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WHY AM I HERE? EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN

PURPOSE AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT OF FIRST-GENERATION DOCTORAL

STUDENTS

Lily Jenkins

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

Higher Education Leadership

College of Professional Studies and Advancement

National Louis University

September, 2019

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PURPOSE AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT OF FIRST-GENERATION DOCTORAL
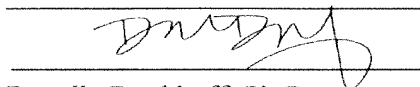STUDENTS

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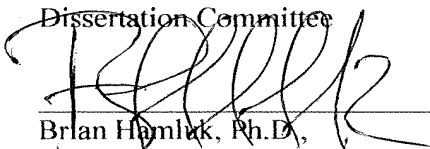
Higher Education Leadership

Approved:

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Karen O'Donnell, Ph.D.

Chair, Dissertation Committee

_____

Danelle Dyckhoff, Ph.D.,
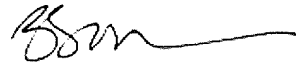
Dissertation Committee

_____

Brian Hamluk, Ph.D.,

Member, Dissertation Committee

_____

Nathanial Cradit, Ph.D.

Program Director

_____

Bettyjo Bouchey, Ed.D.

Member, Dissertation Committee

August 30, 2019

_____

Date Approved

Abstract

Approximately 24% of the college population is comprised on first-generation students, yet they continue to deal with significant challenges when completing their degrees. Research has been done on first-generation student characteristics, challenges, and existing support programs; however, their personal evolution and success in academic achievement and career development once support mechanisms are in place has not been adequately studied. This qualitative study utilized a transcendental phenomenological research design to explore the influence of purpose on degree completion and career advancement of first-generation doctoral students. The study examined the experiences of 14 first-generation doctoral students to find qualities that led to a strong sense of purpose for degree completion and career advancement. The goal of this study was to research how first-generation doctoral students embrace purpose as a resource for achieving educational goals and career advancement. Careful attention was taken to preserve the integrity of self-determination theory (SDT), which was the theoretical framework used to examine the role purpose played in degree completion and career advancement. A major finding in the study was that all participants had a different definition of purpose, which translated into three meaning making units (design, direction, and development) that participants used to focus their attitudes and behaviors toward their goals. When it came time to leverage that sense of purpose, all participants engaged in meaning making to strengthen their resolve to complete their degrees and career choices. Student development professionals could innovate new ways to incorporate the development of purpose in the learning experience by creating a community of purpose where first-generation doctoral students could synthesize their career interests with a strong sense of purpose.

Keywords: first-generation, purpose, qualitative research, phenomenology

Acknowledgements

I could not have completed such an accomplishment as a doctorate degree without the people in my life that mean the most. Any achievement of this magnitude has to be accomplished with a strong support team that is willing to tough it out with you through the highs and lows, times when one would want to give up and quit, and occasions when the house may not get cleaned or food cooked to feed the family. It was through the love and support of my husband, Donald, and my daughter, Asia Denise, that got me through.

Donald, from day one, you told me that you would support me with your faith. You told me that anything I wanted to do in life with you, you would be there for me and never stand in my way in accomplishing it. You were honest and completely faithful to the process. For that, I thank you. Your wisdom and guidance through the process helped me many days, and I could not have done this, I believe, without you. I love you.

Asia, you were truly my help over these past few years. What I could not do because of all the reading I had to do and the papers I had to write, you did, and you never complained. Sometimes I feel like I have sacrificed so much, because it seems that in a short amount of time, you have grown into a beautiful young lady. However, I want to you to know that I did this not just for me, but for you. I wanted you to know that if your mother could do it, you could do it, too. I have always told you I do not want you to be me, but be better than me. Now, you do not have to get a doctorate degree to prove your betterment; just be the best you can be in the manner you know how. That way, you will not have to worry about whether I am pleased with your accomplishments; you will be pleased, too! I love you.

Finally, I want to say thank you to my dissertation committee for your assistance through this process. I have completed a major milestone because of you. My dissertation chair, Dr.

Karen O'Donnell, from day one, you were a light to me in my search for a doctoral program and school I could be proud to say I completed. You were not only my chair and professor, but now my colleague and friend. Thank you for encouraging me, allowing me to vent, and keeping it real with me, every step of the way. Thank you also to Dr. BettyJo Bouchey and Dr. Brian Hamluk for your tough rhetoric and steadfast commitment to my successful dissertation completion. Also, I want to say thank you to Dr. Danelle Dyckhoff-Stelzriede. Because of my short stint at Kennesaw State University as an adjunct professor, I was able to be connected to you through email, and I must say that was the best connection that was ever made. Because of you and your commitment to first-generation students (also being one like myself), your guidance allowed my study to be shaped in ways that gave me a clearer path to apply my research towards first-generation doctoral students. I appreciate you very much!

Dedication

To my grandmother, the late Mrs. Doretha Brown Hooker. You may have been my maternal grandmother, but on paper and in my heart, you were my mother. Because of you and your drive to not only want me to attend college and complete a degree, but also to go as high as I could go so that I would not have to depend of anyone to meet my needs, I have achieved the highest level of education possible, a doctoral degree in Education. I remember the pact we made together months before your passing. So many years have gone by and yet, I would always come back to what we had discussed. Well, after years of searching and planning to go back, I finally decided to take this journey, and I knew that once I had finished, I would dedicate this long-awaited moment to you. Thank you for instilling in me how to be a strong woman who does not mind asking questions, will not take no for an answer, and will persevere through any obstacle to get to the finish line of my endeavors. I did it, momma! Your spirit is forever present in my life, and I hope you are pleased with my accomplishment. I love and miss you very much.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to identify the role purpose plays in first-generation doctoral students' degree completion and career advancement. Nikos Mourkogiannis (2006), author of the book *Purpose: The Starting Point of Great Companies*, stated, "Purpose is the primary source for achievement. Most stories about wealth creation and success are far easier to understand when we recognize the part that purpose has played" (p. vi). This study sought to build evidence that purpose is a primary source for achievement for first-generation doctoral students in their quests for degree completion and career advancement. The transcendental phenomenological method explores what Jack Canfield, America's number one success coach, and Dr. Peter Chee, CEO of ITD World, stated about the active role of purpose in achievement. In the book, *Coaching for Breakthrough Success*, both stated, "When people are clear about their purpose of being in this world, their life takes on higher meaning. They can see more clearly the overall direction that they are taking and can align their vision and goals to their purpose" (2013, p. 219). Through the lived experiences of first-generation doctoral students, personal evolution was examined to see how participants use purpose to align their visions and goals to their quests for degree completion and career advancement. Personal evolution reveals how first-generation doctoral students adjust their attitudes and behaviors to support their directions and overcome challenges in their quests for degree completion and career advancement (Greenstone & Looney, 2012). The adjustment of attitudes and behaviors accentuates the meaning making process to identify how first-generation doctoral students used purpose as a resource for degree completion and career advancement.

Problem Statement

The study of purpose as a resource identifies how participants used their meaning making abilities to aid in their personal evolution and motivation. As discussed in the literature review, research has been done on first-generation student characteristics, challenges, and existing support programs. What was not adequately represented in the research is the personal evolution and successes that first-generation doctoral students experience once support mechanisms are in place to motivate students for academic achievement and career advancement. Academic motivation is defined as a student's desire, effort, and persistence regarding academic subjects when the student's competence is "in connection with evaluated performance" (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953, p. 79). Many studies involving academic motivation suggest that motivated students, who have goals and direction, also exhibit an interest in academic activities, complete assignments on time, explore extra materials related to study topics, and perform well on class exams (Ames, 1992; Rawsthorne & Elliot, 1999; Van Etten, Pressely, McInerney, & Liem, 2008; Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006; Zimmerman, 2008). The studies showed that students can complete a task, but personal attributes that enable students to interact effectively with others and do work outside their degree sets remain unknown. These studies confirm LinkedIn's™ research of its members in 100 metropolitan areas to find the disparity between interpersonal skills and technical skills. LinkedIn™ found that there were more members who lacked interpersonal skills than technical skills like software coding (Selingo, 2018). Jeffery Selingo (2018), *The Washington Post* writer and best-selling author of the 2017 book, *There is Life After College*, stated in his article, "Forget coding. It's the soft skills, stupid…," that the degree showed students could finish a task, but one study revealed that

college graduates are looking for more than completing a task when it comes to career

advancement (Lovell Corporation, 2017; Mercurio, 2017).

By associating first-generation doctoral students' strong sense of purpose with

completing their degrees, this dissertation captures what students are looking for in career

advancement, and the study should compel higher education institutions to offer more resources

to help students synergize their coursework with a sense of purpose. This study contributes to the

body of knowledge regarding meaningful activity and appropriate support regarding challenges,

self-worth, and personal validation (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). This study showed

how first-generation doctoral students' strong sense of purpose can be developed to engage in

activities, overcome challenges, increase self-worth, and provide personal validation. To build

evidence that purpose is a primary source for first-generation doctoral students' quest for degree

completion and career advancement, this study was viewed through the lens of my personal

experience as a first-generation student as mentioned in my positionality statement.

Through my lived experience as a first-generation student, my sense of purpose became a

quality or state of consciousness I used to condition my character for personal evolution and

motivation. Purpose played a major role in completing my bachelor's degree, which is why I

wanted to see if there was a connection between purpose and motivation for doctoral student's

degree completion and career advancement. My strong sense of purpose in my educational

journey gave me a framework for creating a criterion for evaluating the role of purpose in

helping doctoral students align their attitudes and behaviors with degree completion and career

advancement. For years, purpose has been confined to a path or vocation, which leaves many

people confined to finding purpose in what they do for a living. However, this study explored the

extent to which purpose is an intuitive force that can be developed and used by everyone, instead of a select few who pursue purpose in what they do for a living.

The intuitive nature of purpose in regard to shaping attitudes and behaviors was explored to see what role purpose plays in first-generation doctoral student's academic and career pursuits. Regardless of the educational trajectory (bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree), all students who use the framework that leads to a strong sense of purpose may be able to identify steps that become milestones for advancing their careers. Students may be able to meet the demands for social responsibility by creating meaningful work experiences and understand purpose to be more than what they do in their career. When students can associate degree completion and career advancement with their personal transformations, they may be able to translate the work required to adjust attitudes and behaviors into a strong sense of purpose.

Existing research identified the characteristics and challenges of first-generation students, plus the many support programs that exist to help these students succeed (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Gardner, 2013; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Thayer, 2000). First-generation student challenges are discussed in the literature review and again later in Chapter 4 as the resistance that first-generation doctoral students had to face in their quests for obtaining their degrees. This study went one step further by exploring the role purpose plays in first-generation doctoral students' educational goals and career advancement. Researchers at the Brookings Institution, a non-profit research organization out of Washington, DC, revealed that the higher the education, the better the opportunities (Greenstone & Looney, 2012). The Brookings Institution's research coincided with a basic component for achievement that reveals in order to achieve more, one must undergo a personal evolution, which *New York Times* bestselling author, Ramit Sethi, confirmed in the online article, "To be Successful,

Focus on Your Personal Growth" (2017). The same should be true for first-generation

doctoral students.

Chapter 5 recommends that first-generation students be willing to undergo a personal

evolution to ensure that attitudes and behaviors align with academic goals and career

advancement. This study investigated the meaning making narratives that first-generation

doctoral students used to create a sense of purpose to drive academic pursuits. Once

discovered, the meaning making narratives may be used to help students create an action plan

for increasing the role purpose plays in career advancement. Instead of purpose being

confined to what first-generation doctoral students do in their career, they may be able to

interpret their senses of purpose as an instrument for improving their decisions, attitudes, and

behaviors. The passion that comes from purpose can be channeled into an action plan to help

them exercise control over their degrees of purpose. The degrees of purpose were seen in how

participants created an awareness of purpose in their lived experiences and used purpose as a

resource for evolving in their conscious thoughts. Controlling the degrees of purpose was also

seen in how participants took more responsibility in adding meaning to the challenges they

faced in their quests for degree completion.

Conceptual Framework

Research has many moving parts that can appear to be confusing for researchers and

readers if a solid basis (conceptual framework) was not present. A conceptual framework is

described as a set of broad ideas and principles taken from relevant fields of enquiry and used to

structure a subsequent presentation (Reichel & Ramey, 1987). A conceptual framework gives

researchers an infrastructure upon which to base their entire studies while also helping

researchers stay focused and aligned while informing the rest of the design (Gabriel, 2005;

Smyth, 2004). This transcendental phenomenological study applied the SDT framework in understanding how the lived experiences of first-generation doctoral students sustained a strong sense of purpose under all circumstances. The SDT is a theory of motivation based on how people grow and develop based on two distinct contexts: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Self-determination theory [SDT], 2017). The SDT model was used to identify the intentions of first-generation doctoral students in their quests for degree completion and career advancement. This model provides a solid foundation for analyzing participants' lived experiences to determine whether purpose was an influence in the evolution of consciousness and motivation of first-generation doctoral students.

Introduction to Methodology and Research Design

Creswell (2014) discussed three approaches to research (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods) that, depending on the research question, can provide an appropriate framework for a study. This qualitative study utilized a transcendental phenomenological research design to explore the influence of purpose on degree completion and career advancement of first-generation doctoral students. The study examined the lived experiences of first-generation doctoral students to find qualities that led to a strong sense of purpose for degree completion and career advancement. The targeted population was purposefully selected resulting in a sample of 14 first-generation doctoral students. Out of 50 first-generation doctoral students who went through the preliminary survey, 14 first-generation doctoral students from seven universities across the United States were subsequently invited to participate in the study. Twelve first-generation doctoral students were enrolled in non-profit universities located in the southeastern United States. One first-generation doctoral student was enrolled in a for-profit university located in the western United States. One first-generation doctoral student was enrolled at a for-

profit university located in the mid-western United States. I chose first-generation doctoral students, regardless of major and year in their respective programs. This group was chosen because according to the research, first-generation students face certain challenges that negatively impact their retention and graduation rates. This research could help students optimize the academic learning experience and expand the framework for career advancement through the sense of purpose.

Willis, Inman, and Valenti (2010) shared information on the types of traditional qualitative research methods used in doctoral studies. To gather the lived experiences of this sample group, I engaged in individual, open-ended interviews that allowed the participants to create a complete picture of how they developed their senses of purpose to achieve the highest level of education. I asked them their opinions and perspectives regarding their college journeys and what prompted each of them to pursue their respective degrees and continue to earn a doctoral degree. Various questions were asked regarding purpose, motivation, and career advancement. Interviews were then transcribed and sent through a Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method for phenomenological analysis (Moustakas, 1994). This method included horizontalization techniques of listing meanings, clustering themes, developing textural descriptions, and writing structured experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Limitations. The limitations of the study were traits in design or methodology that were beyond the control of the research, but, nonetheless, influenced the interpretation of the overall findings (Price & Murnan, 2004). The definition of purpose could be multi-faceted as well as broad for many people. Therefore, careful attention was taken in making sure a specific definition for the term was not given to sway the participants' answers. However, the importance

of giving a specific definition could have helped the participants' respond better, even after

clarifying questions were asked. Access was also a limitation to this research study. Being a full-

time teacher could keep me from being able to conduct the interviews in person with the

participants. Those that chose to interview by phone could hinder me from viewing the

participants' mannerisms and facial expressions.

Delimitations. Delimitations are factors, within the control of the researcher, around

what is best for one's study. In this case, I had to make the decision in how a first-generation

doctoral student was defined. To secure the appropriate sample of participants to take part in the

study, I had to describe what a first-generation doctoral student represented, which was an

individual who was the first in his or her family to complete a bachelor's and master's degree

and decided to continue the journey to a doctoral degree. Also, since there was a lack of research

on first-generation doctoral students, I had to generalize during her research, lumping first-

generation doctoral students and first-generation students together. This was to show that

regardless of whether a first-generation student pursued a bachelor's degree or a doctoral degree,

a first-generation student is a first-generation student.

Significance of the Study

Proving that purpose is a primary source for first-generation doctoral students in their

quests for degree completion and career advancement may enhance the use of resources needed

for degree completion. Campus resources are designed to enhance the academic learning

experience, but without a sense of purpose, student learning continues to trend according to the

report by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (2016). The trend showed that

21% (one in five) of the 25,000 first-year students who completed the survey had difficulty

getting the help they needed with academic coursework (NSSE, 2016). This difficulty left many

first-year students considering leaving college (NSSE, 2016). Optimizing the learning experience must begin with expanding the scope of postsecondary education to exploring the role of purpose in degree completion. Many institutions acknowledge both formal and informal learning but fail to help students connect both to a bigger purpose. A recent article by the *Huffington Post* confirmed research that college students are looking to gain meaning out of their college experience (Mercurio, 2016). Writer and best-selling author, Zach Mercurio (2016), mentioned that the fundamental search for life's meaning is unresponsive to the economy and college rating systems because researchers have discovered that people are looking for more than a paycheck at the end of the week. Mercurio referenced psychiatrist Viktor Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946), and a research study done at Johns Hopkins University. In the study, 7,948 students from 48 colleges were asked what was important when considering a job. Sixteen percent indicated that making money was important and 78% indicated that finding purpose and meaning in life was important (Mercurio, 2016).

Mercurio (2016) also mentioned that a recent 2012 study by Bryan Dik and Ryan Duffy found that 68% of college students considered a spiritual calling and sense of higher purpose critical to them when considering a career. He asserted that "there is a wide and disturbing disconnect, however, with how colleges are cultivating the spiritual search for meaning and purpose among their students" (Mercurio, 2016, para. 13). Mercurio suggested that institutions for higher education examine whether they are in the business of developing people or jobs. Unfortunately, the college experience leans more toward job preparation than meaning making. Students are conditioned to dress up a resume with marketable skills such as education, volunteer work, and internships, but many institutions fail to realize that the classroom for career advancement is bigger than marketable skills on a resume.

According to the research above, students can enhance their college experience when they are given the tools to create a strong sense of purpose for education and career readiness. Student affairs professionals cannot be afraid to explore the business of education beyond degrees. Marketable skills are critical for opening doors for career opportunities, but the path for student development must be rooted in what drives the sense of purpose. First-generation college students are looking for a bridge that allows them to cross the chasm of challenges to discover how higher education fulfills their hungers for purpose. Education must become a vehicle that fulfills a fundamental instinct for the human soul. Institutions that provide higher education must expand not only their purposes to provide support resources for education, but also resources to help students explore and develop themselves beyond marketable skills.

To achieve this goal, educational institutions must begin to see postsecondary education beyond the traditional classroom. Student affairs professionals must realize that the world is a classroom and it is waiting on students who can come to the front of the room and give an accurate report on the purpose beyond marketable skills. Purpose is the driving force behind the pursuit for higher education and it lies deep within the souls of the students. Student learning must be revised to include helping students understand how marketable skills lead to meaningful work and how student development is a vehicle for meaning making. Regardless of pre-higher education background, the capacity to expand the intellect lies deep within first-generation students. However, they must have opportunities to build enough value to sustain their purposes for education, so they can undergo a transformation to overcome challenges that undermine their motivations. Instead of allowing challenges to abort educational goals, first-generation students will be able to confidently report on the purpose that supports their quests for higher education. It is admirable that most higher learning institutions provide first-year seminars, learning

communities, tutoring and mentoring, academic advising, financial assistance, early warning

alerts, safety nets, internships, and supplemental instruction. However, college students, and

specifically first-generation college students, must see these resources as contributors to their

callings for purpose as mentioned in the research by Colorado State University and vocational

psychologist, Bryan Dik (Mercurio, 2016).

