ASHESI UNIVERSITY

EXAMINING CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN PURSUING DOCTORATE DEGREES IN GHANA

Undergraduate Thesis

By

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Supervised by Mrs. Rebecca Awuah
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and that no part of it has been

presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature:

Candidate's Name: Daphne Ngenwie Chebesi

Date:

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this thesis was supervised in

accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis established by Ashesi University.

Supervisor's Signature:

Supervisor's Name: Rebecca Awuah

Date:

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the challenges faced by women pursuing doctorate degrees in Ghana using doctorate students from the University of Ghana as the case study. While women's participation in education in Ghana has improved significantly over the past years, data suggests that women are still missing at higher levels of education, especially at the doctorate level.

Using a phenomenological hermeneutic approach to qualitative research, this study aims to understand gender-specific differences in the key identity transition from student to a scholar for men and women pursuing PhDs in Ghana. Identifying these challenges will help policymakers know how to better support women through their gender-specific challenges and could help increase the ranks and number of women relative to men in teaching and research roles within universities. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with male and female doctorate students at the University of Ghana. Transcripts from the research were analysed using thematic analysis.

The results show that women in this study are under much more pressure from society than men to perform certain gender roles or meet societal gender expectations. Compared to men, women's gender roles and expectations more often clashed with roles and expectations of their emerging scholarly identity, causing tension. These tensions make the PhD journey more challenging for women, especially married women compared to men. It is recommended that the government and higher education institutions provide priority funding for married women with dependents during the PhD programs. Also, PhD lecturers and supervisors should be more empathetic toward PhD students balancing family demands with intense academic programs.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

A doctorate is a sign of approval conferred on a student by a higher education institution, giving the recipient the go-ahead to research and teach in an academic discipline (Fomunyam, 2020). Carter, Blumenstein & Cook (2013) acknowledge that an identity transition is necessary for socialisation into academia, making the doctoral journey challenging.

According to Mays and Smith (2009), the process of getting a doctorate is a complex one that goes beyond taking courses. Mays and Smith (2009) describe it as a daunting but life-altering decision. Doctoral studies come with many challenges like financial setbacks, academic competition and high workload. Most challenging is that students must transition into a scholarly identity for the first time. However, the challenges of doctoral students may differ based on characteristics and circumstances, and one of these is gender. Research shows that women handle the challenges that come with doctoral studies differently from men and may face greater obstacles (Kurtz-Costes, Andrews & Ülkü-Steiner, 2006)

The empirical research on the influence of gender on doctoral studies internationally gives a mixed picture. An empirical study on how women perceive the challenges of doctoral studies at the University of Aukland in New Zealand revealed no significant difference in completion times between men and women pursuing doctorate degrees (Carter, Blumenstein & Cook, 2013). However, doctoral attrition rates were higher for women than men because women faced more challenges. Some of the challenges identified in the study include family commitments, relationship problems, gender expectations, and women's inability to manage the renegotiation of roles required of them

before beginning doctoral studies (Carter, Blumenstein & cook, 2013). A similar study on gender differences in doctorate educational attainment in Norway revealed that women are less likely than men to enrol in doctorate education for most disciplines. However, after enrollment, there was no significant difference in the completion times for men and women in universities in Norway. They also found that children born to enrolled doctorate students lowered the probability of completing doctorate education for women but had no impact on men (Mastekaasa, 2005)

A similar study by Bireda (2015) on the challenges to the doctoral journey for female doctoral students from Ethiopia used a qualitative case study research design that explored the experiences of 5 female doctorate students from the University of South Africa Ethiopia Regional Learning center. The study revealed that the challenges in women's doctoral studies resulted from lack of quality supervision, insufficient academic preparation, stress, lack of motivation, and difficulties balancing home and professional life. (Bireda, 2015) Additionally, women reported motherhood, relationship problems, multiple roles at home, and lack of support to women in academia as gender-specific challenges they faced on their doctoral journeys (Bireda, 2015)

A similar pattern can be noticed among women in academia in some public universities across Ghana. A phenomenological study on lived experiences of female staff from three public universities in Ghana revealed that women in academia are often faced with gender stereotypes and the extra burden of balancing work and family life (Akyere, 2018). One of the stereotypes identified includes the perception that successful women in academia are exceptional, while those who are not are to be blamed for not being sufficiently aggressive or committed. Further, women in the study had the additional task

of keeping their homes undisturbed as they pursued their careers in academia (Akyere, 2018). While Akyere's (2018) study focuses on the lived experiences of female staff Academic staff, this study explores the experiences of female doctoral students to understand how the challenges evolve from when they become students to when they become academic staff. According to Daddieh (2003), women's participation in education in Ghana has been vulnerable to entrenched cultural practices and attitudes. Women have been given a stereotypical place in Ghanaian society, and higher levels of education are perceived as a threat to their gender roles. As such, women tend to be lacking in numbers compared to men at very high levels of education like the doctorate level.

1.2. Problem Statement

Research conducted by Education Sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA) in 2020 revealed that only 8% of professors in public universities in Ghana are women and women account for only 24% of academic staff in universities in Sub-Saharan Africa. Also, only 32% out of 2510 researchers in the African Evidence research Database are women (ESSA, 2020)

The most recent available statistics show a gap in female enrollment compared to men in higher education in public universities in Ghana. This gender gap in enrollment increases with higher levels of education. As of 2019, 40% of undergraduates enrolled in public universities across Ghana were women, while 60% were men. At the master's level, 37% of students enrolled were women, and 67% were men (Tertiary Education Annual Statistics Report, 2019). While this statistic may reflect a closing gender gap in higher education at the undergraduate and master's levels, it is quite different for doctoral education. About 29% of students enrolled in doctoral programs were women, and 71% were men (Tertiary Education Annual Statistics Report, 2019). Therefore 20% and 30%

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more men than women were enrolled in undergraduate and master's programs respectively in public universities across Ghana in 2019. However, 42% more men than women were enrolled at doctorate programs in public universities across Ghana in 2019.

Figure 1
Higher education enrollment by gender in public universities in Ghana in 2019

Gender distribution of higher education enrollment in public universities in Ghana in 2019
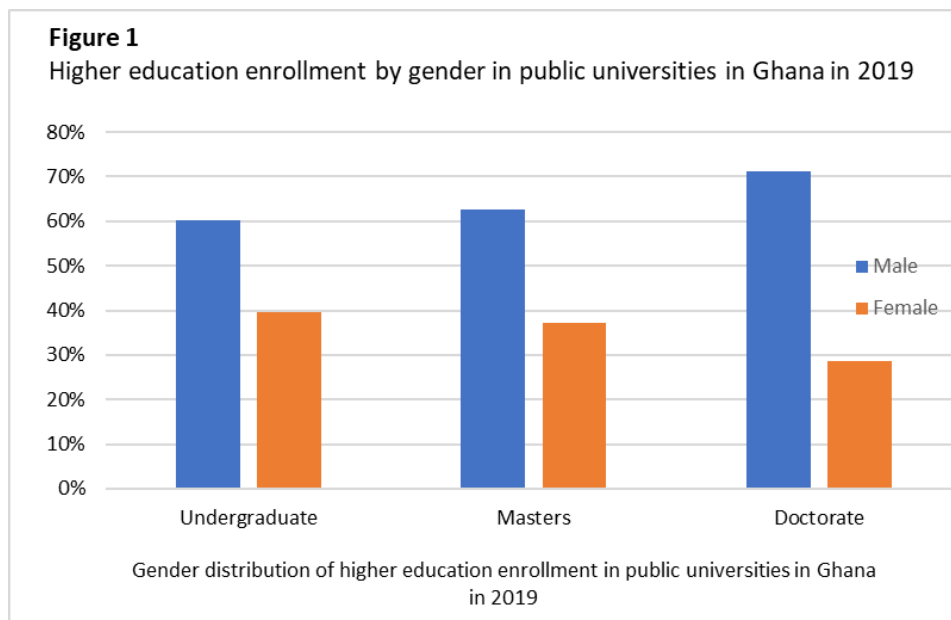
Source: Authors Analysis

Available statistics from the University of Ghana reveal a similar trend even though the gap in gender enrollment for each program closes a little, as shown in *figure 2*. In 2019, 47% of undergraduates enrolled at the University of Ghana were women, while 53% were men. Also, 48% of master's students enrolled at the University of Ghana were women, while 52% were men (Tertiary Education Annual Statistics Report, 2019). The gap in gender enrollment for undergraduate and master's enrollment is almost the same as 8% more men than women are enrolled at the undergraduate level, and 7% more men than women are enrolled at the master's level. Surprisingly, the gap in gender enrollment is higher at the undergraduate level than the master's level by 1%. At the doctorate level, 36% of students enrolled were women while 64% were men meaning 28% more men were

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enrolled than women at the doctorate level (Tertiary Education Annual Statistics Report, 2019)

Figure 2
Higher education enrollment by gender at the University of Ghana in 2019

