“IT’S NOT ALWAYS WHAT IT SEEMS”: EXPLORING THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM WITHIN A DOCTORAL PROGRAM

A dissertation submitted to the Kent State University College and Graduate School of Education, Health, and Human Services in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Rachel Elizabeth Foot
August, 2017
A dissertation written by

Rachel E. Foot

B.A. (Hons), University of the West of England, 2000

M.Sc., Clarion University, 2003

Ph.D., Kent State University, 2017

Approved by

__________________________________, Director, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Alicia R. Crowe

__________________________________, Member, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Joanne Kilgour Dowdy

__________________________________, Member, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Tricia Niesz

Accepted by

__________________________________, Director, School of Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Studies
Alexa L. Sandmann

__________________________________, Dean, College of Education, Health and Human Services
James C. Hannon
“IT’S NOT ALWAYS WHAT IT SEEMS”: EXPLORING THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM WITHIN A DOCTORAL PROGRAM (pp. 315)

Dissertation Director: Alicia R. Crowe Ph.D.

The purpose of this qualitative, naturalistic study was to explore the ways in which hidden curriculum might influence doctoral student success. Two questions guided the study: (a) How do doctoral students experience the hidden curriculum? (b) What forms of hidden curricula can be identified in a PhD program?

Data were collected from twelve doctoral students within a single program at one university. Participants took part in three sets of semi-structured interviews and data were analyzed using a cross-case analysis. Findings suggest that doctoral students experience mixed messages related to the values and norms of the program when the intended, explicit curriculum is contradicted by a hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum is communicated through and related to the structure and organization of the program, the social structures inherent in the program, and the identities students are encouraged to value. The hidden curriculum is interpreted through each student’s unique self-lens.

These findings suggest doctoral programs should examine their curriculum with a focus on contradictory cultural messages from the perspectives of past and present students. Only when administrators, faculty, and students examine the hidden curriculum together and reflect on their part in (re)producing that hidden curriculum can we remove the invisibility cloak from doctoral education and improve doctoral student satisfaction and success.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I considered multiple approaches to this acknowledgements page. A long narrative starting with my first and favorite teacher and moving through the 34 years of my educational life perhaps? A parody of an Oscar winner’s speech maybe? Or possibly a pastiche of a recipe from a book? In the end though, I’ve decided to keep things simple. There are a handful of people who have directly supported my work in this dissertation, a small group who have been instrumental in my journey to this point in my life and academia, and a vast number who have provided invaluable friendship and support, and I will briefly address each in turn.

Firstly, I must thank those directly involved in the research and writing of this dissertation. My committee chair, advisor, colleague, and friend, Dr. Alicia R. Crowe has provided support, advice, and many long and philosophical conversations about the hidden curriculum for over 5 years now. Alicia introduced me to the hidden curriculum in a class she taught; it was her passion for the process of teaching and learning, and how the two integrate to create a fulfilling education experience (or not) that really started me on the journey to this specific dissertation topic. Alicia has been patient and kind during this long journey, and in my opinion gave her time above and beyond the requirements of a dissertation advisor, especially in this last sprint to the finish. It is safe to say, I simply would not be here if Alicia had not been such an amazing advisor. I must also thank and acknowledge my additional committee members, Dr. Tricia Niesz and Dr. Joanne Kilgour Dowdy. I was lucky to take classes with these scholars as part of the coursework phase of the program and thankfully they agreed to sit on my dissertation committee.
Both Tricia and Joanne are inspirational faculty who have provided me with opportunities to research and write with them, and I am lucky to have their perspectives help shape my work and future goals. Thank you all, so much.

While still looking to those with direct involvement in this dissertation, there are three critical friends that must be acknowledged, Dr. Karen Andrus Tollafield, Chad Everett Allan, and Dr. Katherine Batchelor. Without the scholarly, psychological, and emotional support of these once doctoral colleagues and forever friends, I would never have made it through this process. For the late night messages of support, for the talking through of ideas, for the reading of drafts, and mostly for the hilarious group texts, I thank you. I must also thank Jennifer L. Schneider, my flame-haired partner in crime who enjoys a glitter ball curriculum reference as much as I do, and Elizabeth Ritz, a dear friend who was kind to me on day one of the doctoral program and set the tone for the rest of my experience.

On then to those who have supported me not just with this dissertation, but in all my endeavors and in ways it may be impossible to verbalize. My parents, Gillian and Michael Foot and the love of my life, Aaron Near. First, to Gill and Mike – the best parents in the world. There may be readers of this page who think their parents are the best, but I can assure you, my parents win that title hands down. I was lucky to live with two of the most intelligent, well-read, hilarious people on this Earth. My parents are a large part of who I am. The research I value, the work I want to complete, and my academic goals are all driven by my view of the world, shaped by these two amazing people. My parents encouraged me in every way possible, and even when I had to leave
them in England to continue my academic journey in the USA, they put my needs before their own and sent me away with their blessing and, thank goodness, weekly Facetime calls to keep me sane. Mum and Dad, you are the best and there will never be enough ways for me to thank you.

