement with her students, she did allow them to disrupt her personal life with phone calls to her home and late meetings after hours.

Although Hannah did not allow her students to be too personally involved, Mattie commented that Hannah knew about problems in her personal life and was always willing to help her work through them. Hannah said that she does not counsel her students, but does make allowances for them when they are having difficulties:

If there is something wrong that’s going to affect how they are going to perform then they usually tell me, “Look, my mother has cancer,” or something else. I’ll say, “Okay. Work when you feel like it and don’t work when you don’t.” But beyond that, no. Because it’s inappropriate in my opinion.

Hannah explained later that her professional distance had nothing to do with a lack of care:

I think my students realize that I have a great deal of affection for them. They know that I am very devoted to them and attached to them. If anyone does anything to them, I am the first one to jump in and defend them. Although, there needs to be that professional distance.

Both Mattie and Hannah described their relationship as one of mother/daughter.

Mattie commented, “I think she felt kind of protective of me and a lot of times she said
that I am a mother figure to you. I’m your mother at school.” Also, Hannah, through an
extension about the concept of friendship, noted:

That friendship thing. It’s tricky. There has to be that objectivity. Think about
your mother. Your mother is not a friend in terms of you sharing intimate secrets
or gossiping with. You love your mother and you respect your mother. You seek
your mother for guidance and advice. But there are certain things that you don’t
talk about with your mother that you would talk about with your girlfriends. The
mentor relationship, at least for me, is very much the same as a parent and child.
I’m responsible for looking out for them, taking care, making sure they get
through the program, and that they have skills they need to function as a
professional. I don’t want them to think of me as their friend.

Mattie also described their relationship as a professional friendship. Even now, after
completion of the degree, Mattie said that she would like to be in contact more with
Hannah, but would feel intrusive if she contacted her “just to chat.” Mattie commented
that she understood that Hannah was busy and that she only “bothered” her if she
needed professional advice.

Ironically, Hannah said that she would welcome a friendship with Mattie, but
stated, “I’ve only had a few phone conversations since she’s left, and it’s usually been
because she needed something. If she wanted to collaborate or she needed my help, I
would be more than delighted to do that.” Unfortunately, because her students know
that there is a clear line with Hannah between personal and professional matters, then
it may be difficult or uncomfortable for them to forge friendships after completion of
the degree.

Finally, it seemed that each participant in this mentoring relationship really
valued the same qualities as the other. They held similar beliefs about mentoring as
well as shared a similar work ethic. Mattie believed that the most important lessons
Sarah and Beth

Sarah

Through my initial contact with Sarah, I learned that she had taught as adjunct faculty at the university where I am employed. Because she had business to attend to at my university, we agreed to meet there. She explained that this would probably be the only time that we would be able to meet because she was packing up to move to Georgia at the end of the week.

Sarah was originally from Georgia, where she was the oldest of four children. She completed her postsecondary education in Virginia and then went on to obtain a master’s degree at Wayne State. All of Sarah’s degrees are in [a humanities field]. She explained how she made that career choice:

I had a really fabulous undergraduate teacher. She’s still one of the finest teachers I’ve ever had, and she became a really good friend. In terms of my career path and education, she was the cornerstone of my life. She taught me how to think. She introduced me to the excitement of [my field] and challenges of it. She was very much a mentor in my graduate education. She was always on the phone with me when I had a question about the Ph.D. I think she would be the main reason why I did what I did. I really admire her, and I wanted to teach in college.

Sarah credited her undergraduate mentor for helping her define her career goals. She...
knew that she wanted to get a Ph.D., but, after completing the master’s degree, learned that the only woman that she would consider working with had left the program. Therefore, Sarah left school and went to teach in secondary education for three years before she decided to pursue her dream.

Once Sarah made the decision to pursue the degree, she sent out applications and was later accepted to both the University of Georgia at Athens and LSU. She explained why she eventually chose LSU:

LSU had an assistantship, which was great. When I came for my interview, I asked a professor: “Do y’all play nice together?” As you know, Ph.D. students can get caught in a faculty war and the results can be destructive. The faculty member assured me, “That doesn’t happen here.” That’s why I came to LSU.

Because Sarah had an excellent undergraduate mentor, she had a clear understanding of the educational environment she needed. She learned that she not only needed a good professor to work with, but also a Ph.D. program that did not foster major internal conflicts between faculty members.

Sarah described her educational and personal life as being guided by many women mentors. She stated, “I chose different people because of the qualities they have that will provide me with what I need.” She initially chose a woman from her department to be her advisor because the man she initially interviewed with told her that it would be a “fabulous” match. Sarah stated, “He was right. She knew the field really well. She was incredibly easy to work with. She was amazingly supportive. It was really painful losing her in the middle of the process.” Sarah’s first doctoral mentor obtained a job at another university. Although she left, Sarah explained that she
still continued to help her: “She continued to advise me through the phone, through letter and e-mail. She was really fabulous about that. I found her advice amazingly helpful, but I knew that I needed someone here. So, Beth participated in that mentoring role.”

Beth

The lessons I learned from Beth’s experiences were far different than any of the other advisors I interviewed. From the first question that I asked her until the last, Beth refused to let me place her experiences and ideologies in a nice, neat mentoring package. She offered explanations and insights that gave me new perspectives regarding my study.

Beth explained to me that she came from a very different ideological background than most individuals. She grew up as a Quaker and began her career teaching at a Quaker school. Beth told me that the Quaker culture does not believe in hierarchy. Therefore, her reluctance to classify and assign specific meaning to experiences was ingrained in her from birth.

In addition to her philosophy, Beth had an impressive educational background. She obtained her undergraduate degree from Brown, and, after spending a year abroad, she went back to Brown and received her master’s. Next, she taught at the Quaker boarding school, where she became Dean of Girls.

When she decided to obtain her Ph.D., Beth enrolled in Yale. She talked quite candidly about her experiences at Yale:
I went to Yale when there were no feminists. We formed a reading group of graduate students and junior faculty who basically self-taught gender theory because no one was there to do it. I had a choice between two dissertation advisors in my field—one who didn’t read his student’s dissertations, but was willing to write letters of recommendation. He was very famous. The other did read his student’s dissertations and was very critical of writing. I picked the second because I thought, at least, I would be a better writer.

Next, Beth described her experiences with her advisor:

I worked with him, but it was hard. I wrote pretty much on my own. At Yale, they had this process where the faculty write reader’s reports for your dissertation. A junior faculty who was a woman in my feminist group wrote all about what I was doing in my dissertation. My own dissertation advisor said, “Oh, when I read [Junior Faculty’s] report, I understood what you were trying to do.” When I started doing gender theory and publishing articles, my dissertation advisor said that he couldn’t write me letters of recommendation because he didn’t approve of my work. I had an actively ‘non-mentoring’ dissertation relationship.

Beth believes that her doctoral process took longer because she did not have a mentor.

She stated, “It took me a while to get where I wanted to go.”

Although Beth did not have a mentoring relationship with her advisor, she was able to see the positive side of this:

I think there are advantages to not having a mentor. I have a lot of friends who have very strong feminist mentors. I was really jealous. They had these wonderful women who worked with them. The problem with that is you model yourself on your mentor. It takes a while in your career for you to separate. It’s like a parental relationship. I was like an orphan. I had to do it on my own. So, I didn’t have to go through that separation process from a mentor. That’s the positive side.

Because of her experiences, Beth explained that she has always “looked for lateral support.” Although Beth is seen as a mentor and role model to students, she commented, “I don’t want them to model themselves on me. I want them to figure out
what they want to do.” I asked Beth, “Don’t you think that your students still see you as a role model?” She replied, “I think they do no matter how hard you try.”

**Sarah and Beth**

Sarah knew that she wanted to work with Beth after she took one of her classes. Beth liked Sarah from the start because she had clear goals and expectations. Beth explained:

I actually find that my LSU students don’t do a lot of expecting. I wish they did more expecting. I have to teach them to expect something. Some of my students are way too passive. Someone like Sarah was nice because she came in and said, “Look, I want to work with you because I took your class, and I know that you will make me work on my writing. That’s what I need to get through.” She made plain her expectations. That was a help.

Sarah saw Beth as being able to fill a very important role for her through help with writing. Sarah talked about her distaste of writing: “It was a big surprise to me that the Ph.D. is about writing and not teaching. Nobody told me that. I can write, but it’s painful, and I don’t enjoy it.” Sarah and Beth were also well-suited because Beth also does work in film and gender.

Sarah mentioned several times that her life was full of women mentors. She lightheartedly commented that she felt it was too much responsibility to charge one woman with mentoring her. Also, Sarah used the term mentor and mentoring when describing each of the women in her life that provided that function. On the other hand, Beth stated that the term mentoring, as well as the concept of mentoring, can be problematic. She explained:

To say, “what is mentoring,” seems to me, problematic. Mentoring for me has that edge of somebody’s above, and I like working with people. I just think that I
have a lot of training to be available for students and to be supportive. I am aware that students see me as a mentor. I won the graduate student teaching award. In terms of my work and philosophy, what I find most interesting in my own life is finding areas where I can improve and improving on them. I like helping other people do that. I just naturally fall into relationships where the people who want help and want to improve writing and work come to me. That's a pleasure. I don't think of it as mentoring.

Although Beth did not like classifying the things she does as mentoring, she was very aware that others saw it that way.

I gained a little insight into the connection of Sarah and Beth through their objections to a parental element. When asked what Sarah expected from her advisor, she replied:

I didn’t need what my undergraduate advisor gave me—that was how to be a grown up. By the time I got to the Ph.D. program, I was already grown up. I didn’t need advising on how to conduct myself in a classroom or how to act as a graduate student. I needed advice on what it takes to do a dissertation. That’s exactly what I got—how to put the document and research together. I think a mentor is someone who can guide you, but not dictate the terms in which it is going to be done. I think the mentor is really someone who avows you with the depth of their experience, as well as their knowledge, and also provides you with options for your career. Well, not just your career. I think it’s an example for living.

This perspective may have worked well for Sarah because Beth made it clear that she had no interest in filling a parental role:

I’ve taught high school and lived in a dorm of 150 girls. I think students at the doctoral level do not need to have the parent. They need to be adults about their own stuff. I will make them aware of options, and I will tell what where I think the options would leave them. But, I don’t actually do that parental stuff with them. I have colleagues who do, and it works well for them.

Although Beth did not provide a parental role for Sarah, she gave her the opportunity to strengthen and grow as a professional.
Another reason why Sarah and Beth seemed to bond was their mutual understanding of what it takes to do really good work and the willingness to do it. Beth explained:

My expectation is that they will do the best work that they can do. That's where some people are not going to work well with me. Some people just want to get through. That's just not a mind-set that I have. I understand that, and I will send them to someone else. I just believe that you really want to work on things and make them the best. I also am really interested in people finding something to do that they really care about, that they enjoy, and that they’re really engaged in. Someone like Sarah is a good example. She was great to work with. She admitted she had problems as a writer, and we talked about that. But, she loved her topic. She had found something that was really close to her heart. The dissertation was strong, even though she’s not a great writer.

Sarah said that she understood what it took to do good work. She commented, “I think I understood the process really well, so it didn’t surprise me that I was going to have to rewrite or change things.”

Sarah talked about the amount of time Beth spent helping her with her dissertation. Also, Beth believed that being available was very important. She explained: “I think that you have a range of relationships with students. I would sense that it’s my responsibility to do as much as possible. It’s part of my job to be available for graduate students.” Further, Beth talked about her role in the completion of Sarah’s dissertation:

I have some students where I think my input will really make a difference between their being able to do it or not do it. Someone like Sarah was very interesting. I don’t think that was true in terms of subject matter, but writing. Sarah was very astute about picking me. Some of my students just really figure out what they need. I admire this. I know Sarah’s committee were in some ways blown away by the dissertation because it was better writing than they had ever seen from Sarah. I don’t know why, but they really didn’t believe in her and I did
believe in her. I believed that she could do better. For her, that made the difference.

Sarah appreciated the time and effort that Beth expended on their relationship. She said of Beth and her first doctoral mentor:

I would do anything for either one of them. I really respect them. I admire them. Because of my mentors, I had a really fabulous situation which could not become anywhere near what it was without them. It would have been so empty without them. They really launched me into my professional career with new ways of thinking and learning. I’m very grateful to them.

Sarah concluded her interview with the comment, “Beth is really great! She’s fabulous.”

**Kasey and Heidi**

**Kasey**

Kasey was the only participant who asked me to come to her home for the interview. She was also the only student that I interviewed after having interviewed her advisor. Although I wanted to follow the usual protocol of interviewing the student first, time and scheduling constraints made it impossible.

Kasey’s home was warm and inviting. I was briefly introduced to her husband and the family dog. We then sat down at the kitchen table to begin. I learned that Kasey is originally from Pennsylvania. She got her undergraduate degree from Penn State in biology. She then got a master’s degree in physiology and worked for many years in labs and science departments. She worked for the Zoology Department at LSU for 4 years before deciding that she wanted to get an advanced degree. She discussed how she decided on her degree:
Because my husband is a microbiologist, I didn’t want to get something in a similar field. During my master’s degree I had taken some classes in audiology. Audiology is one of the sub-curriculums of communication disorders. I initially went over looking to get a Ph.D. in Audiology. When I started taking classes, I decided that I liked language problems better. I went part-time for a year. Since my undergrad was in a different field, I had to do undergraduate courses, master’s courses, and then Ph.D. courses. So it took me a long time to get through.

Throughout her course work, Kasey was part of a cohort of women graduate students who supported one another. She talked about this bond:

I was one of the last to come through in the group. One of them is in our department now. We were close to one another. We did a lot of talking back and forth and sharing experiences. Especially since they all finished before me. That made a difference. Some of the students that were behind me, I tried to help.

During the pursuit of her Ph.D, Kasey decided on her professional focus. She explained:

While I was getting my Ph.D., I worked in the preschool at the Communications and Disorders school. They have a pre-school for language disorder children. I worked there for two years to do an internship which was part of our certification. I really enjoyed that kind of small group of working with children with language problems. That’s where I decided I wanted to go on and do after I finished.

Kasey now teaches a Kindergarten Special Education Class for Language Disorder Children. She said that she is not concerned with making “big bucks” because she is not the only earner in the family. “I wanted to do something I enjoyed doing. I really love my job.” Because she was able to work with Heidi on her research projects, Kasey not only realized the dream of getting a Ph.D., but also found a specific professional focus that she now enjoys doing.
Heidi

Heidi began her postsecondary education at Augustana, a small liberal arts college in Illinois of about 2500 students. There were less than 20 students in her Speech Pathology Department. Next, she went to the University of Kansas and obtained a master's in Speech Pathology, and a Ph.D. in the interdisciplinary Child Language Program.

Heidi stated that her advisor had been an exceptional mentor. She also said that she did not realize the magnitude of her advisor's mentoring until she “got out into the real world.” Heidi explained:

I probably do a lot of things related to research and student advising like her. I didn’t appreciate it when I was there, but one of her strengths as a mentor was that she let you do important work on her projects. This meant that she gave you the opportunity to make decisions, make mistakes, and correct and/or deal with those mistakes. This sharing of her work gave me a great deal of confidence. She was, and still is, an exceptional scientist. One of the greatest benefits of having her as a mentor was that you got to watch her work. She also invited you to attend many of her research meeting with colleagues. I remember a student colleague and I leaving a meeting that our advisor had organized. Sure, the content of the meeting was important, but after the talk, my friend and I spent the next 30 minutes discussing our advisor’s skill in facilitating the discussion at the meeting. That’s great mentoring to me.