Gender distribution of higher education enrollment in University of Ghana in 2019
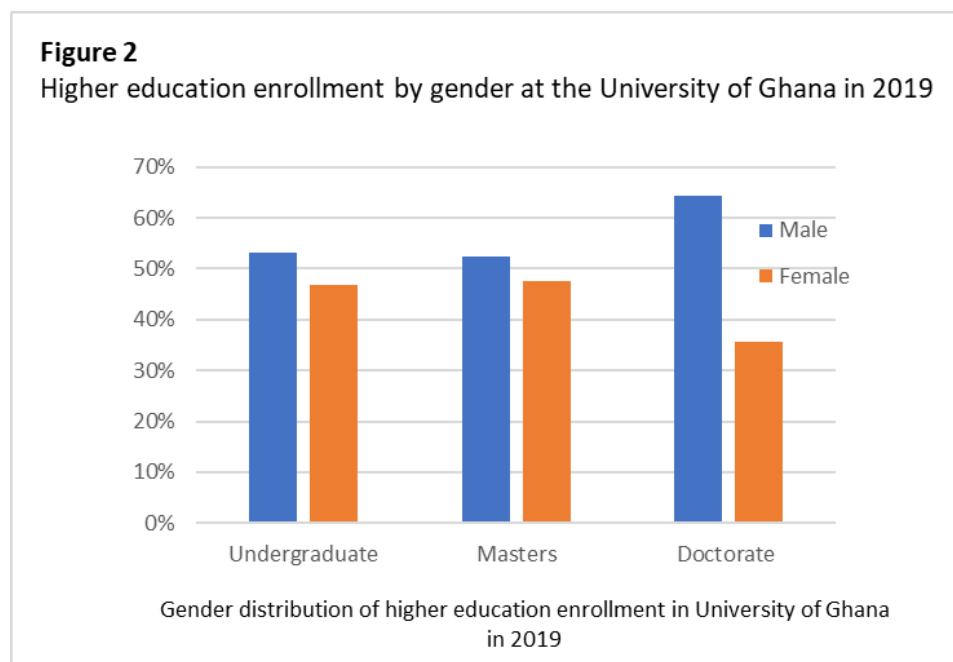
Source: Authors Analysis

This large gap in women's enrollment in higher education at the doctorate level translates into women being absent from faculty positions in higher institutions of learning in Ghana, as revealed by Education Sub-Saharan Africa (2020). This is visible in the university of Ghana, where 12% of professors are women while 88% are men. Similarly, 24% of associate professors are women, while 74% are men. The gender gaps close at lower levels of faculty positions, where 35% of lecturers were women for lower-level staff, while 65% were men and 37% of associate lecturers were women, while 63% were men. Like doctorate student enrollment, the gender gap for female academic staff is higher at higher levels than at lower levels of academia. While 30% more men than women were lecturers, 75% more men than women were professors (University of Ghana Basic Statistics, 2020)

Figure 3
Gender distribution of Academic Staff at the University of Ghana in 2020

Gender Distribution of Academic Staff at the University of Ghana in 2020
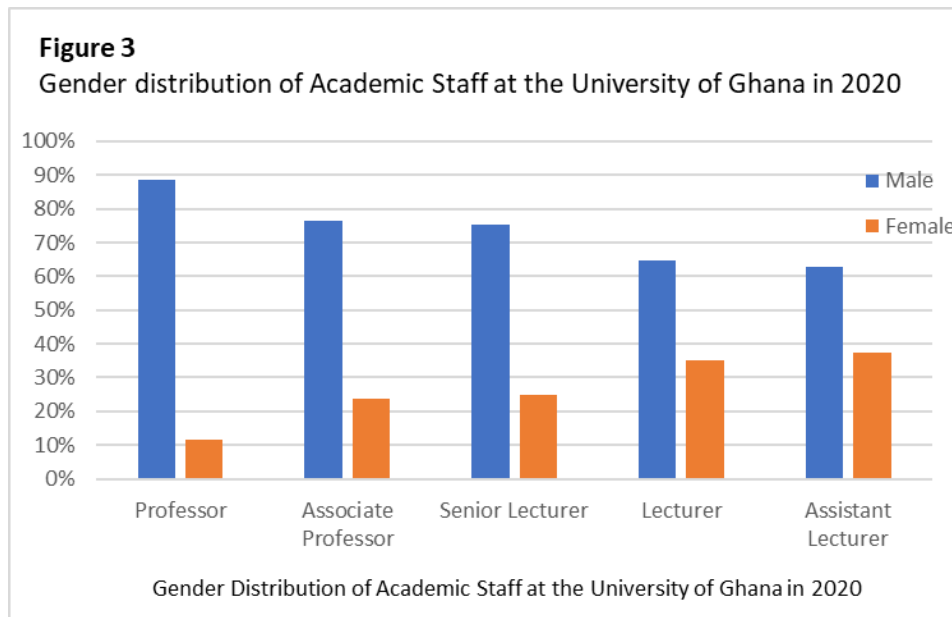
Source: Authors Analysis

These numbers reflect a gap in women's participation at higher levels of higher education, especially at the doctorate level in Ghana. It also explains why women are missing in numbers amongst university staff in Ghana since a doctorate is increasingly required for teaching and research positions. This data suggests more research is needed to understand why women are missing at higher levels of education, especially at the doctorate level.

Attaining gender equality in higher education is very important because education has proven to be a transformative process for women. It enables them to exploit their full potential, explore their abilities and make informed decisions in many areas like family, religion, socio-culture, law, and state politics (Noreen & Khali, 2012). For most women, pursuing a doctorate comes with advantages like status, respect, and improved self-development (Sari, Turhan & Yolcu, 2019). Despite the potential benefits of women getting higher education degrees, women are still missing at higher levels of education.

There are numerous arguments that academia is still patriarchal despite recent developments in women's education. In many universities worldwide, senior positions are more often occupied by men than women (Kurtz-Costes, Andrews & Ülkü-Steiner, 2006)

Many of the challenges female doctorate students face are linked to gender identity and society's expectations of women. Women's journey through academia clashes with the idea that their emotional and sexual lives should revolve around their homes. Therefore, the identity transformation required of doctoral students as they transition into higher levels of academia clashes with societal expectations of women outside their academic roles (Carter, Blumenstein & Cook, 2013). Tensions, therefore, arise because female researchers have a dual identity (Carter, Blumenstein & Cook, 2013)

Women's academic journeys are more challenging not because they are women but because their gender identity pushes them to marry and have children (Brown & Watson, 2010). However, the doctoral journey requires that women transition to the academic identity of a scholar. Many women, find it challenging to integrate their female identities, for example, the identity of being a mother and their academic identity of being scholars. Instead, they feel the need to choose one over another (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding & Lunde, 2017). Even though women can perform their roles as wives/mothers and manage their identity as scholars; they are faced with a lot of challenges as societal pressure makes them believe they must prioritise one over the other.

This research sets out to explain why there is a gender gap in female enrollment at the doctorate level in Ghana by examining how feminine gender identity affects women's transition into the process of becoming scholars. This paper is focused on examining the barriers facing women pursuing doctorate degrees in Ghana, with a particular focus on how

gender identity and how the identity transition that comes with doctorate education impact how women perceive their doctorate journeys. Using a phenomenological hermeneutic approach to qualitative research, this study captures the profound experiences of male and female doctorate students, giving readers an understanding of how gender identity shapes gender roles and expectations, makes the transition to a scholarly identity different for men and women. By providing a comparative perspective, this study helps readers understand the challenges in the doctorate journey that are specific to women and how they can be resolved to motivate women to enroll in and graduate from doctorate programs.

1.3. Research Questions

Below are the research questions that guided this study

1) How are the challenges of pursuing doctorate degrees in Ghana different for men and women?

2) How does gender affect the identity transition from student to scholar during the doctoral program?

3) How do men and women interpret their experiences as doctoral students differently?

1.4. Significance/Relevance of the Study

According to a World Bank Report by Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2018), the individual wage returns on women's higher education are 2% more than men's. This does not imply higher earnings for females but that the extra income earned from an additional year of education is 2% more for women than men. This indicates that investment in women's higher education is vital in improving the development of a country. Research has shown that gender equality in education increases human capital, positively impacting economic growth. Human capital refers to knowledge, experiences and skills people in an

economy acquire through education and training. Human capital positively influences economic development by improving people's skills, knowledge and expertise, leading to increased innovative capacity (Gruzina, Firsova & Strielkowski, 2021). It also contributes to economic growth and development by improving economic efficiency and prosperity and promoting of other human development goals like lowering fertility rates and infant mortality (Stephan, 2002). Also, improvement in women's participation in higher levels of education will allow them to compete for jobs that require higher education, resulting in reduced income inequalities (Education Sub-Saharan Africa, 2021)

Increasing women's involvement in higher education, especially at the doctorate level, also has educational benefits. One of such benefits is the "Role Model Effect." There is a significant relationship between the educational attainment of female students and the percentage of faculty and professional staff who are women (Nixon & Robinson, 1999). Also, women are likely to succeed in academia when they have other women who can serve as role models (Kaziboni & Uys, 2015). Therefore, increasing women's participation in doctoral education will increase the number of female faculty and professionals in higher institutions of learning, which will positively affect the performance of female students in these institutions.