Helping students associate education to a calling benefits both the student and the

institution. When students see the world as a classroom where they can report on purpose, a

sense for a higher calling can open new doors for institutions to expand the scope of the meaning

making process in student development and learning. College students must be able to derive

meaning from the way they define themselves, their relationships with others, and what they do

with their lives. By doing so, meaning making narratives allow institutions to align educational

goals with construction-developmental theories created by researchers Robert Kegan (1982,

1994) and Marcia Baxter-Magolda (2001). Patton, Renn, Guido, and Quaye (2016) alluded to

Kegan's evolution of consciousness by saying, "The process of growth involves the evolution of

meaning, marked by continual shifts from periods of stability to periods of instability leading to

reconstruction relationships between persons and their environment" (p. 356). Both Kegan and

Baxter Magolda's theories included self-authoring as an intricate part of the construct for

meaning making.

Kegan defined self-authoring as the ability to "take responsibility for and ownership of…

internal authority" (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016, p. 358). Baxter Magolda (2001) stated

that self-authoring opens doors for constructing solid belief systems and convictions to protect

beliefs (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). Both views are consistent with Chapter 62 of the

Academic Excellence Brochure from California State University, Fresno. The brochure defined

academic excellence as something that is more than making good grades because it maximizes the development of one's intellectual capacity and skills in service to humanity. When viewed in this light, academic excellence becomes more than performing to get a good paying job; it becomes a quest to feed the appetite for purpose, which could help students remain engaged in the academic process.

The Council of Graduate Schools (2018) reported that approximately 56% of doctoral students finish their degree. Although circumstances vary for each student, the moment the meaning making process no longer aligns with goals, students delay their time to complete higher education goals, or dropout (Hess, 2018). When students sense that their purposes or senses of responsibility are to personal obligations, instead of achieving academically, by default, they shift their focus and motivation to handle pressing concerns. However, one of the major issues of first-generation students is balancing their perceived challenges with a long-term effort to change their current conditions through education (Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004). First-generation doctoral students could possibly change their plight by opening the gift of purpose to help them transition from education and marketable skills to education and meaningful work.

Education and meaningful work can be achieved when first-generation doctoral students use purpose to condition their characters to extract meaning out of all circumstances, which confirmed my personal experience as a first-generation student. Usually, students' sense of purpose breaks down under the current challenges placed upon them. Chapter 4 reveals these challenges as breaking points that provide resistance in the achievement process. At this point, the institution must become a resource for not only higher education, but for transforming challenges that undermine motivation into narratives that lead to designing a life that generates

the most value, moves into the direction of their goals, and engages in ongoing development. In other words, the bridge between education and purpose must be recognizable.

First-generation students must see their experiences as an opportunity to balance their quests for higher education with their responsibilities to meet demands that could potentially undermine their successes as students (Mercurio, 2016). By doing so, students can create a community of purpose, which is the culmination of all the institution's campus resources and first-generation students' sense of purpose to support their long-term efforts to change their current conditions through education. The community of purpose is where students share ideas on how their strong senses of purpose aided them in their personal evolutions. The community of purpose allows first-generation doctoral students to find support to fortify their convictions and motivations to complete their degrees.

Helping first-generation students build a community of purpose is also a missing component for career advancement. Educational institutions must realize that the marketplace is evolving into a culture that values the power of purpose. Philip Kotler, Marketing Author, Consultant, and S.C. Johnson Distinguished Professor of International Marketing at the Kellogg School of Management stated, "Beyond wealth creation and shareholder value is an unlimited resource to create a better world and a lasting legacy for businesspeople around the globe. It's called purpose" (Reiman, 2013, p. xv). More companies are returning to their roots to find their origins of inspiration, distinctiveness, and soul (Reiman, 2013). Institutions of higher education must follow the trend of both the marketplace and students who desire to find purpose and meaning. Higher education institutions cannot be afraid to provide an education to help students return to the root of their existences, which leads to inspiration and motivation for academic excellence.

Definition of Terms

This section highlights key terms with the corresponding definitions that were used throughout the study.

Appetite for Purpose. The sum of how people identify themselves to give them meaning to exist and a purpose to perform.

First-Generation College Student. An individual whose parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree (Higher Education Act Amendment, 1998, United States Education Act of 1965).

First-Generation Doctoral Student. An individual who is the first in his or her family to complete a bachelor's and master's degree (whether terminal or built into a doctoral program), and decided to continue the journey to a doctoral degree. In the parameters of this study, the terms first-generation college student and first-generation doctoral student will be used interchangeably but is one and the same.

Meaningful Excellence. The personal evolution that conditions the character to achieve a quality or state of being outstanding or extremely good at sustaining a strong sense of purpose under all circumstances.

Purpose. When the intent to perform or do something outweighs the resistance to perform.

Sense of Purpose. An appreciation for the existence and performance of humanity that ignites the ability to add meaning to current realities.

Strength Factor. The personal evolution of participants that allows them to achieve despite challenges.

Three Milestones of Purpose. Significant points in development.

Value of Purpose. The standard for prioritizing purpose in awareness, usefulness, and responsibility.

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation consists of five chapters. The first chapter outlines a rationale for the study. The second chapter provides a chronological review of the literature on first-generation student characteristics, challenges, and support programs that exist while also providing a model for capturing a strong sense of purpose in degree completion. The third chapter presents the qualitative research methodology and design that was used during data collection and the reporting of the findings in Chapters 4 and 5. The fourth chapter presents the data and discusses the findings of the lived experiences of first-generation doctoral students who participated in this phenomenological study. The fifth and final chapter provides conclusions and recommendations for future studies that emerged from the findings.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Currently, there are approximately 4.2 million first-generation students enrolled in colleges and universities today (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Engle and Tinto (2008) shared that is close to 24% of the undergraduate student population. Even though that seems to be a significant number of students, low-income, first-generation students' access to higher education as well as their completing a college degree remains elusive in nature (Cole, 2018). Borrego (2003) found that someone with a low-income background can be characterized as having a "lack of power, limited cultural capital, economic vulnerability, and a low level of education" (p. 3). Engle and Tinto (2008) defined a first-generation student as someone whose parent(s) never earned a bachelor's degree. Mostly, those who are low-income students are also first-generation students (Engle & Tinto, 2008). However, Patton, Renn, Guido, and Quaye (2016) found that not all first-generation students are low-income.

This literature review discusses a chronology of the many characteristics that make up the profile of first-generation students, including those first-generation students who pursue doctoral degrees. What is also discussed is a report of the many challenges these students face when trying to succeed academically and socially. Additionally, a history of student support programs is highlighted to show what works at various college campuses to help first-generation students get through what Jenkins, Belanger, Boals, and Durón (2013) termed "academic acculturative stress" that comes with being away from their home environments and being academically underprepared for college-level work" (p. 130). Then, we examine a theoretical model of motivation that may shed some light on why some students are convicted and motivated to complete college, whereas others are not. Finally, an overview of the Jenkins model of

meaningful excellence™ and the first-generation student is discussed to set the tone for

recommendations in Chapter 5. The foundation for this model was taken from the meaning

making units in Chapter 4 to build upon future research. Each narrative is used to build the

bridge between the five subunits that emerged from SDT and the Jenkins model for meaningful

excellence in Chapter 5 to show how first-generation doctoral students used their sense of

purpose to align their attitudes and behaviors to their goals.

<div align="center">**Review of the Literature**</div>

Characteristics of First-Generation College Students

First-generation college students are defined as individuals whose parents did not

complete a baccalaureate degree (Higher Education Act of 1965). Even though researchers have

used this definition to distinguish undergraduate students, many doctoral students also identify

themselves as first-generation (Gardner & Holley, 2011). Engle and Tinto (2008) found that

first-generation students were likely to be older, to be female, to have a disability, to have

dependent children, to be single parents, to have earned only a high school diploma, to come

from minority backgrounds, and/or to be non-native English speakers and born outside of the

United States. Engle and Tinto (2008) also found that first-generation students were more likely

to delay going to college right out of high school, go to college closer to home, live off-campus,

attend only part-time, and work full-time while enrolled. Gibbons and Woodside (2014)

discovered that first-generation students often go to college to honor the family or to pursue

future financial or career goals. However, they are unlikely to have access to information about

the college experience because most of their immediate relatives never earned a degree.

Challenges of First-Generation College Students

According to researchers, first-generation college students deal with significant

challenges when completing their undergraduate degrees (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Merritt,

2008, 2010; Orbe, 2008; Strayhorn, 2006). Hoffer et al. (2003) found one challenge to be that

many first-generation students begin higher education at the community college level and tend to

be in more financial debt by the time they graduate. Pike and Kuh (2005) even found that first-

generation students take longer to complete an undergraduate degree and have lower aspirations

of enrolling in graduate school. Many first-generation college students are challenged with

parents' lack of guidance in what to provide them in terms of college experiences and

expectations (Barry, Hudley, Cho, & Kelly, 2009). As a result, many first-generation college

students have no prior knowledge of what college is like and need guidance with study skills,

time management, and the types of college resources that may be available for them (Gardner,

2013).

Another challenge facing first-generation college students is their arrival to college

underprepared to perform college-level work. Researchers report that most first-generation

college students shun away from taking courses related to math, science, and computer science in

high school, which are important to four-year college enrollment (Balemain & Feng, 2013; Chen,

2005; Engle, 2007). Because of this dilemma, first-generation college students would have to

take remedial courses to make up for the lack of knowledge in those subject areas. Remedial

courses are necessary, but these classes also bring added expenses and more time for degree

completion. Judith Scott-Clayton (2018), an Associate Professor of Economics and Education

and a Senior Research Associate for the Community College Research Center, says the

anticipation of offering remedial education to underprepared students was to improve academic

performance enough to more than make up for the gap in knowledge that was present. For some students, that was enough; others not so. In turn, first-generation college students who could not make the cut simply dropped out before finishing their remedial education.

First-generation students also have financial challenges that make it difficult for them to persist and complete college. Gardner (2013) conducted a study on the challenges that first-generation students face. She found that first-generation students, especially those who graduate and are in a graduate degree program, looked at their own resources as the only resource in funding their education, whereas non-first-generation students look to fellowships and assistantships to support their graduate programs, leaving first-generation students feeling they have a lack of options. Many first-generation college students have responsibilities beyond coursework because they must seek employment to cover the additional expenses.

First-generation college students also typically deal with stressors that students who have college-educated parents do not share. Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, and Al-Timimi (2004) found that students suffer many stressors as a result of this, including physical, social, and psychological consequences. Barry et al. (2009) found that many first-generation students were less likely to share feelings of stress while in college than non-first-generation students. Therefore, these consequences could culminate into anxiety or depression, and progress over time, if students do not have the right support system to help them cope or manage their stressors (Poyrazli et al., 2004). First-generation students have to interact with two cultures: their home cultures and their academic cultures. Many must negotiate between their home cultures and a very different academic culture in which they are trying to adapt and merge. Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boals, and Durón (2013) described this as "academic acculturative stress" (p. 130). These challenges likely compound when first-generation students pursue graduate education.

Support Programs

There are many programs created that aim to support, remediate, and close the achievement gap for first-generation students. Thayer (2000) found successful learning community strategies like the Student Support Services (SSS) project a success for first-generation students. He shared that this project was implemented at various colleges and universities to give students a structured academic program in the summer prior to the first fall semester. Students stay on campus in a residence hall together on one floor. Students enroll in several credit and non-credit classes and are placed with a peer mentor and an advisor from the SSS staff to monitor their grades and keep them in touch with college and academic resources. The SSS project forms bonds among the students and gives them confidence that they can succeed in a college environment.

Bailey (2009) found that placing students, especially first-generation students, in learning communities is also a "simple way to accelerate movement through various levels of remediation [by combining levels or eliminating] any elapsed time between levels" (p. 27). Brock (2010) shared that "students in the Learning Communities were more likely to feel integrated at school and …be engaged in their courses and with fellow students and instructors" (p. 117). Also, Bettinger, Boatman, and Long (2013) found that learning communities place students into cohorts to build relationships while placing them into paired courses (remedial and college-level). It is a popular choice when it comes to remediation and shows a significant success rate among students. It makes the content more interesting; thus, motivating students to work harder while enjoying the comradery of students like themselves.

Bettinger et al. (2013) conducted a study and found the Summer Bridge Program, which is offered at various colleges and universities across the United States, most beneficial for

students who are underprepared to make the transition to college. The Summer Bridge Program is a six-week program designed to allow a select number of students, who are usually underprepared to start college and may be at risk of not attending at all, to go through remedial courses in the summer, thereby reducing the need for remedial courses in the fall or spring semesters. Students live on campus if they choose, take six credit hours of courses, and are granted full tuition, room and board, and books provided they have financial need.

Additional services for first-generation students include advising, freshman seminar courses, tutoring, and early academic alerts. Gardner (2013) found that "creating supportive environments …by providing university-wide organizations, peer mentoring programs, and connections to scholars…outside of the university may facilitate their retention and success" (p. 53). Gibbons and Woodside (2014) also found ways to help make first-generation students feel accepted and understood on campus by including these students on "targeted electronic mailing lists …, offering evening workshops introducing students to the unique needs they may have as first-generation students, and providing orientation activities specific to this group" (p. 34). At the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, the four-year completion rate of first-generation college students increased from 69% to 76% after the school instituted at system-wide email outreach campaign (O'Connor, 2016). At San Jose State University, 77% of students reported they felt of sense of belonging after attending an evening event where first-generation advocate videos were shown (O'Connor, 2016).

What the Research Does Not Illustrate

I found extensive studies on the first-generation student. From research pertaining to first-generation students' characteristics and the unique challenges that they share, to the support programs that are available within colleges and universities today, anything that student affairs

professionals need to know about this level of student identity was available. However, what was

not represented enough in research was how these underrepresented students can overcome the

many challenges placed upon them and succeed against the odds. This may be done by

measuring the persistence and levels of motivation first-generation students need to get through

the challenges of being underprepared and receive the support systems needed to increase

achievement academically and complete college.

The literature did not adequately illustrate the successes of first-generation students once

strategies and support mechanisms are in place. It was not so much about the time it takes first-

generation students to complete a college degree as it was what happens after the degree is

completed. Some students have gone on to complete graduate school and led very fulfilling lives

while working in various career fields. Much of their successes came from developing

relationships with their professors, advisors, and fellow peers, which assisted them in their

identity development and ultimate career readiness (Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup, & Kuh, 2008).

Also, I believe the literature did not clearly illustrate that not all first-generation students

have the many "challenging" characteristics that much of the research indicated. Having once

been a student, who was also the first in her family to go to college, I can attest to some of what

the previous researchers found. First, as quoted within the literature review, Gibbons and

Woodside (2014) discovered that first-generation students often "attend college to honor the

family or to pursue future financial success" (p. 21). I enrolled in college, immediately after high

school, with the hopes of making my family proud and fulfilling the lifelong dream of becoming

a teacher. That was only possible with a college education. Secondly, Allen (1999) shared that

precollege motivation, such as having a desire to complete college, was a strong indicator of

those who will complete a degree and even move on to complete additional education. I had a

strong desire and was self-motivated to not only attend and graduate from college, but to earn

two additional advanced degrees. On the other hand, what was not agreed upon was the research

that first-generation students, according to Engle and Tinto (2008):

> are likely to be older, … have a disability, have dependent children, be single parents,
>
> have earned only a high school diploma, …and likely to delay going to college right out
>
> of high school, attend college closer to home, live off-campus, attend part-time, and work
>
> full-time while enrolled (p. 8).

None of these things fit me, even though I was a first-generation college student. On the

contrary, I was a traditional age student who had no other responsibilities other than to attend

college. I attended school an hour away, lived on campus, was enrolled in a living/learning

program through SSS, attended college full-time, and did not work until my junior year in

college, and even then only part-time (Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007; Thayer, 2000;

University of South Florida, n.d.). Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, and Leonard (2007) found that

according to research, these characteristics were out of the norm and found to be more of a

strength for first-generation college students than a deficit. So, it is important for student affairs

professionals to take each first-generation college student on a case-by-case basis and not group

everyone in one category based on research that may have been studied based on a small sample

of students. First-generation college students of today come with a variety of situations and

circumstances that warrant a closer look and a helping hand so that each student is assisted based

on his or her particular need.

In order to challenge the deficit framework or the belief that if [first-generation]

marginalized students worked harder, they would succeed in college (Lombardi, 2016), one

study sought to prove that the experiences of first-generation college students were more of a

strength than a weakness meant to deter them from completing a degree. Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin (2014) conducted a *difference education* panel that showed first-generation college students how important it was to seek help from advisors and other support services, including professors, in order to have a good college experience; thus, persist and graduate. Using a panel of first-generation junior and seniors and a control group, first-year, first-generation college students heard stories about the panelists' individual college transition. Some of those students were recognized as first-generation juniors and seniors, and others were not. However, after the panel discussion, Stephens et al. found that first-generation college students who consequently sought help or support services had a higher grade-point average than those who did not.

Minorities and Motivation

Minorities make up a large portion of the first-generation student population. The Postsecondary National Policy Institute (2018) noted that a 2012 report by the Department of Education reported that 41% of African-Americans and 61% of Hispanic-Americans were classified as first-generation students. However, Allen (1999) reported that one of the reasons minorities do not participate in college is because of their lack of aspiration about going to college. Minorities, also known as people of color, have been looked at from a deficit framework as being unskilled and poor performing. Yosso (2005) stated the reasons this deficit exists are because, "(a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child's education" (p. 75). Therefore, much of this lack of motivation to attend college was attributed to feelings of inadequacy that they are not smart enough to earn a degree, not being sure of what they want to do in life, having family and work obligations, and lacking the financial resources to pay for college (Bandura, 1986; Complete

College America, 2012; Hellman & Harbeck, 1996; Raynor & Entin, 1982; Schunk &

Zimmerman, 1996).

  While these are all valid reasons for many minorities, Kinzie et al. (2008) reported that

another reason for not wanting to attend was that they may not know about many of the

resources they could receive that would assist them in addressing their concerns. However, this

deficit framework contradicts what Yosso (2005) shared as a need for higher education

institutions to take the experiences of minorities and change the academic landscape around the

"knowledge, skills, abilities and networks—community cultural wealth—possessed and utilized

by People of Color" (p. 82).

  Also, once these first-generation college students enroll in and begin college, "well-

designed and well-implemented placement testing; first-year seminars; learning communities;

early warning systems; …safety nets; supplemental instruction; peer tutoring and mentoring;

theme based campus housing; adequate financial aid, … internships; service-learning; and

demonstrably effective teaching practices" must be in place and unavoidable so that students

must use these campus resources (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007; Wang &

Grimes, 2001). Otherwise, there is no guarantee that students will use them, or even know about

them. The NSSE (2005) reported that fewer students use campus learning and support services

than those who say they will when they start college. The resources must also be of high quality

and customized to meet the needs of first-generation college students. Finally, they must be

intentionally connected to students, courses, and faculty to increase the likelihood that students

will take full advantage of the programs.