The last named person in this acknowledgement page is Aaron Near, but in this case last does not mean least. Aaron Near is the person who witnessed the roller coaster of PhD program and dissertation process first-hand. He was on the frontline of this thing and may deserve a medal for the friendly fire he took on occasions. The doctoral journey is far from easy, with ups and downs akin to standing on a ship deck during the storm of the century, but with Aaron I had a steady hand to hold my own. Aaron comforted me when the dissertation work felt like too much, he celebrated with me with every new milestone, and perhaps the most important of all, he provided me with love when I needed it…and chocolate, which is almost as important as love in my book. Aaron and our dog Odin provided the hugs and love that all doctoral students need, as well as a myriad of wonderful experiences to help me gain space and clarity from the dissertation when I needed it. Aaron, thank you babe.

Finally, to all the faculty who shaped my educational experiences from day one. Mrs. Ruth Crouch in primary school, Dr. Patricia Kennedy at Clarion University of Pennsylvania, and Dr. Kristiina Montero at Syracuse University, and many more, thank you for seeing something in me and inspiring me to continue on this educational journey. I never would have got here without you. And to my wonderful friends and family near
and far, I wish I could name you all. You have helped and supported me in ways most of
you will never know, and I appreciate and thank you for that.

And I cannot end without mentioning Comma the cat. Who supported me in the
way you would expect of a cat, by sitting on my computer a lot when I was trying to
write.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** ........................................................................................................................................... iv

**LIST OF FIGURES** .................................................................................................................................................. xi

**LIST OF TABLES** .................................................................................................................................................... xii

**CHAPTER**

I. **INTRODUCTION** .................................................................................................................................................. 1

   Preface ........................................................................................................................................................................ 1
   Background ................................................................................................................................................................. 7
   Purpose of Study ........................................................................................................................................................ 8
   Statement of Significance ............................................................................................................................................. 8
   Research Questions ....................................................................................................................................................... 10
   Definitions .................................................................................................................................................................... 10
   Curriculum .................................................................................................................................................................. 10
   Hidden Curriculum ...................................................................................................................................................... 12
   Doctorate/Doctoral .................................................................................................................................................... 13

II. **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE** ............................................................................................................................. 16

   Higher Education and Doctoral Education ................................................................................................................. 16
   Hidden Curriculum ...................................................................................................................................................... 17
   History of Research on Hidden Curriculum .............................................................................................................. 18
   The Hidden Curriculum in Doctoral Studies ............................................................................................................... 25
     Supervision ............................................................................................................................................................. 26
     Doctoral Milestones ................................................................................................................................................. 29
     Socialization ........................................................................................................................................................... 31
   Hidden Curriculum Summary .................................................................................................................................... 33
   Doctoral Student Socialization and Identity ................................................................................................................ 35
     Communities of Practice .......................................................................................................................................... 42
     Supervisors and Identity .......................................................................................................................................... 44
     Social Networks ....................................................................................................................................................... 45
     Agency ..................................................................................................................................................................... 50
   Doctoral Socialization and Identity Summary ........................................................................................................... 52
   Literature Review Summary ........................................................................................................................................ 53

III. **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY** ......................................................................................................... 55

   Methodology ............................................................................................................................................................ 55
   Theoretical Framework ................................................................................................................................................. 56
     Ontology and epistemology ..................................................................................................................................... 57
     The role of the researcher ......................................................................................................................................... 59
   Researcher assumptions and bracketing ..................................................................................................................... 63
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imposter syndrome</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency and resistance</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Study</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of Findings</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come out, Come out, Wherever you are</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulling Back the Curtain</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow the Yellow Brick Road</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We're Not in Kansas Anymore</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As Plain as the Nose On My Face</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's So Kind of You to Visit Me in My Loneliness</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They Have One Thing you Haven’t Got</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay No Attention to That Man Behind the Curtain</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please, Sir. We've Done What You Told Us</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearts Will Never be Practical Until They Can Be Made Unbreakable</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a Little Courage</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toto, we’re Home</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications and Recommendations</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Planning Implications and Recommendations</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing connections between specializations</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make visible the post-coursework stages of study</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing opportunities for part-time students</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisors</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing Identities and agency</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A. RECRUITMENT MATERIALS</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B. CONSENT FORM</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX D. CASE SUMMARIES</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My Scholarly Identity Development</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Example of Coding from First Analysis</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Example of Coding from Second Analysis</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Example of Coding from Third Analysis</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Dana’s Representation of the Educational Journey</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Program Student Demographics Summary: Spring 2014</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Participant Summary</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How the Data Informs the Research</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Overview of Findings</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Preface

As I sat at the table, I smiled warmly at my dear friend. She was preparing for her dissertation defense; the culmination of all of her hard work for the past 7 years would take place shortly. I felt pretty relaxed; my friend’s presentation was fantastic and I knew she would give a wonderful demonstration of her knowledge. I was also very, very experienced at attending dissertation defenses. Early on in my PhD experience we had been told to attend other students’ defenses to understand and experience first-hand a PhD milestone that is very specific to the dissertation, or post-course work, stage of the PhD. Yes, you give class presentations during course work, but they are rarely as pressurized as a dissertation defense, and nothing more than a grade is at stake in class presentations that are usually held with a group of students you’ve known for at least a semester. The dissertation defense, however, is open to the public and ends with a grilling of questions from your committee. Your whole PhD rests on doing well in this one setting. A pressurized situation indeed. Still, I had witnessed so many defenses (possibly 10 or more at this point in my education) that I knew the drill well.