Mitigating challenges facing women's doctorate education will reduce gender inequalities in education and help attain the vision of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, which is: "ensuring that boys and girls, men and women do not only gain access to and complete education cycles but are empowered equally in and through education" (UNESCO, 2019). Eliminating barriers to women's education at all levels is vital in guaranteeing absolute gender equality in education. It is also necessary for the

socio-economic empowerment of women and their communities. Therefore, it is crucial to research how barriers to women's participation in higher levels of education can be eliminated.

This study helps scholars and policymakers better understand how the identity transition from student to scholar differs for Ghanaian women than for Ghanaian men. This is important because fewer women in Ghana enter doctorate programs, and even fewer complete them. Although scholars have studied this issue in other countries and using single case studies and phenomenology, this study adds to the understanding of the issue because it will explore how factors like gender roles, individual and societal gender expectations and cultural norms shape the gender identity for women that makes it difficult for them to transition from students to scholars making the doctorate journey a challenging one. Unlike studies done in other countries, this study provides a comparative perspective by exploring the experiences of both men and women to enable the identification of challenges specific to women. Supporting women through gender-specific challenges could help increase the number of women in teaching and research roles within Ghanaian universities. This would go a long way towards increasing women's participation at higher education levels and reducing gender inequality in higher education.

1.5. Overview of Research Methodology

A similar study by Asamenew (2015) at the University of South Africa explored the challenges female Ethiopian doctoral students experience in their doctoral journey. This was a qualitative study, and it used a single case study research design to dig into the experiences and perspectives of the research participants. The study used interviews with five female doctoral students to explore the experiences of female doctorate students in a

holistic way. The study aimed at investigating some of the academic, professional, and psychological challenges female doctorate students face during their educational journeys. The question guiding this research was: what are some of the challenges female doctoral students experience?

The sample for this study was selected using a purposive sampling method because the researcher wanted research participants with a particular set of characteristics: women who are active doctoral students, Ethiopian nationals and registered for their doctorates through the Ethiopian learning centre. Results from the study were analysed using thematic analysis, where the researcher sought common themes that were recurrent during the interviews. This study concluded that women doing their doctorate programs face gender-specific challenges due to gender roles as caregivers and societal expectations of them as women. One limitation of this study was that the sample was not representative enough and could not be generalised to a large population of female doctorate students.

The above study was a qualitative study that used a single case study research and interviews as a data collection tool. Similarly, this study is qualitative and lends itself to the phenomenological hermeneutic approach to qualitative research. Sampling for this study was also done purposively, and data was collected through semi-structured interviews. This research collected data on the experiences and perspectives of six male and six female doctorate students to understand how gender identity affects the transition into the identity of a scholar. Qualitative research was most suitable because it allowed for exploration of the different interpretations research participants would attach to the experiences they have (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2008). The Phenomenological hermeneutic approach to qualitative research was used because it allowed the research to

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focus on the subjective experiences of each doctorate student and the interpretations they attach to these experiences (Kafle, 2013)

Unlike Asamenew's (2015) study, this research also compares the responses of male and female research participants. Comparison is essential in qualitative research as all descriptions require comparison (Morse, 2004). Making comparative studies within and across groups allows researchers to gain insights into participants' situated understanding of their context (Torrance, 2016). Data for this research was collected through interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and stored in a google drive folder. In the analysis, common expressions and patterns were identified and grouped to create themes. Thematic analysis involves systematically identifying, organising, and offering insights into patterns of meaning across data sets. It allows researchers to see and make sense of collective shared meanings and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2012)

1.6. Organisation of the Paper

This thesis paper has five chapters. Chapter 1 covers the background of the study, problem statement, research questions, research methodology and relevance of the study. Chapter 2 focuses on reviewing the literature on gender identity and doctorate education to identify existing gaps and analyse various concepts related to the study.

Chapter 3 covers the methodology, including research methods, data collection techniques, data sources, and data analysis methods. Chapter 4 provides information on research results and analysis of interpretations and findings. Chapter 5 focuses on conclusions, implications and recommendations, a recap of the study and suggestions on areas of further research.

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CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter analyses existing literature and discussions related to higher education in Ghana, the importance of gender equality in higher education, barriers to women's participation in higher education in Ghana, gender identity, and the study's theoretical framework. This literature review aims to analyse and critique the existing literature to identify gaps that justify this study's relevance.

2.2. Gender Identity

Gender identity has been defined in many ways. Definitions range from one's recognition of their biological sex to one's sense of masculinity or femininity (Freedman, 1993). For the sake of this study, the definition of gender identity is limited to gender as a social construct. Gender as a social construct espouses the idea that gender identity reflects socially constructed ideas (Payne, Swami & Stanistreet, 2008)

In this study, gender identity is the perceived social gender attributed to each gender. That is, a male is a boy or man, and a female is a girl or woman. The cultural and social differences in behavioural patterns associated with being a man or a woman have come to be accepted and recognised by social constructs (Diamond, 2002)

Gender identity is one of the many possible social identities. Social identity has to do with how people perceive themselves as members of a particular group compared to another group and the effects of such perceptions. Having a specific social identity causes one to identify with a particular group, be like people in that group and perceive things like people in that group (Stets & Burke, 2000)

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Concepts of gender identity are dependent on cultural constructs. Diverse cultures give different meanings to what constitutes masculine and feminine behaviour. However, most countries share similar gender stereotypes of what should constitute acceptable feminine or masculine behaviour (Nadal, 2017). Some cultures provide greater or lesser flexibility to gender expression outside what is considered normative behaviour as cross-cultural research has shown that gender roles are more differentiated and rigid in conservative countries with low levels of socio-economic development (Nadal, 2017)

Gender socialisation plays a crucial role in defining what characterises gender identity. Gender socialisation is assigning life-long roles to people based on gender. It is a process where children learn different values, skills, behaviour patterns, standards and, in turn, transfer this knowledge to other generations (Hoominfer, 2019). Gender roles are a manifestation of gender identity (Diamond, 2002). Gender socialisation and gender roles give a better understanding of what encompasses gender identity.

In traditional Ghanaian societies, the socialisation of girls and boys into men and women reflect Nadals (2017) idea that in some cultures, gender roles are more differentiated and rigid, especially in the poor and conservative countries. Traditional Ghanaian communities see men as stronger, more intelligent, better leaders, and better positioned to provide security, sustenance, and livelihood (Gyan et al., 2020). Therefore, the definition of a proper man in the African context is a breadwinner, protector, and defender (Ebila, 2017). This makes men more likely to take up leadership and professional roles in society (Ampofo, 2001). The definition of a proper woman in indigenous African societies was always seen in the context of family. Women were expected to embrace marriage and childbearing as marriage was considered the end goal for most women (Ebila,

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2017). Many women who did not fit into this definition of who is a proper woman were considered a failure (Ebila, 2017)

Even though situations have changed in contemporary times with the rise of feminism and women empowerment, the expectations of who women should be and what they should do still reflect what existed in most traditional Ghanaian societies in the past. As a result, the contemporary roles of women as wives and mothers make it much more difficult for women to compete for roles outside the home (Taiwo, 2010). Modernisation has given women the burden of performing their roles as women and mothers while contributing to society (Taiwo, 2010). These multiple expectations comprise the feminine gender identity, and the attempt by women to fit into these multiple identities that makes socialisation into the scholarly community a difficult one.

2.3. Scholarly Identity

A study by Foot, Crowe, Tollafield and Allan (2014) on doctoral student identity development in the USA revealed that the doctorate journey is not limited to possessing expert knowledge on a particular subject but is also about identity transitions. Most students, however, face challenges transitioning from their lives and identities before the doctoral program to their scholarly identity during and after the doctorate program. Leshem (2020), in a similar study on identity formations of doctorate students in South Africa and Israel, found that one of the most important elements of the doctoral student experience is identity development. This is because doctoral student development involves challenging and emotional experiences like isolation, alienation and loneliness. They also must deal with issues relating to autonomy, independence and desired competence.

Different academic researchers have different definitions of doctorate student identity. For researchers like Kovalcikiene and Buksnyte-Marmiene (2015), doctoral student identity centres around their roles as researchers, teachers and practitioners, while Austin and McDaniels (2016) think developing an identity as a scholar should be most important to the doctorate student. Zhao, Chen and Jia (2021), in a study on doctoral student identity in China, found that doctoral student identity includes three things: acceptance of the identity of a doctorate student, one's perceptions about being a doctorate student and the emotional meaning and value an individual attached to being doctorate students. These approaches to doctoral student identity are, however, limited because they fail to take into consideration the fact that the identities of doctorate students are not only shaped by their academics or school but other external factors like gender, culture, religion and tradition.

According to Lesley Le Grange (2018), becoming a scholar is a lifelong process that extends beyond the doctoral student phase. However, being a doctorate student is a defining element in an individual's transition into a scholarly identity. That is a transition from being relatively dependent to being independent. Le Grange (2018) also notes that developing a scholarly identity is complex and differs for each doctorate student because of certain factors like genetic makeup, upbringing, family, race, gender, and class. Therefore, defining scholarly identity is quite complex and not fixed.

Despite the complexities, some scholars have tried defining scholarly identity. Walsh and Ortega (2013) and Noonan (2015) define scholarly identity in terms of the characteristics a scholar should possess. For Walsh and Ortega (2013), scholarly identity involves having knowledge in a particular subject area and making a life-long commitment to contributing knowledge to that subject area. Noonan (2015) defines doctoral identity as

possessing adequate formal knowledge in a particular subject area or discipline. Other scholars like Pyhältö, Nummennmaa, Soini, Stubb and Lonka (2012) argue that this definition of scholarly identity is fixed. According to them, scholarly identity depends on the learning cultures within different disciplines.