Another important aspect of her mentoring was that she always had us write aspects of articles and we were always co-authors. When I left KU, I had three or four publications. Other colleagues in the country had none. My advisor’s message about publication was not ‘publish or perish.’ Instead, the message was, “This is a really important project and we need to do it.” By working with her, you grew to love the scientific process. She also modeled good “research” behavior. When I left, I thought everyone wrote up their findings immediately after collecting/analyzing their data. I now know that this isn’t always the case. It’s been hard for some of my friends who haven’t had good mentors in writing. One of my friends has been out five years, and she just wrote her first paper. She said that her mentor was so controlling of her own data that she never learned how to do the writing part of the project.
Heidi had a great deal of respect for her advisor. She credited her advisor for being “a great role model of how to be a scientist and then letting us into her process.” Heidi exhibited those same traits in working with Kasey.

**Kasey and Heidi**

Kasey was Heidi’s first doctoral student to receive a Ph.D. Heidi explained that there are only a few Ph.D. students in their department. Also, many students are more interested in therapy-based intervention rather than the scientific process of analyzing why language impaired children are different than those who are not, which is Heidi’s area of study. Kasey was paired with Heidi shortly after accepting her position at LSU. Heidi became Kasey’s teaching assistant and ran a lab for her Introduction to Language class. Through working with Heidi, Kasey developed an interest in working with her in another capacity:

From [working as Heidi’s teaching assistant], I saw the kind of work she did. I realized that she was really active in research. She had just gotten her Ph.D. when I started working for her. I really felt that she was the best person in the department to match what I was looking for.

Likewise, Heidi was impressed with Kasey, especially her determination and dedication to take the necessary steps to complete the degree.

It was her first semester and my first semester. She had to get a master’s and Ph.D. because she didn’t have a degree in Speech Pathology. It took her a long time. She had a visual disability, so we knew going into it that some things were going to be slower. She also chose to do something that is pretty intense visually—language samples of children. She had to find someone that she could pay to edit her papers. It took her longer than the typical student, but she was excellent. She was so easy to work with. I would work with 100 Kaseys.
Heidi said that Kasey basically worked with her for 7 years as a Ph.D. student. She explained that, in the Speech and Pathology Program if you declare from the beginning that you are going to get your Ph.D., then you are treated like one from the start.

Kasey told me that because her husband is a professor, she had notions of what a doctoral advising relationship would be like. However, she talked about how her relationship with Heidi ended up being different than she expected.

Heidi and I had a different relationship than my husband has with some of his students. I did have previous experience, and I’m actually older than she is, which is kind of an unusual thing. I looked at it as I wanted to pick someone who could teach me things that I didn’t already know and someone who was able to help me learn how to promote the field. She publishes a lot. She has grants. I preferred working with someone with that sort of background as opposed to someone who doesn’t publish nor manage research grants. I wanted someone dynamic like that. I think that if you are going for a Ph.D. you should work with someone who has an active research program. That’s really what a Ph.D. program is.

Even though Kasey is the only Ph.D. graduate that Heidi chaired, Heidi serves on committees for others. She talked about how Kasey, her other Ph.D. students, and master’s students affected her faculty position:

I don’t think there are any negatives. They are great. That’s why I like to come here. They are the cream of the crop. They don’t make me a valued faculty member. But, as far as my job, it’s so much more fun to come to work. It’s almost like having you own little team. When you leave graduate school, you sometimes have this shock of a loss. I went to school where there were seven females getting a Ph.D. at the same time. We had this huge cohort. Then I came here and there was no one who studied what I studied. It was very lonely. When you get your good master’s students or Ph.D. students, it’s like having a partner.

For Heidi, working with Ph.D. and master’s students enhanced her faculty position in a significantly positive way.
Just as Heidi’s advisor had included her and other students in research, Heidi also
believed that was a very important part of the doctoral process. It was apparent that
Kasey appreciated the time and effort that Heidi spent in guiding her research:

We did a lot of sharing ideas and talking about the research. She encouraged me
to go to meetings. She was always very focused on making sure the research was
structured and that it was reasonable research that would get published.
Publishing or writing a grant was always the goal. It wasn’t, “Just do this.” I
would go to her with a bunch of ideas, and she would guide me. I know people
who didn’t come out with good dissertation products because they weren’t
customarily told go back and rethink why they were doing it. It may be fun or cute,
but they need to have a reason to do it. Heidi was really good in that way.

Kasey described how she and Heidi also interacted through collecting research data.
She enjoyed the time spent riding back and forth to the research site and talking about
their research.

Through guiding Kasey in research and writing, Heidi not only helped her to
develop and strengthen those professional skills, but she also helped her to obtain grant
funding through a program for students with disabilities. The grant was not funded the
first year because it had been routed to the wrong department. However, Heidi and
Kasey resubmitted it the next year and were successful. Kasey talked about Heidi’s
vital role in receiving the grant:

Heidi had to write many parts of the grant. She had to write letters of
recommendation. It was a lot of work, and if she hadn’t been willing to do that it
would have been impossible. She had a major role in that. Even before that,
when I had an assistantship, she knew that I needed to earn money. I also did a
research assistantship with her, and she would go to bat with the department head
to get me money.

Along with grant writing, Heidi and Kasey have also published collaborative work
together.
Just as in any close working relationship, however, Kasey and Heidi did not always agree. Kasey attributed her unwillingness to “just give in” to her age.

We didn’t always agree on things. I think being older, I was less willing to give in. I fought with her more about things that younger students might not have. I think she would have preferred that I do a different kind of project than I did. We finally came to a compromise of what my project was going to be.

Also, Kasey and Heidi had different perspectives on professional introductions. Kasey said that Heidi encouraged all of her students to go to conferences, but “wasn’t great about introducing you to people.” However, it seems that Heidi felt introducing her students to colleagues and friends at conferences was a form of self-promotion. She commented:

I encourage them to go to conferences that I’m going to. Other than getting them out there—do I hold their hand at conferences and introduce them to everyone—no. I say hi to [my students]. I’ll have lunch with them, and I may introduce them to graduate students of my friends and colleagues. But they are not my poster children.

Kasey had watched her husband help his students network and felt that she could have benefitted from new professional connections.

Because Kasey and Heidi worked together for so many years, they went through personal change and growth together. Kasey talked about how Heidi’s perspective on the role of mother changed after she had children:

When I first started working with her, she was married and didn’t have any children. I think after she had children, she was a little more understanding with my needing to have leeway for my children. She was much more understanding of mother problems after she had her own.

Heidi said that having patience was the most difficult part of chairing a doctoral student’s dissertation. She talked about growth that is achieved in the process. “It takes
patience. It’s kind of a metamorphosis. You come in not knowing much and you leave very skilled. That’s the whole thing. Letting people develop.”

Finally, Kasey and Heidi’s relationship flourished because they both gained professional support from one another. They both had the opportunity to learn and grow from one another. Kasey stated, “I would pick her again if I was in the same situation. She could teach me what I needed to know.”

Christy and Hope

Christy

I met Christy at the LSU Student Union. As we searched for a place to conduct the interview, we chatted about our jobs. Christy, who is in her early 50s, had already had significant achievement in her profession. She explained:

I started my dissertation when I was relatively old, and so, I think, I probably did it for personal satisfaction more than anything else. I have two bachelor’s degrees. I have one in vocational home economics education, which is now family and consumer science. I have another bachelor’s degree in home economics. I also have a master’s degree in vocational home economics education. Then I got the Ph.D. in [an education field]. I’ve been teaching for 21 years, 18 in one school. I’ve only actually been in two schools. I’m head of the department at [High School].

Unfortunately for Christy, after completing her Ph.D., she was unable to find employment at the university level that offered a salary compatible to her current salary in secondary education.

Christy took longer than the average student to finish the degree for two reasons. First, she had problems deciding on a dissertation topic. She explained:

I was always interested in education—principals in particular. I just thought they needed a little bit of study. I got tunnel vision with it. I just had to do this
particular thing. I started out with one—I have one half-finished in something else. I was looking at teacher empowerment and principal’s leadership styles. After I started working with that, I became interested in school reform. That was just one of the things that I pulled from there. I’m sort of hard headed. I made the dissertation harder on myself because they kept trying to get me to limit the scope, and I didn’t want to. That’s precisely why it took me 7 years to get it. It was a long time. It was hard to narrow the scope.

The second hindrance to Christy’s completion of the degree was a devastating injury that occurred while working on her Ph.D. She fell out of an elevator and as a result suffered severe neck and back injuries. Along with many other times of shared support Hope, Christy’s advisor, accompanied her to the hospital on the day of the accident.

Hope was the oldest advisor that I interviewed. I listened intently as she told her life story, and I became so engrossed that I barely remembered the necessary cassette tape changes. The journey of her professional career is admirable. She seemed to always “be in the right place at the right time.” At the start of our interview she told me, “I am a woman of many firsts.” I soon learned that she was.

Hope was raised in Arkansas and received both her secondary and postsecondary degrees from there. In high school, she was the first class president to hold office for two consecutive years, and she was the first female to go to Girl’s State. In her senior year in college, she became the first from her university to complete student teaching and to graduate despite being pregnant.

When she started her teaching career in secondary education, Hope was the highest paid beginning teacher in the state of Arkansas that year. She taught for many years in the secondary school system, but continued her education while doing so. She
said: “I started on my master’s. I kept on going—in the summer. I took evening courses and Saturday courses. I drove 30 miles to do that. Any time someone offered me money to go to school, I’d go because I love learning.” Throughout her career, Hope received a great deal of help from others who believed in her abilities. She was awarded scholarships and was often sent to special training seminars to further herself professionally and to make contacts. Finally, when Hope decided to get her Ph.D., she juggled her time between her family in Arkansas and her graduate program in Texas. Hope finished her doctoral program and then went to Virginia Tech to teach. Later, she accepted a position at LSU and has taught there for 21 years.

**Christy and Hope**

Christy and Hope became connected to one another a few years after Hope began teaching at LSU. Christy described how they came to work together:

I met her in 1985 when I was working on my master’s. At that time she was not my advisor. I had a different advisor. I don’t even remember what her name was. I had met [Hope] in one of the classes that I was taking. She just personified everything that I thought I wanted to be. So I guess I chose to emulate her.

In fact, Christy credited Hope as being a guiding force in pursuing a doctoral degree. When asked why she chose to get the Ph.D., she said, “My advisor encouraged me to do it. I guess she saw potential in me that I didn’t see. She was always encouraging me to pursue this. So, I decided to do it.” In her master’s program, Christy took some of Hope’s classes and decided to work with her. Christy said that throughout the dissertation process, Hope encouraged her and helped her to see the potential that she had within.
Hope believes that initially students may need her to hold their hand until they know what they are doing. She stated:

Sometimes it's building complete trust that I won't steer them wrong. I think they need to know that you know how to do this. If they sense that you don't know how, it's a problem. You have to establish that rapport, that sense of trust. There are certain things that you have to accomplish, but it doesn't all have to be my way. I think there is a place to start by holding their hand, but then you have to give them confidence to say, 'I can do this.' I think this is why some people stay ABD. They don't have the confidence.

Hope gives her students confidence by taking whatever time is necessary to see the student through the process:

I'm willing to give whatever time it takes. Usually, we walk through a lot of steps. If a student comes in and needs something revised we think of possible ways in which it can be done. I don't make their choices for them. Sometimes, like Christy for example, she would sit at my computer, and I would sit here, and I would tell her things that should be changed. She would make an effort and then would ask me if it would meet the needs of her paper. I think other people would say, "Go away and do it." To me, even though I spend a little more time doing this, it actually saves time because we don't just keep going back and forth. I feel if they sign up for six hours then I owe them that six hours. We may not spend six hours every week, but we may spend more than that sometimes.

Christy valued the extra time that Hope was willing to spend with her, and Hope valued Christy's willingness to continue on, despite her hardships.

Although Hope believes that the extra time she expends on students is important and valuable, she is aware that other faculty members in her department resent her student interactions. She described their resistance to her actions:

I've had some men tell me, "You spend too much time." I think there are other faculty members who don't want you to be a certain way. I feel a strong bond between my students and myself. I think that's why they keep in touch and we share information. I think there are people who don't approve of that. I think when you do have a good working relationship with your students that it's sometimes resented.
Despite the negative feedback that she gets from some faculty members, Hope sees her continued and supportive relationships with her students as a marker of her success.

Both Hope and Christy defined their relationship as a friendship. Hope believes that is possible to forge friendships with students, but that can only happen if there is complete trust. She comments:

I like to have that student feel that they can say anything to me. Sometimes they can’t say to other people what they say to me. We talk. I consider them my friend. But there has to be some way there is a distinction about what I know and they are learning. You have to establish that rapport, that sense of trust. If they don’t like what I say, they can tell me, and it will still be okay.

Christy words validated what Hope had conveyed to me:

We’ve become close friends. She’s someone that I know that I can talk to when I need her, and I know what I say won’t go any further. I must have quit [the Ph.D. program] about 40 times. She would just keep encouraging me. I thought, “I’m never going to finish.” She just kept pushing and pushing me.

Both Christy and Hope mentioned that another faculty member on Christy’s committee gave her problems and delayed her completion of the degree. Through Hope’s encouragement, Christy was able to persist and complete the degree.

**Reflections on the Interview Process**

In all but one case, I interviewed the graduate women first, and then the advisors. Through interviewing the students first, I had the opportunity to learn about their advisors before I interviewed them. When planning my interview procedures, I believed that interviewing the graduate women would be more comfortable than interviewing the advisors because of my own position as a doctoral student. It is interesting that, even though the graduate women I interviewed had already achieved
the same educational status as their advisors, I initially perceived that I would identify more closely with the graduate women.

I realize my perceptions which led to the desire to interview the graduate women first are a result of the power dynamics that feminist researchers believe play an important role in the research process. In reflections on their research processes, feminists (Bloom, 1998; Fine, 1994; Lather, 1994; Munro, 1998; Ropers-Huilman, 1998) discuss the politics of power between the researcher and the researched. Similar to Bloom (1998), I was engaged in the process of “researching up.” She describes: “Researching up is defined as conducting research in an elite setting with respondents who have more power and status than the researcher” (Nader, 1996). Also, along with Bloom, I did not realize how much my perceptions of power guided my research interactions until I stepped back from the process.

Even though the women “graduate students” had already graduated, I felt that they were the women I would relate to more easily. In retrospect, I realize that I treated them as if they were my equals throughout the interview process. From the time that I initially contacted them by phone, throughout the interviews, and in post-interview conversations and e-mails, I addressed all the graduate women by their first name, even though they had earned the right to be called “Dr.” Also, I felt more connected to and comfortable around the “student” interview participants because of my own position as a student.

However, my treatment of advisors was different. Throughout every form of communication, I addressed them as “Dr.”
interview process, I generally felt more nervous and self-conscious with the advisors because they held more power. I believe that, by interviewing the “students” first, it often helped me get past my nervousness with advisors when I thought about them in ways that their students described.

Upon reflecting about the interview process, I know that my interactions with participants would have been different if the power dynamics were different. Throughout this study, at times, I was both an insider and an outsider. As an insider, I was a member of the higher education academic community. At the time of the interviews, I was a doctoral student and I was employed in higher education. As a doctoral student, I learned doctoral student process and culture. However, I was also an outsider because I had not yet obtained the doctoral degree, nor the status and power that go along with that achievement.