In my early days I had been petrified walking into someone else’s defense. The fear stemmed a little from intruding on a stranger’s big day and selfishly using their final milestone as a learning experience for myself, but mostly it stemmed from the fear that I would do or say something wrong, or that I wasn’t supposed to be there. Perhaps I would sit in the wrong spot, make a noise, or worst of all, perhaps I would be asked to question
the speaker! Every defense in our program is set up in a similar way. You normally have a projector screen for the student’s presentation, a table of varying size where the committee sits, and a few chairs strewn around the room for guests. I remember my first few defenses well. I quietly entered each room, trying to be as small and as quiet as possible; I wanted to go unnoticed. No matter what the room layout, I would go to the chair in the furthest corner of the room and try to make myself tiny, so afraid I didn’t belong there. Honestly, I’m not even sure when things changed and I started to have the confidence to sit at the table during dissertation defenses. The table is where the committee members sit during a defense, and sometimes I had witnessed guests sit at the table, while other times it was only the committee members. But in those early days I was petrified of sitting at the table. To sit with the committee would have made me visible in a way I couldn’t bear and which would make me vulnerable. Very irrationally, I also worried people would think I was more important than I actually was if I sat at the table. Maybe they would think I was a committee member?! Of course, now I know that would be impossible and the committee members know each other well. I also worried that I would be asked to move from the table if I sat there - the ultimate shame would be to be singled out in front of everyone in this high pressure environment for being in the wrong place. I don’t remember how or why I eventually transitioned to sitting at the table in defenses, but transition I did.

I think perhaps an advisor invited the participants to sit at the table on one or two occasions, or the rooms where some dissertations were held made it impossible for guests to sit anywhere but at the table with the committee, or perhaps there was no external
change at all, perhaps the change came from within me. At some point I stopped being a scared PhD student, frightened to open my mouth in this room of ‘real’ academics; I was now a PhD candidate. I was close to my own defense and had worked with multiple faculty on projects and research. I no longer felt like I had to justify my existence in the room, at the table, or in academia. Maybe that was when I started sitting with the committee at the table. But however it had happened, it had happened, and by the time my dear friend was ready to defend I had sat at the table multiple times and was doing so again today. My guard was down and all I was concerned about was helping my friend and colleague feel secure for her big moment.

My friend’s advisor came in. A long-time advisor and teacher of mine, we all welcomed each other with smiles and began chatting about the defense. I had sat near my friend at the head of the table, but as we spoke I moved down the table slightly; while I felt secure sitting at the table and being a visible academic in the room, it seemed only right and respectful that the dissertation committee sat closest to the candidate at the head of the table. I sat happily near the center of the large table as I chatted with my friend’s advisor (also the committee chair) as he started moving around the room and arranging chairs around the side walls.

“Rachel, do you mind moving to the peanut gallery when we get started” or something to that effect, the advisor asked with a wry smile. I laughed - this was very amusing because it related to my work on hidden curriculum so perfectly. What a great joke!
“Haha” I said, “it’s funny you should say that. One of my research participants was asked not to sit at the table in her first defense visit. Can you believe it?!”

“I don’t know why we do this” he sighed.

I kept laughing. “Indeed. Why aren’t students allowed to sit at the table?”

“Because you’re peons” the advisor responded with sarcasm, as you’d expect from an advisor who viewed his doctoral students as colleagues. But then he once again referenced “having” to do this, and I slowly stopped laughing.

The advisor was serious, I realized. I was being asked to move away from the table. The table was huge. I counted 4 or 5 chairs at the head of the table next to the PhD candidate, with another 4 or 5 at the end of the table.

“You really want me to move?” I asked, incredulous now. My face had started to go red.

“Oh, I hope I haven’t offended you” he replied, concerned.

“No, I’m not offended, but I’ve sat at the table in many, many defenses. Why do I have to move?” I asked, trying not to look offended, when inside I felt completely mortified and wished I had kept with my practice of being invisible. Invisible was always safer in educational settings - I should have remembered that.

“I don’t know” was the advisor’s response. I couldn’t help it, I had to keep pushing. I was so embarrassed by this turn of events my only defense now was to pretend I wasn’t.

“Where does it say in the handbook students can’t sit at the table?” I asked.

“It doesn’t, I guess. I hope I haven’t offended you”.
“No, I’m not offended, but why do I have to move if it’s not written anywhere? I’ve sat at the table so many times in defenses.”