Scholar identity emerges when an individual possesses adequate levels of competence, confidence, autonomy, and influence over scholarly activities, products, and communities. Students often experience tensions on their journeys to becoming scholars because they must deal with multiple identities and manage the disparities between the idea of who a scholar should be and what they can achieve as scholars. As such, scholarly development does not occur naturally but requires actors within the doctoral student's environment like the school and supervisors to put in place enabling factors to ease their identity development (Ha Choi, Bouwma-Gearhart & Ermis, 2021)

The literature on scholarly identity reveals that scholars have different definitions for scholarly identity. While some try to limit it to the characteristics a doctorate student should possess, others think it depends on the learning culture of one's discipline of study. However, factors like academic competence, autonomy, identity transition and social isolation have proven to be common characteristics of scholarly identity.

2.4. Gender in Higher Education in Ghana

Over the past twenty years, there have been rapid structural and policy developments in higher education in Ghana. This rapid advancement in higher education results from policy reforms upgrading polytechnics into higher education institutions, the creation of the Ghana Education Trust Fund and many other reforms (Atuahene, 2014). The number of higher education institutions and higher education enrolment in Ghana has

increased dramatically over the last three decades, thereby widening access to tertiary education (Ayelazuno & Aziabah, 2021)

Despite these improvements in higher education in Ghana, studies have shown that the demand for higher education is greater than the supply due to a lack of the necessary higher education infrastructure (Tagoe, 2014). Also, there is a significant gender disparity in the number of males and females applying and being accepted into Ghanaian universities (Tagoe, 2014). According to Aurthur and Aurthur (2016), one of the challenges facing higher education is gender inequality in access to university, especially for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) courses.

Inequality in access for women has proven to be one of the major challenges facing higher education in Ghana. Between 1999 and 2011, the gross enrollment ratio for higher education increased from 2.92% to 12.41% in Ghana. Despite this, there was no equality and equity in the proportion of male to female students as the male students were more than female (Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013) The 2019 Annual Tertiary Statistics Education Report reveals that out of 399,956 students enrolled across public universities across Ghana in 2019, 224,011 were male and 175,945 were female, indicating a gender gap in higher education enrollment. This gender gap in education is wider at higher levels of education. Still, in 2019, only 28.7% of PhD students enrolled in public universities across Ghana were women (Tertiary Education Annual Statistics report, 2019). While not much has been written in detail about gender disparities at the various levels of higher education in Ghana, it can be concluded from previous literature that gender inequality in higher education in Ghana applies to the context of doctorate education in Ghana. Also,

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while quantitative studies show a significant gender gap exists, especially at the PhD level, they cannot explain why few women enter and complete degrees at the highest levels.

2.5. Importance of Gender Equality in higher education

Reducing gender inequalities at all levels of education has proven to be desirable as it guarantees increased women's participation in higher education. Women's education has taken centre stage on the topic of international development over the past few years. However, primary and secondary education is often emphasised, while women's higher education has received very little attention (Tjomsland, 2009). Theoretical literature and empirical studies reveal that gender inequality in education reduces economic growth (Klasen & Lamanna, 2009).

Theoretical literature suggests that gender inequality in education reduces average human capital in society, negatively impacting economic performance, especially in middle-income countries (Dollar & Gatti, 1999). Women's education has many externalities, like reducing fertility levels and reducing infant mortality. Gender gaps in education reduce the benefits of high female education on society (Galor & Weil, 1993) and promote education for the next generation (World Bank, 2001). These positive externalities tend to have a positive impact on economic growth (Klasen & Lamanna, 2009)

Empirical studies also show that gender gaps in education reduce economic growth. Using the Solow-Model framework, Knowles, Lorgelly and Owen (2002) discovered that female education has a statistically significant positive effect on labour productivity, contributing to economic growth for a cross-section of countries. Also, a study on how gender equality in education affects economic growth and education in five South African

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Development Community Countries revealed that gender equality in education has a positive, robust, and significant effect on economic growth (Licumba et al., 2015)

Narrowing it down, women's participation in higher education shifts the allocation of women's time from non-market to market activities, resulting in potential wage gains, contributes to GNP, increases a country's tax base, and enhances its quality leadership. From a social viewpoint, women's higher education increases productive opportunities and improves regional and upward labour mobility and household income mobility. It plays a significant role in contributing to long-run poverty alleviation (Subbarao, Raney, Dundar & Haworth, 1994)

In the Netherlands, returns to doctorate education differ strongly by sex. Women with PhD experience a positive return of 10% on their education in the first 20 years after graduation as women with PhDs tend to work more hours than males (Steeg, Wiel & Wouterse, 2014). Gender equality in education has a vital role in advancing the growth and development of a country at all levels. Therefore, developing countries like Ghana should prioritise this if they want to improve the country's development.

2.6. Barriers to women's participation in Higher education in Ghana

UNESCO (2007) reports that in, Sub-Saharan African countries, like many other developing countries, women's participation in higher is still extremely low, with only 38% of students in tertiary education institutions being women. The government of Ghana has put several measures to reduce gender gaps in education. A good example is the establishment of a Girls Education Unit in the Ghana Education Service to address the educational needs and outcomes of women and girls (Bosu & Dawson-Amoah, 2018). Despite these efforts, there is still a significant gap in women's participation in higher

education in Ghana compared to men (Ayelazuno & Aziabah, 2021). The World Bank (2021) reports that all over the world, there are multiple barriers to women's education which include violence, child marriage, lack of schools, adequate infrastructure, unsafe environments, and limitations in teacher training, teaching, and learning materials which reinforce gender biases.

Common factors that hinder women's participation in education in Ghana include culture, poverty, and pregnancy. In some traditional Ghanaian communities, little attention is given to the education of the girl child because the gender roles they must play as wives and mothers do not require them to have very much formal education (Appiah-Kubi & Luboder, 2020). This is opposed to boys who are expected to be breadwinners of the family and hence must pursue education to empower them to succeed to be able to take care of their families (Appiah-Kubi & Luboder, 2020)

In Ghana, female advancement in higher education has been affected by negative cultural perceptions, especially in rural areas and Islamic communities. In such communities, the role of women is limited to procreation, caring for the family, and taking care of the household. These gender roles do not require women to have a formal education; hence their education is not a priority (Atta, 2015). In recent times, negative perceptions of the value of female education in most Ghanaian communities are gradually fading away. However, some culturally endemic communities still uphold binary gender roles that limit women to taking care of the household, which they perceive as the proper role and place of a woman in the society (Bosu & Dawson-Amoah, 2018)

A study conducted to understand the experiences of women returning to Ghana from abroad to pursue higher education revealed that tensions arise in women's academic

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journeys because women want to satisfy their culturally assigned duties as wives while satisfying their desires of participating in higher education to obtain the benefits of getting a higher education degree (Adu-Yeboah & Forde, 2011). Tensions, therefore, arise because female researchers have a dual identity (Carter, Blumenstein & cook, 2013) The culture in most African societies including Ghana plays a great role in shaping negative perceptions about women pursuing higher education.

2.7. Theoretical Framework

2.7.1. Social Identity Theory

In social identity theory, a person's social identity refers to their awareness that they belong to a particular social group, being at one with that social group and seeing things from the group's perspective (Stets & Burke, 2000). An individual's experience with a collective identity is based on membership in a group. Such identities could include racial, ethnic or gender identities. To maintain their social identities, people tend to demonstrate certain characteristics that are expected of individuals within the social group they identify with. (Ramasubramanian & Murphy, 2014)

Culture and socialisation influence the meaning people attach to certain groups and define group expectations. Many groups tend to be defined by gender behavioural patterns and expectations (Carter, 2014). Gender is seen as a social identity because people often identify with others of the same gender belonging to a common group. Individuals begin to share similar viewpoints and behavioural expectations (Carter, 2014). Studies have shown that people use group memberships to distinguish themselves from others and are likely to sacrifice an absolute level of rewards to maintain relative superiority over members of other groups (Bulck, 2020). Therefore, women and men are more likely to identify with behavioural patterns common with their respective genders.

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Social Identity Theory was used in a study by Van Breen, Spears, Kuppens and De Lumus (2017) in the Netherlands to determine how women's identification with women and identification with feminists govern women's attitude towards group membership. The results from the study showed that most women identified strongly with the characteristics associated with women but identified substantially lower as feminists. Therefore, femininity might not necessarily co-exist with feminism. One implication for this study was that identification as a woman and identification as a feminist are two independent variables. As such, they can have conflicting or opposing towards specific gender issues (Van Breen, Spears, Kuppens & De Lumus, 2017)

Like gender, scholarly identity is also a social identity as it is seen in the context of the characteristics a student should possess to identify as a scholar (Noonan 2015; Walsh and Ortega 2013). Such features include competence, confidence, autonomy and influence in a scholarly community (Ha Choi, Bouwma-Gearhart and Ermis, 2021). Authors like Zhao, Chen and Jia (2021) define scholarly identity as acceptance of the identity as a doctorate student and one's perceptions about being a doctorate. Therefore, one scholarly identity refers to an individual's willingness and ability to demonstrate certain acceptable characteristics associated with a scholar.