Another way that power issues surfaced in this study became evident when I gave the participants their texts to review. Before the interview process began, the respondents knew that their advisor or student was also participating and discussing their relationship. While I gave pseudonyms to participants so that others will not be able to identify them, I knew that the pairs would definitely be able to identify one another. Although the study is on meaningful mentoring relationships, a few of the participants discussed difficulties they had while negotiating the dissertation process. Because of this, I made the decision to allow two of the graduate women to review and comment on the texts before I allowed their advisor to review and comment.
Although the women graduate students have graduated and are considered “equal” to their advisors, they have less power in the mentoring dynamic. I made the decision to let the graduate women review the text first because I thought about how I might feel if my advisor read potentially uncomfortable text that was interpreted through someone else's perceptions. Therefore, I gave both of the women their texts, with an explanation that I was allowing them to review the text first, and would negotiate changes with them.

I waited for their reply and contemplated the fact that I might receive resistance to the “uncomfortable” text. However, with both students, I received a few changes in wording and also a note congratulating me on my work. In retrospect, I am relieved that I did not “lose” those two important pieces of my study. I told the participants that we would negotiate, but I am not sure how I would have proceeded if they had objected.

Finally, other women participants provided comments about the texts I provided them. Some replies contained only minor word changes. Also, three participants asked me to obscure their department. Others provided me with changes and explanations for wanting them. One advisor commented:

I hated reading what I ‘said’ so I had to make changes. The major change is that I deleted the last paragraph. When I read it, it didn’t sound like I feel/felt. I know I said the [mother] comment, but in hindsight I don’t feel like a mother of any type to my students. Can we just go without the paragraph?

Further, a student participant commented:

Thank you so much for the opportunity to read the interview and your assessment. I was particularly interested in [her advisor’s] comments on the
process. I really do need to send her a note. I must admit to being shocked at how casual I sound when I speak. I’m sure your transcripts are correct, and after awhile, I became used to it. I do have one favor—and that is exactly what it is—a favor. Could you possible paraphrase the quote on how I chose LSU?

The changes the advisor and student wanted to make in all of their texts did not change the context or meaning of their stories; and I was glad to make them. Although I did delete the last paragraph from the advisor’s section, the request and the text itself is interrogated (confidentially) through the gender analysis section.

Finally, I realize that carrying out this feminist phenomenological research has not only affected my ways of thinking about mentoring relationship, but has also impacted the participants in my study. After the interview process was over, a few of the participants thanked me for “giving me the opportunity to review the process.” Also, after reviewing their texts, participants learned how their mentoring partners described mentoring relationships and their interactions. From reading the insights that their partner perceived regarding mentoring, some advisors and students were able to engage in deeper reflection about mentoring relationships. These reflections may influence how their future mentoring relationships are shaped.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION OF DATA

Through the profile questionnaires and in-depth, semi-structured interviews, I gained multiple perspectives and insights on meaningful mentoring relationships between women doctoral students and their advisors. Through analysis of the data, I identified nine themes that are introduced throughout the first three of four categories of understanding: 1) participants’ needs and desires, 2) benefits, and 3) problems. The fourth category, difference, explores participant’s perspectives on discipline, age, and gender differences. Finally, the categories and themes that I present are not intended to provide an ultimate definition or theory of “meaningful mentoring.” The categories and themes serve as tools for understanding the meanings participants ascribed to their relationships.

Participants’ Needs and Desires

Findings here provide insight into the second research question of the study: What do graduate women and their advisors desire from doctoral advising relationships and how do they perceive each other’s needs and roles? The three themes that emerged from participants’ needs and desires was personality, dedication, and support. Each of these themes were important for both the women graduates and their advisors.

Personality

Matching of personalities was a factor that every participant, but one, found important in forging mentoring relationships. Repeatedly, I heard both students and
advisors remark, “We have the same personality.” Chad, when discussing how he made the decision to chair someone’s committee, commented that the two things he looked for were students who were competent enough to do the work and “the other thing [is] personality. I would have to feel comfortable that this is someone whom I would not mind going the extra mile for on a personal level.”

Through the interviews, I learned that all but two graduate women selected their mentors because they had previous interactions with them and knew that their personalities were similar. Christy, Mattie, and Sarah had all taken classes that their mentors taught. From classroom interactions each participant learned that her advisor had a personality that would enhance the learning process. Further, Mattie and Kasey worked in labs with their advisors beforehand, and learned that their styles matched.

Hope, the one professor who did not believe that personality made a difference, knew that this was specific to her training and expertise. She teaches a class on how individuals learn and process. Because her teaching includes work with different personality styles, she believes that she is more tolerant and knowledgeable of other personality types. She stated, “As I interact with people, I can read them pretty well. Sometimes I miss, but by and large I can read people really well.” Hope continued on to say:

I like to think that I follow the golden rule of ‘Do unto others as they would have you do unto them’ as opposed to ‘as I would have them do unto me.’ I think there is a difference there. I would not want someone to treat me certain ways, but if they want to be treated that way it’s okay. I want them to tell me how they want me to interact with them. I feel that it is a responsibility of guiding and not dictating. If they let me know they need help and I can’t provide it, I’ll help them.
find someone who can. Our interactions are very open. I don’t hide things. I’m up front with people. I hope they are with me.

Because of Hope’s professional training and ability to read people well, she did not believe that personality matching was a must.

Finally, several advisors talked individually about having learned the hard way that personality played an important role in the mentoring dynamic. Beth said that it took time for her to learn that opposing personalities were difficult to work with. She explained:

I don’t think you realize it when you start. I had a student who was very anal. She would call me all the time because she needed someone to be on top of things every minute. It just got to the point where it felt like someone was trying to compel me to do things that I just don’t naturally do. We really struggled. Those really different personalities are very hard to make work and have it be positive.

Similarly, Christian’s personality did not match the student who was assigned to him by the chair of the department when he was told, “Don’t mess it up.” His interactions with that student were uncomfortable and Christian was quite relieved when she actually finished. Also, Hannah reminded me that I had not asked her about personality. Hannah talked about students who had come and gone where, “it just doesn’t click.” It was interesting to me that instead of telling me what kind of students she could not work well with, Hannah stated the problem in terms of students not being able to work with her:

I can’t teach everybody. I can only really train and mentor well students who can follow my guidance and direction in the way that I give it to them. The ones that are most uncomfortable with uncertainty do not work well with me at all.

Other professors talked about declining to be a student’s advisor because they knew there were personality differences that would have made the experience difficult.
Dedication

Dedication was very important to both students and advisors in each mentoring pair. Advisors wanted students who were dedicated to their graduate studies and dissertation work. Also, students wanted advisors who were dedicated to mentoring them and seeing them through their dissertations.

Hope talked about Christy's setbacks because of her accident and injury. She explained that it took her longer to finish, but that Christy remained dedicated to and focused on her purpose:

Because of the health problems, she was delayed in getting some of the things done that she had to do. She worked diligently. There were also a lot of changes that came about because other people wanted things done differently [with her dissertation]. I told her to stick with it and persevere.

Further, Chad talked about Ashlyn's dedication:

She has been such a hard worker. She has always taken upon herself to do whatever is necessary. I admire that in people. I like that in myself and hope to see it in people around me. So, when you see that kind of initiative and desire in people it makes it a lot easier to reach out and take whatever steps are necessary.

In addition to admiration from her professor, Ashlyn's dedication to her work landed her a graduate position abroad.

Like Hope and Chad, Beth also yearned for dedicated students. Beth attributed her thirst for student dedication to the fact that she came from a "different world" than the majority of LSU students. She explained that at Brown and Yale everyone was channeled toward higher education and academic rigor. She talked about her expectations of students:
My expectation is that they will do the best they can do. That’s where some people are not going to work well with me because some people just want to get through. That’s just not a mind-set that I have. I like to work with somebody who will really want to improve their work.

Similarly, Heidi stated that lack of dedication on a student’s part caused her to turn down students. “Some people, if they are not willing to put in the time, it’s really hard to help.”

Most women graduates in the study said that when they initially started the program, they expected general guidance and advice. Eventually, all of the students learned that their professors were dedicated to helping them complete the dissertation. For most, a marker of dedication was the long hours that their advisors spent with them so that they could be successful.

Ashlyn said, “His office is right there. I just knock on his door. If he’s busy, he would tell me. If he wasn’t he would give me as much time and direction as I needed.” Also, Christy said, “We had weekly meetings. More if necessary. I would go to her house sometimes on weekends and we would talk on the phone. Whatever I needed, she was there.”

Further, Mattie discussed how much thought and time Hannah spent making sure that things went well with her committee:

She spent a lot of time. I think she made a big difference in helping me find who the other people on committee would be. She spent a lot of time so that they would fit with my personality and she made sure that they had a good understanding of what we were working on. The whole process went very smooth.
Mattie also explained how Hannah met with her after hours to go over research and writing.

**Support**

Support was the most important need and valued desire of the women doctoral students and, in most cases, seemed to flow both ways. Support for students included help with writing, choosing a committee, doing research, protection, and sometimes, counseling. Help with writing, committee work, and doing research were expected to some degree, but students reported that their mentors really showed that they cared about their progress through providing those functions. Also, some advisors provided protection from outside forces to their students and also counseled them when they had problems.

Although Sarah had identified several mentors, she talked about the support that Beth gave her: “She was incredibly easy to work with. She was amazingly supportive. Beth was very encouraging with my writing. She would return the writing with comments. That was really good.” Mattie stated of Hannah: “She helped me become a professional by giving me support. I think a lot of it was directly giving advice on how to handle different situations and how to feel you are skilled.” Further, Ashlyn believed that support was what she valued most from the mentoring relationship. She said, “I think the best thing that Chad has done for me is to be very supportive of me. I’m a lot more confident in my abilities.”

Ashlyn, as well as other students, also believed that advisor support in the form of protection was crucial. She provided me with an example of this type of support:
I came up with a problem in my dissertation defense. I passed my defense, but one professor had a problem with some of my calculations. He supported me. After it was over, I just felt really bad about myself. I felt I hadn’t done the job I was supposed to do because there was a problem. Chad told me, "Ashlyn, you’re never going to be perfect. You’re just like me. You have to just realize that you’re never going to be perfect. You’re always growing.” He made me feel so much better.

Chad also talked about providing a level of protection to support his students:

Well I think in the sense of maybe professional relationships in the department where not all professors would look at Ph.D. students as being just a step away from a peer type of relationship. Particularly after they have completed their general exams and all they are doing is finishing up their dissertation. There is still a sort of subordinate mentality that still exists because they don’t “have the union card yet.” So there’s that level of interaction with colleagues to convince them that this student is worthy of that respect. The other area would be in general and final exams. Not to the point of carrying them, but I’ve seen professors who I believe were inappropriately harassing the student in the exam. So I see it as my job if it’s going too far for me to step in and provide that level of protection.

Finally, Christy also discussed protection from other committee members. She stated, "I think with my committee, if she felt they were getting a little too out of control she had a little talk with them and helped me out.”

Although the advising relationship is established so that a faculty member can provide support to the doctoral student, several professors in the mentoring relationships studied talked about the support they received from working with graduate students. The type of support revealed most often was in the form of help with their own research projects. Beth talked about the advising process as one of mutual support:

For me, it’s a process of exchange. It helps my work when I have a good graduate student. The best of them will help my work because they will be thinking about stuff that I need to be thinking about. I got a really good chapter from my first
graduate student. She wasn’t even working in my field. But she was thinking about issues of race and gender. When we worked on them together, I ended up getting one of the best chapters of my book.

Further, Heidi stated, “It’s almost like having your own team. When you get your good master’s students or Ph.D. students, it’s like having a partner.” Finally, Hope mentioned spiritual support. She explained, “When I’m at my worst, one of my graduates will seem to know when to call and pick my spirits up.”

Benefits

Both the women graduates and the advisors reaped benefits that went beyond the completion of the dissertation. The two themes, satisfaction and professional growth, were important factors in building the foundation for the mentoring relationships that formed.

Satisfaction

Through their initial responses and agreement to participate in my study, the women doctoral students all expressed satisfaction with their advisors and the process that they went through because of the support and guidance received. Also, several advisors discussed the level of satisfaction that they received by mentoring their Ph.D. students through the dissertation process.

Lauren said that Christian made her experience rewarding because he was “always available, always willing to help.” Kasey told me that Heidi “was a good role model. I feel better prepared because of her.” Also, Mattie stated:

It made a world of difference because I knew her and she knew me. She knew what was going on in my life when I had work problems or things that came up
in my family. I think she was more willing to be helpful or to change. I’m thankful for that.

Sarah also expressed that Beth was an integral part in helping her develop through the doctoral process.

Two of the women doctoral students reported that they would not have persisted if their advisor had not encouraged them to continue on. Both of the students, Lauren and Christy, had both experienced medical problems and contemplated leaving their degree programs. Lauren felt that having Christian as a mentor “made it worthwhile and made me want to keep going.” Christy thought that she would never finish, but said that she did because Hope kept nudging her forward day by day.

Three of the students stated that they probably would have persisted even if they had not formed a connection with their mentor. However, they did realize that their experiences would have been much different and possibly not as satisfying. One student who finished her Ph.D. in 3 years noted, “I probably would have gotten it, but it may have taken longer.” In fact, Beth, when describing her doctoral experiences, said that her doctoral process was much slower because she did not have a mentor.

A final note regarding persistence was the fact that Sarah believed that she would have persisted even if she had not had Beth as a mentor. However, Beth believed that she was able to provide Sarah with valuable guidance in writing. Beth knew the dynamics of Sarah’s committee and even stated that other members of the committee did not believe in Sarah. Because of Sarah’s love of her topic and willingness to get it
right, Beth helped her "blow her committee away" with the writing in her dissertation, and she believed that Sarah may not have graduated without that help.

Although most professors who mentor students through the doctoral process do not receive incentive or reward for their efforts, most of the advisors in this study identified reasons why they engage in the mentoring process. Chad stated:

I'd like to think that overall there is an enhancement to my work. After all, if I do my job right then they're going to be publishing papers from their dissertation, and they're going to go on to bigger and better things and, hopefully, be a better scientist for having been in my program.

Heidi also talked about how her graduate students enhanced her work. She stated that they were the reason why she went to work. When she had good students, she said it was "like having your own team." She also used the words "partner" and "team member" when talking about her graduate students. Other professors spoke of the satisfaction they received from watching their students develop. Christian said that, for him, the best part of mentoring a student is seeing the success of the student—seeing them master tasks along the way, becoming more polished in the presentation of their writing, and growing more confident.

Further, Hope talked about what gave her personal satisfaction:

You always gain when you develop a good relationship with someone. I take a lot of pride in seeing them succeed. Some of them make choices that I probably wouldn't make in where they go and what they do, but they have a right to make their own choices. They don't always please the academic world. Overall, just knowing that I maybe helped someone along the way gives me satisfaction.

Many women doctoral students and their advisors in my study understood that satisfaction was a large determinant in the quality of the graduate experience.
Professional Growth

For the women doctoral students participating in this study, professional growth seemed to occur in three steps. For most of the women, the first step to professional growth was the building of confidence in their research and writing abilities. The next step was entering into professional circles through conference presentations, publishing, networking, and joining professional organizations. The last step was taken when the students began to separate from their mentors.