Benefits of a College Degree

Significant benefits come with earning a college degree; therefore, ensuring improved access for all who desire to attend is essential. While the advantages of earning a bachelor's degree are numerous, so is earning a doctoral degree. Baum, Ma, and Payea (2016) reported that individuals with higher education levels tend to make 66% more money, pay more taxes, and are more likely to be employed compared to others without a degree. To illustrate this, the College Board produced a report called *Education Pays* in 2016. In that report, Baum et al. highlighted how those who enrolled in college at 18 but graduated from college in four years earned approximately the same as 34-year-olds who had nothing but a high school diploma, even though those college graduates were out of work for four years and had to pay full tuition and fees and books and materials without any federal grant aid. Bachelor's degree earners earn 74% or $2.3 million more over a lifetime than those with only a high school diploma (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011). Furthermore, doctoral degree earners earn 61% or $3.3 million more over a lifetime than those with a bachelor's degree (Carnevale et al., 2011). Having a college degree also increases the chances of individuals advancing in their career. College graduates are more likely to be at the upper end of the income quartile than those with only have a high school diploma (Baum et al., 2016). Also, having a doctoral degree ensures more flexibility and security in different career paths that those with a bachelor's degree or lower may not possess (Cascio, n.d.).

Gaining a college degree, especially a doctoral degree, leads to healthier lifestyles and less out-of-pocket healthcare costs (Baum, Ma, & Payea; 2013). For example, college educated adults tend to be less obese than adults with no college education. Also, children of educated parents are less likely than other children to be obese (Baum et al., 2013). Also, the amount of

exercise or lack thereof and the knowledge of dietary choices are also relevant (Baum et al.,

2013). College-educated adults volunteer more, engage themselves civically, and vote more than

twice as high as adults with only a high school diploma (Baum et al., 2016). Society benefits

from those who complete a college degree, thereby raising individual opportunities and living

standards, which, in turn, helps the next generation.

Statement of Context

Many research studies existed on student motivation, persistence, and passion. However,

one study stood out as instrumental in helping students find meaning and purpose in life. Below

is an overview of self-determination theory. A basis for why this theory is related to the study

and the research question follows.

Self-determination theory. This transcendental phenomenological study applied SDT

when understanding how the lived experiences of first-generation doctoral students sustained a

strong sense of purpose under all circumstances. Self-determination theory is a theory of

motivation, developed by psychologists Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, that serves as a

model for how people develop and grow based on two distinct contexts: through intrinsic

motivation and through extrinsic motivation (SDT, 2017).

Intrinsically, people are motivated "based on the satisfactions of behaving 'for its own

sake'" (SDT, 2017, p. 1). The cause to engage in behavior is satisfied through the reward that

comes from the behavior, as in the way children play, for example (Flannery, 2017). Children are

internally motivated to play, whether outside in exploration, or inside with video games.

Extrinsic motivation are those behaviors performed that result in an outcome separate from the

work that was executed, like praise, fame, or money (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Intrinsic motivation,

per the SDT, is more conducive to learning than extrinsic motivation because of its association to

satisfaction and emotional well-being (SDT, 2017).

      Self-determination theory suggests that for psychological well-being to take place, three

basic psychological needs must be met—autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy

refers to the need to be in charge over one's own life. This allows people to have choices, to

share their respective feelings, and to depict how they would like certain decisions to take place.

Competence refers to the ability and skill to carry out certain tasks. For example, students are

considered competent when they can effectively and efficiently complete class and homework

after a professor has introduced the concept. Autonomy and competence are both essential to

intrinsic motivation. Students who are competent but do not have autonomy become unmotivated

and despondent towards learning. Research consistently explained the importance of both

autonomy and competence in sustaining intrinsic motivation in people (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan,

1999).

      Relatedness refers to the need for secure, close, personal relationships. People want to

have a sense of trust and security with those around them. Relatedness is not associated with

only family, spouses or significant others, and close friends, but also faculty. For example,

students who feel a close, personal connection with their faculty are more academically

successful (Astin, 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Of all three psychological needs

(autonomy, competence, and relatedness), intrinsic motivation is most likely in people who have

secure, close, personal relationships, through relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000b) (see Figure 1).

Self-Determination Theory

Edward L. Deci & Richard M. Ryan (2017)

Intrinsic Motivation

Motivation based on the
satisfaction of behaving

Example:

Child's motivation to play

Extrinsic Motivation

Motivation based on
satisfaction and well being

Example:

Praise, fame, money

Three basic needs for psychological well-being

Autonomy   Competence   Relatedness

Figure 1. Self-determination theory (adapted from SDT, 2017).

When these three psychological needs are not in place, meaning they are not supported or are

frustrated in a social or situational context, the well-being of an individual is impacted. For

example, when faculty are not supportive of the learning process in students, then the students,

by default, isolate themselves from the environment and become non-participatory and

unmotivated to succeed (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

How this theory relates to the study and research question. To determine the role that

purpose plays in first-generation doctoral students' degree completion and career advancement,

personal evolution and motivation was examined. The strong sense of purpose provides the

framework for exploring personal evolution within the context of the environment and SDT

provides the framework for motivation. Self-determination theory captures personal growth and

development through intrinsic and extrinsic motivation that must be sustained by the

psychological well-being created by one's autonomy, competence, and relatedness (SDT, 2017).

Self-determination theory creates the intent to perform through psychological well-being.

This theory suggests that for first-generation doctoral students to achieve educational goals and

career advancement, they must be more purposeful in creating psychological well-being and engage in activities that promote a strong sense of purpose.

Conclusion

This study contributed to the body of knowledge of meaning making in student development. This study combines meaning making strategies with academic motivation to produce new models for understanding the role purpose plays in academic motivation and career advancement. Knowledge gaps were exposed for both institutions and students to construct a bridge between meaning making and academic motivation. Both institutions and students can use these gaps to develop intellectual capacities for creating a workable blueprint. The sense of purpose in student development provides a promising solution for institutions to enhance the college experience with a blueprint for expanding the scope of the meaning making process in student development and learning. The sense of purpose also provides student development professionals with an opportunity to position their institutions to be on the leading-edge of preparing students to not only acquire their degrees but apply meaning making strategies to their careers.

Students, and specifically first-generation doctoral students, can use the body of knowledge to be more strategic in the role purpose plays in academic motivation and career advancement. Their newly acquired skills allow them to construct meaning out of their environments and sustain the conviction and motivation they need to finish their degrees. As determined from the literature on student motivation, there was a need to assess first-generation doctoral students' motivation to complete their degrees in light of their association with making meaning.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This chapter showcases an emphasis on phenomenological research design. This method was most effective for this study because it allowed first-generation doctoral students the freedom to express their diverse experiences, that captured their abilities to make meaning, as it relates to purpose and career advancement (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, phenomenology is seeded in questions that give the researcher a mirrored view of the phenomenon; thereby, making the meaning making process more personal and intimate (Moustakas, 1994). This design is explained in more detail in this section, framed in context by the research question on the lived experiences of first-generation doctoral students. The chapter outlines the population and sample, sampling procedure, data collection and data analysis, methods of validity and reliability, and the ethical considerations and limitations associated with this study.

Research Question

This study sought to explore the meaning making narratives that first-generation doctoral students, at seven universities, used to design the life that would give them the most value, move them in the direction of their career goals, and engage them in an ongoing process for development. The following research question was addressed in this study: *How do first-generation doctoral students embrace purpose as a resource for achieving educational goals and career advancement?*

Positionality Statement

The context of my positionality is one of reflexivity, an intentional consideration of my role in the research process, and the relationship between me and an "other" (Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 1996; Pillow, 2003). Callaway (1992) called reflexivity "a continuing mode of self-

analysis" (p. 33). My positionality was important because it allowed me to reflect on my previous college experience and relate it in a way that placed me in the space of many marginalized undergraduate students. This narrative showcased my experiences; which were biases I had to set aside during the data collection and analysis of the findings.

As someone who was the first in my family to go to college (more often termed as a first-generation college student), I remember enrolling into college immediately after graduating high school, with the hopes of securing a bachelor's degree in education and fulfilling a childhood dream of becoming a teacher. I was excited, but also nervous knowing that upon entering college, I would lack the knowledge of the many resources college offered students to help them succeed. However, I figured I would just get help along the way. Before knowing I would attend this college, a minority representative came from the college to my home to speak to me and my grandparents who raised me about how I could attend, even though I would come in with only a 2.8 grade point average. I also had no real credentials to add to my college application other than my being a part of choir for four years. I had no other volunteer experience or extracurricular activities that would make my application stand out among others. My grandmother and grandfather had no way of assisting me in my college pursuits because my grandmother only had an 11th grade education and my grandfather went straight to the military after high school. So, even though the encouragement to go to college was there, the knowledge of how to do so was non-existent. All I knew was that I wanted to go to college, and I was determined to get a degree.

In order to fulfill this lifelong dream, I had to rely on my definition of purpose, which compelled me to condition my character with a strong sense of purpose. Now I can see how my sense of purpose was responsible for my personal evolution and motivation to obtain my first degree in spite of circumstances that first-generation students faced. My personal experience

with the sense of purpose prompted me to study the role purpose played in first-generation doctoral students' degree completion and career advancement. My lived experience allowed me to identify the strength that came from purpose to engage in a way that outweighed all circumstances that would prevent me from pursuing my education. I had to seek help from advisors and professors, use the resources my institution offered in order to succeed each term, stay current on my assignments, and develop a time-management plan so that I would not get too overwhelmed when deadlines were upon me. Even though I may have been a first-generation student, I would not allow that label to deter me from what I knew how to do.

Having help along my educational path gave me the knowledge to succeed through each juncture of degree program, and ultimately, for career advancement. The earning of that degree increased my potential to earn other degrees (three to be exact). At each juncture, I had support personnel that helped me when times were difficult, and I needed a helping hand or a word of encouragement. These degrees helped me land very good jobs. However, I had yet to achieve the highest degree level possible, a doctoral degree in Education.

This study was oriented toward exploring the theoretical framework of SDT and how it related to first-generation doctoral students undergoing the evolution of consciousness to apply meaning making skills for achievement. I believe my experiences of self-evolution confirmed that purpose plays an active role in degree completion and career advancement.

Methodology

Qualitative. When researchers wish to explore a problem, and need extensive understanding of that issue, qualitative research methods are appropriate (Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching, n.d.). Qualitative research methods are usually conducted when variables cannot be easily measured. When quantitative measures do not fit the problem,

qualitative methods can be used to give a better interpretation of the data. Qualitative research

methods help researchers uncover patterns in opinions and thought; thus, allowing researchers to

write their findings more narratively, in the voices of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Qualitative research is interpretive research, meaning the researcher is extensively engulfed in

the research experience with the participants. This, in turn, makes the researcher cognizant of the

potential biases he or she may cognitively possess and reflexively identifies those biases to make

sure they do not influence the interpretations formed during the study (Creswell, 2013).

Through this qualitative research design, I sought to expand purpose from a general

concept to a more comprehensive view of how first-generation doctoral students engage in

action-steps to capture the role purpose plays in degree completion. Grounded in the

constructionist worldview, phenomenology was chosen as the research tradition to conduct the

study. Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed key beliefs of the constructivist worldview, which

were (a) multiple realities are constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with

others; (b) reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the researched and shaped by

individual experiences; (c) individual values are honored and are negotiated among individuals;

and (d) more of a literary style of writing is used. (p. 35)

Phenomenology. The research tradition of phenomenology has its history in early 20th

century European philosophy (van Manen, 2000). Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger began

the phenomenology movement; however, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, writer of the widely-

debated book *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, constructed the meaning of phenomenology:

"Phenomenology referred to knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing

what one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience"

(Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Phenomenological research attempted to examine the meaning of

people's] lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). By doing so, researchers can gather themes and experiences that provide a deeper understanding of the concept or phenomenon. Interviews can easily be conducted in phenomenology, which allows participants to share freely, thereby giving meaning of their experiences. In addition, phenomenology allows researchers to bracket any biases or preconceived opinions about what is already known about the phenomenon, which is also known as phenomenological reduction (Ramos, 2012). Cileciz (2009) described this process as:

> Individual textural descriptions are constituted by the participant's verbatim statements representing meaning units rearranged in narrative form, with any necessary supplementary statements by the researcher inserted within brackets. Each statement by an individual expressing a meaning unit—either shared with other participants or unique to that individual—is included in his/her individual textural description. (p. 500)

This study utilized a transcendental phenomenological methodology by examining the phenomenon of how first-generation doctoral students intuitively embraced purpose as a resource for achieving educational goals and career advancement.

The transcendental phenomenological design was selected to investigate the evolving process of growth through meaning making. Meaning making was alluded to in Robert Kegan's evolution of consciousness (Patton et al., 2016). The epistemological view of constructivism suggests that people tend to seek understanding in the world in which they live and work, and in doing so, they form subjective meanings on the experiences around them (Mertens, 2010). Therefore, it is important that the researcher looks to participants for the meaning of a concept or phenomenon. Through this constructivist framework, lives are changed and shaped in ways that provide a voice to research participants and raises their consciousness (Job et al., 2013). The

transcendental phenomenological method allowed, through a series of broad, open-ended questions and prompts, first-generation doctoral students to describe the meaning making phenomenon as it relates to SDT and their personal growth. Through participants' responses, I interpreted or made meaning of experiences about the world around them.

For participants to conceptualize the meaning making phenomenon so data can be coded from interviews to build a theory from their shared experiences, the ambiguous nature of purpose was removed. To highlight the special attention taken to prove the role purpose played in degree completion and career advancement, the interview questions were designed to capture the role purpose played in the evolution of consciousness of the participants. Grouping the interview questions under the evolution of consciousness made it easier to interpret findings as participants senses of purpose, which confirmed the definition of purpose revealed in the literature review. I defined purpose as when the intent to perform outweighs the resistance to perform. This definition allowed for the ease in capturing the role purpose played in degree completion.

The research question also referred to how individuals achieve the self-authoring mind, which was a part of Kegan's (1982, 1994) six orders that described the evolution of consciousness. By examining the self-authoring mind through the lived experiences of participants, it made it easier to identify the intuitive nature of purpose in SDT. According to Kegan, the self-authoring mind was achieved when individuals explored the capacity to take responsibility for and ownership of their internal authority. By exploring how participants embraced purpose as a resource for achieving educational goals, this process revealed the psychological state of participants taking responsibility for overcoming the resistance for degree completion.

The outcome of this strategy helped participants standardize the process that led to purpose instead of collecting multiple interpretations from participants. Again, purpose lent itself to multiple interpretations. However, by asking specific questions that simplified the self-authoring phenomenon allowed me to draw conclusions that highlighted the role purpose plays in degree completion.

Questions were shaped to discover the different states of mind participants used to stabilize their emotions to navigate the turbulent waters of degree completion. Creating the right environment and using time wisely was essential for achieving goals. These questions also explored the process participants used to create an environment that promoted a good use of their time. Taking ownership and exercising internal authority to achieve goals also required a character that has been conditioned for success. I also asked a question to capture the process participants used to condition their character for degree completion. Lastly, I explored how participants channeled their convictions for degree completion considering career benefits.

Reducing ownership and internal authority down to action-steps that revealed the strength that came from purpose confirms my personal experience as a first-generation student. The process allowed me to capture critical information that revealed the evolution of consciousness represented by the five subunits. Interviews were conducted to capture the influence of purpose on attitudes and behaviors. To determine the role that purpose played in degree completion and career advancement, participants' definitions of purpose were grouped into three meaning making units to reveal how they used the themes to align their goals with a strong sense of purpose.

Population and Sample

Population. Approximately 30% of first-generation students are recipients of doctoral

degrees (Hoffer, 2003; National Science Foundation, 2015; Roska, Feldon, & Maher, 2018). At

one of my study sites, 243 students were in various doctoral programs (Kennesaw State

University, 2017), which suggested that 73 of them were first-generation. However, not much

was known about these students' college experiences and outcomes at the doctoral level

(Gardner, 2013). These statistics imply that first-generation college student characteristics hinder

opportunities for advanced degrees. Some of the characteristics included (a) likely to be older,

(b) to be female, (c) to have a disability, (d) to have dependent children, (e) to be single parents,

(f) to come from minority backgrounds, and/or (g) to be non-native English speakers and born

outside of the United States (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Characteristics can also include likely to

delay going to college right out of high school, attend only part-time, and work full-time while

enrolled (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Many of them also go to college to honor the family or to pursue

future financial or career goals, but have difficulty getting access to college information—

college applications, financial aid, and other important findings about the college experience

(Gibbons & Woodside, 2014).

Sample. Morse (2000) discussed a number of factors that would determine sample size in

qualitative research: the scope of the study, the quality of data, the nature of the topic, the

number of interviews per participant, the amount of useful data from each participant, and the

qualitative method and design used. While there is no specific formula for determining sample

size, the sample size used for this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was

approximately 10 to 16 first-generation doctoral students. One study conducted interviews on

nine first-generation graduate students, at one university, to determine ways these students deal

with marginality and cultural changes (Longwell-Grice, Adsitt, Mullins, & Serrata, 2016).

Another study used a purposeful sample of 10 participants when exploring parental involvement

in first-generation college students' decision-making in continuing enrollment in private, small

higher education institutions (McCulloh, 2016). The sample size of 10 to 16 confirmed what was

prevalent in previous research studies and ensured rich, extensive data was collected from

different perspectives.

Sampling Procedure

I chose a purposeful Criterion-i™ sample of first-generation doctoral students. The

Criterion-i™ sampling was used to identify and select participants from a pre-determined set of

criteria, using standardized questionnaires or surveys for in-depth follow-up (Palinkas et al.,

2015; Patton, 2002). Initially, all doctoral students at one metropolitan state university in

southeastern United States were sent an interest survey requesting participation in dissertation

research. The interest survey first asked participants if they were first-generation doctoral

students, given my definition of the term. If participants of the survey were not, the survey would

end. If participants labeled themselves as first-generation doctoral students, the survey then

posed other questions that would eventually eliminate participants from the survey. While

answering a multiple-choice question, if participants chose solely the answer, "I chose to enroll

in a doctoral degree program for academic achievement," participants stopped answering

questions and were thanked for participating in the survey. However, if participants taking the

survey chose either "I chose to enroll in a doctoral degree program for career advancement," or

"I chose to enroll in a doctoral degree program for career advancement and academic

achievement," the survey continued with specifics about the research study, why they were

chosen for the study with a reference to the study's purpose, and then asked them to participate

in the study using a consent-to-participate form (as shown in Appendix B). While securing

participants for the study, I had to go outside of the home institution to solicit other participants

for reasons beyond my control. Therefore, 14 first-generation doctoral students from a total of

seven different universities took part in this study. A detailed description of this limitation is in

Chapter 5. All first-generation doctoral student participants were compensated with a $10

Starbucks gift card for participating in the study.

Participant data was collected using an interview protocol (as shown in Appendix A).