From an early age, men and women take on characteristics of the gender group they belong to, which eventually shapes their identity and society's expectation of them. Similarly, upon enrollment in their doctorate programs, doctorate students are expected to develop certain desirable characteristics pertaining to scholars. As such, doctorate students would want to display favourable attributes and expectations of both their gender community and scholarly community to identify with both social groups. However, it is

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not certain that the characteristics and expectations of both the gender and scholarly social groups would co-exist. The tensions that arise when features and expectations of these social identities clash give rise to challenges for PhD students on their PhD journeys.

Social identity theory is suitable for this study because it helps us understand why doctorate students do not suppress one social identity or choose one social identity over the other but try to balance both. It is because they belong to these social groups and maintaining their status in these groups requires that they display specific attributes and meet certain expectations associated with their gender and scholarly communities.

2.8. Conclusion

A review of the literature has shown significant gender gaps in women's education at higher levels in Ghana, especially at the doctorate level, making it hard for Ghana to have the full benefits of gender equality in education at all levels. While not much literature is available on specifically doctorate education in Ghana, the findings on higher education can be applied to the doctorate context since it constitutes a part of higher education.

The literature also reveals many barriers to women's participation in Ghana higher education in Ghana. Among them is the socio-cultural roles and expectations placed on women, which affect their ability to fully participate in higher education (Appiah-Kubi & Luboder, 2020). The concept of gender identity is crucial in understanding how social constructs shape gender identity.

Social identity theory explains how women's identification with feminine identity causes them to demonstrate characteristics and assume roles that society defines as acceptable feminine gender roles. This theory is also important in understanding how belonging to the scholarly community may make both men and women want to identify as

scholars but leads to greater tension for women who are confronted with the need to manage their identity as women and scholars and may tend to be biased on their identity as women because it is what they have been socialised into from birth (Ramasubramanian & Murphy, 2014)

There is, however, little or no literature available on how gender identity affects the transition of women into the scholarly identity in higher education and especially doctorate education in the Ghanaian context. This research seeks to fill this gap while offering a comparative perspective for both men and women.

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CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This study examines the experiences of doctorate students in Ghana to understand how gender identity affects the transition process into scholarly identity and how this gives rise to specific challenges women face as they go through the doctorate journey. This chapter will outline the process used to explore this topic. It will shed more light on the tools, methods, and frameworks used to collect and analyse the data used for this research. It will also justify the choice of methods used in this research.

3.2. Research Design

This research employed a qualitative study by systematically collecting, organising, and interpreting data from people's narration on their experiences of a particular issue (Malterud, 2001), It explores the meaning people attach to phenomena as they experience them in their context. In this study, qualitative research helped to get complex contextual descriptions of participants' experiences as doctorate students (Mack et al., 2005). This research uses a phenomenological approach because it aimed at better understanding the experiences of male and female doctorate students in Ghana as they transition from student to scholar identity through their doctoral journey. This would not have been possible using quantitative methods because it does not allow for the understanding of subjective interpretations people give to certain experiences. The phenomenological hermeneutic approach focuses on the subjective experiences of individuals and groups and the interpretations attached to these experiences. It uses life world stories of research subjects to unveil the world as experienced by them (Kafle, 2013)

The phenomenological hermeneutic approach was an appropriate method for this study because it helped to capture the profound subjective experiences of both male and

female doctorate students and the interpretations and meanings they attached to these experiences. This gave the researcher insights into how participants perceive that being male or female impacted their doctorate journeys.

3.3. Research Method/Tools

Using the phenomenological hermeneutic approach, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the research participants (Creswell, 1998). The interviewer asked a few pre-planned questions in semi-structured interviews, while some were unplanned. The interviews lasted for a maximum of 30 minutes. A sample interview guide can be found in ***appendix A.*** Interviews were most appropriate as a data collection tool because they helped to develop and understand the meaning behind a phenomenon and spark a conversation around the meaning participants attach to how they experience it (Lauterbach,2018) Semi-structured interviews also allowed research participants to revisit their experiences by digging into the memories and reflecting (Lauterbach, 2018)

3.4. Research Scope

The participants in this study include six male and six female doctorate students from one department at the University of Ghana. A small number of participants in each gender group allowed the researcher to delve deep into the meaning each participant attaches to their experiences. A study with many participants may only have allowed for surface interpretations (Creswell, 1998). The study used selected doctorate students from the University of Ghana because it has the highest population of doctorate students amongst the other higher institutions of learning in Ghana (Tertiary Education Annual Statistics Report, 2019). It provided access to a large pool of students to choose research participants from.

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3.5. Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for this study. Purposive alllowed for deliberately choosing research participants based on certain characteristics (Etikan, 2016). Participants for this study were selected from three categories: doctorate students at the early stages of their doctorate program, doctorate students midway through their doctorate studies and doctorate students about to complete their doctorate education. This was to ensure that the study captured the experiences of doctorate students at different parts of their journey to understand how students' experiences changed as they transitioned from the early stages of their doctorate education to the final stages. Some research participants were recruited by visiting the University of Ghana Campus and others were contacted through professional networks.

3.6. Data Analysis

Data was transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis by systematically identifying, organising, and offering insights into patterns of meaning in the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Themes were developed, taking into consideration the theoretical framework of the social identity theory. As such themes were developed under two main headings: participants' perceptions and interpretations of their scholarly identity and participants' perceptions and interpretations of their scholarly identity. Similar expressions or patterns suggestive of key ideas in the literature on gender identity and scholarly identity or any new insights were identified and grouped under the same themes. The different interpretations or perceptions doctorate students had under each theme were identified and compared to find out how they are different for men and women and how tensions arise for either gender.

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3.7. Ethical Considerations

This study ensured confidentiality by keeping the personal information of participants private. Interview recordings and transcriptions from the recordings collected from participants were kept in a google drive folder and only be accessed by the researcher. Both the researcher and research participants signed consent forms that allowed participants to discontinue interviews at any point they wanted to. The procedures involved in this study and the interview guide that was used for this research were validated by Ashesi University's Human Subject Review Committee (HSRC) before administration.

3.8. Validity

Validity ensures that research results reflect what the research intended to measure (Golafshani, 2015). To address issues of validity, a standard interview guide was used to interview respondents to guarantee consistency in the data collected in this study. Follow-up questions were asked for clarification purposes. A pilot test was done to ensure that the research questions used generated responses that were aligned with the study's objective and the research questions.

3.9. Limitations of the Study

The sample for this study was drawn from one department at the University of Ghana. This may not provide an adequate representation of the experiences of doctorate students across all higher institutions of learning in Ghana. Also, the experiences could be different in different doctoral programs at the university of Ghana as study participants were drawn from different departments. Lastly, because this research involves doctorate students at higher levels of learning, having access to research participants may require a lot of bureaucracy and formality, making data collection tedious.

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CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents results from the analysis of data collected via semi-structured interviews with 12 doctorate students at the University of Ghana. The interviews aimed to meet the objectives of the study, which are: to document gender-specific barriers women pursuing doctorate degrees face, to identify how the experiences of female doctorate students differ from those of men and to determine how gender identity affects the way women and men perceive their doctorate journeys differently. It also presents themes and key insights drawn from interviews.

This chapter also relates findings to the literature reviewed in the previous chapter. Participants shared some similar experiences but different interpretations of those experiences. Responses mainly varied based on the gender and marital status of participants. Married female PhD students shared similar experiences and interpretations of these experiences, while married males did the same. Similarly, unmarried female doctorate students shared similar experiences and interpretations of these experiences while unmarried male students did the same. The results from the study reveal some challenges to the doctoral journey that are unique to women because of their gender identity.

4.2. Participants' Demographics

Participants' demographic information was collected, but their identities were kept anonymous. Participants in each gender group include students at the early stages of their doctorate programs, students who are midway through the doctorate program and students who are at the final stages of the doctorate program. Out of the six women interviewed, four were married, and two were single, and out of six men, three were married, and three

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were single. All but one participant was between the ages of 30 – 40 except for the participant who was 46. A code was assigned to each participant in place of their name and a way of concealing their identities. Female participants were assigned codes from F1to F6, and male participants were assigned M1 to M6**.**

4.3. Data Analysis Process

Interviews were conducted via zoom and in-person, recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were used to identify themes and generate insights from participants' responses. During the analysis, four participant sub-groups emerged: married men, married women, unmarried men, and unmarried women. The themes identified were related to three broad categories gender identity, scholarly identity, and the transition process.