For many women doctoral students, gaining confidence in their professional abilities was an important step early in the doctoral process. Mattie believed that her mentor gave her confidence by validating the work she did and allowing her to make choices and decisions on her own. Further, Ashlyn expressed that Chad helped increase her confidence by helping her develop as a scientist and by telling her that she’s doing a good job. Hope explained the importance of confidence: “I think there is a place to start by holding their hand, but then you have to give them confidence to say, “I can do this.” I think this is why some people stay ABD. They don’t have the confidence.”

To reinforce student confidence and to give students experience in the professional world, all of the advisors helped their students enter into professional circles. Lauren discussed how her mentor helped her set goals so that she could become a professional. She talked about the experience he gave her: “I had a lot of experience in many different areas. Not only lab experience but also experience as far as preparing presentations and writing grants and that kind of thing so I really did get a
lot of experience from him.” Kasey stated that Heidi helped her become a professional through giving her research and publishing opportunities.

Every student that I spoke with stated that their advisor encouraged them to go to conferences and to become members of professional organizations. Lauren said of Christian, “He has been supportive about encouraging me to go to meetings and to present at meetings.” Christy gave Hope credit for her accomplishments in professional organizations:

First of all, she introduced me to all of my professional organizations. Prior to my meeting her, I really had not been made aware in all of my other schooling of the professional organizations to which I should belong. So, she was instrumental in getting me started into those organizations and helping me become a more professional person. I’ve been President, President-Elect. I’ve held many offices in lots of the professional organizations. I think that has broadened my view of what Family and Consumer Science should be instead of keeping me stuck in time.

Further, Mattie stated that Hannah was responsible for getting her involved with the Alzheimer’s Association and helped her become the facilitator of an Alzheimer’s support group.

Many of the mentors discussed the importance of opening the doors to professional organizations and work. Hannah stated:

I take my graduate students with me everywhere I go—not only to conferences but when I give talks in the community. I take them with me so they can watch because they will be doing that themselves in a couple of years. I think there is no substitute for experience in learning, so I take them with me.

Christian saw his mentoring toward professional growth as a sharing process. He explained:
You’re sharing—especially with writing papers and seeing them at meetings. With one prior student, I’m still rewriting a paper that was rejected. I saw her at the meeting in San Diego about a month ago. Hopefully, Lauren and I will continue to communicate and work together. Another student, who wasn’t in our department, is still collaborating. She comes back and does studies with us in the summer. So we like to do that. If you like the students.

Later, Christian added, “I think the way it works is that I get something. They teach me a lot of things. In other words, everyone has different talents, and that’s how I approach it. I have certain expertise, but they have talents, and we both mutually benefit.”

Finally, in the area of professional growth, women students and advisors both discussed a “breaking off” period. For Ashlyn, the separation period began when Chad taught her to “think on my own.” She explained, “He’s encouraged me to think for myself and come up with new projects and to take the research that we’ve outlined and pursue my own interests. He just encouraged me to think for myself.” Mattie said that she valued the time in her mentoring relationship when her mentor “began to let loose of the reigns.” For Mattie, this signified that Hannah trusted her as a professional. Also, just as Hannah had done with her own mentor, Mattie began to sort through those traits and practices her mentor that she wanted to emulate and those that she wanted to leave behind.

Advisors also discussed how the separation step was important. Hope mentioned holding the student’s hand. She said that, in the beginning, you may need to hold a student’s hand, but eventually, you must let it go. She explained, “In the end they have to be able to stand on their own. I believe there is a progression of turning loose.” Beth
explained that one benefit to her not having had her own mentor was that she did not have to go through a separation phase. She stated:

Some graduate students, you just struggle with. It’s like psychological separation. A student has to stand on their own and go off on their own. In some ways it’s like being with 2 year olds. There’s these weird struggles for them not to be able to let go.

Although not all professors believed in “hand holding,” they all agreed that the ultimate goal of a mentor is to teach their student what it takes to make it and then giving them the opportunity to begin to make their own path.

Problems

Just as in any human relationships, mentoring relationships are never free from conflict. Although the focus of this dissertation is meaningful mentoring relationships, there were problems in the relationships that were discussed in my interviews with the participants. I summarized these problems within three themes: communication/differing personal perspectives; time; and negotiating friendship. Each of these problems provides insight into concerns of women graduate students and their advisors.

Communication/Differing Personal Perspectives

There were three problems which involved opposing perspectives or mis-communication. First, Kasey and Heidi had opposing views on introducing a student to other professionals. Kasey mentioned that Heidi “wasn’t very good at introducing me to people.” Kasey had watched her husband introduce his Ph.D. students to other professionals, so she understood its importance to networking and believed it
necessary for her own system of networking. On the other hand, Heidi told me during her interview that she did not introduce her students to friends and colleagues at professional conferences because “they are not my poster children.” Unlike the other advisors in the study who found value in professional introductions, Heidi saw it as a form of self-promotion and did not feel comfortable in participating in that aspect.

There were other hints of differing perspectives from several students. One said, “I learned from my mentor what to do to be a professional, but I also watched her mistakes and learned what not to do.” This was not surprising considering that all but one advisor that I interviewed could name things that they transferred from their own mentoring relationships to those with their students. They also talked about interactions with their own mentors that were painful for them to experience and did not emulate. One advisor said, laughingly, “I don’t roll my eyes at my students. [My advisor] could just kill you with those eyes.”

A few students talked about communication problems with their advisor. The nature of these communication problems ranged from not understanding about “mother problems” to communicating in ways that made the student uncomfortable. Both Ashlyn and Chad talked about the difficult hurdle of communication. Chad had not realized that his style of communication seemed sarcastic to Ashlyn. She was confused about Chad’s communication tone, when in fact he was only communicating in the same way that he did since childhood. However, Ashlyn’s direct confrontation with Chad about the problem marked a turning point in their relationship and brought them closer together. Each of the “working out” phases of the communication problems that
students and advisors discussed was identified as vital in strengthening the mentoring bond.

**Time**

Time commitment was another problem in the mentoring relationship for both the students and advisors. While both partners in the mentoring dynamic appreciated and valued the time that the other expended on the dissertation process, they felt that the amount of time they had to spend in producing a good dissertation or, in the case of the advisor, training a good student, was trying. Students complained that it “just takes so long.”

While students certainly felt the amount of time expended on the project weighed heavily on the other personal and professional aspects of their lives, I believe that advisors suffered more from the amount of time commitment than students. One advisor commented:

But there is certainly also a requirement or obligation for parts of my time that I have to juggle with other obligations. So there are times when those collide and probably more so than we’d like to admit; we then don’t place a high enough priority on the student.

Similarly, another advisor stated:

I would say the time commitment of finding the amount of time, particularly at the time it’s needed in terms of a particular crisis either personally or professionally needs to be attended to because we always have more things to do in a day than we have time to do them in. I would say that’s the biggest [barrier]—trying to balance that with the other obligations on my time—making sure that I’m being fair to the students and also fair to myself and my family in terms of time.
Still, another professor explained the difficulties of working with more than one student:

Probably making time. Everyone's got the same amount of time. It's how you manage that time. I think probably the most difficult part is to be sure that you give the individual the time that they need. Sometimes I've had as many as four working at the same time on dissertations or proposals.

Several of the professors believed that if their mentoring was recognized and rewarded more on the university level, they could expend more time doing this critical aspect of their job.

**Negotiating Friendship**

Negotiating friendships was one of the hardest and most intense parts of every mentoring pair's relationship, but one. Both Hope and Christy described, without hesitation, their mentoring relationship as one of friendship. Hope explained:

I think that really has to be on an individual basis. Again, I probably would consider that based on trust. I think a true friend is going to stand by you, whatever. I think if you have that real sound base of trust that will happen. Sometimes more than others. I think that linkage is there and that connection is made if you have developed that sense of trust.

Hope and Christy have known one another for years and both said that they felt comfortable enough to tell the other person anything. Christy stated, “We’ve become close friends. She’s someone that I know that I can talk to when I need to, and it’s not going to go any further. I think that she feels the same way.” They had been through a lot together and felt a strong friendship bond because of their shared experiences.

Other participants in the study struggled with friendship issues. Many students yearned for a closer personal friendship with their advisors. One student explicitly
stated that she would have enjoyed a deeper friendship on a personal level, but knew where her advisor was “coming from” in not allowing that to happen. She described her relationship: “I would think of her as a professional friend because of the boundaries that she set up. Even when we do go eat lunch or drink coffee we mainly talk business. She’s more of a private person.” Another student explained:

I would enjoy it if it could develop more into a friendship. With any student-teacher relationship, there is a power dynamic. Your advisor sits on the committee and their professional reputations, to some extent, are on the line. You can’t embarrass them. There is a very complicated dynamic going on that’s so uncut and dry. It’s not like we were peers. I felt very comfortable with her. For me, it was the idea that they are professors. It wasn’t formal, but it was never familiar. It’s now becoming more collegial, but I still occasionally ask for advice.

Also, one student described her advisor as her friend, but not a “friend, friend.” She elaborated:

Well, I don’t hang out with him. I have been to his house for things. I really like his wife. He’s come to a party that I’ve thrown. You know, I go canoeing with my friends on the weekend. I don’t do that with him. He has a family and different responsibilities. He’s in a different stage of his life.

Finally, one student said that she had never expected her mentoring relationship to be a friendship:

I can’t say we were ever really good friends, but I don’t think that’s the kind of relationship you need with a mentor. That can confuse the issue when you have someone training you and teaching you what to do. If you become good buddies, you may not get out of it what you need. That can over-shadow what your relationship is.

Although most students wanted a more personal relationship with their mentor, they understood why a friendship would have been difficult during the dissertation stage.
Advisors seemed to struggle with friendship issues as well. One of the male advisors stated:

That’s a word that can be defined in varying degrees. I’d like to think so at one level. But, again at another, there is a certain distance that you have to maintain in terms of the relationship because there are times when you have to say things and provide critical analysis that is not necessarily something that a friend would feel comfortable doing. Quite frankly, I think that we all, as professors and as supervisors, are always concerned with how that relationship may interfere with your ability to do the things that you think need to be done. I would say that probably it’s not a friendship in the sense of a really strong bond of mutual interests and being able to say or do anything openly in that context of a relationship, but it’s not quite as casual as an acquaintance. I see it as a very unique relationship that has facets of all the things we have talked about. So it’s its own entity to some extent. But, if you have to check in a box I would say that I feel like I’m a friend to them.

One advisor said that there was no room for personal friendship:

If they called me at 10:00 at night and had an emergency, I’d certainly do what I can for them. But, to try and develop friendships with them—no. I like having the two parties per year for them. I like having the professional intimacy. But, I don’t want to know about their personal life. I don’t want to use them as an outlet for my personal life. It’s a really cool profession. We have tons of stuff to talk about in the profession. I don’t have any room for personal things.

Further, Hannah described her mentoring relationships in terms of mother and child.

She stated:

Think about your mother. Your mother is not a friend in terms of you sharing intimate secrets or gossiping with. You love your mother and you respect your mother and you seek your mother for guidance and advice. But there are certain things that you don’t talk about with your mother that you would talk about with your girlfriends. The mentor relationship, at least for me, is very much the same as a parent and child. I’m responsible for looking out for them and taking care and making sure they get through the program and that they have skills they need to function as a professional. I don’t want them to think of me as their friend.

All of the advisors, except Hope, agreed that there must be a “professional distance” between them and their graduate students.
Finally, a few advisors said that they welcomed a friendship after the doctoral process was over. However, students had already been socialized in the appropriate types of interactions with the advisor and believed that trying to forge a friendship with them would be out of line. This is not surprising considering that a few of the advisors alluded to the same beliefs about their relationships with their own mentors.

**Difference**

The category of difference reveals two relevant areas of non-similarity that I explored with the participants in my study. The first variable is age, and the second is gender. Rather than exploring these two areas within the previously mentioned nine themes, I decided to discuss them separately, because perspectives regarding these two elements of difference were often distinct and sometimes, different in focus.

**Age**

Due to the mixture of ages of the participants, age issues usually surfaced before I had a chance to ask about them. Conversations about age not only covered the actual age of the individuals, but also were described in constructs that usually signify age differences—mother, father, daughter, and sister. In five of the mentoring pairs, the advisor was older than the student. In one, the student was older than the advisor.

In the opinion of both of the women with male advisors, age played no significant part in the process. Even though these advisors were both older than the graduate women, neither woman considered her mentor a “fatherly” figure. Lauren stated: “I think he treats me and other people in the department more like a colleague. But I see him with more respect. Even now that I’m completing my process, I see him
as my role model. I’m not sure about the age difference.” On the other hand, their
advisors held different perspectives. Ashlyn’s advisor, Chad, when discussing age
issues, stated:

That’s a double-edge sword because none of us want to feel that we’re that much
older. But certainly, I think it’s harder to feel like a peer than an older more
stable relationship. I guess fatherly is one that comes to mind. I don’t think of it
as a problem. Once my students come in and I work with them all the time, I let
them call me [by my first name] if they want, but most, like Ashlyn prefer to call
me Dr. all the time. So I recognize that I’m moving into that maturing stage
relative to the age of my students.

Further, Christian described his relationships with students of varying ages and the
positives and negatives that resulted:

The first student that I helped, she was like tunnel vision. She was older,
probably in her 50s or 60s. Her kids were grown. Part of mentoring her was
slowing her down and saying, “You’ve got to make sure you make a good honest
story out of your data. You’re not interpreting it properly. Slow down. You’re
just looking to get a job.” She knew what she wanted to do, but needed a little bit
of slowing down. The next one that I co-chaired was older, and she came to me
first because she just needed a member here because she was working at
Pennington. She came to me for more help, but she was already an expert in what
she did. Lauren is different because she is a lot younger. Although very capable,
she’s not as experienced as these other two. They both were married, had raised
children. For one, both were grown and out and the other had both still in the
house, but in high school and college. So it’s a little different.

For Christian, it seemed that his view of age difference and experience was tied not
only to professional experience, but also personal issues, such as parenting.

The other two women who had professors older than themselves, Sarah and
Mattie, felt that their mentors’ age and experience were helpful in negotiating their
own doctoral paths. Sarah said of her mentors, “They were older. But it only helped in
a positive way. They had more experiences to share.” Her dissertation mentor, Beth, said she believed that age matters, but tries to disrupt this:

    That’s another form of hierarchy. I’m actually older than I look. I think most of them don’t really know that. I don’t think of myself as a person in her 50s. It probably does though [have an effect]. You know, I do things. For example, I might meet my students at Mardi Gras on the street dressed like someone from Star Trek.

Beth does not think of herself as a motherly, nurturing figure and does not want her students to think of her in that manner either.

    Although Hannah was older than Mattie, she was still a young, new professor when they started working together. Mattie saw her selection of Hannah as a strategic move toward her goal:

    I was interested in working with a female who was younger just to get an idea of someone coming out of a Ph.D. program. Someone new in the working world so that I could see what types of struggles and issues she had rather than someone who had been there for 20 or 30 years. Because, in our program, it was either very young or very old professors. There was a difference in the way that they would handle their working with you.

Mattie not only believed that she would learn more by watching her mentor experience and negotiate her field, but she also believed that the older professors would have approached her doctoral training and advising in a very different manner.