Interviewees had the choice of being interviewed via Zoom, phone, or in person. However, all

interviews were audio-recorded for easy transcription. Participants were informed of the

measures taken during the interview's recording in maintaining confidentiality. All transcriptions

were stored on a digital file for later coding.

Data Collection

Instrumentation. Participants were asked six questions (as shown in Appendix A),

which were designed to capture their attempt to engage in self-determination that leads to a

strong sense of purpose. To refine data from an abstract concept like purpose, an instrument had

to be created to allow participants to articulate the meaning making process while removing

the ambiguous nature of purpose. Open-ended questions were used to give students

an opportunity to articulate their drive for academic achievement, which preserved the

theoretical framework of SDT. Clarifying questions or prompts were used only if participants

needed further clarity or understanding of the original question asked. However, in a

phenomenological interview, questions that a researcher prepares beforehand to elicit a complete

response may be adjusted or eliminated altogether when participants share the full account of

their experience of the bracketed question (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, the researcher should

make participants feel comfortable during the interview process so that participants can give an accurate account of their lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). To ensure that participants could provide useable data, a pilot test was conducted with a non-participating first-generation doctoral graduate to validate the effectiveness of the instrument. By using someone who has undergone the process of self-determination in doctoral degree completion, questions asked during the pilot test regarding the role purpose played can be either adjusted or confirmed for upcoming participant interviews. The instrument was designed to measure self-determination as it relates to the dominate action created when intentions are influenced by a sense of purpose.

Protection of human subjects. To keep participants from harm, several parameters were put into place. First, a consent-to-participate (confidentiality) form (Appendix B) was given to all potential participants. On the form, I stressed the anonymity of all participants. At any time, the participants could choose to withdraw from the study, no questions asked. Second, all original names were replaced with aliases. Third, the findings represented multiple perspectives reflective of the study. Finally, I conducted member-checking strategies to make sure all data collected represented the views of those participating. These parameters, in turn, ensured reliability and validity of the research study.

Data Analysis

Below is a chart chronicling how a researcher should organize data from transcribed interviews. The process is called phenomenal analysis and is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Phenomenal Analysis

Type	
Horizontalizing the data	Refers to regarding every horizon or statement relevant to the topic and question as having equal value. From the horizontalized statements, the meaning or meaning units are listed.
Meaning or meaning units	These are clustered into common categories or themes, removing overlapping and repetitive statements. The clustered themes and meanings are used to develop the textural descriptions of the experience.
Textual descriptions of the experience	From the textural descriptions, structural descriptions and an integration of textures and structures into the meanings and essences of the phenomenon are constructed.

Adapted from *Phenomenological research methods* by Moustakas, 1994.

Phenomenal analysis was used to analyze and code data, and the work was clearly organized into files with the participant's alias. Initial codes were placed into categories and themes. Data was stored and analyzed using the Qualitative Data Analysis™ (QDA) Miner software package, rather than online. Only I and the principal faculty investigator had access to participants' identifying information.

Validity and Reliability

As stated, a pilot test was conducted before the official participant interviews with a recent doctoral graduate who was not a part of the research study. The pilot test was conducted to increase the chances that the official interviews were a success. The test also gave valuable insight and preliminary data from someone who was a first-generation doctoral student. The pilot test showed that the five interview questions were clear and concise enough for the recent doctoral graduate to understand and did not lend itself to further clarifying questions. However, I did ask the recent doctoral graduate the clarifying questions to see if any more insight could be

shared outside of the original interview questions. The questions allowed the recent doctoral graduate to openly share her life experience in a way that was rich yet unprovoked.

I attempted to draw representations of data from multiple participant perspectives. Because of that, special care was taken to obtain detailed data through probing and clarifying questioning. Creswell (2018) calls this "thick descriptions" (p. 263). Going immediately back to the raw data after an interview allowed me to add details such as mannerisms and fluctuations of tone and mood. These descriptions further advanced the analysis of the findings.

I also conducted member-checking strategies to make sure all data collected represented the views of those participating. Transcriptions from the interviews were returned to all participants in order for them to verify them for accuracy and credibility. Doing this allowed the participants to add to anything they said, clarify, and note if it seemed not what they meant. This promoted a sense of trust between me and the participants.

Ethical Considerations

Data management. All participants in the study remained anonymous. Participant names were replaced with numbers and/or aliases for confidentiality. All recorded transcripts and observational notes were protected and in my possession. Files of the recorded transcripts and observational notes were stored on a resident computer hard drive and then printed and stored in a locked file cabinet. The documents were destroyed from both mediums once participants from the study reviewed them for accuracy. Recordings from interviews as well as emails to and from participants were also deleted.

Conclusion

This transcendental phenomenological study sought to examine how first-generation doctoral students underwent the evolution of consciousness to apply meaning making skills for

educational goals and career advancement. In addition, by utilizing the theory of self-determination as a framework, I was also able to determine how first-generation doctoral students embraced purpose to influence both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to achieve a doctoral degree.

Participants of the study were selected from a pre-determined set of criteria, known as a Criterion-i™ sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2002). Participants were chosen based on their individual responses to a brief, initial survey, which then gave me the opportunity to do an in-depth, follow-up interview with them. Interviews were conducted with open-ended questions to give students an opportunity to express their drive for academic achievement. If participants needed further clarity or understanding of the original question asked, clarifying questions or prompts were used.

I ensured the validity and trustworthiness of the data through safe and secure management of the data. Notes and transcriptions from the interviews were analyzed by me, the dissertation committee, and the participants. A system of member-checking was used in making sure everything that was shared represented the views of those who shared them.

The study made a significant contribution to the body of scholarly research on the outcomes of first-generation students' higher education successes when paired with my definition of purpose. The research captured SDT in the lived experience of participants as they articulated how their personal evolutions were used to condition their characters to achieve a quality or state of being outstanding or extremely good at sustaining a strong sense of purpose under all circumstances. Much of students' success came from developing relationships with their professors, advisors, and fellow peers who also assisted them in their identity development and educational goals.

First-generation doctoral students can overcome the many challenges placed upon them and succeed against the odds. However, students must take ownership for their learning and use their senses of purpose to gain the internal authority needed for the evolution of consciousness. This study added credence to how first-generation doctoral students' ability to embrace purpose as a resource equips them to outperform despite the obstacles that surrounds their existence. The study revealed that when first-generation doctoral students have an awareness of what is needed to increase their performances (intrinsic motivation), take responsibility for their achievements (intrinsic motivation), and use the resources available to them through academic support programs and services (extrinsic motivation), they, in effect, achieve academic success, complete college, and set themselves up for career advancement. Participant responses in Chapter 4 reveal how SDT not only provides the framework for examining motivational factors, but also provides the influence of purpose in motivating participants to align their goals with academic achievement and career advancement.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

This transcendental phenomenological study examined the role purpose played in first-generation doctoral students' degree completion and career advancement at seven universities across the United States. A gap in previous research on this phenomenon compelled me to explore the dynamics of first-generation doctoral students' motivation to complete their degrees, while considering their personal evolution associated with meaning making. My personal experience as a first-generation student compelled me to explore this targeted group from the conceptual framework of SDT. Examining a motivational theory to capture the role of purpose in degree completion was important because it allowed me to explore how the meaning making process plays an active role in the evolution of consciousness and motivation. The study revealed how students with a strong sense of purpose can use their meaning making skills to increase their motivation for academic and career achievement. A qualitative transcendental phenomenological design was used in this study. Transcendental phenomenological research guided the data collection and analysis process (Moustakas, 1994). As a result, participants shared their lived experiences on the meaning making units they used to design the life that would give them the most value, move them in the direction of their career goals, and engage them in an ongoing process for development. I established the research framework using the research question: "How do first-generation doctoral students embrace purpose as a resource for achieving educational goals and career advancement?"

This chapter presents findings from 14 first-generation doctoral students, regardless of major, who were at various points in their programs of study. The interview protocol (as shown in appendix A) provided a framework from which I could obtain a picture from participants

regarding how they developed their senses of purpose to achieve the highest level of education.

The participants' transcriptions were then analyzed using phenomenal analysis (Moustakas,

1994). This was accomplished by annotating patterns in words and phrases to form associated

themes (Moustakas, 1994). From the analysis, three meaning units and five subunits emerged. I

titled the meaning units Design, Direction, and Development, and the subunits Mental Stamina,

Manage Deadlines, Support Systems, Redefining Self, and Personal Why. Each subunit provided

insight into how participants aligned their attitudes and behaviors with their sense of purpose.

The subunits indicated how participants achieved the psychological well-being needed for

actualization of self-determination. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness, the pillars of SDT

and their relationships to motivation derived from meaning making, can be clearly seen in

participants' responses (Self Determination Theory [SDT], 2017). SP is a good example of how

relatedness from SDT provided motivation for completing her degree. Her passion for teacher

leadership helped her relate the process of degree completion to remain motivated and never give

up (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

Within the context of this study, purpose was seen as an intuitive force that transforms

the personal evolution of participants into five breaking points that allowed the subunits for this

research to emerge. As first-generation student, I experienced countless events that challenged

my degree of purpose under stressful circumstances. Each event brought me to a point of

breaking down under stress, but my strong sense of purpose allowed me to persevere under

difficult circumstances. Examples of breaking points were seen in every day, stress-related

events of each participant. Some participants gave examples of how time constraints brought

additional stress that caused them to use their meaning making skills to manage their time.

Others spoke about how emotional it was to manage the demands of coursework with personal

responsibilities. All of the examples fit within the framework of events in life that tested

participants' ability to control their degrees of purpose through meaning making (Kegan, 1982).

Examples also revealed how life events and life course perspectives from the life span

approaches show how critical events and unpredictable environments can shape personal

evolution and motivation (Patton et al., 2016). Participants were able to communicate how

specific events contributed to their evolution of consciousness (Kegan, 1982). Each subunit

revealed how cues from the environment were used to reconstruct meaning to validate the work

needed for personal development apart from the work required for coursework.

Participant Demographics

Results from this transcendental phenomenological study came from data collected from

14 first-generation doctoral students attending various for-profit or non-profit universities in the

United States. Criterion-i™ sampling helped to focus on the target population while also increase

the probability of getting first-generation doctoral students who could give enough rich data that

would answer this study's interview questions (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2012). Certain

parameters were set in determining the type of students who would be invited to participate in

this study. Those parameters included (a) identifying oneself as a first-generation doctoral

student and (b) choosing to enroll in a doctoral degree program for either career advancement or

academic achievement and career advancement. Of the 50 prospects who initially took the

interest survey (Appendix A), 40 of them completed the survey, 33 of them identified as having

enrolled in a doctoral degree program for academic achievement and career advancement, but

only 16 agreed to be interviewed. Two of the 16 had a scheduling conflict that ultimately

prevented them from participating. Therefore, a final number of 14 first-generation doctoral

students from seven universities (nine women and five men) were interviewed via Zoom with

recorded audio. The number of those who participated provided a rich sampling for a

transcendental phenomenological study. The number of participants provided insight into how

their evolutions of consciousness may have formulated meaningful relationships between their

lived experiences and their discussions of purpose (Kegan, 1982). These students presented a

picture of their lived experiences while considering how they developed their senses of purpose

to achieve the highest level of education. Below is a table of participant demographics (see Table

2). A more detailed description of the demographics for the first-generation doctoral students

who participated as well as their discussions of purpose can be viewed in Appendix F.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Major	Year	Survey Results	Narratives
MG	Female	Statistics	3rd	Academic Achievement (AA) and Career Advancement (CA)	Direction
DT	Male	Business Administration (Marketing)	2nd of 3-Year Program	AA and CA	Direction
JW	Male	Counseling and Student Personnel Services (College Student Affairs Administration)	Doctoral Candidate (Data Collection)	AA and CA	Design
SP	Female	Teacher Leadership	Doctoral Candidate (Data Collection)	AA and CA	Design
SS	Female	Education (Learning Instruction and Innovation)	5th out of an 8-year program	AA and CA	Direction
AW	Female	Instructional Technology and Distance Education	7th (takes 3 years to complete, applied for extension)	AA and CA	Direction

RM	Male	Public Policy (Higher Education)	Graduate May 2019	CA	Direction
JW2	Male	Business Administration	2nd of 3-year program	AA and CA	Direction
KB	Female	Special Education	3rd (expects to graduate December 2019)	AA and CA	Direction
QJ	Female	Interdisciplinary Leadership Studies	Doctoral Candidate (Data Collection)	CA	Direction
MG2	Female	Instruction, Curriculum, and Assessment	Final Year	CA and AA	Design
AMC	Female	Instructional Technology and Leadership	1st of 3-year program	CA	Development
GB	Male	International Conflict Management	2nd of 5-year program	AA and CA	Development
JB	Male	Business Administration (Management)	1st of 3-year program	AA and CA	Design

Presentation of the Data

One question asked during the interview was the student's definition of purpose, which allowed each participant to be categorized into one of three meaning making units. These units were Design, Direction, and Development. Additionally, five subunits emerged, which showed how participants aligned their attitudes and behaviors with their senses of purpose—Design, Direction, or Development.

These three meaning making units, given in the voices of the participants, reveal insights to the self-determination process that led to the evolution of consciousness to align attitudes and behaviors to goals. Below, each of the meaning making units are defined and explained within the context of this study. Following each explanation is a discussion of how they relate to the

subunits. A full explanation and definition of each subunit, as well as examples of its

applications, follows this initial discussion.

Participants' discussions of purpose captured the role SDT played in providing emotional

well-being (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and motivation to complete their degree

(Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Participants were grouped based on their discussions of purpose, which

gave indications of how participants used meaning making to establish emotional well-being.

They were able to describe how their lived experiences gave them either autonomy, competence,

or relatedness for degree completion and career advancement. From their discussions of purpose,

the meaning units emerged which provided insights to the sources of their motivation.

Participants' responses described how the psychological states of Design, Direction, and

Development were used for the meaning units. Participants' responses to interview questions

revealed how the meaning making units of Design, Direction, and Development were linked with

the subunits to align attitudes and behaviors for degree completion and career advancement (see

Figure 2).

Meaning Making Units	Design		Direction		Development	
# of Participants	3		9		2	

Alignment of Participants Meaning Units to Subunits

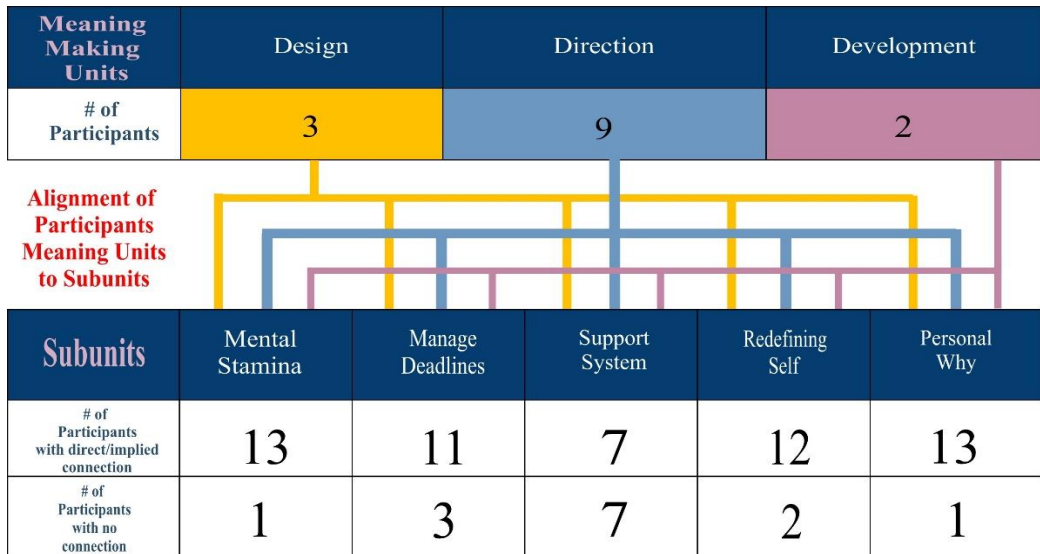| Subunits	Mental Stamina	Manage Deadlines	Support System	Redefining Self	Personal Why
# of Participants with direct/implied connection	13	11	7	12	13
# of Participants with no connection	1	3	7	2	1

Figure 2. Meaning making units and subunits.

As stated in Chapter 3, the data analysis of the transcendental phenomenological method allowed, through a series of broad, open-ended questions and prompts, first-generation doctoral students to describe the meaning making phenomenon as it relates to SDT and their personal growth (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Special attention was taken to examine the role purpose played in degree completion and career advancement by examining how participants were able to utilize the meaning units to provide motivation in their lived experience. This process made it easier for me to examine how participants aligned their attitudes and behaviors with their goals, identify the work required to transform attitudes and behaviors into a sense of purpose, and use meaning making to close gaps between person-environment (Patton et al., 2016). Examining how the meaning units provided motivation in the lived experience of participants made it easier to capture how the personal evolution of participants helped them to achieve despite challenges. The Meaning Making Unit and Subunit Mapping Chart (as shown in Figure 3) illustrates examples of how subunits correspond to units and the highlighted action steps participants used to reveal how purpose played a role in degree completion and career advancement. Note, these are examples. However, each subunit may correspond with all units depending upon the motivators that participants identify with to define their sense of purpose. The table also shows how participants used specific meaning making units (listed on the far right of Figure 3) to connect the five subunits to degree completion and career advancement.

Participant	Mental Stamina	Manage Deadlines	Support Systems	Redefining Self	Personal Why	Meaning Making Units
MG	Reminded herself that it is not a mistake she is in the program					Design
DT		Compelled to inquire about the best use of time				Direction
QJ			Inquired about what is important?			Direction
GB				Empowered to complete what he began		Development
JB					Used the opportunity to serve others to channel her energy	Design

Meaning Making Units & Subunits Mapping A mapping of the units and subunits that reveal the personal evolution of participants in their lived experiences and the role purpose played in aligning goals with degree completion and career advancement.

Figure 3. Meaning making unit and subunit mapping chart.

Discussion of Meaning Units

Design meaning unit. Three participants' responses indicated that creating value (Design) was important in their lived experiences for degree completion. Their responses indicated that their abilities to gain value from the process of degree completion and career advancement helped them achieve an emotional state of well-being, which is an intricate part of the three pillars of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Their discussions of purpose indicated how autonomy, competence, and relatedness through meaning making allowed them to use the

subunits for motivation to Design the life that created value through degree completion and

career advancement (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

      Correlation to subunits. Participants' responses to interview questions under the Design

Meaning Unit indicated how each subunit was used to design a life that gave them value. When

faced with challenges or breaking points, participants found motivation in being able to use the

challenges or breaking points to design a path that would lead them beyond giving up. Designing

value for degree completion and career advancement provided the Mental Stamina to sustain

their motivation throughout the degree completion process. The participants under the Design

Meaning Unit indicated that their motivation to create value for degree completion and career

advancement allowed them to Manage Deadlines. The participants under the Design Meaning

Unit also indicated the value of having the right Support System, which motivated them to

scrutinize the people around them for providing value. Another important factor for participants

under the Design Meaning Unit was the value of Redefining Self in the face of challenges.