4.4. Results
Participants Perceptions and Interpretations of Gender Identity

All but one respondent agreed that gender identity impacted their doctorate journey. The dynamics of gender identity differed for different groups of doctorate students. It, however, centred around three themes: g*ender roles, societal gender expectations* and *gender Stereotypes*. As Carter (2014) notes, certain groups tend to be defined by gender behavioural patterns and expectations more than others. Similarly, married female and male doctorate students in this study felt like they had gender roles and societal gender expectations to conform to that were different from those that were not married. Married men feel like society expects them to be the family's breadwinners and provide for the household's needs which is reflected in responses like *"the challenge had to do with home because I had very huge home commitments, upkeep of children payment of fees, my own fees"*. So, they tend to perform duties or display attitudes that correspond with these expectations. Similarly, women need to conform to certain societal expectations and gender

roles like childbearing, taking care of the home, and raising the children. When asked about the pros and cons they had to consider before starting the program, married women made statements like, *"I just could not see myself combining school, work and then family. And as I said, being a woman, I need to make sure that I take care of my family well."*

The difference between married men and married women, however, is that the married women felt like they had less control over their decision on whether to perform certain gender roles or meet certain expectations than men did. For example, when one woman in this study was asked to describe how gender has impacted her doctorate education, she mentioned that:

"I'm a Ghanaian, and in Ghana, you know, our roles are gendered. There are duties for men duties for women. And you bear with me that most of the chores that are done within the home, on the shoulders of women, here lies the case, my husband is fully employed, and I am fully employed. Yet, I need to come back home and make sure everything in the house is in order. He gets to do some work; however, those responsibilities are not expected of him. Even though he would help, he would help you when he wants. You get it. But he's not obliged to"

Also, married women in this study seemed to be more conscious of their roles as mothers and wives than men as fathers and husbands, which was evidenced by comments from women like:

"It is mostly the challenges associated with your family, your husband and then the kids, and then you just must manage. It will not come easy, or it does not come easy, but you will just have to manage, and you must make sure that you make time for both. That is

your husband and then your kids because you know they both have different needs. So,

you just must manage and then make sure you continue to create that bond with them."

Therefore, there is more external and internal pressure on women to perform certain roles and meet certain expectations than men. When asked how gender has impacted their doctorate studies, men gave responses like:

"The man is supposed to be the breadwinner of the family, although my wife works, the

biggest budgets of the school fees, servicing their mortgage, ensuring that you have a

vehicle that runs, so that is convenient are on me."

"I think, for the most part, I just feel the need to be able to provide enough for the home

as a man. It is typical for men in this side of the world to be providers. I do receive

support from my wife for that as well."

For unmarried male and female doctorate students, gender played out as gender expectations and gender stereotypes, especially for women. For the two unmarried female doctorate students that were part of this study, they perceived their decision to marry was irrespective of their decision to pursue a doctorate program. They also were not overly concerned that they were not married at ages when society expects them to be married. However, one of the women expressed concerns that she receives comments suggestive of certain expectations of her as a woman of a certain age and stereotypes about women who pursue advanced degrees. They are comments like:

"Oh, you are not going to get married; you are not going to have kids; you are going to

stay for long in school. Sometimes I get so angry. So, it is like if you are doing a PhD,

you cannot live any other life aside, it is like your whole life revolves around that PhD."

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" This your head, how smart you are, you are going to do a PhD, and you are still not married, right now nobody is going to come."

However, the other unmarried woman felt like her gender impacts her doctorate studies, but it is less visible because she is not married. Surprisingly, the male students were more conscious that they must get married by a certain age even though the perception is that society does not place as much pressure on them compared to women. However, one unmarried male student felt like his gender did not impact his doctorate studies in any significant way. The unmarried male doctorate students in this also shared the perception that when compared to women, their gender makes the doctorate process easier . They made comments like:

"As I said, I am 36; if I were a woman, I would have been getting a lot of pressure like why are you doing this? Why are you not settling? Your biological clock is ticking. This is Ghana, and this is Africa, you will hear it. But as a man, I do not hear that. I don't feel it. It feels like this is my decision to go this route, and the benefits that I derive from it are solely mine, so I go for it anyway. So, my gender as a man living in Africa and a Ghanaian has made it an easy decision for me to take"

"If you're looking at it in isolation, then no but then when, you know, you compare it to the, to the other gender and to all the other groups that are mentioned in the, you know, you start appreciating the fact that you don't have to go through that because the women go through a tougher time."

Both the married and unmarried women who participated in this study had lesser flexibility over gender roles, gender expectations and gender stereotypes than the men who participated. This could be because women face more pressure from society and culture to

portray certain attitudes or take-on certain roles that pertain to their gender. The interviews suggest that married women in Ghana are more conscious of performing these roles or meeting these expectations than married men. Therefore, married women face internal and external pressure to perform their roles as wives and mothers. The perception of women and men about their gender identity is consistent with Nadal's (2017) idea that in some cultures, gender roles are more differentiated and rigid, especially in less developed countries like Ghana. It is also a reflection of the social identity theory as both men and women on the program are conscious of the behavioural patterns associated with their gender and are likely to act in ways that correspond to these behavioural patterns.

Participants' Perceptions of their Scholarly identity development

Being a doctorate student is a critical phase in the process of developing a scholarly identity. However, developing a scholarly identity is complex because each student's doctorate experience will differ based on certain factors like gender (Lesley Le Grange, 2018). The perceptions of the participants in this study on their scholarly identity could be grouped under four main themes: ***Independence/Autonomy, Social Isolation, Academic Competence/Expectation*** and ***Identity Transition***. These factors are consistent with findings in the literature that state that doctoral student development involves challenging and emotional experiences like isolation, alienation and loneliness, and they deal with issues relating to autonomy, independence and desired competence (Leshem, 2020)

Independence/Autonomy

All the students who took part in this study felt the need to be independent as PhD students. Independence here refers to academic, financial and emotional Independence. They feel the need to own their work, provide for themselves and manage their emotions

without significant support. While this is not a socially or academically required trait of PhD students, most made suggestive comments. Some of those comments include:

M3: "I come from a family with a low financial background, and so I was thinking how I was going to support my doctoral degree?"

F1: "I feel like I am an adult now. My parents have supported me all they can; if I want to do a PhD, I should be able to pay my fees and support myself because my parents took care of me throughout my master's program."

Because of the need to feel independent, many PhD students want to do things or portray certain characteristics that are suggestive of this. For example, PhD students in this study juggle school and work because of financial independence, making the process cumbersome. This desire to be independent was a shared feeling amongst men and women, married and unmarried. However, some married women reported that they felt like they were not as independent as they would want to because they depend on their spouses for financial support on their PhD programs and family to help them take care of the children while they are at school.

Social Isolation

Another factor that constitutes doctoral identity is social isolation. Most research participants reported that they have lost contact with some friends or no longer meet up with family or connect with family like they used to. Again, while this is not academically or socially required for PhD students, they tend to be socially isolated because of school demands, juggling work and school, or maybe school and family. Both men and women, married or unmarried, shared similar experiences suggestive of this.

However, for married women and men, the social isolation is more intense because they must go to school, work and take care of the home. Married men tend to be socially isolated from their families because they prioritise work providing for their families financially. Being a breadwinner is what defines a man in the African context (Ebila, 2017). Women tend to be socially isolated from their friends because they prioritise their education and take care of the home. They do not create as many social relationships outside the house as men because they prioritise family and education. Both unmarried men and women also experience social isolation but not as intensely as those who are married. Examples of comments suggestive of social isolation include:

"Everything has changed, the doctoral program is demanding, and this limits the time you spend with your kids, the kind of work you do, you always have divided attention."

"The doctorate studies is you.",

"I've left a lot of friends and other things which used to take my time, you know because you need to dedicate a lot of effort and time to a PhD."

Academic Competence/Expectations

Another defining element of scholarly identity is the academic and personal expectations of a doctorate student. All doctorate students must meet certain academic standards; therefore, they are conscious of their grades and research work. While these are academic expectations of the doctorate program, male and female students, tend to have different priorities while on the doctorate journey. Most women seemed to prioritise grades and meeting certain academic standards, while most men see networking, gaining internship experience, and fieldwork as more important. Women, therefore, tend to perform activities that will ensure that they maintain good grades at school or publish papers as they

should, while male doctorate student's lookout for opportunities for networking and field experience. Women tend to make comments like.

> *They expect me to publish more than when I was a master's student and upgrade my chosen career path. For me, my expectation is to be a better researcher build a network that will help me in my career*

> *As a student, people expect that you should be that kind of person who does research, who is interested and is doing the best kind of research that there could be*

Men, on the other hand, shared comments like:

> *"What has changed is that at the master's level and the undergraduate level, I was more concerned about making the grades, getting a lot of As and being the best student sort of a first-class student, but moving on to the PhD, I realised that the focus is no more on getting the As and the Bs. In fact, that one is not important at all. What was important at that level was networks. The networking that you have been able to establish. Those you will have in your class, the professors that you will work with, the organisations that you intern with and volunteer with, and all else, the meetings that you attended, the people you meet."*

This is not to say male PhD students are not concerned about their grades and academic performance. They also value grades. However, women participants were more conscious about their grades than men and saw academic performance as a very defining element of their doctoral identity compared to men. This is so much so that when their grades or performance at school fails to meet certain standards, they had set for themselves or the school had set for them, they tend to feel like they are not performing as well as doctorate students should. On the other hand, when men do not meet certain standards in

terms of grades and academic expectations, they tend to find consolation in the other components of their doctorate program, like the networks they build or the experiences they gain. Two of the six women that took part in this study hit the most challenging moments of their PhD journeys when they failed a particular course. This was a moment when they questioned their competence as PhD students. Men, on the other hand, rarely mentioned grades.