    For Mattie’s advisor though, age plays a part in the doctoral process, but only when combined with other elements:

    I don’t think age as a variable by itself has any influence. What you’ve got to realize is that an older professor is more seasoned and more knowledgeable so they have more to offer. They have more wisdom and better guidance. Older may be better in that older means more experienced and more knowledgeable. They have more experience with bringing people through the process. I have 5 Ph.D.’s that I’ve created and I’m much better now on my sixth one than I was on the first
one. So, I think it’s not age by itself; it’s age combined with experience that makes the difference.

Both of the women doctoral students and their older advisors, although presenting different nuances to age, generally believed that age did matter to some extent.

For Heidi and Kasey, the mentoring relationship differed from “traditional” mentoring relationships because Kasey was older than her mentor. Kasey recognized that her age and experience added a different twist to the relationship. In my interview with Kasey, she used her position of being older in describing the mentoring relationship and also in distinguishing why the mentoring relationship she had with Heidi was “not the same as with students who are younger.” In fact, Kasey had difficulty classifying the nature of her mentoring relationship because of the reversed age pattern, “Since I am older than she, we certainly didn’t have a mother/daughter thing. I couldn’t say that it was a sister kind of thing either.” She finally described the relationships as a professional friendship.

Heidi also believes that age plays a large part in how mentoring meets the needs of students. She explains:

It takes someone knowing a lot and having the skill to mentor somebody. I don’t know how age can not affect the process. You just change as you grow older. When I have an older student, I have totally different issues. I’m mentoring an undergraduate now. She shared a room with me at a conference. Her favorite show is the Brady Bunch. That was a very different experience for me than mentoring an older person with children. The needs were so different. I think age does make a difference on both parts.

Heidi believes that age not only affects how she interacts with her students, but it also greatly affects the types of needs that will have to be fulfilled.
Finally, Christy and Hope are both older and have known one another for several years. Although Christy’s advisor is older than she is, she does not believe that age played a part in her mentoring relationship because she is older and more experienced professionally than the average doctoral student. Also, when asked if she thought age played a difference in the mentoring process, Hope stated, “It could, but not with me.”

**Gender**

Gender, like age, was experienced and articulated differently by each participant. Because context for the participants in this study was provided largely through the mentoring pairs, I also discuss gender perspectives as pairs. In some pairs, the concept of gender was articulated similarly, while in others the differences were notable. Presenting gender perspectives through the pairs provides further insight into the dynamics of each mentoring relationship in my study.

**Lauren and Christian**

Lauren did not believe that gender played a significant part in her mentoring relationship. She initially began with a female advisor, but then decided to work with Christian because she was interested in the work he was doing and she felt they would work well together. She explained that her field consists mostly of women; in fact, Christian is the only male professor in the department. Lauren was the only doctoral student in Nutrition, and although she did have interactions with other doctoral students, she did not feel that she had a cohort of female students in a predominately female department.
Likewise, Christian did not believe that gender was a factor in his mentoring relationships. When asked if he thought males and females approached or managed the dissertation process differently, he stated:

I think it’s just personality. It depends...I don’t like to stereotype males and females. A lot of times stereotyping is about personality. I see those characteristics in both. I think it runs across both, and so I don’t really take a different approach.

Further, Christian said that the only distinctions that he made between males and females were “just realistic and practical.” He explained:

The only difference would be in the evening when we check on rats. I might tell a female to come with someone else and a male not. I don’t think that’s chauvinistic, just realistic and practical. It’s accepting the differences but still treating them equally. That would probably be the major difference between the two.

Christian and Lauren both believed that their relationship was meaningful and that gender issues did not get in the way of reaching their goals.

Ashlyn and Chad

Unlike Lauren, Ashlyn did articulate feelings about gender issues. Early in her interview, she pointed out that even though her department only has one female professor, approximately half of the doctoral students were women, which is not typical of the science field. Ashlyn wished that she had the opportunity to identify with more female professors. She stated:

I really wish there were more women. I just had an interview with the head of the department—an exit interview. I told him my feelings about that. I think that they need more women.
Ashlyn said that she did not see the gender difference between her and Chad as making a difference. However, she explained that in her scientific career there were only a few women professors. She stated:

I think women perceive things differently than men. I also think men have a different way of communicating with each other than women do. I'm sure I would have come up with this Ph.D. in the end, but I may have done it differently with a woman. It's hard to explain. I had a discussion with my sister's fiance about this—about scientific observations and how men and women will differ. I think my interactions would have been different if I had a woman advisor, but I don't know if I can explain how.

Finally, Ashlyn did say that she found support from other women students in her department. She stated, “If I had been the only woman, it would have been hard. It's like being a minority. It helps to have someone to identify with.”

Chad said that he believes that his students had different needs, but “it would be hard for me to say if they are gender related.” Like Christian, Chad said that his only difference in advising involved safety issues:

In our department, there are some obvious physical and safety issues. In other words, I have no problem sending my other male Ph.D. students out in the field by themselves without even thinking about it. We work in very remote areas in harsh conditions. I would definitely say that is different for a female. It doesn't reflect on the individual, it's just our society. It's just an unfortunate circumstance that you have to be more concerned about women. Probably too, because I am a father; I have a teenaged daughter. I have a more nurturing role in that regard for their safety—similarly, with large or heavy work. Again, this may be a bias on my part. If the work involves heavy labor of hauling equipment long distances or something like that, I think I'm more inclined to let the male grad student just figure out how to do it or to get help, whereas I'm more likely to try to provide that help for the female student.

When Chad explained how Ashlyn approached him about being uncomfortable with their communication, he stated that “the male side of me said we gotta fix it.” Chad
respected Ashlyn for being honest about her feelings. As he talked through the process of resolving their problem, Chad commented:

I don’t know if that may be more true for women than men—that they would feel more comfortable going to their major professor. I would suspect that it would be harder for a male student to say hey, “I’m having this problem.” I think our culture and society sends messages to males that it’s not okay to be weak, have a problem, or need help. Whereas, I don’t think that it is as restrictive for women.

Mattie and Hannah

Both Mattie and Hannah stated that their field, as well as their Department at LSU, is predominately male. As stated earlier, Mattie chose to work with Hannah, rather than some of the other male professors in her department because she felt she would learn valuable lessons from her about “being a woman in the field.” Further, many of the valuable lessons that Mattie learned were centered around role modeling her advisor. She talked about this learning process:

[It was] just seeing how she acted and behaved in committee meetings and in the classroom. I was helping her with other projects and seeing the ways she dealt with other people. Also, when we were trying to submit projects, [it was watching] the ways that she dealt with other people and with putting things in different journals—the way she handled feedback from them. Sometimes you have to be assertive and insist on things being certain ways. In a lot of ways, you are very dependent on people to get things published in journals. You really have to do what they want you to do.

She learned from observation how to be a professional. Mattie realized early on that the lessons she learned from Hannah about professionalism would have been different with a male. She knew that women in her field sometimes had difficulties negotiating their professional careers and decided that a female would provide example for her.
Hannah has never supervised a male dissertation student, so she did not know if they managed the dissertation process differently. However, she has mentored males to the master’s thesis level. She commented:

I think it’s easier to mentor the same gender, because with my women graduate students, we are always talking about strategies for coping with insecurity. That’s a woman’s issue—how can they present themselves to be confident? I don’t really know what men’s issues are. How could I know? I am a woman first and a psychologist second.

Finally, Hannah referred to and thought of her Ph.D. students as “my kids.” In fact, she told Mattie that she was her professional mother and Mattie also viewed her as such.

As described earlier, Hannah viewed friendships with doctoral students similar to the friendships of a mothers and daughters.

Sarah and Beth

Sarah, who identified herself as a feminist, had many feminist mentors. When asked if being the same gender as her mentors had an effect on her mentoring interactions, she stated:

I think men can be very fine mentors. Especially, if they don’t have some preconceived notion about what you should be doing and how it should all work. I think if they’re open and flexible, then men can be very good mentors. I am tickled to death that mine are all women. It also helped with my dissertation because [her first advisor] had children. I was writing about pregnant women on the stage and about pregnancy and how we view it. She was very helpful with that because she had kids. So, she talked about that whole process. That was an added plus. I needed a female perspective. It’s hard to articulate what that difference was. It’s not just that they were female. It was that they were female and feminist. You would be much better off having a male who had feminist sympathies rather than a male-identified woman. So, it’s not the physical biology that’s the perspective. I think that a female feminist perspective is really invaluable, especially if you are working in feminism.
Sarah learned many invaluable lessons from her mentors and knows they have helped define who she is as a woman.

Beth, a feminist, does research on gender and teaches gender related courses. She met Sarah while doing work with film and gender. During our interview, Beth provided many insights on gender related issues and how being a woman affected her position. First, based on her own experiences, Beth talked about the positives and negatives of having a female mentor:

It took me a while to get where I wanted to get because I didn’t have a mentor. I think there are advantages to not having a mentor. I have a lot of friends who have very strong feminist mentors. I was really jealous. They had these wonderful women who worked with them, but you could see that the problem with that is that you model yourself on your mentor. It takes a while in your career for you to separate. It’s like a parental relationship. I was like an orphan; I had to do it on my own. So, I didn’t have to go through that separation process from a mentor. That’s the positive side. I’ve always looked for lateral support so that’s why I do that for my students. I don’t want them to model themselves on me. I want them to figure out what they want to do.

As a result of her own experiences, Beth says that she tries not to be a nurturing figure to her students. She explains why:

I think it’s especially hard for women because when students come to you as a woman, they are expecting a certain kind of emotional support. This is a point where, with my male students, I engage in some difference. I make it clear to a male student that I will be challenging him because of the gender stereotyping that women will be nurturing. I think people tend to automatically experience me as nurturing. I often have to go out of my way to let people know that I’m not about that. It’s not that I’m not—but being a nurturer doesn’t mean that I won’t have really high standards.

Even though Beth doesn’t want to be viewed as a nurturer, she says that this often happens because in her classroom, she creates an “atmosphere where it’s easy for people to feel they can come talk to me.”
Beth spent some time talking about how males and females approach the dissertation differently:

I think that’s an interesting question because I do gender work. I’m going to give you an intellectual guess. This would be different in different disciplines. [My field] is already a feminized discipline. So I think men in [my field] are going to be more like the women. I would say the biggest difference would be over exams. I think my male students in general have less of sense of anxiety of not being able to do it. That would be an area where I would sense some differences. I find that I work easily with both. I think it’s difficult to answer because there is a self-selection process that goes on. Because I teach gender and because students know that I teach gender, I will self-select and get students who are interested in me. Even the men who take courses with me are going to be interested in these types of problems. Some men are not going to be working with me because of the way I would be seen. I would guess that I get only a segment of the population. In some ways, I’m not getting certain kinds of mainstream, traditional graduate students because of the kinds of courses I’m teaching.

Finally, Beth stated that she has been the chair of male committees, but realizes that in other fields, as well as other areas of her field, men would not choose female dissertation chairs because of power issues. She noted that this was especially true in the science fields.

Kasey and Heidi

Kasey said she did not believe that gender had an effect on her mentoring relationship, but then talked about a change in Heidi’s perspective regarding mothering. She stated:

When I did my master’s in physiology, my major professor was a male. I really can’t say that there were that many differences. When I first started working with Heidi, she was married and didn’t have any children. I think after she had children, she was a little more understanding with my needing to have leeway for my children. She was much more understanding of mother problems after she had her own.
Also, when describing their relationship, Kasey said that she did not view it as either mother/daughter or sisterly. Kasey did belong to a cohort of women students in her department. She explained that the cohort made a big difference because most of the students finished before she did and gave her advice and shared experiences.

Heidi says that she generally does not believe that males and females approach the dissertation process differently, but then stated that women may have some different issues:

No. I think you have to find someone who really likes writing and likes the scientific process. If you find a person like that, then they have almost the same needs. They may have logistical differences. The women are more likely to have child care issues.

Even though Heidi and Kasey both originally stated that they both did not believe gender played a role in their mentoring relationship, the each gave the example of mothering issues as having an impact.

Christy and Hope

Both Christy and Hope did not believe that gender played a part in the mentoring relationship. Hope stated that she knew there were gender differences, but she did not believe “there was a lot of difference.” When asked if gender played a part in their mentoring relationship, Christy stated, “No. I chose her because we were friends.” She and Hope had bonded before the doctoral process, and that is why they decided to work together.

Although Hope did not perceive any gender issues in her mentoring relationships with students, she did identify conflicting views between male professors in her
department and herself. She believed that these conflicts were gender related. Hope stated, "I’ve had some men tell me, ‘You spend too much time.’"

Hope believed that other faculty members’ resistance of her mentoring practices affected her faculty position in negative ways. She stated:

I think there are other faculty members who don’t want you to be a certain way. I feel a strong bond between my students and myself. I think that’s why they keep in touch and we share information. I think there are people who don’t approve of that. I think when you do have a good working relationship with your students, that it is sometimes resented.

Even though Hope was told that her ways of mentoring were not “normal,” she continued on because, as she stated, “I believe that you should do it the student’s way as best you can as long as it’s on course.” Hope’s mentoring practices are validated in her eyes because of the continued connections she maintains with her graduates.

**Further Interrogation of Gender**

Although discussions about gender vary among the women and men in my study, there are some points worth further examination. They are: the need for confidence building, the importance of encouraging women to form cohort groups with other women students, and the need to transform societal views of women’s roles.

First, based on my own experiences, I am not surprised that every participant in my research talked about building confidence. Throughout my own doctoral student journey, I believe that a large amount of confidence that I gained can be attributed to my mentor. Although I knew the importance of confidence building, I never thought of it as being a “woman’s issue.” However, two female mentors stated that it is indeed a woman’s issue. Hannah stated, “I think its easier to mentor the same gender. Because
with my women graduate students we are always talking about strategies for coping with insecurity. That’s a woman’s issue—how you present yourself to be confident.”

Whereas male-to-male advising relationships tend to focus on academic and research activities and responsibilities (Hulbert, 1994; Kronik, 1990), female-to-female and male-to-female relationships may require an additional component of nurturing. Some of the women students in my study doubted their academic abilities and needed assurance that they have what it takes to be a professional. Beth believes the major difference between the women and men she mentors is that men generally have more confidence than women. She explained that men are more confident in their own ability to pass general and proposal defense examinations, whereas women sometimes do not even have enough confidence to believe they should even be in the doctoral program. Beth stated: “I think my male students in general have less of a sense of anxiety of not being able to do it. That would be an area where I would sense some differences.” In fact, a few of the women graduate students in my study either stated that their mentor encouraged them to attempt the doctoral program or worked to dispel their uncertain feelings about “not being good enough” to be a doctoral student. For some women students, encouraging and confidence building that proved helpful in the doctoral process often began either before they decided to enter or early on in their Ph.D. studies.

Second, some of the participants in my study discussed having a cohort group composed of other women graduate students in their fields of study. Ashlyn, who stated that there was only one woman faculty member in her department, said that she
received a lot of support from other women students in her department: "If I had been the only woman, it would have been hard. It's like being a minority. It helps to have someone to identify with." It seems that the graduate women’s cohort groups of support may allow for a greater degree of friendship than as experienced with mentors. Also, some cohort groups may provide a degree of nurturing to women that may be important in their doctoral progression.

Third, advising relationships in my study were described through societal views of women’s roles. Some students described their mentors as filling mothering roles. Likewise, some women advisors viewed themselves as professional mothers. Also, both male professors described themselves as father figures. Mentors possibly formed their perceptions through fulfilling nurturing roles for women students or through perceptions of the hierarchical nature of mentoring.