“I don’t know. Well if you’re upset, you CAN sit at the table, but can I ask you to move to the end of the table?” The advisor gestured to the seat at what we might call the bottom of the table, three or four seats down from the center where I currently sat, before leaving to collect some papers. At the same time some early phase doctoral students entered. They (of course?) headed straight for the ‘peanut gallery’ and I, full of shame and wrapped in the imposter syndrome that is always so close during doctoral study, did the same thing and moved to a chair at the side of the room.

As I sat blushing hot tomato red, I realized it was more than ironic that I had been very clearly put in my place - whatever that was - by a hidden curriculum. A curriculum or practice that wasn’t written anywhere (that I knew of), and a practice which the advisor himself seemed to dislike but that he did not question in any way.

This was the set-up for defenses that he had seen or had always used in the past, so this was the way it would be done here today. Would a faculty member who came to view the defense have been asked to sit on the literal sideline? Perhaps? We’ll never know, but I do doubt it. In the space of one small interaction I had received a message loud and clear: I was not good enough/experienced enough/relevant enough/qualified enough to sit with the committee at ‘the table’. I was a PhD student, and my place was on the sideline. I don’t think the instructor intended that to be the message, and I don’t think every student would have inferred the things I did from that interaction - or perhaps they may not have consciously inferred that message. But because I had experienced defenses
where I was welcomed at the table, because I had been studying hidden curricula for so long, and because I had the benefit of knowing from my research interviews that at least one other PhD student had gone through this experience and had taken away similar messages as me, the social structure ‘hidden’ in the instructor’s interaction and the unwritten rules of this defense setting seemed more than clear to me.

If I have to attend another dissertation defense I don’t know whether I will be able to so assuredly sit at the table again; I believe the voice of my constant companion, the imposter, will be too loud to silence after this experience, and she will tell me to hide myself in the corner as I had in the early days of my PhD journey. However, I’m lucky in that the next dissertation defense I attend will be my own. And imposter syndrome or not, on that day - on the day I tell whoever wants to listen about my research and work - I will sit at the head of that table and I will invite any student or guest who wishes to do so, to sit at that table with me and be a part of the social construction of knowledge that will be my dissertation defense.

I begin my dissertation with this true story for two reasons. First, as will become clear throughout this dissertation, I believe that I (researcher, author, doctoral candidate) am a fundamental element of my research. If I move forward describing my research study without giving you, the reader, some indication of who I am in this study, I immediately begin to perpetuate the notion of a researcher identity as something hidden and separate from research. This story demonstrates that I have fears and insecurities about being a researcher and academic, just as many of the participants you will read about in this study do. But perhaps more importantly, this story reveals an example of
hidden curriculum. As I will discuss later when defining hidden curriculum, hidden curriculum is always embedded within a specific context that includes a setting, an experience, and a specific frame through which that lesson is interpreted and a change takes place; all of these elements are clear in the story I describe here. One other important element exists within the story, that of the unquestioning nature of the instructor to the hidden curriculum he is now a part of. This study is, at the core, about removing a cloak of invisibility from doctoral programs and encouraging doctoral students, faculty, and other higher education stakeholders to examine unintended, uncommunicated, or intentionally hidden elements of the doctoral curriculum and consider how that hidden curriculum influences and is perpetuated by all of us in academia.

**Background**

Broadly speaking the hidden curriculum consists of unspoken social norms, values, and dispositions unintentionally communicated to students in educational contexts (Apple, 1971; Apple, 1995; Eisner, 1992; Margolis et al., 2001). The hidden curriculum is often not explicitly or consciously planned by administrators and instructors, or acknowledged by students (Jackson, 1968; Eisner, 2005; Margolis et al., 2001), but it has the potential to send messages that can make the doctoral journey more or less satisfying and successful for students. As students strive to understand the hidden norms and values of their field, institution, and the academy, they have to not only complete specific course requirements but also position themselves successfully within the hierarchy of the academy (Margolis et al., 2001; Miller, 2005) and their own field or specialization.
However, few studies outside of nursing and health education have examined the hidden curriculum in a higher education setting (Bergenhenegouwen, 1987), and even fewer have explored how doctoral students experience the hidden curriculum and the influence of that curriculum on their success.

**Purpose of Study**

In this study I investigated students’ experiences of hidden curricula within a single doctoral program in the field of education in one College of Education at a public four-year institution in the mid-west USA. I examined how doctoral students experience and make sense of messages from all aspects of their doctoral program and then explored the possible forms of hidden curricula that may have communicated those messages.