Therefore, the academic pressure on women is greater because their academic and personal expectations during their doctorate programs are centered around grades even though grades can often be controlled by external factors like supervision, quality of teaching and learning, and sometimes how the lecturers decide to assess their work. While they may have control over their ability to study and complete work on time, the grades they get are not determined by them. When they do not perform according to their expectations, they question their identity as doctorate students.

Identity Transition

Central to an individual's scholarly identity is an identity transition from their life and identity before the doctorate program to being doctorate students and then becoming scholars in a particular field of study. This is consistent with Foot, Crowe, Tollafield and Allan's (2014) findings that the doctorate journey centres around becoming an expert in a particular field and about identity transitions. Both male and female doctorate students experience some form of identity transition as they develop from pre-doctoral students to doctoral students and then to scholars. The identity transition for married women differed from that of unmarried women. Before their doctorate programs, most married women only work and take of their families, which they could manage. However, all married women

face difficulties managing work and family alongside their doctorate studies upon enrolling in their doctorate programs. As a result, 3 out of the four women in the doctorate program had to quit their jobs to focus on school and family because they could not separate themselves from their identities as wives as mothers. When asked about their transition process, married women made comments like:

"Yeah, there is a big change because initially, it was more or less like you work, and then you come home and take care of the family, and that is it, but now you are taking care of the family, you are trying to learn alongside. My kids are young, so one way or the other, they will be falling sick here and there, taking care of them, trying to make up with deadlines, trying to meet your supervisors and all of that. It has not been a joke at all. Sometimes, sleepless nights."

"Everything has changed, the doctoral program is demanding, and this limits the time you spend with your kids, the kind of work you do, you always have divided attention. I had to quit my job because there was no way I could manage the demanding academic workload and work with an organisation that would still need more from me. I am still transitioning."

Therefore, for married women, their identity transition had a lot to do with managing their identities as wives as mothers while developing their scholarly identity as doctorate students. Many tensions arise here because women's roles as wives and mothers are a huge part of their gender identity, which they have little control compared to their working lives. Also, there are substantial societal expectations of women as wives and mothers, which they cannot compromise because of their doctorate studies. As women try to develop their scholarly identities vis-à-vis their roles as wives and mothers, it poses

many problems like stress, making difficult trade-offs, and maintaining a work-school-family balance. Even though these tensions reduce as women progress through their doctorate programs, it is an integral part of developing their scholarly identity. These findings are consistent with the idea getting a doctorate requires women with identities relating to their female selves to transition from the academic identity of being a student to that of being a scholar. However, most women find it challenging to integrate being a mother and their academic identities as scholars as they may be under pressure from society to prioritise one over the other (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding & Lunde, 2017)

For unmarried women, on the other hand, identity transition has a lot to do with managing work life and then developing a scholarly identity. However, one thing that stood out as a similarity for both married and unmarried female PhD students is that as their scholarly identity develops, much of their expectations of themselves shift from getting good grades to developing other scholarly competencies like research growth.

Before the doctorate program, men's lives were centred around balancing work and family life. It, however, weighed more on working hard enough to provide for the family as society considers men to be breadwinners. When they enrol in their doctorate programs, they prioritise balancing work-life and school to provide for the family while going to school. Even though some men still perform certain functions within the home as fathers, there is not as much pressure on them to do so as much as there is for women. This is reflected in a comment like:

"What I've realised is, it's like a trade-off. If you tend to have too much time for the family, it affects the time you dedicate to your PhD. So, I've actually decided to move

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to campus. And that means I'll be limiting the kind of time and attention I have for my

kids"

Unlike women, most men have greater flexibility over their societal expectations as fathers and husbands, making the identity transition that is part of their scholarly identity development less "tensious" than that of women as they do not have to make so much of a trade-off between family, school, and work. Like married men, unmarried male PhD students also deal with the challenges of balancing work and school as they develop their scholarly identities. The difference is that married men are under more pressure to maintain their jobs to meet the demands of their gender roles as fathers and husbands.

4.5. Discussion of Results

An analysis of how the doctoral students in this study perceive their gender identity, scholarly identity, and the identity transition that comes with doctorate studies reveals that gender identity plays a role in how women and men in Ghana interpret their doctorate experiences. Women tend to feel that many external factors beyond their control like societal expectations, cultural patterns, work, and family commitments interact to shape their gender identity, resulting in gender roles and expectations that they must meet up with. Also, women more often express being under much more pressure than men to meet these gender roles and expectations. Women's gender roles and expectations more often clash with their ability to develop their scholarly identity, which results in tensions. Therefore, while both men and women faced challenges in their doctoral journeys, women navigated greater complexity due to their gender identity and society's expectations of women (Carter, Blumenstein & cook, 2013)

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The results from the study are consistent with the literature that women face greater challenges in their academic journeys not just because they are women but because part of their gender identity requires that they get married and have children (Brown & Watson, 2010) The results reveal that the tensions that come with transition into scholarly identity weigh more on married women. Gender roles like childbearing and gender expectations like marriage come result from socialisation and women have little control over the decision to perform these roles or not. Hence when they conflict with women's scholarly identity, they have no option but to manage both. With the rise of feminism, women empowerment, and gender equality in education, it is expected that this will not be the case. However, modernisation has made things harder for women, as it has given women the additional burden of contributing to society while taking care of their families. An attempt by women to meet their gender expectations as wives and mothers, therefore, makes the transition into their scholarly identity a complex one (Taiwo, 2010)

Due to the complexity of their PhD process, the challenges women face during their PhD journey are also complex and unavoidable. They are complex because they result from tensions that arise when women try to manage the expectations of their scholarly identity and gender identity. These challenges could also be seen as unavoidable because they are linked to feminine gender identity which is an aspect of women's lives that is shaped by the society in which they live, and they do not have flexibility over. It is therefore not easy to arrive at solutions that eliminate such challenges, as they can only be managed. Below is a summary of how the challenges of pursuing a doctorate are more complex for women than men from a gender identity perspective

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Conflicting Dual Identities

Both male and female PhD students manage two dominant identities when they enrol in their PhD programs. Men must manage their identities as fathers and husbands, and women, must manage their identities as wives and mothers while developing their scholarly identity. A critical look at how women and men perceive that their gender identity affects their doctorate program reveals greater complexity when women try to manage their roles and mothers and wives while developing their scholarly identity and the tension that arises. This is because personal and socially acceptable gender roles and expectations of women are usually demanding and not easily controlled by women themselves. Men seemed to have a greater degree of control over their gender roles and expectations.

Also, married women describe their domestic roles and expectations as more pressing than that of men. Therefore, trying to manage their roles as mothers and develop their identities as scholars tends to be particularly challenging for women. During the interviews, all married women listed managing their roles as wives and mothers while being students as the main challenge they faced during their doctorate program—other challenges like funding, lack of educational infrastructure and inadequate supervision as secondary challenges. On the other hand, married men listed balancing school and work as the main challenge during their doctorate studies. Therefore, women's academic careers suffer not because they are women but because they marry and have children (Brown & Watson, 2010). Female doctorate students face tensions because they have conflicting dual identities. That is, the identity transformation that is required of doctoral students as they transition into higher levels of academia clashes with societal expectations of women outside their academic roles (Carter, Blumenstein & cook, 2013)

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Stereotypes and Societal Expectations of women

While it may seem like tensions only arise for married female doctorate students, unmarried women also face challenges linked to societal gender expectations of them compared to unmarried men. In a typical African setting, women are expected to have gotten married by a certain age to bear children before their biological time ticks out as a "proper woman" in Indigenous African society is seen in the context of family (Ebila, 2017) While on their PhD programs, unmarried women were under so much pressure to get married even if they do not want to which also results in tensions. On the other hand, unmarried men who seemed to be more conscious of their marital status were not under as much pressure to get married as married women were.

Also, during the interviews, one of the unmarried women mentioned that there is a stereotype in African societies that women who pursue advanced degrees like a PhD have lower chances of getting married. This supports Daddieh's (2003) argument that women have been given a stereotypical place in Ghanaian society, and higher levels of education are perceived as a threat to these roles. People seem to use this as a yardstick to pressure women to get married while doing a PhD or before starting their PhD. These stereotypes and societal pressure on women to get married causes a lot of tension for them. Women who succumb to these societal stereotypes and expectations to be wives and mothers before or during their doctorate programs face the challenges of conflicting mother/wife and scholarly identity.

Lack of acknowledgement of these dual identities

Unlike social identities like religion, socio-economic class or even race, gender identity is one of those social identities that cannot be ignored or suppressed because one

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has become a doctorate student. Women's roles as caretakers and nurturers of the home do not usually change when they decide to pursue higher education (Adu-Yeboah & Forde, 2011). Being a mother and wife or father and husband is a component of gender identity that cannot be ignored. Developing a scholarly identity also requires a lot from PhD students. As earlier noted, women tend to face more tensions because they do not have much control over the components of their gender identity. Importantly, some women mentioned a lack of acknowledgement of these conflicting identities as a challenge from their doctoral programs and supervisors. Two out of the four married women interviewed as part of this study were pregnant at some point during their PhD programs. However, they were required by lecturers and supervisors to return to school a few days after giving birth. They received equal treatment as every other student even though childbearing is a feminine gender role and cannot be put on hold just because a woman has enrolled in a PhD Program. One of the women mentioned that there were times when she had to go to school with her baby, who was just a few weeks old. She felt she had to put the child's life at risk to attend classes and sit in for exams, which she ultimately failed.