Despite some women students’ need for nurturing experiences in mentoring, a few women advisors in my study rejected or tried to disrupt societal perception of them as “nurturers.” Women’s developmental research found gender-related patterns of socialization of men to be achievers and women to be nurturers (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger; & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1987). In higher education feminist critique draws attention to institutional practices of rewarding achievement and research oriented activities—those valued most by men, over teaching and mentoring—those activities that women are either relegated to or find more value doing.

Both Beth and Hannah are aware that because they are women, others expect them to fill nurturing roles. However, they consciously work to not be perceived as
nurturers. As a feminist, Beth tries to let her students know that being a nurturer does not mean that she will not have “really high standards.” She alluded to the fact that some students believe women who appear to be nurturers are perceived as being “easy” when it comes to committee presentations and exams.

Further, one woman advisor, after reviewing her texts asked that I delete a paragraph where she spoke of her advisor and herself as being “professional mothers.” Reflecting on the interview text, she stated: “When I read it, it didn’t sound like I feel/felt. I know I said the [mother] comment, but in hindsight I don’t feel like a mother of any type to my students.” I introduce the text here (confidentially) to illustrate the difficulty that women faced in “naming” the nature of their mentoring relationships:

I used to think of [my mentor] as being a different type of mother. She gave me things that my mom couldn’t. [My mom] wasn’t in a professional world. [My mentor] was a role model. Would I be willing to e-mail or call her if I had a professional problem? She would be the first one I’d call. But, I would never call her for something I would call my mother for. I might be a professional mother, but these women all have mothers.

In retrospect, this advisor decided that did not see herself as a mother in any way. Also, another advisor, after reviewing her text, seemed surprised that she described her mentoring relationships in terms of mother/daughter. She asked: “Was I the only advisor to describe the student professor relationship in terms of mother/daughter?”

Although some advisors resist being nurturing, others find value in fulfilling nurturing roles for their students. For example, Hope discussed the need to hold her students’ hands in the beginning until they are confident enough to continue on their
own. She was also well aware of other male professors’ disapproval of her “spending too much time” with her students. However, she continued these practices despite that others, through disapproval of her practices, made her feel less valued as a faculty member.

Summary

The mentoring relationships in my study, being multifaceted and sometimes contradictory, illustrate the difficulty of identifying the “best mentor,” “best mentee,” or the most useful components of the “best mentoring relationships” because all participants in the mentoring dynamic have identities that are tentative and fluid. In her research of feminist teaching, Ropers-Huilman (1998) states:

There exists no time when a totally new and unchanging being enters a discourse. Rather, the concept of identities is, for me, like viewing a borderless map. Many of the landmarks have posted names; indeed, I have lived in places called White and Woman. Once a location, an identity, is a part of me, I cannot disown it. Yet it need not own me. Rather, I can visit, through careful listening and interaction, other locations whose characteristics and opportunities provide lessons and insights as well. While some people travel more frequently and enthusiastically than others, this process of traveling is endless (p. 43).

Although this research does not reveal a new mentoring theory, it may offer lessons or open up new ways of thinking for individuals hoping to engage in meaningful mentoring practices.
CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine meaningful mentoring relationships between women doctoral students and their advisors. This exploration was guided by three research questions: (a) How do graduate women and their advisors enter into mentoring relationships? (b) What do graduate women and their advisors desire from doctoral advising relationships and how do they perceive each other’s needs and roles? And, (c) what do advisors and graduate women perceive to be the benefits and problems that resulted from their mentoring experience?

This chapter begins with a discussion of the common themes and categories of difference as they relate to the current body of literature. The remaining sections of the chapter unfold as follows: (a) limitations; (b) conclusions; (c) recommendations; (d) implications for practice; and (e) reflections on feminist research.

Common Themes and Categories of Difference

This section provides a summary of the results of each research question of the study. The common themes identified are discussed throughout the summary of questions two and three. Finally, the categories of difference are summarized. Each of these discussions are examined through the body of current literature.

Research Question 1: Entering Into the Mentoring Relationship

The connection of the mentoring pairs in this study offers additional insight into the current literature on women and mentoring. Current mentoring literature regarding education focuses on the mentor choosing the student and why a student may or may
not be chosen (Noe, 1988; Fleming, 1991; Sandler, 1993). However, in my study all of
the mentoring relationships formed not through a decision to mentor or to be
mentored, but through mutual interactions and processes that helped form the bond. In
fact, these relationships began as advising relationships that were a result of either
earlier interactions or similar research interests between the advisor and student.

First, the students in this study chose their dissertation advisors. All of the
students who connected with other women professors did so because of previous
interactions. These students had taken classes and/or worked with their advisors prior
to beginning the dissertation. Consequently, those initial interactions formed the basis
of the decision of graduate women to seek out their teachers to serve as advisors. Also,
although both of the women who chose males to advise their dissertations had not had
previous interactions with them, they were interested their area of work. In fact, one
student had not physically met her advisor before they agreed to work together, but
through phone conversations and e-mail decided that they would have an ideal
working situation.

Even though students chose who they wanted as advisors, the advisors had to
agree to participate in the relationship. Reasons advisors gave for not serving as a
dissertation chair were: not having enough time to devote to the relationship; not
having similar interests; and not having the same personality or traits as the student. A
few of the advisors explained that knowing when it is necessary to turn down a
chairing position usually takes time and experience to learn.
Further, both the female and male advisors told me that they do not have expectations that they will mentor all the students they agree to advise. Also, many of the students only expected general advising at the start of their relationships with their advisor. However, all of the advising relationships in my study progressed into mentoring relationships. Because mentoring relationships are multifaceted, it is not surprising that most of the participants in my study could not specify a single event or action that signified the movement of their relationships from advising to mentoring. Instead, these relationships developed over time through the participants’ ability to meet the needs of their partners in powerful ways.

Research Question 2: Needs and Desires

In searching out the needs and desires of my participants’ mentoring relationships, I learned that, although participants had varied needs, it was important for them to have “connected” perceptions or beliefs and to be willing to renegotiate their actions when they were not meeting their partner’s needs. For example, Sarah stated that she did not need Beth to teach her how to “grow up” because she had already received that type of mentoring from someone else. Later, I saw a connecting point in their relationship when Beth told me that she was not interested in filling a mother role because doctoral student training “is a professional kind of training and I really don’t see my job as being like that.” So, if Sarah did not have another mentor to teach her the things that Beth believes are not part of a doctoral advisor’s responsibilities, would their relationship have been as powerful? Relatedly, in the earlier example of Chad and Ashlyn’s communication difficulties, if Chad was not
willing to "change" what Ashlyn felt was sarcastic behavior, would their relationship
have continued to develop into a mentoring relationship? It is important to note
though, that there is no "right" way to act and the things that need to be negotiated are
different from pair to pair because of the multiple identities that come into play.

Participants in my study seemed to "be on the same page" as their partner. To
achieve this some important needs and desires for both women doctoral students and
their advisors were: having a mentoring partner with matching personality; receiving
continued support from their mentor/mentee; and having a deep dedication to the
project. Although support was an important construct in many of the studies I reviewed
(Levinson, 1978; Heinrich, 1995), matching personality and mutual dedication to the
dissertation project were often not identified. This may be, in part, because many prior
studies have only interviewed and focused on one side of the mentoring dynamic.

In previous literature, as well as in my study, support was the most important
facet of the mentoring relationship. In describing and defining the word mentoring,
almost every participant used the word support. Some of Kram's (1985) mentoring
functions describe the types of support both students and advisors discussed in their
interviews. Specifically, these were sponsoring, exposure and visibility, coaching,
protection, and counseling.

Advisors also gained support from the mentoring relationship. Some areas of
support to faculty members who mentor that have been identified in previous literature
were getting ideas and feedback about their own projects and having help with
research and teaching (Hall & Sandler, 1983; Olson & Ashton Jones, 1994). These
types of support to faculty members may be important in increasing satisfaction and fostering continued commitment of advisors whose institutions may not support their mentoring efforts. Another type of support that Hall and Sandler (1983) reported, collaboration on projects with former mentees, was only realized by one male advisor in my study. However, this could possibly be a result of the fact that all of my women doctoral student research participants were fairly recent graduates.

Levels of support and kinds of support that were most beneficial varied amongst the women students. Also, the type of mentoring support that was most helpful or valuable fluctuated depending upon student needs. All types of support provided by advisors showed students that they cared about them and wanted them to be successful. Many advisors explained to me that each student had different needs and that their job was to determine those needs and try to fulfill them. However, what seemed important in accomplishing this task was a matching of personality style.

Possessing similar personality styles was helpful in forging and maintaining the mentoring relationships in my study. Similarly, Lees (1996) found that her “participants chose chairpersons who were reflections and extensions of themselves, acknowledging how their sense of self became the organizer for choosing and building relationships with others who had similar qualities and characteristics” (p. 200). Through having similar personality styles, advisors and students seemed to describe similar perceptions of the mentoring process and similar descriptions of what they expected of the relationship.
Finally, mutual dedication was important in forming the mentoring relationship. Students not only had to be dedicated to their research; faculty members also had to be dedicated to helping the student. Faculty dedication in the student’s research and education showed the student that the faculty member cared. Golde (2000) discussed how reasons for graduate student attrition are usually attributed to the student. However, in her study, she found that some students attributed their reasons for dropping out or stopping out to difficulties experienced with their advisor and/or committee members. Many students in my study realized and voiced that their advisors’ dedication to “seeing them through” was very important in keeping them focused on their goals.

For faculty members, student dedication went beyond “just wanting to complete the degree.” Completing the dissertation is a long, and often tedious process that requires a great deal of dedication. Almost all of the advisors said that they needed students who wanted to do the best job possible to “get it right.” They voiced that this type of dedication often took time, but was noticed and appreciated. Further, many advisors stressed that they could not form a mentoring relationship with a student who was only dedicated to obtaining the degree.

**Research Question 3: Benefits and Problems**

**Benefits**

Two benefits to the mentoring relationship that were identified in my study were satisfaction and professional growth. These benefits have been identified in the prior
research in numerous ways. Satisfaction and professional growth were achieved by both women graduate students and advisors.

Researchers have reported that students who are mentored in academic settings are more satisfied with their overall educational experience (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Ervin, 1995; Johnsrud, 1991). All of the students in my study reported that they were satisfied with the doctoral process and their advisors' interactions. Although various students experienced frustration and doubt at times, their overall satisfaction with their mentors helped them complete the Ph.D. process. Most importantly, many students credited their advisors for making their doctoral experience more rewarding and satisfying.

Along with students, advisors received satisfaction from their mentoring interactions. Hall and Sandler (1983) stated that faculty members who mentor get, "the satisfaction of helping in the development of another person who may carry on his or her own work" (p. 3). Many faculty members in my study discussed how mentoring students helps to enhance their work. These advisors generally enjoyed helping their students grow and develop professionally and personally through their guidance.

Professional growth was the greatest benefit received and mainly occurred through the different types of support that students received from their mentors. The students in my study experienced professional growth in three stages. These were: confidence building, entering into professional circles, and separation. Some of the interactions that helped students through these areas of professional growth are explained through Kram's (1985) mentoring functions.
Sponsoring. For the participants in my study, sponsoring was important in helping build confidence. Students knew that their mentors believed they were competent through words and actions. Also, students knew that their mentors would “go to bat for them” if necessary. Further, all of the students reported getting letters of recommendation from their mentors for jobs, grants, awards, and fellowships/assistantships.

Sponsoring was a reciprocal mentoring function. Just as advisors “gave good press” (Kram, 1985, p. 25) to students, students also promoted the good work of their mentors. Some students wrote letters of recommendation for their mentors. Also, Beth won the graduate student teaching award for her efforts. Finally, students were able to promote the work of their professors through this study. Even though mentors are not identified by name, all of the advisors were pleased that their students wanted to tell their mentoring story.

Exposure and visibility. Exposure and visibility not only gave students additional confidence, but also allowed them to enter into professional circles. The students discussed doing research, attending conferences and professional meetings, writing grants, and publishing with their mentor. Through participating in the professional arenas of their discipline, students were able to become acculturated to those environments. The most important comments that I heard from students in my study were that their mentors had been the only faculty members to provide them with these professional opportunities.
Coaching. The coaching function mentioned most by both students and mentors involved choosing committee members. Mentors talked about providing students advice and knowledge about various faculty members and the roles that they could or could not fulfill for students. Several students talked about the importance of having a good committee, as well as how much time and effort their mentor expended while helping them select their members.

Protection. Just as with coaching, both students and mentors talked about protection in interactions with other faculty or committee members. For example, Chad discussed the need to remind other faculty members that doctoral students deserve mutual respect even though “they haven’t gotten the union card” yet. The protection function also demonstrated to students that their mentors believed in them and had confidence in their abilities. One important comment that several mentors stressed is that protection is not the same as “carrying a student.”

Challenging assignments. Of course the dissertation itself is one of the most challenging assignments that a student is expected to complete. However, mentors also encouraged their students to present at conferences, pursue offices in professional organizations, work on research projects other than the dissertation, and to write grants. These experiences were important in teaching students what is expected of them in the “professional world.” A few advisors knew the importance of this function because they had realized benefits of this function from their own advisors.

Role modeling. All of the students in my study considered their advisors to be role models. Students watched their advisors and often wanted to emulate their
behaviors. Also, advisors who had meaningful mentoring relationships with their own advisors saw their advisors as role models. However, with role modeling, both students in my study and the advisors who had mentors as doctoral students identified traits and actions that their mentor possessed that they chose not to emulate.

Acceptance and Confirmation. In the acceptance and confirmation stage, Kram (1985) states that the mentor and protege both receive “psychological nurturance” (p.35). The student becomes confident in her abilities and the advisor becomes confident in the role of mentoring. Acceptance and confirmation were extremely important in the confidence building that many women students needed.

Counseling. All of the mentors reported having counseled students on a professional level. However, most of the women advisors stated that they did not or were not comfortable with counseling students on a personal level. Although some advisors said that did not counsel on a personal level, their students believed that they did.

Friendship. Although both students and advisors reported participating in informal social events, all but one mentoring pair had difficulty negotiating friendship. I found that friendship was the hardest concept for both members of the pair to define. However, the professional distance that mentors reported was necessary may allow students to navigate the separation phase.

Kram’s mentoring interactions provide a useful framework for understanding the mentoring relationships between the participants in my study. However, as described
earlier, the mentoring functions that participants need or value may fluctuate and vary over time because of the multiple identities and complex lives that individuals lead.

The women doctoral students in my study had connected with an advisor who guided them through a crucial time in their academic development. This guidance often proved to be a powerful tool for graduate student persistence. Persistence in Ph.D. programs has historically been a problem. Golde (2000) reminded us that the most academically capable students are in danger of not completing the degree. Many researchers have discussed the ABD phenomenon (Damrosch, 1995; Golde, 2000; Williams, 1997), and reported that mentoring may be an important tool in countering stagnation or attrition at the dissertation stage. Two of the women students in my study specifically said that their mentor was the reason that they persisted when they were in danger of dropping. Several others also commented that they knew the journey would have taken longer had they not connected with their mentor.

Although none of the students entered into their advising relationships with the expectation of that they would evolve into mentoring relationships, all of them reported that those relationships became meaningful and important in their completion of the degree. Finally, all of the women doctoral students in my study agreed that their mentoring relationships have provided them with necessary tools that will continue to help them in their professional and personal lives.
Problems

Three problems or barriers to the dissertation process were: communication/differing perspectives, time, and negotiating friendship. For some participants in my study, the difficulties that arose from mentoring interactions involved a "working out" period that eventually made the relationship stronger. Still, other problems were not resolved, but did not change the dynamic of the mentoring relationship.