**Statement of Significance**

Doctoral programs all over the world face a high level of attrition and lengthy time to completion with the research putting the number of students who fail to complete their doctoral degree at around 40-50% (Bagaka, Badillo, & Bransteter, 2015; Gardner, 2008a; Gardner 2007; Golde, 2005; Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2008; Stubb, Pyhalto, & Lonka, 2012); this is a problem that researchers are currently examining globally. While doctoral socialization and identity development research explore and suggest ways we can develop doctoral curriculum and experiences to help students succeed, I have found little research examining the influence of the hidden curriculum on the doctoral student experience. The hidden curriculum is a crucial element of the doctoral discussion because it can influence doctoral student socialization and identity development as students strive to understand the hidden norms and values of
the multiple cultures they interact with during their studies. These cultures can include their program, their field of inquiry, their institution, and the academy as a whole. PhD students can suffer at the hands of hidden curricula during their studies even if they graduate and are deemed to have been successful. For example, As Margolis, Soldatenko, Acker and Gair (2001) explain, students who oppose the norms and values inherent in a program may face difficulties that would not normally be an issue, such as not easily locating a supervisor to work with, which can cause a great deal of distress and delay in graduation, or those who do adjust their identities to fit into the cultural norm of a program may end up losing part of their own identity in the process. I suggest the hidden curriculum is an important factor in doctoral student success and satisfaction and argue that the hidden curriculum plays an important role in any PhD program.

This study is important because it seeks to bring to light and examine the way the hidden curriculum influences doctoral students’ experiences in higher education. I argue that a fundamental aspect of the doctoral journey is to travel from the role and identity of a student who “consumes” knowledge (Gardner, 2008a, p. 328) to a scholar who creates knowledge. Upon completion of a doctoral program, candidates should be scholars who are “prepared both to know and to do” (Walker et al., 2008, p. x). Put another way, one of the primary purposes of doctoral education is to produce scholars who think critically and ask difficult questions; if this is the case, doctoral students and faculty need to take Margolis’ et al. advice and “pull back the curtain” of the hidden curriculum (2001, p. 4) and examine the cultural values and power dynamics that influence students’ everyday doctoral and scholarly lives. It is only through such an examination by educational
researchers, faculty, and doctoral students that new “forms of thought and paradigms”
can be produced (Margolis & Romero, 2001, p. 84).

The various forms of curricula and communication in doctoral programs, whether
intended or unintended, are integrated with social practices involving people (Fairclough,
2001). Messages from curricula can therefore only exist once they are taken in and
interpreted by a student – whether or not they are interpreted consciously or sub-
consciously. In order to fully understand how the hidden curriculum influences doctoral
student success I examined how doctoral students make meaning of the curriculum
around them in a doctoral program, and used their experiences to identify forms of
hidden curricula that may influence student experience and success at the doctoral level.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore the hidden curriculum in doctoral studies
through the examination of doctoral students’ experiences. My study addressed the
following research questions:

1. How do doctoral students experience the hidden curriculum?
2. What forms of hidden curricula can be identified in a PhD program?

**Definitions**

The following section briefly describes the major terms used in this dissertation and
how I define them.

**Curriculum**

The term curriculum is understood differently throughout the field of education
(Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006; Lattuca & Stark, 2009). The simplest definition of
curriculum describes it as a course of study; many of the traditional definitions of curriculum describe it as a plan or program of study (Jackson, 1992). However, definitions have evolved over the years. A reconceptualization movement occurred in curriculum studies comprised of a number of different theorists who rejected a traditional definition of curriculum. The reconceptualists valued “eclectic intellectualism, intent on exploring bodies of knowledge and intellectual traditions that educators heretofore had not drawn on heavily” (Jackson, 1992, p. 35). Because of the variety of branches in the reconceptualization movement, it is difficult to draw one definition of curriculum from their work (Jackson, 1992); however, I think it is crucial to acknowledge the reconceptualization of curriculum because it implies a broader definition of curriculum as a way of being in the world that values the life experiences, creativity, imagination, and multiple forms of understanding; for reconceptualists, education is less about teaching students to “earn a living but for learning how to live” (Eisner, 1992, p. 316) and is not simply concerned with traditional curriculum methodology or the design of day-to-day school life. It is a broader and more theoretical definition of curriculum that I adhere to. In other words, while many definitions of curriculum often concentrate on a program’s purpose, the experiences provided for students, the courses offered to students, the course content, or the syllabus (Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006; Lattuca & Stark, 2009), I believe the term curriculum includes those elements and much more. Curriculum also includes the interconnection of curriculum, pedagogy and teaching, and the “collaborative process of learning” between students and teachers, (Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006, p. 275). I believe curriculum is an evolving entity encompassing explicit and intentionally designed
elements as well as implicit and unintentional branches, with each emerging from the unique needs of a student group, the social relations between students and teacher, and the individual context and situation in which the curriculum is enacted (Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006).

**Hidden Curriculum**

The hidden curriculum is an implicit or often times unconsciously designed element of the official curriculum (Apple, 1995; Eisner, 2002; Margolis et al., 2001); the hidden curriculum is not planned for in curriculum documents nor is it typically discussed or analyzed by instructors or administrators (Apple, 1995; Eisner, 2002; Margolis et al., 2001; Zais, 1976). The hidden curriculum then is essentially the hidden messages that are inherent and unplanned in education.