Participants indicated their determinations to use their lived experiences of degree completion

and career advancement to redefine themselves into persons that were worthy of degree

completion and career advancement. Lastly, participants under the Design Meaning Unit

indicated a strong conviction and motivation to create value in degree completion and career

advancement. Based upon Deci's description of emotional well-being in SDT, participants were

able to utilize the subunits to create the value that contributed to their emotional well-being, from

the meaning unit, the purpose they Designed (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

      Direction meaning unit. Of the three meaning units, Direction in achieving goals

appears to be what most participants identified. Participants' responses indicated how they

adjusted their attitudes and behaviors to continue to move in the direction of degree completion

and career advancement despite challenges. Nine participants indicated how moving in the direction of their goals helped them achieve an emotional state of well-being, which fulfills a pillar requirement for SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Their discussions of purpose indicated how autonomy, competence, and relatedness through meaning making provided motivation to use the subunits to provide direction in degree completion and career advancement.

   Correlation to subunits. Participants' responses to interview questions under the Direction Meaning Unit indicated that when faced with challenges or breaking points, they were motivated to use each subunit to keep moving in the direction of their goals. Their senses of purpose from challenges or breaking points caused them to evolve in their consciousness to provide motivation to move in the direction of degree completion and career advancement. Participants' responses from the interview questions revealed how challenges motivated them to fortify their Mental Stamina for moving in the direction of degree completion and career advancement. Participants' desire to move in the direction of degree completion and career advancement motivated them to Manage Deadlines. To preserve moving in the direction of degree completion and career advancement, participants expressed their motivations to scrutinize their Support Systems to ensure relationships that provided direction and guidance. Participants also indicated the importance of redefining themselves to provide additional motivation for degree completion and career advancement. Lastly, participants expressed how their Personal Whys were used to motivate them to refrain from moving in directions detracted from their efforts to complete their degrees and advance their careers. Again, in reference to Deci's description of emotional well-being in SDT, participants were able to utilize the subunits to build the necessary framework for moving in the direction of their goals, which contributed to their emotional well-being, from the meaning unit Direction (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

Development meaning unit. Participants' responses, who fell under the Development Meaning Unit, used their lived experiences for degree completion and career advancement for personal development. Two participants indicated they were more motivated by being able to grow their character (Development), which provided an emotional state of well-being to help fulfill a pillar requirement for SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Their discussions of purpose indicated how autonomy, competence, and relatedness through meaning making allowed them to use the subunits for motivation to develop the right character for degree completion and career advancement.

Correlation to subunits. Participant responses to interview questions under the Development Meaning Unit indicated how each subunit helped participants engage in ongoing growth by making meaning out of challenges or breaking points from their lived experiences. Their senses of purpose from challenges or breaking points caused them to evolve in their consciousness to provide motivation to develop character for degree completion and career advancement. A good example of how participants were motivated to develop character was seen in their motivations to use their Mental Stamina to develop character for the rigors of completing their degrees and career advancement. These two participants gave strong indications of how specific deadlines motivated them to use their lived experiences to develop character. Support Systems were also scrutinized to ensure motivation to develop the right attitudes and behaviors for degree completion and career advancement. Data from these two participant responses to interview questions provided insights to their motivations to redefine themselves to develop attitudes and behaviors that moved them away from challenges in their lived experiences. Participants under this meaning unit provided insights to how their Personal Whys motivated them to develop a strong case for degree completion and career advancement. The last meaning

unit is also in reference to Deci's description of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Participants were able to utilize the subunits for ongoing development, which contributed to their emotional well-being from the meaning unit Development.

A good example of a breaking point came from JW's definition of purpose, which is defined in his relationship with God. His response to the interview questions indicated that breaking points were supported by the value he received from knowing God put him on the earth for a purpose. A second example came from DT, who used breaking points to move in the direction of his goals. His definition of purpose indicated that maintaining direction toward goals was a primary concern. Moreover, a third example of a breaking point came from GB's definition of purpose, which was closely related to personal impact. He stated that purpose felt like doing something that was meaningful and had an impact on others (as shown in Appendix F).

Discussion of Subunits of Meaning Making

Each phenomenological meaning making unit is a representation of the evolution of consciousness that participants experienced in their journeys to complete their degrees. Participants were able to articulate their evolutions of consciousness through the five interview questions, which examined participants identity under stress measured in emotional stability, time utilization, space utilization, character conditioning, and convictions and motivations (as shown in Appendix A). All five subunits provided the framework for the sense of purpose to be defined beyond what individuals do with their gifts and talents, to what they can become to provide motivation for maximizing their potentials to achieve. From the five interview questions emerged five subunits: Mental Stamina, Manage Deadlines, Support Systems, Redefining Self, and Personal Why (as shown in Figure 2). Each subunit captured how participants used the

meaning making process to provide emotional well-being related to the three pillars of SDT (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and align their attitudes and behaviors with their motivations to use purpose as a resource for degree completion and career advancement. The meaning making process reveals how purpose is not confined to a select few who are extremely gifted and talented. Purpose can now be seen as a motivational factor that anyone can use for achievement.

Each subunit preserves the integrity of the theoretical framework of SDT and its role in fortifying intentions to remain motivated for degree completion and career advancement (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Self-determination was a common occurrence for all subunits because participants' responses revealed their determination to succeed in spite of challenges. Figure 3 reveals how many participants per subunit used their determination from the sense of purpose to fortify their intentions to remain motivated to complete their degrees.

Subunit 1: Mental stamina. The first subunit, Mental Stamina, takes into consideration that life is full of unexpected realities in which individuals must use their senses of purpose to stabilize their emotions. The essence of this subunit reveals how life's challenges are processed based on the strong sense of purpose. According to Figure 2, 13 participants who answered this question showed how purpose could shape their attitudes and behaviors to stabilize their emotions amidst the challenges of completing a degree. Again, participants expressed how the three pillars of SDT created an emotional state to use their definition of purpose for motivation to build Mental Stamina. Some participant responses revealed how they used their senses of purpose to fortify their mental stamina by relating their desire to succeed to specific challenges they faced in degree completion and career advancement (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). When MG was asked to explain the role that purpose plays in stabilizing her emotions to complete her degree,

she felt her emotions were all over the place when she first started her doctoral degree program.

She said,

> Depending on the week, I feel like every grad student kind of goes through phases of
>
> emotional states, especially when you first start off. I mean, you first start off, the first
>
> year I feel like was the hardest year. I'm in the third year now, and I felt lost. I felt
>
> anxious. I felt sometimes like I was an imposter, and my emotions kind of took over in
>
> that way.

Then she discussed what she had to do to overcome these emotions:

> But when those thoughts came in, I noticed my grades started to go down, so I noticed
>
> that I had to change my emotional state in order for me to succeed in the program.
>
> Whenever I feel like an imposter because I know imposter syndrome is a real thing, I feel
>
> like I have to kind of remind myself it's not a mistake that I'm here. I know I can do this.
>
> You've been doing this for years. You can complete this degree. Just think more happy
>
> thoughts and pick-me-ups, which really helped because, when I was feeling like an
>
> imposter, I felt like my purpose here was not ... it wasn't meant to be here. I felt like my
>
> purpose was non-existent. But when I'm happier, I feel like what I'm doing is going to
>
> contribute to the statistical field, so I have to keep going.

MG is a classic example of how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from SDT might not be clearly

evident as she relied on her sense of purpose to stabilize her emotions (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

MG proved that the intuitive nature of purpose can be used to shape thoughts to move away from

negative influences that impede one's ability to succeed. Through my lived experience as a first-

generation student, I observed how my sense of purpose helped me intuitively adjust my

attitudes and behaviors and MG's lived experience reminded me of similar personal experiences

as a first-generation student.

   KB realized that getting a doctoral degree can be overwhelming at times, so she had to

put things into perspective. She said:

> I look to my children to kind of balance me out and keep me from really letting this
>
> process consume me and overwhelm me, at times it has, it's affected my health. This is
>
> my third year in the program, as I stated earlier and it's starting to affect my health, but I
>
> have to stop and look at them and remember that they're the reasons that I'm in the
>
> program and they're the reasons that I need to complete this and I need to be successful in
>
> completing it.

KB's hybrid response reveals how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from SDT can be used in

conjunction with meaning making to create a strong sense of purpose (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Her

children provided an extrinsic motivation that allowed her to leverage her sense of purpose to

create mental stamina. Her response also expresses the need for further development

opportunities to create a strong sense of purpose to avoid limitations that come from the

motivational factors of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Through my lived experience as a first-

generation student, there were times when I had neither intrinsic nor extrinsic motivation, which

compelled me to rely on my sense of purpose to overcome the reality of not feeling the

motivation needed to complete my goals.

   AMC shared how tough it can be to focus on studies during challenging times. She

stated:

> Well ... to that regard I would say that you do have to stay focused and it's been
>
> challenging at times because there are so many different streams of information coming

in between work and home and family and events that are going on around you. It's been tough to remain emotionally stable at all times when handling all that. When it's time to get to work I'm able to focus long enough that I can complete the work that I'm required to do for that program and then when it's my time off I think in those moments where you're allowed to relax, that's where the breakdown comes in. I think we all have those moments when we get overwhelmed and right now the content that I'm learning is very deep for me in comparison to other classes that I've taken….

Even with these challenges, she shared:

So, that's been the toughest part is because I think up until this degree that most things really have been pretty easy, and so things are starting to get challenging but I know if I continue to work hard and focus and try to stay emotionally stable then I'll be able to persevere and work my way through.

AMC's response showcased how her work provided the foundation for her evolution of consciousness. It provided Mental Stamina by allowing her to focus on the task at hand. AMC's work provided the sense of purpose to help her stabilize her emotions and allow her conviction and motivation to persevere to get things done.

GB has dealt with mental health issues throughout his life. So, when stress entered in early on in his doctoral degree program, he knew how to deal with it. He shared, "I don't self-medicate. I don't drink. I don't do any of that stuff. I deal with all that stuff on my own." He continued:

Particularly, this last summer was a bit difficult because I didn't have any classes that had a paper I needed to finish. I guess if you want to talk about a sense of purpose that I have going back to Southeast Asia, I would remind myself that if I get this work done and do it

well, I'll be in a better position to be able to go back to the part of the world that I enjoy

most and am most comfortable being in.

GB's response reveals how the sense of purpose can provide Mental Stamina and motivation to

finish what one has started. It showcased how meaning making can help position one's career

interest to align with goals.

　　　　Subunit 2: Manage deadlines. The second subunit, Manage Deadlines, takes into

consideration that the degree of success in the future is dependent on the degree of purpose in the

present. This subunit is important because I know all too well how time can be wasted on

activities that detract from goals. The sense of purpose and time usage can be the deciding factor

for achieving goals within a set time. Participants expressed how the three pillars of SDT created

an emotional state to use their discussions of purpose for motivation to Manage Deadlines (Ryan

& Deci, 2000a). It allows participants to see that a strong sense of purpose produces a wise use

of time. Time management is a topic that many students have difficulty with (Harman, 2014).

This is no different for 11 of the participants. When asked the question, "Explain the role

purpose plays in your use of time," DT normally asks the questions, "…when do I maximize that

time? Do I do it in the evenings? ... Or do I do it on the weekends, where I'm sacrificing time I

could be spending with my kids?" He continued, "So I try to take that approach, and I try to do a

little bit each day. But I really try to do most of it on the weekend." DT's response confirms how

a clear purpose will help make better decisions. The sense of purpose compelled DT to ask

questions to use time wisely. Decisions were not motivated by intrinsic or extrinsic motivation.

However, DT's preference to devote the weekend to completing the work required for degree

completion allowed him to leverage the sense of purpose. The sense of purpose gave him the

discipline to set aside time on the weekends to complete the work needed for degree completion.

SP realized that she doesn't have time to waste in her doctoral degree program. She said: "As others may have time to really watch TV, I always need to be looking at how I can add that time to finish working on my dissertation. Let me read this article, let me look this up. So, I'm always dedicating time that I have to my completion." SP's response reveals how the strength that came from her purpose to complete her degree motivated her to take an inventory of extra time to devote to degree completion. When purpose is involved in managing time, purpose compels one to be resourceful to avoid wasting time on matters that do not lead to goals.

Knowing herself as the "worst procrastinator ever," SS realized that she had to do things differently in order to get things done. She shared:

> It really is, it's the thing that at the point where I know that I've been procrastinating too long. I have to get off my butt and go, "all right, SS, it's time. It's, you know, stop it." It is the thing that stops me in my procrastination of nonsense. It gets me out, basically gets me to put the book down that I'm reading that has nothing to do with my topic and get back on the computer and get coding.

AW had a similar reaction when asked the question. She said:

> Okay, now I am known as the queen of procrastination. I think that it does not correlate at all, because sometimes I would sit there and say, "Well, I'm not going to do this today." I'm tired, I think of every excuse, but then when it's time to buckle down, when I think, *Okay, you're wasting money, you're wasting time, get this thing done, it's already been six years, let's go ahead and get it done.*

Both SS and AW's responses reveal how the sense of purpose can cause the conscious to evolve into self-talk to avoid procrastination. Both SS and AW were able to take charge of their time through self-talk to provide the conceptual framework for intrinsic motivation from SDT.

MG has never had a problem with time management. As a matter of fact, she shared that in high school and time as an undergraduate, she was involved in many extracurricular activities that made her have to use her time wisely. She shared:

I ran track, I was in a lot of clubs, so I had to be very careful with my time because, in high school, I went to Detroit Public Schools, and the high school that I went to, you had to take a test to get into, so you had to be at least at a 3.0 to stay there. I couldn't let my grades slip, so I had to be careful. I went to class from eight to three, track practice was from four to 6:30, and then I had to wedge in eating dinner, getting cleaned up, and doing homework before a certain amount of time when my brain just shuts down at like 11. I kind of got used to being wise with my time, even through undergrad and even now. My last semester of undergrad, things didn't go as planned with my credits. I ended up having to take 20 credits to graduate.

She continued:

At first, when I saw that, I said it's either take 20 credits now or graduate in the fall, which would be later, and I would miss my grad school start, so I said, "That's not an option." I had to buckle down. I wrote out lists of times, and I used to print out these time-sheets and put in and schedule what days I wanted to do homework for specific classes. It really helped, and I think it was meant to happen that way because the amount of homework I had with 20 credits was just the same as my first year of graduate school. I was prepared, I was already on task, on target with time and managing it, and I was able to get a 3.5 or above from that semester in undergrad, that last one, and grad school. So purposefully, I think time management is key in keeping your purpose because you can

have a purpose, but if you don't have time to complete the purpose or you're not putting

time in to complete the purpose, it's just a dream, but you're not really filling it.

MG's response to the role of purpose in managing time is the epitome of how the sense of

purpose can support goals. Even though she carried heavy class loads from undergrad to

graduate school, she was able to make sure her intentions to do the required work outweighed the

resistance she had to face with time constraints. Her self-determination was not the product of

extrinsic motivation, but it was her intrinsic motivation from SDT that caused her to pursue her

idea of purpose (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

      Subunit 3: Support systems. I understood that one of the biggest distractions for

completing a degree comes from the environment/space. The essence of this subunit captures

what seven participants who answered this question had to become to overcome resistance from

their environments. The subunit shows the value participants were willing to bring to their spaces

to prevent them from being derailed from completing their degrees. Measuring value showed

their resolve to overcome negative influences from their environments. Again, participants

expressed how the three pillars of SDT created an emotional state to use their discussions of

purpose for motivation to scrutinize their support systems which included people and the

environment (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). When asked to explain how purpose plays a role in shaping

one's environment, QJ shared that many times, it takes having mental conversations with oneself

to keep one focused and in the right head space to complete the work. She said:

      I think that it goes back to a little bit of my first answer about, excuse me, having those

negotiations with myself. Like, "What's the end game?" and ... excuse me, and, "What's

important?" And, "What do I need to do in order to inch me further to that mark?" If it's the fact

that I need to run through these transcriptions tonight and I may want to do something else, well

that first chunk of time is gonna be devoted to the transcription because my brain needs to be

clear. I need to be focused. I need to be in a space where I can give it 110%. For me, it's making

those negotiations with self and really putting myself in a space to say, "You're gonna have to

delay gratification. I know you're tired, but we're gonna have to delay that right now and do what

we need to do and have to do to get where we want to be."

> She also shared instances when the people in her life were key to her being in the right

environment. She shared:

> So, I had to put myself in spaces and places that allowed me to learn from others, and
>
> then, it's gonna sound weird but, making sure that I hook-up with another Black person,
>
> because often times hooking-up with that other Black person is going to help you. That's
>
> gonna be the hand that you need to ... even at an HBCU. You need somebody to almost
>
> vouch for you. That's definitely been a key role in me making those thought, having those
>
> thought processes like, "Where do I wanna be? What do I wanna do? What am I good at?
>
> What do I see in my future as far as a professional role? In my personal life. Etcetera."
>
> And then, "Who are the people around me who can help me do that?" That's definitely
>
> intentional, at least for me.

She continued:

> Even in my friend group. You always need people around you, whom you can learn from,
>
> and who can learn from you. Once you have, and I guess that goes back to why I'm
>
> researching social networks, but that just goes back to making sure that your circle is give
>
> and take, right? It's not always you taking from someone. There has to be a give and take
>
> and I think that for you to know your purpose, I think that's the first piece, but you gotta

know what your purpose is or having an idea of leaning towards that for you to know

who to have around you.

One of the keys to leveraging the sense of purpose is delayed gratification. QJ's response

revealed how a sense of purpose could help create a space for endurance to emerge for degree

completion. QJ also revealed how she surrounded herself with the right support system to help

optimize her space or environment for meaning making.

MG2 answered the question this way:

Well, it caused me to drop a lot of friends that ... Like I said, they were not contributing

towards my purpose. We didn't have the same goals in mind. The people that I allowed to

be around me, folks I associated with, things began to change… what I noticed is as you

elevate to your next level, everybody can't be there. Everybody can't get on that bus and

follow you all the way to the end of your journey. Some folks are going to have to get off

the bus, and some folks you're going to have to let on the bus that will help you to take a

quicker route.

She continued:

And so, as I began to get older, you get a little bit more wisdom. And as you start reading

more stuff and start surrounding ... As I surrounded myself around people that were in

their purpose doing the things that they were destined to do, and I began to watch and

pick their brain. "Well, what is it that you're doing that's making you so successful? ...

And so, I had to come to that point in my mindset of, "You know, it's not that you're

trying to be better than anybody, but if you're trying to elevate and they not willing to

elevate themselves and they at a level of complacency, well, yeah, you need to change

your environment. You need to change the people that you hang around, the people that

you talk to, the folks that you associate with."

The sense of purpose compelled MG2 to develop a keen awareness for people who supported her

effort to pursue purpose. MG2's evolution of consciousness allowed her to search out people for

additional insights on the role purpose played in achievement. The strong sense of purpose

compelled MG2 to build parameters to guard her vision of her future so she could align her

attitude and behavior to her goals.

AMC also limits people and things that may distract her from her academic achievement

and career goals. She has this to say:

I am helping myself by completing my education and working on those things at home

and I really don't find myself in particular environments that could negatively affect my

completion of my degree that might misuse my time or around people that wouldn't value

the same things that I do. I also probably don't find myself enjoying situations where if I

go somewhere, I've been invited to an event, and there are things going on that aren't in

line with my faith or what I believe that would be ... things that are conducive to me

completing my degree. I probably would ... I'd feel uncomfortable and I usually don't

participate or stay very long, but I try to interject myself and be social, but it doesn't

always work because everyone always has their own philosophy and their environments

are very different, but my environment is very controlled.