Previous literature has identified drawbacks and negative effects of mentoring women. Some of those are: sexual involvement and harassment, discrimination, advisor plagiarism, stereotyping, and power issues. Although the women graduates in my study did not report mentoring problems that had been identified in the research, some women advisors reported that they had experienced some of the barriers identified in the literature.

Finally, negotiating friendship was, by far, the most difficult part of the mentoring relationship for the participants in my study. The literature talked about friendship and collegiality as being a by-product of the mentoring relationship. Although my participants felt their relationships were powerful in helping them negotiate the doctoral process, many had problems describing their type of bond. None of my participants had reached Johnsrud's (1991) interdependent stage of mentoring, where the relationship evolves into reciprocal roles of supportive colleagues. As stated earlier, this may be because the students are relatively new Ph.D.'s.

However, advisors who reported having a mentor stated that they still received advice and support from their mentors, but did not consider them friends. Although the
students still sought professional advice from their mentors, they still respected the professional distance that their advisors conditioned them to throughout their doctoral program. It is important to note that Johnsrud (1991) does posit that the interdependent stage where “individuals have the ability to fulfill for one another the yearning for connectedness and the yearning for identity” (p. 15), is rare within the academy.

**Difference**

**Age**

Two categories of difference that I explored were age and gender. Perceptions about age varied among participants in my study. Although the “traditional” mentor is generally older and more experienced than the mentee (Anderson, Dey, Gray, & Thomas, 1995; Bruce, 1995), some students in this study entered into mentoring relationships with advisors who were younger, and/or not very experienced as faculty members. However, these disruptions of “traditional” roles of age and experience were not perceived by participants as having negative impacts. In fact, two students reported that their advisors’ non-traditional role in the mentoring dynamic was an important factor in their decision to chose those advisors.

Further, perceptions of age differences intersected with gender through women students’ perceptions of their mentors as mothers and advisors’ perceptions of themselves as “mother” or “father” figures. Heinrich (1995), in her study of doctoral advising relationships between women, found that women often described their relationships in terms of their own feelings about their parents. She stated:
Participants' responses fell into two groups, those with: (1) supportive relationships with female or male advisors who reminded them of supportive parenting figures, or (2) conflictual relationships with female advisors reminiscent of difficult relationships with mothers (p. 456).

The students and advisors in my study who described their relationships in familial terms may make sense of, and act in their mentoring relationships based on their own roles in their family units.

Gender

In exploring gender differences, I found that many participants had difficulty expressing gender issues. This was especially true of the male professors in the study who could only give examples of safety issues when asked if there were differences in the ways they mentored females and males. Christian discussed how he recommended his female student to bring a friend for protection when they had to go to the lab after hours or at night. Chad also stated that he would do "physical" work for women that he would allow men to do on their own. Both men explained that they followed these practices because they were concerned for the women's safety.

Further, when Chad talked about Ashlyn coming to him about their communication problem, he stated that male students would probably not be able to approach advisors with problems they were having because "our culture and society sends messages to males that it's not okay to be weak." Kronik (1991) states: "It's extremely difficult to transplant yourself into the psyche of the other and dangerous to determine what might be best for someone whose gender sensitivities and obligations aren't the same as yours" (p. 25).
When explored through a feminist lens, some of the understandings and explanations provided by participants illustrate how individuals may reproduce and reinforce hierarchical and/or patriarchal norms that may affect women in negative ways. First, defining mentoring relationships in familial terms can be dangerous because traditional family roles place men in dominant positions over females. Second, male professors’ roles of protector of women, as described by both Christian and Chad, may actually work to limit women’s participation and may be unconsciously interpreted by women students as their mentors’ lack of trust or confidence in her ability to “do it on her own.” Finally, Chad’s comment about society’s disapproval of weakness in males illustrates how individuals are shaped and socialized to certain roles. Chad’s comment brings many questions to mind. If we send out the message to women that it is okay to be weak and need help, does this teach women that they are weak? Also, if we send messages to men that it is not okay to be weak, does this teach men that they must be confident? What happens to men who are not confident in their abilities, but do not feel comfortable enough to ask for help because it “wrong” for them to be weak?

Because society has not yet been transformed to one of equality between women and men, some important points made in my study regarding gender are: women students need to become confident in their abilities as students and professionals; women student cohort groups may be important in filling in the “gaps” of mentoring needs; and there is a need to change in societal views of women’s roles. Hulbert (1994) reports that “a woman graduate student is often doubtful of her academic ability in
graduate school, unsure of whether she should be in graduate school and concerned about the possible conflicts with her other roles and responsibilities” (p. 257). Also, in my study, the explanations that both women students and advisors expressed about the importance of confidence building indicates that some women may need to be mentored even before they begin the doctoral process. In fact, two students discussed how a mentor convinced them that they were smart enough to actually pursue the Ph.D. If this hold true for others, then how many women who have the potential to obtain the Ph.D. may not attempt it because they do not have confidence in their own abilities?

Next, women in my study discussed forming cohort groups with other women students in their fields. In current mentoring literature, some researchers who draw attention to the lack of mentors for women suggests that women should find other avenues of support such as peer mentoring (Bizzari, 1995; Dickey, 1996). However, Johnsrud (1991) suggests that by examining power relations in mentoring relationships, mentors of women can learn to effectively mentor women through the student/advisor role. For these relationships have the potential to yield greater benefits.

Finally, there needs to be a change in how society views and values women’s roles. Many pieces of current literature report that women are viewed as nurturers, whereas men are viewed as achievement-oriented (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1987; Hulbert, 1994). Therefore, women advisors are often sought out to fulfill nurturing roles for their students. Stalker (1994) reports:
In terms of personal relationships, women who establish sensitive, caring and concerned personal relationships with their mentors risk confirming views of themselves as located primarily within the women’s culture, rather than within the male academic culture. In that environment, such caring relationships are associated with increased professional and political vulnerability (p. 369).

Because of these reasons some advisors in my study resist societal views of them as nurturers. These advisors do not view themselves or want others to view them as “mothers.” Therefore, they take specific stances and engage in practices that work to dispel the “nurturing” stigma.

Conversely, some women advisors describe themselves in terms of “mother,” and even though they are aware that others may not value their work, these advisors continue on with their practices because they know that they make a difference in the lives of other women. Although not all women want to be viewed as nurturers, some women advisors realize that women students do need nurturing, especially at the start of the doctoral process.

In order that work that is often crucial to the advancement of women and other traditionally marginalized individuals can continue, educational institutions need to find ways to value women’s needs and strengths in academic settings. This can be accomplished through providing reward and recognition for teaching, counseling, and mentoring—roles that women enjoy more and/or are relegated to.

Conclusions

The conclusions resulting from the findings in this study are summarized as follows:
Entering Into the Mentoring Relationship

1. All of the women students participating in my study had meaningful mentoring relationships, but several women who were initially contacted reported that their experiences had not been positive or meaningful.

2. All the women students who chose women advisors had previous classroom and/or work interactions with their mentors. Both women who chose men had not had any previous interactions with them, but had similar research interests as their advisors.

3. Although women students found other women advisors to connect with, both students and advisors discussed lack of women to fill mentoring roles for women in the social science field, humanities field, Oceanography and Coastal Studies, and Communication Science and Disorders.

4. Only women advisors in the feminized fields in humanities and education had chaired a male dissertation committee.

5. Only one woman stated that her advisor’s gender was a determining factor for choosing her as an advisor.

Participants’ Needs and Desires

1. Participants reported having similar personalities and described similar understandings of the mentoring process as their mentoring partner.

2. Support in the form of sponsoring, exposure and visibility, coaching, protection, and, sometimes, counseling were very important factors in the development of the mentoring relationship.
3. Dedication on the part of both participants in the mentoring dynamic was both respected and also a requirement for the development of the mentoring relationship.

Benefits and Problems

1. Graduate women’s satisfaction with their mentors was important in their overall satisfaction of the program.

2. Graduate women and their advisors experienced professional growth through mentoring relationships.

3. Graduate women reported that many of the professional interactions that their advisors helped them become involved with were never introduced by any other faculty members they encountered.

4. Two women graduate students attributed their mentoring relationship as being important in their continued persistence in the program.

5. Some students and advisors had problems with communication or differing perspectives, but were able to either work through them or understand where their partner was coming from.

6. The amount of time required of each participant weighed heavily on other professional and personal responsibilities.

7. Negotiating friendships was difficult and continues to be difficult even after completion of the degree.
Difference

1. Some students and advisors described their mentoring relationships in parental or familial terms such as mother/daughter and father/daughter. However, at times, only one side of the mentoring pair described the relationship in those terms.

2. Advisor and students both agreed that age differences were not a problem, but served as a determinant in the types of needs women graduate students had.

3. Overall, graduate women did not perceive that the age differences between themselves and their advisors had a significant impact on the mentoring relationship.

4. Although age and gender issues were discussed and sometimes identified, overall, participants had difficulties naming those differences.

5. Women students sometimes reported that gender did not have an impact on their mentoring relationships, but then provided examples of gender effects. Also, one woman student who had a male advisor stated that she knew having a woman would have been different, but could not explain how.

6. Many women graduate students reported that they had a cohort of other women peers who supported one another through the process.

7. Women faculty members stated that building confidence in women students was an important gender issue.
8. Many of the women advisors were either feminists or had gained significant insight of how to negotiate their environments as women. They were well aware of gender issues that affected their everyday lives. Although, these women taught their students how to navigate their environments, they did not always discuss identity issues with their students.

**Limitations**

Through choosing a qualitative style of research, limitations were expected. A small purposive sample, located in one university was employed in conducting this research. However, this feminist, phenomenological approach provides narration of the lived experiences of both women doctoral students and their advisors.

Because the study included a small sample size and located in one region, the results are not generalizable, but offer explanations and example of powerful mentoring interactions. However, there are ethical issues that should be taken into account when reading and analyzing the lives of the women in my study.

First, because the process involved conversations between humans, the interview data could have been misstated by the interviewee or misinterpreted by the interviewer. The state of mind of the interview participants, the informal sequencing of questions, timing, and interview environment could possibly have elicited responses that may have differed otherwise. Also, because most of the interview information involved retrospective accounts, students and advisors may not have correctly remembered particular events.
Second, I may have misinterpreted the data or may have been biased in my interpretations. Although participants were allowed to view their transcripts and texts, three of the advisors did not provide feedback regarding the interview process. For them, the narration was based upon my interpretations of the accounts, without clarification from the participant. Also, because of past experiences with my own mentoring relationship, I may have interpreted the data through my own perspective. However, early in the interview process, through the interview that did not appear in this study I gained some awareness and understanding of how important it was to allow participants to tell their own story, even if it was not what I wanted to hear.

Finally, confidentiality was an issue in my study. Because I wanted to interview both doctoral students and their advisors about their mentoring interactions, it was impossible to keep interviews with the women doctoral student and their advisors confidential. Each knew that the other was participating in the study and would be discussing their relationship. Some participants therefore may not have revealed important information regarding the mentoring dynamic in which they were involved.

Recommendations

This dissertation research contributes to knowledge in higher education by providing a lens from which we may begin to learn about the needs, desires, benefits, and problems that result from mentoring women doctoral students. However, more research is needed to broaden the scope of my findings. Future research may be able to provide more pieces of knowledge that will benefit all participants in the mentoring process.
Future research is needed about women students who persist and complete the degree but do not report having meaningful mentoring experiences. More qualitative accounts of women’s negative experiences are needed so that we may learn and gain insight from them. There are many women who have these stories to tell.

Next, future research can focus on the graduate student experience from start of the Ph.D. program to finish. This type of research would have the potential to provide significant insight in much more powerful ways. Participants could be asked to keep a journal. Additionally, interviews could be conducted periodically to obtain participant perspective throughout the entire Ph.D. process.

Also of importance and in need of study are the doctoral relationships of women of color and women who are disabled. Because these women experience more than one form of marginalization, studies that focus on their populations may provide different insight than the findings in this research.

Finally, a large-scale qualitative study of both males and female students may reveal more insight into gender issues in the mentoring relationship. Also, regarding gender, it would be interesting to learn about the mentoring experiences of male students with female advisors in both feminized and non-feminized fields of study.

**Implications**

I hope that my audience will be graduate professors, women graduate students, and administrators. Administrators and graduate professors may find the information provided by the women doctoral students, as well as their colleagues, useful in their
mentoring situations. Graduate women who read this study may have more
information about selecting a major professor.

**Graduate Advisors**

Evidence from this study suggests that faculty members who advise graduates
could take steps to ensure that their advising relationships are meaningful. Faculty
members could start by providing an orientation to doctoral students regarding the
doctoral process and the importance of choosing a compatible advisor. Students need
to know that an advisor "being an expert" in their research area may not be as
important as having a compatible personality. Also, faculty members can teach
students how to be more proactive in choosing their advisor and committee members.

Further, faculty members could give more attention to formal and informal
interactions both inside and outside the classroom with their students. All of the
women students in my study who chose women advisors stated that their choice of
advisor was based on a previous relationship. As such, women faculty members should
increase their awareness of how others view them and their actions.

Finally, new faculty members should take steps to determine whether a student is
compatible with them before agreeing to chair the dissertation. The advisor should
clearly discuss their expectations with the student and learn about the student's
expectations prior to agreeing to chair the committee.

**Women Doctoral Students**

Based on the findings of this research, women doctoral students can enjoy a more
rewarding doctoral experience by assessing their expectations, as well as the
expectations of potential advisors. Through assessing their needs and desires, graduate women can look for advisors who can fill those roles. Also, if students do not have faculty members who teach them about the dissertation process, they may want to request a meeting with a professor to discuss those issues.

Further, early on in the doctoral process, women students should seek out and form a cohort with other women who will be supportive throughout the dissertation process. A cohort of peers provides powerful assistance to the student through: teaching about rules, policies, and politics of the program and department; giving a student differing perspectives on faculty members in their field; providing help with writing and other assignments; participating in peer counseling; and forging new friendships.

Finally, based on the results of my study, students may hold the key to their own mentoring interactions. Advisors in my study explained to me that some students need mentoring, while others do not. In this study, student participants often played a mutual part in defining how far their relationships would progress. However, for students to receive mentoring, they must want mentoring and not just advising. Most importantly, they must choose advisors who are willing to provide mentoring.

Administrators

Administrators need to consider the findings from this study as well as others that have provided insight on the importance of mentoring women doctoral students. All of the women in my study indicated that they had participated in meaningful mentoring relationships with their advisors. Two of those relationships were powerful
determinants in the persistence of individuals. From these results administrators should realize that faculty members may need more information about the importance of mentoring. Also, administrators should implement policies that reward faculty members who mentor well.

Administrators can implement training programs for both faculty members and students so that they may learn about the mentoring process. Through these training programs, faculty members can learn effective mentoring skills and about the time and commitment required in developing and maintaining mentoring relationships.

Finally, administrators may consider new alternatives of rewarding faculty members for excellent mentoring. Although they are not usually recognized for their mentoring efforts, faculty members stated that they knew that it was an important and crucial function for doctoral students.