The hidden curriculum works to not only teach students the daily routines, rules, and relationships of educational life (Henderson & Gornik, 2007; Jackson, 1968; Margolis et al., 2001), but it also serves to communicate social and cultural expectations, norms, and values of institutions and society at large (Apple, 1995; Margolis et al., 2001). While culture is very much part of the hidden curriculum I do see culture and hidden curriculum as being separate. The hidden curriculum is what sends messages to students about the culture of a doctoral program and works to then produce and reproduce that culture. Doctoral programs are filled with tradition and convention inherited from the past (Walker et al., 2008) and students must come to understand and navigate the inherited culture, either on their own or with assistance from others (Acker, 2001).
Eisner (1992) explains that all people “learn to ‘read’ the forms, rites, rituals, and values of the culture or sub-culture in which we live” (Eisner, 1992, p. 2). In schools though, those rites, rituals, and values are chosen (whether consciously or sub-consciously) and communicated through the particular resources, language, design of the environment, and forms of representation valued (Eisner, 1992); in essence, all the choices educators make weave together to create curricula, and these curricula communicate the norms and values of the cultures of the institution, program, and instructors (Cotton, Winter & Bailey, 2013).

Martin (1994) describes the hidden curriculum as a curriculum that is unintended (or intentionally hidden) and which causes “common” learning states to occur within the context of a particular setting, time, and learner. There are four main elements to this definition of hidden curriculum: a learning state has to occur, those learning states have to be unintended or in some way intentionally hidden from the person learning, the setting and context are crucial elements, and in general “attention [should be]…directed to common themes running through learning states” and not every single learning state that occurs in a setting (Martin, 1994, p. 157). Martin (1994) explains that a hidden curriculum does not have to affect people en mass, and that each individual student brings with them their own experience and context, which influences the lens through which they experience hidden curricula. Martin’s definition provides somewhat of an operational definition of hidden curricula because it suggests characteristics that have to be present for a hidden curriculum to impact a student; therefore, this is the definition that I used as I conducted my analysis of hidden curricula in a doctoral program.
**Doctorate/Doctoral**

Doctoral degrees vary a great deal both nationally and internationally (Boud & Lee, 2005; Gilbert, 2004; McCarty & Orloff, 2004; Walker et al., 2008). Historically, the first doctorates were PhDs (Doctor of Philosophy degrees) emerging around the early 1900s (Thelin, 2011). It is important to note that PhD degrees earned in the USA are not necessarily designed in the same way as those from Europe, Australasia, and other areas of the world (Durling & Friedman, 2002). PhDs in the USA are generally “taught” PhDs, and while there may be variation in the PhD format from institution to institution, there are certain milestones that most doctoral students pass through on their way to the doctorate: such as the qualifying exam (Walker et al., 2008), and the doctoral thesis or dissertation (Malfroy & Yates, 2003). In Europe and Australasia, however, the PhD generally does not include a taught coursework element. Instead these research-based PhDs usually involve a doctoral student/candidate working in close proximity with one or two advisors as s/he undertakes a research project of his/her own design (Durling & Friedman, 2002).

While doctoral programs differ from institution to institution and country to country, I argue that the similarities, such as the emphasis on faculty supervision and similar milestones that cut across programs internationally, makes the literature from other countries pertinent to my study. For this reason, my definition of ‘doctorate’ includes PhD formats from the USA (taught PhDs), and the UK and Australia (research-based PhDs).
Since then other doctorates have emerged such as the Doctor of Arts (DA) or the EdD (Doctor of Education). While the DA did not gain a great deal of popularity (Walker et al., 2008) the EdD has emerged as a ‘professional’ version of the PhD, which is generally believed to contain a lesser emphasis on research skills than the traditional PhD. However, McCarty and Orloff (2004) suggest that “distinctions between the two degrees remain fuzzy in many doctoral programs; often the requirements for the EdD are virtually identical to those of the PhD” (p. 14). The similarities between the EdD and PhD in regard to coursework suggest that it is prudent to include both the PhD and EdD within my use of the term ‘doctorate’. However, the College of Education used as the site for this study only includes Doctor of Philosophy degrees.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following literature review examines three primary areas of research. First, I provide some context for the study by describing a brief history of doctoral programs. Once the context is set, next I move on to elucidate the current research on the hidden curriculum, using this knowledge base to suggest areas where hidden curriculum might manifest in doctoral programs. Finally, I briefly examine the existing literature on doctoral student socialization and identity development and their important role in doctoral student success, further supporting the need for a study to investigate the influence of hidden curriculum on doctoral student satisfaction and success.

Higher Education and Doctoral Education

Doctoral education holds a somewhat contradictory position in the field of higher education. While traditionally considered a prestigious terminal degree, the doctorate has traditionally come second to undergraduate education in terms of research studies and critical examination of the curriculum and pedagogy of the degree (Gilbert, 2004; Green, 2012; Lesko, Simmons, Quashie, & Newton, 2008; Thelin, 2011; Walker et al., 2008). Perhaps one reason for the reticence associated with examining doctoral education has been that the very nature of doctoral study makes any kind of broad-spectrum analysis of the degree extremely difficult. Doctorates are particularly individualized degrees that vary worldwide, field-to-field, institution-to-institution, department-to-department, often supervisor-to-supervisor, and certainly from student-to-student (Boud & Lee, 2005; Gilbert, 2004; McCarty & Orloff, 2004; Walker et al., 2008). However, while doctorates
do vary on a number of factors there are also a number of key milestones built into
doctoral programs that are usually found across programs, such as candidacy exams and
the doctoral dissertation (Malfroy & Yates, 2003; Walker et al., 2008), which makes an
overall analysis of curriculum, pedagogy, and instruction at the doctoral level imperative.