Even though AMC was more disciplined than most participants, her response revealed that the

sense of purpose allowed her to set priorities that created an environment that was conducive for

degree completion. AMC appeared to understand that the degree of success in the future was

dependent on the degree of purpose in the present. AMC created a space that allowed her to

remain in the moment to complete the necessary work for degree completion.

      Subunit 4: Redefining self. This subunit captured participants' identities under stress

and how they remained in character when faced with challenges. As a first-generation student, I

understood the importance of personal evolution in achieving goals. I also understood the

importance of self-development when stressful circumstances were not present. This subunit

reveals the importance of self-development in self-determination to remain in the process of

achievement. Again, the three pillars of SDT played an important role in helping participants

redefine themselves by creating an emotional state to use their discussions of purpose to adjust

their attitudes and behaviors. When asked to explain how purpose plays a role in one's character

development, GB believes having ethics and professionalism goes a long way with those he

works with. He said:

> To me, being ethical professionally not only as a student, but as a graduate assistant in the
>
> program is very important. That's self-ingrained in myself, but I believed that's always
>
> been one of my strongest characters in terms of being honest and being ethical…
>
> Purpose, being able to better articulate myself. If I was in the position where my
>
> character, my intentions were questioned, then I would be able to have better critical
>
> thinking skills and be able to articulate myself better if that ever came up. Also, hoping
>
> that future employers will find value in the fact that I started something that is considered
>
> to be a very challenging process, getting a PhD. The fact that I completed it, and
>
> hopefully completed it in a timely manner doing really good work that will show them, or
>
> whoever else is going to work with that, my sense of character is strong in that way
>
> because I complete what I begin.

GB's response reveals the connection between intentions and purpose. GB was able to use the sense of purpose to redefine character to fortify intentions to complete his degree. Extrinsic motivation from SDT was revealed as GB shared how future employers could examine his commitment to complete his degree in a timely manner as a testament to his character or how he defined himself in his lived experience.

Developing one's character is something JB knows all too well, considering her father is a preacher. She shared how her family contributed to her character development:

And so, when we think about our purpose that we have on this earth, I would have to go back to the core principles that I was taught growing up, to treat people with kindness, to respect each other, to help those in need if you have the ability to do so. I think that when I think about my purpose and my character development, I think my character is shaped in general by those values that I learned growing up. And I try to live that every single day. So, when I'm faced with a challenge where there are multiple options, I tend to lean towards the option that falls in line with my character and my values. I try to do the right thing even when people aren't looking, because that's really important to me as an individual. But then if I think about going back to some of those values in the Bible, being honest and those things, I think that that also helps me determine the route that I go.

JB's response revealed how the sense of purpose can be used for character development to connect to core values. Through her lived experience, her core values shaped her attitude and behavior to maintain a constant connection to purpose. JB's response revealed how the strong sense of purpose can emerge as an influence to shape character and provide the foundation for Redefining Self.

JW feels that purpose and character go hand in hand, especially as it relates to completing his doctoral degree. He shares how the program he is in causes much reflection:

Yeah, I think it has helped me define and redefine who I am and so one of the great things about being in a program I think is just a lot of, at least our program is counseling focused it's about student affairs and so it's a lot of introspection, it's a lot of reflection and figuring out who we are not only as practitioners and professionals but as people and so knowing what my purpose is to educate others and to give back to others, I also have to reflect on who I am and how I show up in spaces… It's a constant cycle of reflection and it's a lot of unlearning, it's a lot of new learning. It's a lot of really finding who I am and how I ... what I want people to say about my character or what I want to convey about my character so yeah, I think that's how purpose has really helped shape and define my character.

DT explained how he had to adjust his character in higher education to complete his doctoral program:

So, in addition to what I do here … professionally, when I'm in class here it's a different environment. And I'm learning from faculty. And a lot of it is kind of blowing my mind. Like, "Man, these are some really, really sharp people." But it helped me to really adjust to higher ed, because this is going to be my career path. And so now I'm in a position where I can take what I think are the best, most healthy things from my military background, that discipline, that punctuality, setting higher standards, but then ratcheting down some of the extreme part of that, and then finding some balance from some of the faculty that I really respect. And finding that balance part, I think, has really helped develop my character.

JW and DT's responses reveal how the sense of purpose can be used for self-reflection to redefine self for degree completion. Again, purpose is more than what one does with gifts and talents. Purpose is an influence that leads to the evolution of consciousness to help individuals redefine themselves to remain motivated to achieve goals.

      Subunit 5: Personal why. Another major threat to goals is allowing energy to be channeled toward things that do not take one in the direction of goals. The essence of the subunit, Personal Why, is that it allowed 13 participants to use their perceived discussions of purpose to communicate how they used their convictions and motivations to continue tracking toward degree completion and career advancement. The subunit also showcased how those participants could create favorable experiences to remain engaged for the work that had to be done. My Personal Why was my commitment to her grandmother to be the first in her family to obtain a college degree. My Personal Why gave me the conviction and motivation to endure challenging circumstances that tried to undermine her goal. Again, participants expressed how the three pillars of SDT created an emotional state to use their discussions of purpose to channel their convictions for degree completion and career advancement (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

      When asked to explain the role that purpose plays in one's career advancement, SP realized that one has to have a plan when it comes to advancing in one's career. She said, "You have to know, 'I'm doing this for a reason. I'm doing this because down the line, I may need this, down the line, this may come in handy.' You never know what doors can be opened." SP's response reveals how the sense of purpose can be used to create a personal why to support convictions and motivations. Her meaning making skills allowed her to evolve in her consciousness to decode her effort to complete her degree for future opportunities. Her anticipation for future opportunities allowed her effort for degree completion to be her reward,

which confirmed her intrinsic motivation from SDT. Her Personal Why reflected a strong sense of purpose, which allowed her to sustain her convictions and motivation over sustained periods.

For JB, career advancement was more about serving others than benefitting herself. She shared:

When I think about the experiences that I've had throughout my life, and I think about the wonderful people that I've met and the experiences that they had been through, I understand that my purpose is not just to serve myself. So, when I think about my career advancement and my goals, I don't want to necessarily choose a career or go down a path that specifically benefits me, and it only benefits my own desires to be where I want to be in my life. So, when I think about career advancement, I think about what else I can give to others. How can I use what I've learned? So not only progress on my own life, but those around me. What differences can I make in other people's lives? So, I would say that my career advancement is important as far as getting me to the position to where I can be to help others. So, advancing my career is obviously going to put me in a position to be able to give back, but also understanding that it's not just about me. What can I give? The things that I'm learning in school and the things that I will learn in my future career; how can I then take those things and apply them to my everyday life? Or how can I take those tools and apply it to the lives of others? … So that's what drives my career advancement is knowing what my purpose is and using the skills and talents that I learn to give back to others.

JB's response revealed how she used the sense of purpose to shape her motivation to serve others. Her strong sense of purpose provided the conviction she needed to position herself to use her career to give back, which became an extrinsic motivator to engage in her work. Her

response reveals her determination to use the extrinsic motivation of giving back to apply meaning to her career.

Summary of Subunits

All five subunits reveal that the role purpose played in first-generation doctoral students' quest for degree completion and career advancement required synergy between SDT and participants sense of purpose (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Participants articulated how their lived experiences in completing their degrees required both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to remain engaged in the degree completion process (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). MG used intrinsic motivation to overcome feelings of being an imposter. She reminded herself that it was not by mistake that she was involved in the process of completing her doctoral degree. KB looked to her children to provide extrinsic motivation for completing her doctoral degree. In spite health concerns, she stopped and looked at her children to remind her that they are the reason she is in the program to complete her doctoral degree. The five subunits also reveal the personal evolution caused between person-environment and how meaning making is used to condition character to adjust attitudes and behaviors. JW expressed how purpose and character go hand in hand by explaining how purpose shaped and defined his character to complete his degree.

This study revealed that when intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are not present, the intuitive nature of purpose plays a deeper role in shaping attitudes and behaviors of first-generation doctoral students. The sense of purpose activated meaning making so participants could self-author thoughts that led to Mental Stamina. Meaning making was also used to self-author actions that led to meeting deadlines. Participants also scrutinized their Support Systems for meaning to determine if their current supports could help them self-author the support needed to overcome negative influences from the environment. The sense of purpose also caused

participants to redefine their characters in light of their quests to complete their degrees, thus

causing participants to adjust attitudes and behaviors according to goals. Lastly, participants

were able to use their senses of purpose to formulate their personal whys to help them fortify

their convictions and motivations. The intuitive nature of purpose served as a mechanism for

controlling the degree of purpose in the evolution of consciousness to help participants ensure

their degrees of success in the future. Engaging participants in this process allowed me to build a

solid framework for understanding the relationship between purpose and career advancement.

The intuitive nature of purpose provided a constant evaluation of person-environment, which

allowed first-generation doctoral students to take a deeper dive into how their degrees would

help them use their careers to either contribute toward their work or better their families

(Holland, 1997). The study not only revealed that purpose played a role in first-generation

doctoral students' degree completion and career advancement, but purpose was the primary

source for activating meaning making narratives to motivate individuals to align attitudes and

behaviors for achieving goals.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided narrative profiles of 14 first-generation doctoral student

participants based on the interviews that were conducted. These narratives gave rich descriptions

of the 14 participants' thoughts on how the five emergent subunits (Mental Stability, Manage

Deadlines, Support Systems, Redefining Self, and Personal Why) are connected to three meaning

making units (Design, Direction, and Development) that reflected their discussions of purpose

(see Appendix F). A detailed description of the collective experiences of the 14 interviewees

were then presented. The strength that came from purpose, which, in Chapter 5, I call the

Strength Factor, echoed throughout the research findings. In Chapter 5, the Strength Factor is

introduced as the personal evolution of participants that forms the intersection with meaningful

excellence. Chapter 5 also provides a discussion of the data derived from the findings, discuss

limitations and delimitations from the study, and offer recommendations for future research.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

This final chapter contributes to the research by providing additional interpretations of and insights into findings by using the data from Chapter 4 to provide an analysis of how the meaning making phenomenon took place among first-generation doctoral students completing their degrees. Chapter 5 expands upon my positionality statement by building a connection between the five subunits from participants' senses of purpose in Chapter 4 to what I now call meaningful excellence as defined in Chapter 1. The five subunits reflect the different circumstances that participants faced in their journeys to degree completion, but what kept emerging in the study was meaningful excellence. Again, meaningful excellence has been defined as the personal evolution that conditions the character to achieve a quality or state of being outstanding or extremely good at sustaining a strong sense of purpose under all circumstances. The Jenkins model of meaningful excellence™ gives further insights to the findings in Chapter 4 by building the bridge between the meaning units derived from this study, self-determination theory, and meaningful excellence. Each theme of Strength Factor could be expressed as the quality or state that participants achieved to sustain their strong senses of purpose under all circumstances. Again, the study not only revealed that purpose played a role in first-generation doctoral students' degree completion and career advancement, but purpose was the primary source for activating meaning making narratives to motivate individuals to align attitudes and behaviors for achieving goals. The study revealed how participants were able to tell their story through the lens of the strength that came from purpose, which was highlighted as the Strength Factor in this chapter.

The purpose for using the Jenkins model of meaningful excellence™ is to help both institutions and students develop intellectual capacities for creating a workable blueprint for meaning making and motivation. Students could create a more definitive action plan for using their strong senses of purpose to engage activities, overcome challenges, increase self-worth, and provide personal validation. The Jenkins model of meaningful excellence™ could also be used as an instrument to identify development opportunities for student development professionals. Student development professionals could be able to understand the scope of the work required for helping students fine-tune the role of purpose in adjusting attitudes and behaviors for degree completion and career advancement. The chapter ends with a presentation of the study's limitations and implications for practice and future research.

The driving force behind academic achievement has been a subject of research for years. Several studies suggested that students who have goals and direction put forth the extra effort to perform well in meeting demands for academic achievement (Ames, 1992; Rawsthorne & Elliot, 1999; Van Etten et al., 2008; Vansteenkiste et al., 2006; Zimmerman, 2008). To examine the role purpose played in first-generation doctoral students' degree completion and career advancement, the study identified a need for data that indicated the personal evolution that these students had to undergo in the achievement process. Personal evolution is an important factor in the achievement cycle because it accentuates the meaning making process. By examining the personal evolution that first-generation doctoral students had to undergo, the strong sense of purpose was clearly seen as a resource each participant used in the quest for academic achievement and career advancement. Participants were able to explore academic achievement beyond goals and direction to clearly explain the role purpose played in their academic achievements. All 14 participants were able to tell their stories through the lens of purpose based on their lived

experiences. This form of storytelling revealed their conscious response to the motivation and work needed to complete their degrees beyond coursework. The research expanded the scope of academic achievement beyond goals and directions. The research factored in the evolution of consciousness that participants underwent as they reconstructed meaningful relationships between their current realities and their academic goals and career advancements. By telling their stories through the lens of purpose, participants were able to reveal their conscious responses to their personal evolutions and motivations, which allowed me to use SDT to identify the work needed to complete their degrees beyond coursework.

A significant finding in this research was the intuitive nature of participants who found paths that led to meaningful excellence. The strong sense of purpose that comes from meaningful excellence can be seen as a phenomenon that occurs in the quest for achievement, but it can be difficult to measure due to its esoteric nature and association to personal passions that drive potential. Even though passion is a force that can be seen, it cannot be measured in a lab. So, I used the Strength Factor, which I defined as the personal evolution of participants that allows them to achieve despite challenges, as a foundation for exploring how first-generation doctoral students used purpose as a resource. The concept of purpose had to be portrayed in a manner that revealed how participants interpreted cues from their environments to create motivation for completing their degrees. This was an important part of the research because the environment plays a significant role in personal evolution and motivation. The environment can either shape attitudes and behaviors toward positive contribution or create attitudes and behaviors that undermine the quest for achievement.

Discussion

Meaningful excellence combines meaning making narratives with academic motivation to represent the quest for personal growth and development in closing the gap between the environment and the value one can bring to the environment. Meaningful excellence is where life events and life course perspectives from the life span approaches come together to display a strong sense of purpose through critical events and unpredictable environments (Patton et al., 2016). The strong sense of purpose that comes through meaningful excellence is clearly seen when the intent to perform outweighs the resistance from events and environments. Self-determination theory creates the intent to perform through psychological well-being. This theory suggests that for first-generation doctoral students to achieve educational goals and career advancement, they must be more purposeful in creating psychological well-being and engage in activities that promote a strong sense of purpose. However, the Jenkins meaningful excellence model™ expands the development of intellectual capacities in academic excellence by providing a blueprint for meaning making and achievement as illustrated in Figure 4.
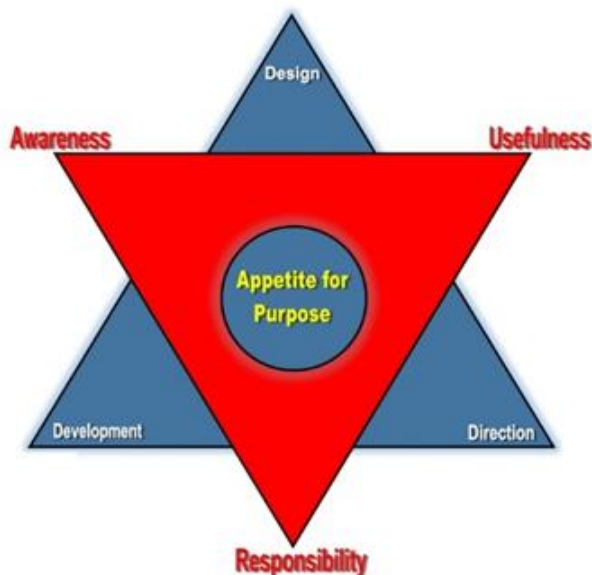

Figure 4. Three milestones of purpose.

The path to meaningful excellence can be found within the parameters that feed the appetite for purpose, which expands purpose beyond what one does with his or her education. Purpose is also an intuitive force with parameters that shape attitudes and behaviors for taking a stand and developing the conscious for self-authoring. The three milestones of purpose are critical for helping students construct meaning out of current realities, thus aiding in the evolution of meaning. According to the Jenkins model of meaningful excellence™, the intuitive side of purpose reveals intentions that can withstand resistance from outside forces. First-generation students have good intentions, but the Jenkins model for meaningful excellence™ gives a blueprint for first-generation doctoral students to explore the three milestones of purpose to fortify their intentions for degree completion. Obtaining a doctoral degree is a significant milestone, but first-generation doctoral students must realize that achieving purpose-oriented milestones, such as awareness, resource, and responsibility, are significant points in their developments that aid in the process of achieving goals.

When first-generation doctoral students can combine a strong sense of purpose for academic excellence, it allows them to make sense of their current realities, so they can see how education is a vehicle to help them move away from labels that undermine their motivation. Once their awareness of their purpose of education is established, the second milestone of purpose enables them to transform their awareness into a resource to help manage their thoughts and actions for better engagement in the educational experience. When a strong sense of purpose becomes a resource, the third milestone of purpose allows them to transfer that resource as a responsibility, which allows first-generation students to view degree completion as an essential part of owning their futures. All three serve to help students create a perpetual connection to the meaning making process so they can activate the self-authoring process. When students engage

in the self-authoring process, they design the life that will give them the most value, move them

in the direction of their goals, and engage them in an ongoing process for development.

      Again, meaningful excellence is a character quality of being outstanding or extremely

good at sustaining a strong sense of purpose under all circumstances. Meaningful excellence is a

viable resource for helping student affairs professionals expand their scopes of student

development, which was defined by Jones and Abes (2011) as "some kind of positive change

[that] occurs in the student (e.g., cognitive complexity, self-awareness, racial identity, or

engagement" (p. 153). Meaningful excellence not only enhances self-awareness and engagement,

it provides a clear path that minimizes the complexity of building a bridge between marketable

skills and purpose. The study suggested that when first-generation doctoral students engage in

the three milestones of purpose, their senses of purpose can become the outstanding quality that

allows them to undergo the transformation to overcome challenges that undermine their

motivation. This process could result in more first-generation doctoral students completing their

degrees, which is represented by the postsecondary meaningful excellence chart in Figure 5.
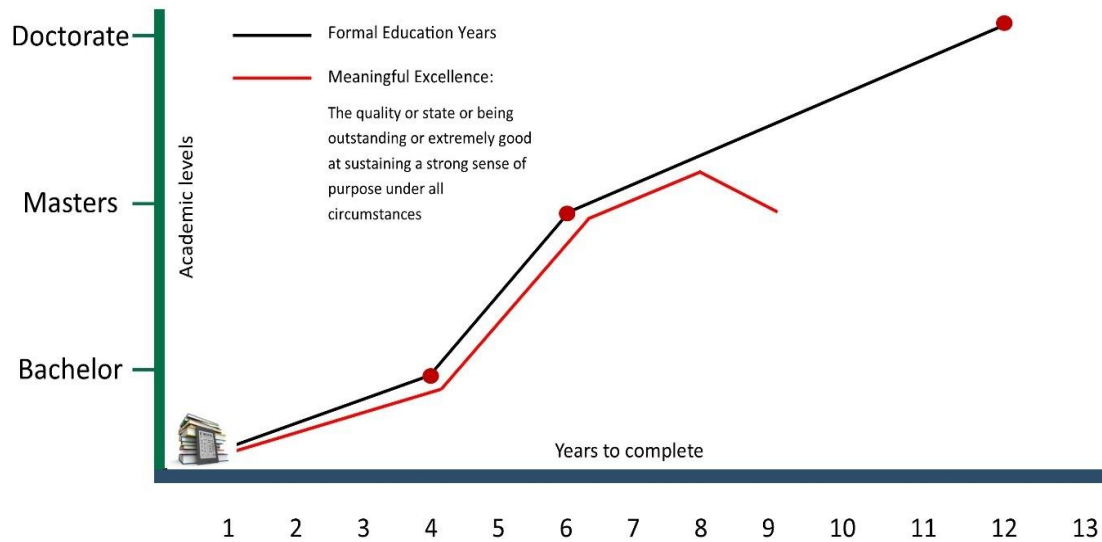
Postsecondary Meaningful Excellence Chart

Figure 5. Postsecondary meaningful excellence chart.