In summary, faculty advisors, women graduate students, and administrators need to increase their knowledge about the implications that mentoring can have on doctoral students. Through taking steps to learn about and helping to forge meaningful mentoring relationships, many more women may begin to experience the critical connections that could make a difference in their educational experiences.

**Reflections on Feminist Research**

I chose to do this research because I believed, through conversations and reading about other women's stories, that mentoring could have a powerful impact on graduate women's experiences. When deciding what methodology I wanted to use, I was quickly drawn to the idea of "doing feminist research." I believed that women had
had stories to tell about the mentoring process that needed to be heard through ways that were different than traditional research methods. Through this research agenda, I wanted to expand my own conceptualization about women's meaningful mentoring relationships.

I started my journey by fervently trying to find the rules and steps that one took to carry out a feminist project. I soon learned that there were no set rules or guidelines to be followed in feminist research. I, like other feminist researchers, would have to reflect on the tenets of feminism that others have found useful and decide, as my professor continually reminded me, “what makes sense.” However, I also knew that I had to complete a study that would be considered “good” research by the academic community.

Fortunately, my committee members led me to some very helpful resources. I learned about the possibilities and problems faced by other feminist researchers (Bloom, 1998; Fine, 1994; Kirsch, 1999; Munro, 1998; Ropers-Huilman, 1998). Throughout the interview and writing process, I found that other feminist work not only provided me with useful tools and understandings about feminist research, but also helped me cope with the tensions of doing feminist research.

For example, feminist researchers have discussed the need to engage in conversational studies that lead to friendship or continued connections after the research is complete. I knew that all of the women in my study had busy lives. I worried about not becoming connected to my research participants on a deeper level after the process was over. However, after reading Bloom’s (1998) work, I was
comforted to know that it was okay if I did not “connect” with all my research participants. In fact, phenomenological research calls for researcher silence. Although these feminist and phenomenological tenets are in tension with one another, Bloom’s accounts about her own research taught me that employing both feminist and phenomenological techniques can help strengthen the project. For some participants in my study, the feminist conversational style worked. In others, the participants guided their own way and it did not feel like my conversation or my experiences belonged in the process.

Representation of research participants was another source of tension in feminist research that has been widely written about in the feminist research arena (Fine, 1994; Munro, 1998; Ropers-Huilman, 1998). I learned from my readings that the idea of letting silent voices be heard can be problematic. I also learned that I should make explicit my role as researcher, that I should not engage in romanticizing my participants’ stories, and that I should not expect or represent my participants’ stories as interpretations of group behavior. Munro’s (1998) reflections about her feminist research and the possibility of research not having conclusions but being a process of reflection and learning about experiences helped me to realize that it would be okay if my participants did not have a similar stories to tell—just as long as I let their stories be heard for better or worse.

As I began my research, I tried to think about Reinharz’s advice about voices. I considered myself as having “examined the power dynamics of the space and the social actors” by allowing the participants to choose their own “safe places” to conduct
the research (as cited in Fine, 1994, p. 20). I reflected on the power dynamics that were inherent in the advisor/mentor and student/mentee mentoring relationship. However, I did not reflect on the power dynamics that came into play in the research process until after the research was complete. I realized that my own unconscious conceptualizations about power in relation to my participants and myself played a part in my decision about the order of interviewing within each pair and in my treatment of the individuals (calling the advisor’s “Dr.” and postdoctoral students by the first names). After my interviews were complete, I examined and wrote about my role in the research process and the role that power played in the process.

Reinharz (as cited in Fine, 1994) also discussed the need to “be willing to hear what someone is saying, even when it violates your expectations or threatens our interests” (p. 21). I remember sitting in the coffee shop listening to one potential participant tell about her mentoring experiences. My initial thoughts were, “Wow. How could this woman think that her advisor was a mentor?” I realized though, that this was her story and her reality. My criteria for student participants in my research was that they believed their advisor had a significantly positive impact on their doctoral experiences. Prior to meeting the woman, she told me, “Yes, my advisor was a mentor to me.” I learned from my interactions with her, that other women’s stories were not necessarily going to be my story, but their mentoring stories were just as important to them as mine was to me.

Finally, Fine (1994) warned that feminist researchers needed to resist “translating for” rather than “with” women (p. 21). Some researchers suggest allowing participants
to have a say in the authoring of their own stories and lives (Fine, 1994; Ropers-Huilman, 2000). After I wrote the texts about participants, I sent each individual a copy of the text I had written about them and their mentoring partner. I asked the participants to review, to comment, and to clarify details—I was engaging in feminist research. However, my decision to allow research participants to have power over their texts was not an easy decision. Not only did I worry about “losing” important text, I worried about how the participants felt about my interpretations of their lives. Also, for a few participants, I worried about how their partner would react to certain text.

Although I did not “lose” important text in the end, my decision to give participants power over their texts was a source of deep discussion in my defense. Questions that my committee and I pondered were: Is this practice too risky—what would I have done if I had lost, what I thought was important text? When we allow participants to have power over texts, when does it stop being our project? On the other hand, does engaging in this process allow us to uncover more truth and reality? A good example in my research was the woman who wanted her comments about being a professional mother deleted because she said that was not really how she felt.

As I approached the end of this project, I realized that engaging in feminist research is often difficult. However, I have learned that feminist research is not impossible and is necessary if we want to include the stories and experiences of individuals who have not been heard. Even though feminist methodology does not come easily and without tensions, engaging in feminist research projects are important because they may enlighten, incite, and transform the lives of many.
REFERENCES


Graduate Profile Questionnaire (GPQ)

Please tell me the following information about yourself by checking the appropriate boxes that apply to you:

1. Age during the dissertation process. □ 20-25 □ 26-35 □ 36-45 □ 46-55 □ 56-65

2. Marital/partner status during the dissertation process?
   □ Single □ Living With □ Married □ Divorced

3. Were you raising children during your dissertation process? □ Yes □ No
   If yes, how many children? ____________

4. Ethnicity: □ Native American □ Asian American □ Caucasian American □ African American □ Mexican American □ Multi-Ethnic □ Other - Please Specify ________________

5. In what year did you first enroll in your doctoral program? ____________

6. Have you graduated from the doctoral program? □ Yes, Year _____ □ No

7. What is/was your area of study? __________________________________

8. Have you done graduate studies at other universities? (Check all that apply)
   □ No □ Yes, same field □ Yes, different fields

9. During the dissertation process, about how many hours per week did you work on the dissertation? □ 10 or less □ 11-20 □ 21-30 □ 31-40 □ over 40 hours

10. Were you employed during the dissertation process? □ Yes □ No

   If Yes:
   a) Full-time In: □ Graduate Assistantship
      □ Research Assistantship
      □ Off campus work related to field of study
      □ Off campus work not related to the study
      □ Combination of on/off campus
   b) Part-time
   b) About how many hours each week did you work?
      □ 10 or less □ 11-20 □ 21-30 □ 31-40 □ over 40

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11. Were there financial hardships during your doctoral study? □ Yes □ No
   If yes, please explain: ________________________________

12. What kind of position did you hope to obtain after completing your doctoral degree?
   □ Graduate fellowship
   □ Teaching or administration in elementary/secondary school
   □ Teaching in junior college
   □ Teaching in a 4-year college
   □ University teaching and research
   □ Executive position at a university (administrator, vice president, dean)
   □ Self-employed professional practice
   □ Research in industry or nonprofit organization
   □ Other (Please specify) ________________________________________

Please return this Graduate Profile Questionnaire along with your consent form to the researcher at your scheduled interview session. When we meet our interview will cover the following:

✔ Key events/elements in your personal and professional life during your doctoral experience

✔ Reflections on your experiences and interactions with your advisor

Thank you
Semi-structured Interview Questions for Graduate Women

Phase I: Informal

In their first phase of the interview, participants will be requested to identify key events in their personal and professional lives during their doctoral years. In addition, interviewees will be asked to freely discuss their experiences and interactions with their dissertation chairperson. This exercise will give both interviewer and interviewees a direction for the interview, and prepare participants for Phase II of the interview.

Phase II: Question Areas

1. How did you decide who would be your dissertation chairperson during your dissertation phase of doctoral study?

2. Did the dissertation chairperson’s gender play and part in your decision of who would be your dissertation chairperson?

3. What kinds of interactions did you have with your dissertation chairperson prior to starting the dissertation process?

4. What expectations did you have concerning how your dissertation chairperson would facilitate the dissertation process prior to your entry into the dissertation phase of doctoral study?

5. How would you describe your interactions with your dissertation chairperson during the dissertation process?

6. How have these student-faculty interactions affected your doctoral satisfaction?

7. Describe how your dissertation chairperson treated you during the dissertation process.

8. How has your dissertation chairperson’s treatment of you affect your dissertation completion?

9. In what specific ways was your dissertation chairperson accessible to you?

10. How did your dissertation chairperson’s accessibility affect your dissertation completion?
11. In what ways has your dissertation chairperson helped you to become a professional?

12. How did being the same gender as your chairperson affect your interactions with her?

13. How did being the same gender as your dissertation chairperson affect your satisfaction with the doctoral process?

14. How would you describe your dissertation chairperson’s mentoring relationships during the dissertation process?

15. What are other issues that you have discussed with your dissertation chairperson besides your dissertation topic and process (i.e. personal or work-related issues)? How did you feel about exploring these issues with her?

16. What are the things that you desire most out your mentoring relationship?

17. What do you believe your mentor desires out of the mentoring relationship?

18. Do you believe that you mentor benefitted from the relationship. If so, how?

19. Anything else you would like to comment on about how your dissertation chairperson influenced your completion of the doctoral degree?

20. Does your advisor ever engage in sponsoring activities with you? If so, in what ways?

21. Does your advisor provide exposure and visibility to you? If so, how?

22. Does your advisor coach you by teaching you unwritten rules?

23. Does your advisor ever protect you? If so, how?

24. Does your advisor give you challenging assignments (other than the dissertation)?

25. Do you see your advisor as a role model?

26. Does your advisor show, through words and action, that she/he views you as a professional? How?
27. Does your advisor ever counsel you either personally or professionally? If so, how?

28. Do you consider yourself friends with your advisor?

29. Any other comments on your mentoring experience?
Advisor Profile Questionnaire (APQ)

Please tell me the following information about yourself by checking the appropriate boxes that apply to you:


2. How many years have you been a faculty member? ____________________

3. Department ______________________________________________________

4. Rank/Title: ______________________________________________________

5. Are you tenured? □ Yes □ No


7. How many doctoral committees have you chaired? ______________

8. How many doctoral committees have you served on as a committee member? _____________

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Semi-structured Interview Questions for Advisors

Phase I: Informal

In their first phase of the interview, participants will be requested to identify key events in their personal and professional lives as faculty members. In addition, interviewees will be asked to freely discuss their experiences and interactions with their doctoral students. This exercise will give both interviewer and interviewees a direction for the interview, and prepare participants for Phase II of the interview.

Phase II: Question Areas

1. How do you define mentoring?

2. How do you decide which students' dissertations you will chair?

3. What kinds of interactions do you engage in with your doctoral students prior to the dissertation process?

4. What expectations do you have of your doctoral students? How do you express those expectations to your students?

5. What do you think that your students expect from you as a dissertation chair?

6. How would you describe your interactions with your student during the dissertation process?

7. How do these interactions affect your faculty position? (Both positive and negative ways)

8. How does your department/university reward your advising positions?

9. In what specific ways were you accessible to your students?

10. Do your male and female students approach or manage the dissertation process in the same ways.

11. Do you find that female students have different needs than males throughout the dissertation process? If so, what are the differences? If not, what are student needs in general?

12. Do you believe that age plays a part in the mentoring process? If so, how?
13. Do you advise males and females in different ways?

14. What do you believe is the difference between advising and mentoring?

15. What are the greatest difficulties that result from the dissertation chairing process?

16. What do you enjoy most when advising students?

17. What other interactions besides dissertation help do you engage in with your students?

18. What are the things that you desire most out your mentoring relationship?

19. How do you benefit from mentoring relationships?

20. What do you believe are the main reasons that doctoral students do not complete the dissertation?

21. Have you ever decided to step down as a committee chair? If so, for what reasons?

22. Did you have a mentoring relationship with your dissertation chairperson?

23. Were there any gender issues in the relationship with your dissertation chairperson?

24. What mentoring/advising interactions did you have with your dissertation chair that you continue with your students?

25. What interactions did you have with your chair that you do not engage in with your students and why?

26. Anything else you would like to comment on about how your dissertation chairperson influenced your ability to chair dissertation committees?

27. Do you engage sponsoring activities with your students? If so, in what ways?

28. Do you provide exposure and visibility for your students? If so, how?

29. Do you coach your students by teaching them unwritten rules?

30. Do you ever need to protect your students? If so, how?
31. Do you give your students challenging assignments (other than the dissertation)?

32. Do you believe that you are a role model to your students?

33. Do you show students that you accept them as professionals? How?

34. Do you ever counsel your students either personally or professionally? If so, how?

35. Do you consider yourself a friend to your students?

36. Any other comments on your doctoral students?
APPENDIX B

SUBJECT CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION
Subject Consent Form for Participation of Human Subjects in Research
Louisiana State University

Project Title: Critical Connections: Meaningful Mentoring Relationships Between Women Doctoral Students and Their Dissertation Chairpersons

Investigator: The following investigator is available for questions about this study, Monday - Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Dawn Wallace (504) 549-5982 dwallace@selu.edu

Advisor: Dr. Becky Ropers-Huilman (225) 388-2892 broper1@lsu.edu

The purpose of this study is to examine the mentoring relationships between women doctoral students and their advisors. All participants in this study will be either women doctoral students nearing degree completion, recent graduates, or dissertation advisors. Participants in the study will be asked to complete either a Graduate Profile Questionnaire or Advisor Profile Questionnaire and to participate in semi-structured interviews which will be approximately 45 minutes in length. For clarification purposes, a second interview for a shorter time period may be requested.

The interviews will be audio taped and non-verbal observations will be recorded by the researcher. However, participant results will remain strictly confidential. Risks to participants are minimal since all data will be numerically coded in order to protect anonymity. Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. As a result of participation graduate women and advisors will have the opportunity to share their dissertation experiences. Results of this study may be published, but no names of identifying information will be included in the publication.

AUTHORIZATION: This study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator or advisor listed above. If I have any questions about subjects’ rights or other concerns, I can contact Charles E. Graham, Institutional Review Board, (225) 388-1492. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator’s obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Participant’s Signature __________________________ Date ____________

Investigator’s Signature __________________________ Date ____________

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VITA

Dawn Wallace is a 1991 graduate of Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond. She holds a bachelor of science degree in accounting. In 1991, she enrolled in the master's program in business administration at Southeastern Louisiana University. Dawn then entered the doctoral educational leadership and research program (higher education concentration) at Louisiana State University in 1996. Since August, 2000 she has been employed in the position of Assistant Professor in the Department of General Business at Southeastern Louisiana University. In addition to studying mentoring at the doctoral level, she has completed studies of undergraduate students and high school students participating in formal mentoring programs.
Candidate:  Dawn Deann Wallace

Major Field:  Educational Leadership and Research

Title of Dissertation:  Critical Connections: Meaningful Mentoring Relationships Between Women Doctoral Students and Their Dissertation Chairpersons

Approved:

R. Rogers Hulman
Major Professor and Chairman

J. Melvin Keehin
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Petra Munro

Richard Jones

Jim Kim

Peggy W. Frensham

Date of Examination:

October 31, 2000