When the PhD was designed in the early 1900s its primary purpose was to prepare
research scholars and faculty who would teach graduates (and later undergraduates) in
higher education (Thelin, 2011). While in the beginning doctoral programs had some
trouble enrolling enough students to make it a cost-effective endeavor, over the years
enrollment rose to the point that there were many more PhD students graduating from
institutions than there were faculty roles to fill (Thelin, 2011). With the scarcity of faculty
roles, PhD qualified candidates had to look to other areas of the job market for positions
after graduation (Kearns, Gardiner, & Marshall, 2008; Malfroy & Yates, 2003), and these
changes in graduate positions are part of what has prompted the more recent calls for
change in doctoral education; graduates entering a varied job market require skills and
knowledge broader than those traditionally available in the research-heavy doctoral
degrees (Taylor, 2011). However, it is not clear at this stage whether the hidden doctoral
curriculum represents these changes in future job roles for doctoral students or whether
students still receive the message that PhDs result in faculty positions.

Hidden Curriculum

Research into the hidden curriculum has traditionally concentrated on the K-12
educational environment, yet some argue that hidden elements of curriculum are just as
prevalent in higher education and doctoral curriculum (Bergenhenegouwen, 1987;
Margolis, 2001; Margolis et al., 2001; Townsend, 1995). While research into higher education hidden curriculum is growing, especially in the health fields, there remains a gap in the research into higher education hidden curriculum pertaining to doctoral programs. However, the existing literature provides suggestions and a framework for how we can approach an examination of hidden curriculum in doctoral studies.

**History of Research on Hidden Curriculum**

It is widely agreed that Jackson popularized the term hidden curriculum in 1968 (Apple, 1971; Cotton et al., 2013; Eisner, 2002; Margolis, et al., 2001; Pinar et al., 1995). Jackson suggested that there were values and norms communicated to students, not through the explicitly designed and “advertised” curriculum (Eisner, 2002), but through the behavioral and social structures used in schools, which constituted a hidden curriculum (Apple, 1995; Eisner, 1992; 1998; 2002; Henderson & Gornik, 2007; Jackson, 1968; Margolis et al., 2001). Jackson concentrated on the functional, behavioral aspects of a hidden curriculum such as students waiting their turn for the teacher’s attention at school, having to be on time, and generally being required to be polite and follow the rules (Eisner, 2002; Jackson, 1968; Margolis et al., 2001). Other theorists then began using the term and examining how the hidden curriculum in education works to “mediate and legitimate the reproduction of inequality, including social class, racial, and gender relations” (Margolis et al., 2001, p. 7). At this stage there was little research on the hidden curriculum in higher education.

While the first theories regarding the hidden curriculum were ‘correspondence theories’, which connected the social norms inherent in school life to those of the
capitalist working system (Apple, 1995; Margolis et al., 2001; Pinar et al., 1995), the field eventually moved forward and scholars began to advance the notion that schools were not merely sites for reproducing capitalist, social norms, but that schools were also a site of production for such norms (Apple, 1995; Margolis et al., 2001). The discussion also began to consider culture as a lived experience, which meant that theorists could consider agency on the part of students and some teachers to both (re)produce and resist the hidden curriculum. This new concentration on reproduction of capitalist values was labeled as a “correspondence theory” (Margolis et al., 2001; Pinar et al., 1995).

One of the early proponents of the correspondence theory of hidden curriculum was Apple (Apple, 1995; Margolis et al., 2001; Pinar et al., 1995). Apple and other correspondence theorists believed that both the formal and, probably even more powerfully, the hidden curriculum in education reproduced society’s stratification of workers by class, race, and gender in order to prepare students for their ‘rightful’ place in working society (Apple, 1995; Margolis et al., 2001). While the written, explicit curriculum helped reproduce the hierarchy of capitalist life through the content of the curriculum and the knowledge that was selected to teach in schools (versus the knowledge that was omitted), some of the taken-for-granted and not consciously planned aspects of school life also reproduced capitalist values, such as the competition inherent in schools, student obedience, the wearing of uniforms, and the ranking of students (Apple, 1995; Margolis et al., 2001).

The social positioning of the school also had an influence on the messages that the hidden curriculum communicated through these methods, for example a middle-class
school would have more messages for students related to their “drive to succeed”, while working class students were encouraged to practice behaviors that they would go on to use in lower skilled jobs in the workforce (Margolis et al., 2001, p. 5). While theories of hidden curriculum are similar, and one does indeed build upon the other, the difference is that in the correspondence theory the reproduction of social norms provided by the hidden curriculum is one that serves not just the school, but more dominant and powerful social groups (Margolis et al., 2001).