The chart provides a visual of what happens when academic achievement is accompanied by

meaningful excellence. The black line represents the path for formal education from the bachelor

to the doctoral level, which on average takes approximately 8.5 years. However, the moment

academic excellence separates from meaningful excellence, it increases the risk of first-

generation doctoral students aborting their academic pursuits, which is represented by the red

line on the meaningful excellence chart.

Success in college is not a guarantee, and based on the participants' responses, all

students are guaranteed to experience challenges that may undermine their convictions and

motivations to complete their degrees. Challenges from lived experiences are the crucible for

achievement that brings students to the point of breaking down in their convictions and

motivations. At this point, first-generation doctoral students either evolve in their consciousness,

or surrender to defeat. When meaningful excellence is non-existent, defeat is inevitable, but when meaningful excellence is a factor in the quest for achievement, first-generation doctoral students can associate challenges from their lived experiences with meaning and push through. The ability to connect meaningful excellence with lived experiences allows first-generation doctoral students to evolve in consciousness to access new growth potential. Not only are first-generation doctoral students conscious of pending challenges, they are conscious of their convictions and motivations to overcome the many challenges associated with obtaining a doctoral degree.

The personal growth diagram (as shown in Figure 6) puts Kegan's (1982, 1994) evolution of consciousness in perspective as he describes the process of growth as the evolution of meaning. When looking at the diagram, the evolution of meaning is a combination of the Jenkins meaningful excellence model™ with the questions that were used to interview research participants. Both capture the phenomenon that allows first-generation doctoral students to evolve in consciousness and control their degrees of purpose under all circumstances. The process of growth involves a strong sense of purpose under circumstances that test the ability to stabilize emotions, manage time, make the most out of given space, maintain a character that leads to achievement, and sustain convictions and motivations under all circumstances. This process is an intricate part of the meaningful excellence phenomenon that causes first-generation doctoral students to experience a personal evolution to excel in academics and career achievement.
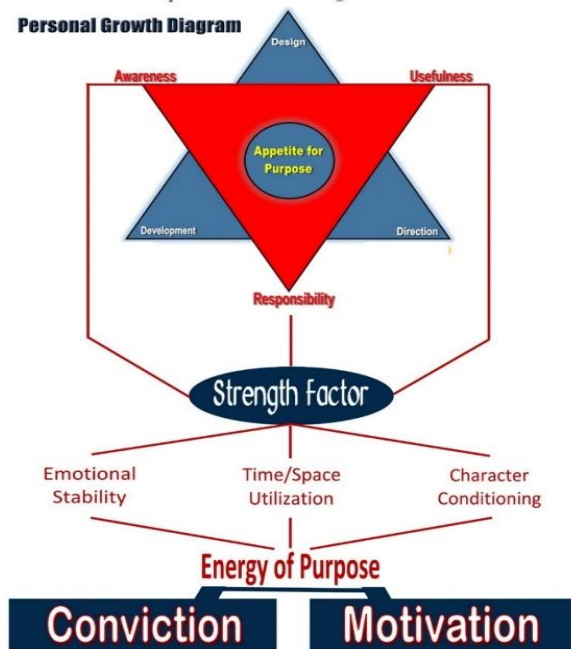
Figure 6. Personal growth diagram.

The personal growth diagram reveals how first-generation doctoral students control their degrees of purpose to increase their degrees of success in the future. First-generation doctoral students cannot control what happens around them, but they can use their senses of purpose to control how challenges influence their attitudes and behaviors. If first-generation doctoral students fail to feed the appetite for purpose through meaning making, they may struggle to develop any significant quality or state of sustaining a strong sense of purpose. I define appetite for purpose as the sum of how people identify themselves to give them meaning to exist and a purpose to perform. Participants in this study revealed how meaning making could be used to feed their appetites for purpose. The three meaning making units and five subunits allowed first-generation doctoral students to explore how the evolution of consciousness is used to increase their values for completing their degrees and perform in a manner to overcome constraints that test their Mental Stamina, Manage Deadlines, optimize their Support Systems, Redefine Self, and examine their Personal Whys.

Mental Stamina is the first place the five subunits are seen in enhancing first-generation doctoral students' performance. When first-generation doctoral students have a strong sense of purpose, their lived experiences become moments to use the strength that comes from purpose to forge mental stamina. Instead of increasing the risk of psychological breakdowns in the achievement process, the strength that comes from purpose compels first-generation doctoral students to have a strong resolve to finish what they started. The same is true with time constraints, which are moments to use the strength that comes from purpose to manage deadlines. When first-generation doctoral students have a strong sense of purpose for completing their degrees, time management becomes a priority. Another performance indicator in the achievement process is evaluating personal Support Systems with goals. When the lived experiences are supported by a strong sense of purpose, those experiences compel first-generation doctoral students to make sure their Support Systems align with their goals. The fourth theme contributes to performance by helping students Redefine Self. When Redefining Self is combined with a strong sense of purpose in their lived experiences, first-generation doctoral students evolve in their consciousness to make sure self-limitations do not stand between them and their goals. The last theme consists of the Personal Why, which leads to a stronger conviction and motivation to engage in activity that leads to completing the degree process.

At the intersection of meaningful excellence and the Strength Factor is the opportunity to increase learning potential beyond the traditional classroom. When first-generation doctoral students have a strong sense of purpose in their lived experiences, those students will seize the opportunity to learn how to use purpose as a resource for stabilizing their emotions. The same is true when it comes to time limitations. A strong sense of purpose compels first-generation

doctoral students to learn how to manage their time according to a bigger purpose. Each day

presents obstacles that challenge one's values for each day, and on the days when first-

generation doctoral students feel valueless, their sense of purpose helps them learn how to rely

on their intrinsic values. Every day is also filled with moments that test character, but first-

generation doctoral students must use each moment to increase their learning potentials for

conditioning their characters for a greater purpose.

  Personal growth that leads to the evolution of meaning can be summed up in the

definition for purpose, which is expressed when the intent to perform outweighs the resistance to

perform. Purpose has more to do with what one becomes through personal evolution, than what

one does with gifts and talents. Purpose is the core of conviction and motivation that causes first-

generation doctoral students to minimize wasting energy on things that undermine their abilities

to extract meaning out of all circumstances. As first-generation doctoral students, this translates

to them finishing what they started when it comes to completing their degrees. The conviction

and motivation from purpose is important for first-generation doctoral students because many do

not have examples of family members who finished degrees before them, especially at the

doctoral level.

  In Chapter 1, I alluded to three significant points in development, better known as the

three milestones of purpose from the Jenkins (model) theory of meaningful excellence™. The

model showcases how the power of meaningful excellence can expand the scope of SDT. The

sense of purpose can be seen in both academic motivation and meaning making, but a bridge

must be built for students to fully explore the role purpose plays in degree completion and career

advancement. The Jenkins model for meaningful excellence™ builds the bridge between

academic motivation and meaning making by using the three milestones of purpose to increase

intentions for the evolving in consciousness to outweigh challenges from the environment. Where SDT comes short in identifying development and growth potential through meaning making, the Jenkins model for meaningful excellence™ provides the framework for exploring the intuitive nature of purpose and its influence on first-generation doctoral students.

Meaningful excellence takes over where SDT leaves off when it comes to personal growth and development through environmental challenges, by accommodating for the periods of stability and instability mentioned in Kegan's evolution of consciousness (Patton et al., 2016). Meaningful excellence closes the gaps between person and environment by exploring how the environment conditions the character for a strong sense of purpose under all circumstances. The strong sense of purpose that comes through meaningful excellence creates an opportunity to develop the intent to perform through meaning making narratives, so intentions to achieve goals can outweigh the challenges that try to undermine goals.

This research is an exhaustive look into the sophistication of purpose as it relates to the intent to perform. The Findings Pyramid (as shown in Figure 7) is a pictorial view of the intuitive nature of purpose used to ensure that the challenges from the environment did not outweigh or hinder the intent to complete degrees.
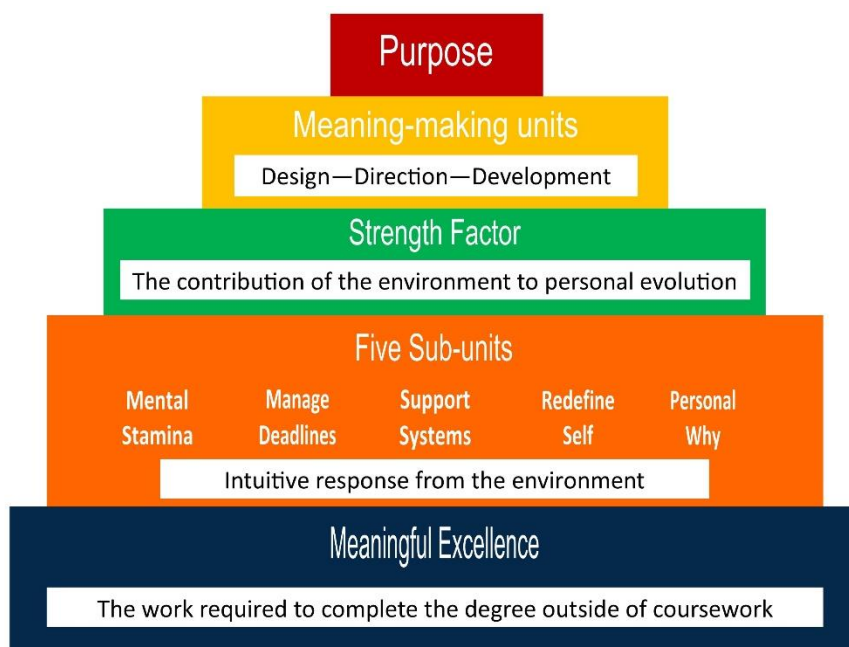
Figure 7. Findings pyramid.

Limitations of the Study

When conducting any research that includes human participants, one runs the risk of potential weaknesses in the study that is beyond the researcher's control. In reference to this study, I intended to invite first-generation doctoral students from one metropolitan state university in the southeastern United States in which I worked as an adjunct professor. However, immediately after getting Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from said university and beginning the solicitation process through the university's interoffice email to all doctoral students, I received an email saying that she was no longer active as an adjunct professor and that all access to the university, such as email and Banner (an administrative software designed specifically for higher education institutions), would cease effective immediately. I only had seven qualified prospects for the study at the time. Therefore, another plan had to be made to ensure I could get an appropriate sampling of participants to go through the interest surveys, get consent to participate, and schedule interviews in a timely fashion.

Therefore, I solicited other first-generation doctoral students who were willing to participate from a Facebook doctoral group. Those prospects went through the same procedures as the other students solicited from my former university. From there, seven other participants were added to the sample, totaling 14 first-generation doctoral students. However, I found this limitation to be more of a strength to the overall findings because each participant outside of the initially chosen sample responded with many of the same answers, which could be a strong indicator that the meaning making phenomenon is a common occurrence among first-generation students, especially those at the doctoral level.

Recommendations

Examining how first-generation doctoral students use purpose as a resource for degree completion validates the research methodology of transcendental phenomenological research. The responses from participants revealed how they used their meaning making abilities to be intentional in overcoming the resistance from the environment. Completing a degree is not without emotional stress. First-generation doctoral students may feel good about their accomplishments in one moment, and in the next moment be faced with events that challenge their emotional stabilities. Neither is it without having to make an efficient use of time. Personal responsibilities bring additional demands outside the classroom, but time must be utilized in a manner to balance personal responsibilities with meeting classroom demands. The environment pushes back through distractions, but students can work harder to eliminate distractions from their environments. The environment also proves character to see if character contains a quality that leads to a strong sense of purpose. This is a discovery process that leads to character flaws that can hinder the achievement process. The environment is a major contributor to the evolution of consciousness that conditions one's character with either a positive or negative influence. The

environment consists of life events or life courses that cannot be controlled by participants. Without a strong sense of purpose, challenges from the environment can expose flaws in character that can delay the achievement process. The last form of resistance is seen in the use of energy to complete the degree. Many times, the environment presents temptations to divert energy to things that do not lead to achievement. The same is true with career advancement. As a professional educator, I can attest that the resistance seen in academic achievement can also be seen in career advancement. The meaning making narratives provide insight into how first-generation doctoral students process information from that resistance to achieve their goals. By doing so, these students can evolve in their conscious thought and transcend limitations from their environments. The research confirms that purpose is a necessary resource for degree completion and career advancement, but it poses two challenges. One, first-generation doctoral students must engage in a process to optimize their meaning making skills, and two, student development professionals must innovate new ways to incorporate the development of purpose in the learning experience.

The research findings suggested that when purpose is not incorporated into the learning experience, it could create a learning hurdle that does not have anything to do with acquiring knowledge and skills to the level expected of those the same age. The research confirmed that students intuitively try to make sense out of their environments, which could possibly be resolved by helping students increase their degree of purpose. The conditions first-generation doctoral students face in degree completion forces them to view the world as a classroom waiting on them to come to the front of the room to give an accurate report on purpose. To increase first-generation doctoral students' accuracy of purpose, students must realize that they are not confined to working with one meaning making unit. Each student has the ability to incorporate

all three units to process challenges from the environment. First-generation doctoral students

must understand that the college experience can be used to design the life that gives them the

most value, move them in the direction of their goals, and engage in ongoing development.

Embracing design, direction, and development as potential for growth is the key to helping

students understand that purpose is more than what they do for a living. Purpose is what they do

to meet the demands from various challenges on the road to success. When first-generation

doctoral students are able to expand their scopes of purpose, those students can also overcome a

big learning hurdle to synergize their career passions with meaning making. Instead of finding a

career that leads to purpose, first-generation doctoral students may be able to understand how to

optimize their meaning making skills to advance in their work. Learning how to feed their

appetites for purpose transforms their educational experiences into an opportunity to make a

seamless transition into a marketplace that demands meaningful excellence. Not only could these

first-generation doctoral students increase their engagements in pursuing higher education, they

could also master a major requirement for career advancement. In the 2016 Global Workforce

Purpose Index (Imperative & LinkedIn, 2016), the study highlighted the role that purpose plays

in the workforce. One conclusion remained, "Companies of all sizes and industries are realizing

the power of inspiring employees with a strong social mission and creating an environment that

fosters purpose" (Imperative & LinkedIn, 2016, p. 3).

     Optimizing meaning making skills include reading books, attending seminars, and

engaging in learning communities that not only teach first-generation doctoral students how to

find purpose, but how to unlock the intuitive nature of purpose in what they think, speak, and do

daily. This is more than a practical exercise in finding purpose. Optimizing meaning making

skills also teaches first-generation doctoral students how to incorporate meaningful excellence in

the academic process so they can use college resources to design a college experience that brings them the most value. Immersing students in the world of purpose helps them achieve the three milestones of purpose related to their awareness, resource, and responsibility. To accommodate first-generation doctoral students' using purpose as a resource for degree completion and career advancement, the following recommendations are suggested.

1. Class offering: Universities can aid in the three milestones of purpose by offering classes that may help first-generation doctoral students associate each milestone with increasing their learning potentials.

2. Formal setting: This class could be called, "Introduction to Meaningful Excellence: Creating a Strategic Plan for Developing a Strong Sense of Purpose in Degree Completion." First-generation doctoral students could learn to create a strategy for synergizing degree completion with meaningful excellence. A major advantage for offering this class is the possibility for increasing retention for the university. Retention is mentioned as a possible incentive for higher education institutions to offer resources to help first-generation doctoral students expand the scope of student development through classes or communities that promote a strong sense of purpose. Many first-generation doctoral students learn how to develop a strong sense of purpose through trial and error from their lived experiences. However, offering a course like this can formalize the process and reduce the learning curve first-generation doctoral students must endure to achieve this goal.

3. Required: Since the meaning making process is an intricate part of personal evolution, the class should be required so first-generation doctoral students can add even more value to the doctoral experience.

4. Benefits: Offering these classes will result in students using their meaning making

abilities beyond a pending crisis. Students may learn to proactively control the degree of

purpose in their lived experiences. When students engage in classes that sharpen their

senses of purpose, learning beyond the classroom will become the norm in the academic

experience.

The personal growth diagram (as shown in Figure 6) expanded upon the new class

offering by providing a blueprint of what the course content would look like. The personal

growth diagram not only illustrated how first-generation doctoral students control their degree of

purpose to increase their degrees of success, but the diagram also showed new growth

opportunities for student development professionals. While the SDT revealed in the literature

review confines growth to intrinsic and extrinsic motivators (2017), the Jenkins meaningful

excellence model expanded development and growth to first-generation doctoral students being

able to control their degrees of purpose under all circumstances. Combined with the interview

questions, this model revealed how student development professionals can aid in the process of

helping first-generation doctoral students control their degrees of purpose.

Self-determination theory provided a solid framework for this research, and this theory

also exposed new recommendations for student development professionals to expand the scope

of the student development theory. This theory refers to the body of educational psychology that

theorizes how students gain knowledge in post-secondary educational environments (Patton et

al., 2016). The Jenkins meaningful excellence model™ expanded the scope of student

development to how the environment contributes to helping students gain knowledge. This

model also expanded the scope of the traditional classroom by transforming the world into a

classroom where students can come to the front of the room and give an accurate report on

purpose. Based on the Jenkins meaningful excellence model™, recommendations can be made for student development professionals to provide resources to help first-generation doctoral students come to the front of the world's classroom to give an accurate report on purpose. Again, purpose is more than what students do with their gifts and talents. Purpose is an intuitive force that drives personal evolution. In the world's classroom, the accurate report on purpose translates into the intuitive response from the challenges first-generation doctoral students face in completing their degrees. Accuracy is determined by first-generation doctoral students' reporting on whether they are using the challenges to design the life that gives them value, move in the direction of goals, and engage in the process of ongoing development. Reporting on purpose in this manner shows first-generation doctoral students' intuitive response for using their meaning making skills in the degree completion process. The Jenkins meaningful excellence model™ transforms post-secondary environments into a classroom where first-generation doctoral students can increase their learning potentials beyond the traditional classroom. This model can be used as a blueprint to help student development professionals create resources to help first-generation doctoral students synthesize their career interests with a strong sense of purpose. Not only does the college campus need learning communities for academic subjects, the campus environment must also include communities to help first-generation doctoral students develop purpose beyond what they do for a living. First-generation doctoral students might find it beneficial to have a community of purpose where they share ideas on how their strong senses of purpose aided them in their personal evolutions. Within this community of purpose, first-generation doctoral students can find support to fortify their convictions and motivations to complete their degrees. This community of purpose will give them a first-hand look at how purpose is more than what one does with career interests. First-generation doctoral students will

not only be able to reinforce their personal evolutions of purpose but witness personal evolution with others who have similar backgrounds and challenges.