Dependence

As mentioned above, one of the components of scholarly identity that PhD students try to develop is autonomy or independence. PhD students often desire to be in control of both their academic and personal lives. This seemed out of reach for the married women. Out of the four married women interviewed, three had quit their jobs and had to depend on their husbands for funding to run the household and meet their demands at school. No man, on the other had quit his job. Men only seemed to need more support from their wives to take care of certain household responsibilities like dropping off the kids. On the other hand,

women do not only have to depend on their husbands for financial support but also on other family members to take care of their kids when they are at school. The dependence that comes from managing the expectations of being a mother and wife while on their doctorate program clashes with women's desire to develop a scholarly identity of independence.

Making trade-offs

Even though married women did not frame their challenges as trade-offs, responses from the interview reveal that most women have had to make a trade-off between family and school or family and work as they found it impossible to manage all three and most of the women choose family and school. This is a tough trade-off considering that they need to be employed to provide for themselves and their families. On the other hand, men do not have to make these trade-offs as they need to balance school and work, which they seem to have more control over. Also, because women are under a lot of pressure to prioritise their societal roles and expectations and are very conscious of this, they tend to face many challenges when making decisions that require them to place more value on their roles as mothers or their doctorate education.

Renegotiation of roles

All married PhD students mentioned receiving support from their spouses as they navigate their doctorate journey. Most women receive emotional and financial support from their husbands, who also take on some household responsibilities. Men also count on women for moral support and to carry a more significant part of the household responsibilities. As PhD students develop their scholarly identity, some renegotiation of gender roles happens to ease the transition process. However, some feminine gender roles cannot be renegotiated. Feminine gender roles like childbearing or nurturing a newborn

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baby cannot be passed down to men. Therefore, these roles are an inseperable part of women lives, and they pose a challenge when their education needs to hands-off such roles.

Social Isolation/Exclusion

Social isolation or exclusion is one of the components of a scholarly identity that doctorate students also develop as they transition throughout their PhD journeys. As men try to meet the demands of school and work, they lose friends or miss out on opportunities to create relationships with people. The same thing happens when women focus on school and family. The difference here is that married women tend to be more isolated or socially excluded because their lives revolve around school and family, with few opportunities to create social relationships. At the same time, men go to work, and they get the chance to create a relationship with people outside of school and the home.

In summary, women's gender identity makes their transition into a scholarly identity very difficult. This is because feminine gender identity comes with many roles, expectations and stereotypes that have been shaped by socialization into the African society which women have no control over. The expectations of feminine gender identity clash with women's ability to develop a scholarly identity which results in tensions. This causes, women to interpret their experiences during their PhD journeys as more complex and challenging than that of men because they are under a lot of internal and external pressure to meet the expectations of their gender identity and scholarly identity. This makes the transition process into a scholarly identity very difficult for women and results in certain unavoidable gender-specific challenges during their PhD journeys.

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CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter summarises findings from the study and its implications. It presents recommendations for improving the doctorate experience of women and reducing the burden of the gender-specific challenges women face in their doctorate journeys. It also touches on the limitations of this study and recommendations for further studies.

5.2. Summary of Findings and Implications

1. How do men and women interpret their experiences as doctoral students differently?

Female doctorate students perceive their doctoral journey as more complex and demanding. This is because factors within the environment like culture, religion, tradition interact to shape the gender identity of women as wives and mothers which conflicts with their scholarly identity. They must meet the demands of their identity and their scholarly identity, which conflict. Their societal expectations as wives and mothers make it hard for them to fully assume their perceived characteristics as mothers as they want to simultaneously display desirable features of wives/mothers and scholars. While men may also face challenges, these challenges are not linked to their gender identity as much as women.

2. How does gender affect the identity transition from student to scholar during the doctoral program?

Women in this study feel like they have less flexibility over their decision to carry out their gender roles and meet certain gender expectations than men are. Also, married women in this study were under more pressure to perform their roles as wives and

mothers than men are to perform their roles as fathers and husbands. Unmarried female doctorate students in this study are also faced with societal gender expectations to get married and stereotypes about women who pursue advanced education without getting married. Unmarried men in this study face no such challenges.

The gender roles and societal gender expectations of women in this study as wives and mothers or to become wives and mothers while in their doctorate programs clashes with their ability to develop their scholarly identity, which revolves around gaining financial, emotional and academic independence and excelling in their academic work. This makes the identity transition that comes with doctorate education more complex for women than men because women's gender identity affects their ability to develop what they perceive as a scholarly identity.

3. How are the challenges of pursuing doctorate degrees in Ghana different for men and women?

The challenges of doctorate education weigh more on married women than any other sub-group within the study population. This implies that the identity conflict between their gender identity and scholarly identity as women transition into their scholarly identity results primarily from marriage and childbearing. As a result, married women in this study perceive their challenges in doctorate studies as complex and unavoidable. Complex because they are linked to the complexities of managing both their scholarly identity and gender identity on their doctorate journeys and unavoidable because these women do not readily have solutions to these challenges since they are linked to their gender identity which they have lesser flexibility over. Some of the gender-specific challenges to the doctorate journey for women include conflicting dual identities,

gender stereotypes, social isolation, dependence, lack of acknowledgement of these dual identities and making difficult tradeoffs.

5.3 Recommendations

1. The government or higher education institutions should provide priority funding for married women with dependents. Many of them trade off their jobs to focus on school and family, which causes them to become dependent on their spouses or families for financial support.

2. PhD supervisors and lecturers should be more mindful that the PhD is a terminal degree, and that the education of PhD students intersects with other aspects of their lives that are equally demanding. Therefore, they should incorporate some element of empathy in their relationships with PhD students, especially married female PhD students, to ease their scholarly identity development process or make the process less complicated.

3. Higher education institutions should provide support systems for PhD students like counselling services to allow PhD students to seek support in overcoming some of the emotional challenges of managing PhD studies alongside other aspects of life like family and work.

4. The government and higher education institutions can ease the transition process from the undergraduate and master's level to the PhD level so that more women can do a PhD before getting married since some of their gender expectations like childbirth and marriage are tied to their age, especially in the Ghanaian context.

5. Families and friends of individual of PhD students, especially the husbands of married female PhD students, should provide them with the necessary physical,

emotional and moral support they need to lessen the burden that comes with doing

a PhD while being a mother and wife.

5.4. Limitations and recommendations for further study

This was a phenomenological study that in-depth understanding experiences of

PhD students. Though the results from this study are not generalisable, they will be of

interest to doctorate students and their supervisors, higher education institutions,

scholarship awarding bodies and the government. Data from this study or similar studies

on the same phenomenon could also be used to shape a quantitative study that would

include many participants. All but one participant who took part in this study were between

30 and 40. Most of those within this age group are students who recently got married and

may still be faced with the burden of taking care of a family and young children than if

they were older and have grown-up children. This may have had an impact on how they

perceived their experiences. A similar study could be conducted but with participants from

a wider range of ages. The experiences of research participants differed based on their

marital status. Different studies that focus on different participant groups would be

insightful. Finally, because this study involved PhD students and the researcher is an

undergraduate, there was a bridge in communication between the researcher and the

research participants. Asking certain questions relevant to the study was difficult. A more

experienced researcher may be able to probe for deeper responses without fear of coming

off as naïve or disrespectful.

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CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN PURSUING DOCTORATE DEGREES

APPENDIX

a. Interview Protocol

Introductory Message

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study. Participation in this research will help in understanding the challenges women pursuing doctorate degrees in Ghana face. I would appreciate honest responses to the questions. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these questions. Your identity will be anonymous throughout this study and data collected will be kept confidential and used only for the analysis.

Interview Questions

1. What doctorate degree program are you pursuing and at what stage you in the process are you?

2. At what stage in your life did you decide to do a doctorate degree and what was your motivation?

3. Remember the time you were making the decision to pursue a doctorate education, what were some of the pros and cons you considered?

4. Describe the transition process from who used to be to who you are now as a student? (Work Life, parenting roles, family roles/responsibilities, personal life)

5. What are the challenges you have faced as a doctorate student since starting your doctorate journey?

6. How has being a man/woman impacted your doctorate journey?

7. In what areas do you think you need to be supported in the process of becoming a scholar

CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN PURSUING DOCTORATE DEGREES

b. Participants demographics

Female

Code	Age	Marital status	Number of children	Program	Year in school
F1	34	Single	0	Finance	6
F2	34	Married	2	Finance	3
F3	33	Married	2	Psychology	3
F4	36	Married	4	Finance	2
F5	32	Single	0	Food Process Engineering	2
F6	35	Married	2	Adult Education Studies	4

Male

Code	Age	Marital Status	Number of children	program	Year in School
M1	36	Single	0	Health Policy	2
M2	34	Single	0	Information systems	3
M3	46	Married	4	Migration studies	5
M4	34	Married	2	Human resources	4
M5	30	Single	0	Finance	3
M6	34	Married	2	Finance	2