Questions for Future Study

Exploring how first-generation doctoral students use purpose as a resource also exposes additional questions for further research for all students.

- How would students use purpose as a resource to align their career interests with their degree sets?

- How would students use purpose as a resource for building relationships with professors, mentors, or coaches?

- How would students expand their understanding for creating more than one meaning making narrative?

- How would undergraduate students use purpose as a resource for completing their degrees?

- How would undergraduate students use purpose as a resource for choosing a career?

- How would undergraduate students use purpose as a resource for maintaining a good grade point average (G.P.A.)?

- How would student athletes use purpose as a resource to balance coursework with obligations to participate in sports?

Answering these questions will enhance the learning communities that explore the sophistication of purpose in academic achievement and career advancement. The new communities of purpose must provide resources for students to measure their degrees of purpose in academic pursuits. The awareness of purpose from the new learning community will aid in the process of personal evolution to manage the right attitudes and behaviors to increase the learning experience.

Conclusion

Campus resources will no longer be seen as an *option* for learning, but an intricate part in helping students synergize their career interests with a strong sense of purpose. When career interests align with a strong sense of purpose, students will take more responsibility for designing the life that gives them the most value, moving in the direction of their goals, and engaging in ongoing development. The development of purpose in the learning experience will not only help students optimize the learning experience for a greater purpose but put institutions on the leading-edge of preparing students with skills to get the most out of career interests.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Step 1: Conduct qualifying survey with potential participants.

Interest Survey Questions

In each question, choose the best answer from the choices provided.

1. Are you a first-generation doctoral student? (An individual who is the first in his or her family to complete a bachelor's and master's degree and decided to continue the journey to pursue a doctoral degree).

    Yes

    No

2. Are you male or female?

    Male

    Female

3. Did you choose to enroll in a doctoral degree program for…

    Academic achievement?

    Career advancement?

    Academic achievement or career advancement?

Step 2: Once participants are identified (those who label themselves as first-generation doctoral students and said "yes" on whether they chose to enroll in a doctoral degree program for career advancement on the preliminary survey), and agree to take part in the study, each of them are given a consent-to-participate form (Appendix B) and told next steps about the interview process.

Step 3: Once a time is established to meet for the interview, I will sit with each participant one-on-one via Zoom or phone. I will introduce the study, establish rapport with them, and ask

questions that would assist me in understanding how these participants embrace purpose as a

resource for achieving educational goals and career advancement.

Introduction & Rapport Building

- Brief explanation of the exploratory study: My interest is on how do first-generation

  doctoral students embrace purpose as a resource for achieving educational goals and

  career advancement? I'm curious about what mechanisms do first-generation doctoral

  students use to design the life that will give them the most value, move them in the

  direction of their career goals, and engage them in an ongoing process for development.

  As a part of that, I'm interested in getting a complete picture of how you develop your

  sense of purpose to achieve the highest level of education.

- Therefore, during our conversation I will ask you six questions that will focus on four

  parts: emotional stability, time/space utilization, character conditioning, and how you

  channel your convictions and motivations. I won't be interrupting you or stopping you to

  ask any questions. I may take some notes to follow up on later, but you have as much

  time as you need to explore and discuss your thoughts on the topic. Any questions?

- If there are no questions, you may start by asking preliminary questions about the

  participant and where he or she is in his or her respective doctoral program.

Name: _____ Date: _____
Ethnicity: _____ Gender: _____
Degree Major: _____
Highest degree held: _____
Year in doctoral degree program: _____ Current job/role? _____

1. What is your definition of purpose?

Based on your definition of purpose:

2. Explain the role purpose plays in your degree completion?

3. Explain the role purpose plays in your use of time?

4. Explain the role purpose plays in you shaping your environment?

5. Explain the role purpose plays in your character development?

6. Explain the role purpose plays in your career advancement?

Clarifying Questions:

7. Explain the role purpose plays in stabilizing your emotions to complete your degree?

8. Explain the role purpose plays in helping you make wise use of your time to complete your degree?

9. Explain the role purpose plays in creating the right environment for completing your degree?

10. Explain the role purpose plays in making sure you maintained the right character for completing your degree?

11. Explain the role purpose plays in channeling your convictions that this degree would benefit your career?

12. Is there anything you'd like to add before we end?

Step 4: I then thank each participant for agreeing to take part in the study and share that I will send a transcript to each of them for review (for accuracy).
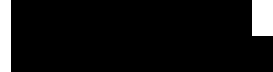
Step 5: At the end of the study, I will give each participant a $10 Starbuck's gift card as a thank you for their time.

Appendix B: Consent-to-Participate Form

TITLE OF STUDY
Study #19-449 PR: "Why am I Here? Examining the relationship between purpose and career advancement of first-generation doctoral students"

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Lily Jenkins

ljenkins11@my.nl.edu

Dear Participant,

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need additional information.

The recently completed survey was provided to you as a means to determine if you fit the description of a first-generation doctoral student who is presently enrolled for the purpose of seeking career advancement. At this stage in the research, sense of purpose will be defined as an appreciation for the existence and performance of humanity that ignites the ability to add meaning to current realities.

The purpose of the study is to explore what occurs when first-generation doctoral students develop their sense of purpose to achieve the highest level of education. Information will be collected by way of one 30 to 45-minute, one-on-one, audio-recorded phone, Zoom, or in-person interview. A transcript of the interview will be made available for your review.

RISKS AND BENEFITS
There are no known risks associated with you participating in this study, other than that of everyday life. The expected benefits from your participation are the information you receive about what occurs when first-generation doctoral students embrace purpose as a resource for achieving educational goals and career advancement and having the opportunity to participate in a qualitative research study. You may ask questions anytime about the research study before and during the time you are participating. You may request a copy of the completed study by contacting the researcher at ljenkins11@my.nl.edu.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your responses during the interview will be anonymous. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning aliases/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.

Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk.

COMPENSATION

Participants will be compensated with a $10 Starbuck's gift card at the conclusion of the research study. There is no compensation for those who wish to withdraw prior to the completion of the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

You may request a copy of this completed study by contacting Lily Jenkins at ljenkins11@my.nl.edu. In the event you have questions or require additional information, please contact the researcher, Lily Jenkins, ljenkins11@my.nl.edu.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact the dissertation chair: Dr. Karen O'Donnell; email: kodonnell1@nl.edu; phone: 813-397-2125 located at National Louis University Tampa, 5110 Sunforest Drive, Tampa, FL, or the co-chairs of NLU's Institutional Research Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth; email: Shaunti.Knauth@nl.edu; phone: (312) 261-3526; or Dr. Carol Burg; email: CBurg@nl.edu; phone: (813) 397-2109. Co-chairs are located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL. You may also contact Dr. Christine Ziegler, the Director and Chair of the Institutional Review Board at Kennesaw State University; email: irb@kennesaw.edu; phone: (470) 578-6407.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read, and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C: National Louis University IRB Approval

NATIONAL
LOUIS
UNIVERSITY
1886   ACCESS. INNOVATION. EXCELLENCE.

Office of the Provost
122 South Michigan Avenue   www.nl.edu
Chicago, Illinois 60603-6162   P/F 312.261.3729

February 20, 2019

Lily Jenkins

Dear Lilly Jenkins:

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has received your application for your research study "Why am I here? Examining the Relationship Between Purpose and Career Advancement of First-Generation Doctoral Students". IRB has noted that your application is complete and that your study has been approved by your primary advisor and an IRB representative. Your application has been filed as Exempt in the Office of the Provost.

Please note that the approval for your study is for one year, from February 20, 2019 to February 20, 2020. At the end of that year, please inform the IRB in writing of the status of the study (i.e. complete, continuing). During this time, if your study changes in ways that impact human participants differently or more significantly than indicated in the current application, please submit a Change of Research Study form to the IRB, which may be found on NLU's IRB website.

All good wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Sincerely,

Shaunti Knauth, Ph.D.
Chair, IRB

Appendix D: IRB Certificate Form

Completion Date 19-Nov-2018
Expiration Date 18-Nov-2020
Record ID 29369184

This is to certify that:

Lily Jenkins

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Human Research (Curriculum Group)
Group 1: Students (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

National Louis University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w2542a248-3369-4189-9b9c-e45d38aeba97-29369184

Appendix E: Approval (Host Site)

From: irb@kennesaw.edu <irb@kennesaw.edu>
Sent: Wednesday, February 27, 2019 2:53 PM
To: Lily Jenkins
Cc: irb; Danelle Dyckhoff
Subject: Study 19-449 PR: Why am I Here? Examining the Relationship Between Purpose and Career Advancement in First-Generation Doctoral Students

2/27/2019

Lily Jenkins, Staff
Instructor

RE: Your permission to recruit application dated 2/27/2019, Study #19-449 PR: Why am I Here? Examining the Relationship Between Purpose and Career Advancement in First-Generation Doctoral Students

Hello Ms. Jenkins,

Your application for the permission to recruit study listed above has been administratively reviewed.

The Kennesaw State University (KSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) has administratively examined your study materials for the study entitled 'Why am I Here? Examining the Relationship Between Purpose and Career Advancement in First-Generation Doctoral Students' (National Louis University IRB) that were reviewed and approved by the National Louis University IRB. You are granted permission to recruit participants for this research project on the KSU campus from February 28th, 2019 through February 20th, 2020, per the specification of the NLUIRB.

Dr. Danelle Dyckhoff, Assistant Director of Learning Communities and Assistant Professor of English, has agreed to assist you in disseminating all information regarding your study. All recruitment efforts are to be coordinated through Dr. Dyckhoff. In addition, any email correspondence must conform to the KSU Mass Email Policy, uphold the KSU policies that protect student email addresses, and contain information indicating the study has been approved by the home IRB and reviewed by the KSU IRB. You may not access KSU student email addresses except through the Dr. Dyckhoff. All KSU participants must be provided with informed consent. All consent documents must contain the KSU IRB study number and KSU IRB contact information.

Please note that permission to recruit is not an IRB review, and applying to recruit does not serve as or replace review by an IRB. The National Louis University IRB retains responsibility for conducting all required continuing reviews of the study, and all unanticipated problems or adverse events related to the study must be reported to the home IRB. Should the study receive a continuing review or be submitted to the home IRB for review and approval of study revisions, you must reapply for permission to recruit research participants at KSU. This is accomplished through submission of copies of revised documents, including the most recent approval documents. Following assessment of these documents, a subsequent letter of permission to recruit may be issued.

Contact the IRB at irb@kennesaw.edu or at (470) 578-6407 if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,

Christine Ziegler, Ph.D.
KSU Institutional Review Board Director and Chair

cc: ddyckhof@kennesaw.edu

Appendix F: Detailed Participant Demographics

MG is a first-generation doctoral student who is majoring in statistics. She is in her third year in the program. She is also a Teaching Assistant (TA), who teaches two sections of Introduction to Statistics, an undergraduate course that introduces techniques for seeing the relationships in data using mathematics. She aspires to be not only a statistician but also a "consultant that can explain the analysis to people." When asked for her definition of purpose, she said:

> My definition of purpose is the reason that I do what I do and how that best fits in
>
> society. Now, I feel like that changes, depending on what type of society, so you have the
>
> academic society and then you have the cultural aspects as an African-American woman
>
> and as an African-American. So, I feel like my purpose changes depending on what
>
> community that I'm in.

DT is a first-generation doctoral student who is majoring in business administration with an emphasis in marketing. He is in the second year of a three-year program. He currently serves as a university's Director of Academic Testing Services and Prior Learning Assessment Coordinator. As an army veteran, his greatest desire is to serve others. He believes that "in order to serve others to the greatest degree possible…a terminal degree was the way to get there." When asked for his definition of purpose, he said, "If I had to define 'purpose,' I would say it is having direction towards a goal. Not just doing something to do it, but you want to accomplish something."

JW is a first-generation doctoral student who is majoring in counseling and student personnel services with an emphasis in college student affairs administration. He is currently a doctoral candidate and beginning the data collection phase of his dissertation. He currently is a

graduate assistant in his Student Affairs Leadership program. His desire is to be a tenured-track

faculty member so that he can "continue to impact lives and reach key audiences." When asked

for his definition of purpose, he said, "I would have to say my purpose would be kind of what is

the thing that I am on Earth to do and so why am I here? And for those who are religious I

identify as being a Christian. So, for me, it's why God put me here on Earth, what is my reason,

what is my why if that makes sense."

SP is a first-generation doctoral student who is majoring in Teacher Leadership. She is

currently a doctoral candidate and in the data collection phase of her dissertation research. She is

currently an instructional coach in her Kindergarten through 12th grade school district. She has a

passion for teacher leadership, having been in education for over 20 years. When asked for her

definition of purpose, she said, "I think my definition of purpose is when you are enacting your

passion."

SS is a first-generation doctoral student who is majoring in education with a

concentration in learning instruction and innovation. She is in her fifth year in the program that

the university allows up to eight years to complete. However, she plans to graduate in May of

2019. She is currently a full-time student, having taken a year off to complete her program. Her

desire is to teach college and to teach the in-service teachers. When asked for her definition of

purpose, this is what she had to say:

> You know, I think it is, and I honestly, I don't know if this is a definition, but I think it is
>
> a drive. The very thing that that causes you to make any decision or to decide the decision
>
> is valuable in your life that you have. I think it's tied to your belief system and I think it's
>
> tied to your ethics and I think it's tied to your motivations and it's all those things

together that decide this drive that you have to meet or follow through in this journey, in

this direction that you're going to go.

AW is a first-generation doctoral student who is majoring in instructional technology and

distance education. She is in the seventh year of her program, even though the average time to

completion is three years. She just applied for an extension (because of a previous divorce and

recent health challenges) so that she could complete Chapters 4 and 5. She is currently a

classroom teacher in a school district. Her desire is to be a "behind the scenes person that installs

new technology, that figures out that this is how we get courses done, this is the technology that

teachers need to get things done in order to maximize the students' experiences at school." When

asked for her definition of purpose, she said, "Purpose for me would be something that basically

you are ordained to do, from the beginning of time, at birth. You have a purpose in this life to

fulfill and your life wouldn't be satisfied until you reach that destination. It's almost spiritually-

driven."

RM is a first-generation doctoral student who is majoring in public policy with a

specialization in higher education. He will graduate in May of 2019. He is currently a director of

science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) success at a two-year college. He desires to

be a vice president of student affairs or a provost so that he can "be at the table when policies are

made." When asked for his definition of purpose, he said:

> Purpose, that's tough. Knowing why you do something, knowing what the why is or why
>
> you are doing it, the purpose and also having a desired outcome so while you're doing
>
> something and what your desired outcome is meaning you go into something with getting
>
> in the car or drive to work or drive to a destination, your purpose is to get to where you're

going and why you're trying to get there whether it's to go to work, see a family member.

It's all about the why and the outcome.

JW2 is a first-generation doctoral student who is majoring in business administration. He is in his second year of a three-year program. He is currently a project manager. He desires to be a tenure-track professor because he thinks it "will give him a good work-life balance." He also said, "It's going to give me from where I am now an increase in pay and it's going to allow me to do something that I find interesting, which is engaging students and now I've gotten into it more, research." When asked for his definition of purpose, he said, "My definition of purpose? I would say it's a reason or a motivation to do something. It should be what drives a person? What motivates you…."

KB is a first-generation doctoral student who is majoring in special education. She is in her third and final year in the program. She expects to graduate in December of 2019. Prior to being a classroom teacher, KB was in insurance and risk management. She desires to be an advocate not only for her own children, who have individual education plans (IEP's), but the children she teaches as well. When asked for her definition of purpose, she said:

> Purpose. Driven is the first thing that comes to mind. Something that drives me; it's the reason that I wake up in the morning. My purpose for this program, my purpose for my drive and the reason I get up in the morning are my children. I have two little boys, a nine-year-old and a seven-year-old and they are the reason that I do everything. So that's …they're my definition of purpose.

QJ is a first-generation doctoral student who is majoring in interdisciplinary leadership studies. She is currently a doctoral candidate and in the data collection phase of her dissertation research. She is currently an instructional designer at a university. Her desire is to "add to the

body of knowledge, especially as it pertains to young, Black, and female academicians." When asked for her definition of purpose, she said, "I think that one's purpose is a combination of things. It can be personal, professional, or a combination. What you're good at, what you're meant to do, and whom you're meant to serve. To me, that's very important when talking about purpose."

MG2 is a first-generation doctoral student who is majoring in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. She is in her final year of the program. She is currently working for the government as an instructional systems designer. She is also in the process of developing her own non-profit organization, which would allow her to write and teach her own curriculum. When asked for her definition of purpose, she said:

Well, my definition of "purpose" would be knowing what you want out of life, what motivates you to get up there and do what it is, whatever your goal is. So as far as purpose is concerned, really, I'm looking at…It's not about having a job or whatever, but it's like you…I'm trying to figure how I put this…is you know who you are and why you're doing it. So, it's like you have come to that self-fulfillment in life that "I know where I'm going. I know the path and stuff I need to take." And regardless of whatever obstacles come my way, that purpose kind of keeps you going. So, if the reason you do what you do is the reason of who you are, who you are.

AMC is a first-generation doctoral student who is majoring in instructional technology and leadership. She is at the end of year one of a three-year program. She is currently an instructional technology coach in a Kindergarten through 12th grade school district. She desires to one day teach a course or two at the college level when she retires from education. When asked for her definition of purpose, she said, "Okay, for me I feel like that we all have gifts and

that we all have some value to the community at large and based on our gift, we can make the most impact."

GB is a first-generation doctoral student who is majoring in international conflict management. He is in his second year of a five-year program. Having previously served as a volunteer in the Peace Corp, GB is currently a full-time student who is also applying "for a federal government fellowship to be able to do research and study Khmer, the language of Cambodia, for a year." When asked for his definition of purpose, he said, "Purpose for me is contingent on how I'm feeling at the time…I guess purpose to me feels like doing something that is meaningful to me and something that can have an impact on other people in a similar way that people have had an impact on me as I've been developing in my adult life."

JB is a first-generation doctoral student who is majoring in business administration with a concentration in management. She is in her first year of a three-year program. Currently, she is an account services coordinator in the events industry. She desires to motivate her younger siblings and other relatives "to know that they can achieve their goals, whether it be education or career-driven." When asked for her definition of purpose, she said, "My definition of purpose is having an internal understanding of what you are meant to be doing. So, it's sort of this internal feeling of knowing why you're on this Earth, what you should be achieving while you're here."