While the messages schools communicate in relation to social and cultural hierarchies and norms might seem obvious to some, Apple (1995) explains that historically people began to view education as a neutral site, which helped to hide the highly political nature of schooling. Many curriculum specialists have sought to find a single holy grail “set of principles that would guide educational planning and evaluation” (Apple, 1995, p. 11), and for many years the quest for a catch-all approach to curriculum caused curriculum theorists to primarily concentrate on method, rather than the political interests inherent in the curriculum (Apple, 1995). Miller (2005) suggests that some curriculum theorists did/do not wish to uncover a hidden curriculum because “their oppositional stance is a necessary act in order to reify the content, identities, and the ‘proper work’ of curriculum scholars” (p. 64). As people eventually stopped asking questions about the political nature of curriculum, the social and political norms and values implicitly taught through various forms became more hidden.

The idea that schools are sites that “recreate ideological hegemony” (Apple, 1995) and inequality based on race and gender is not restricted to the K-12 school system.
Higher education, including doctoral education, also (re)produces unequal structures that seek to favor some groups of students over others. Margolis and Romero (1998) conducted a study of the hidden curriculum in a graduate department of sociology (see also Romero & Margolis, 2000), which explored the experiences of 26 women of color and found that the curriculum the female students were immersed in worked to reproduce “gender, race, class, and other forms of inequality” (Margolis & Romero, 1998, p. 1).

Illustrating that students can be treated unequally based not just on visible characteristics, but by the way they think, the authors discuss how students can be categorized by faculty as being “poor” or “good” based on characteristics like class, race, age, and gender, and whether the students had an original perspective in their field (Roth, 1955 as cited in Margolis & Romero, 1998, p. 8). The authors also note that the tradition of the academy, which was originally designed and developed by white males, still communicates messages within the socialization process, which cause women and students of color to “adopt [ion] attitudes and behavior patterns that are different from or antithetical to their culture of origin” (Margolis & Romero, 1998, p 9). In other words, some students are forced to give up major parts of their identity in order to succeed in doctoral education – this is not something that is written anywhere in explicit curriculum documents; it is part of a hidden curriculum.

Because grades are still prevalent in higher and doctoral education, there is a continued element of competition and stratification at the doctoral level. However, there are also more implicit ways that students can be favored in doctoral studies when they are perceived to have the ‘right’ amount of ‘accepted’ knowledge, views, and language, also
known as ‘cultural capital’ (Apple, 1995; Elmore & Sykes, 1992; Margolis et al., 2001; Margolis & Romero, 2001). For students with cultural capital it is much easier to find a mentor/supervisor who will encourage them to become involved in research projects and guide their entry into the academy. A supervisor reinforcing hidden values by favoring some students over others is part of the “hidden structures of mentorship”, which is one of the primary forms the hidden curriculum takes in doctoral education (Margolis & Romero, 2001).

Much of the more recent work on the hidden curriculum derives from a perspective of culture that believes culture and identity are constructed through socially lived experiences (Margolis et al., 2001, p. 16). Apple now argues that it is simplistic to talk abstractly about the notion of schools as places of reproduction (Apple, 1995; Margolis et al., 2001). Apple asserts that if we view schools as sites where culture is produced through the lived experiences of the people within that site, then we must acknowledge that the people in schools (students, teachers, and administrators to some extent), are not mere pawns recreating dominant social structures without question, but that students and teachers have agency as human beings and can, in some ways, ‘resist’ (Apple, 1995; Margolis et al., 2001; Miller, 2005; Pinar et al., 1995; Willis, 1977). However, a discussion of resistance in relation to the hidden curriculum and the social norms and values imposed on students in schools is not straightforward; resistance is often “contradictory” (Apple, 1995; Miller, 2005).

Willis (1977) is widely reported as one of the first scholars to acknowledge agency in student actions, suggesting that working class “lads” at school had agency to
oppose the structures that placed them at the bottom of the social class ladder. However, it should also be noted that Willis’ work had certain hidden messages itself related to gender norms illustrated by the very fact that women were hardly discussed in the study (Margolis et al., 2001). An important theme in Willis’ work was that as the lads used their agency to resist the hegemony found in school by doing such things as messing around, cutting class, or breaking rules, they were in fact helping to (re)produce the very political structures of class they were resisting and themselves working to reproduce the hidden curriculum related to social class in their school. In other words, as they resisted the school structure and rules, they essentially guaranteed themselves a future in working class jobs upon completion of school because their grades and performance would not allow them much else.

Apple (1995; 2006) talks a great deal about agency and resistance in the labor force, which he uses as a comparison for schools. Resistance is a “contradictory” thing, and as students (or in much of Apple’s discussion, workers) use their agency to successfully deviate from the rules of the institution or workplace, for example by working slowly in factories or disobeying rules at school, they cannot completely resist the structure of power and often times employers and management create techniques to control worker resistance. Indeed, some of the successful management techniques of quashing resistance may only come about because workers resisted in the first place (Apple, 1995). It might seem ridiculous to suggest this kind of resistance occurs, or indeed needs to occur, at the doctoral level of education where students have chosen to study and have worked hard to attend a specific course and institution; however,
“workers at all levels attempt to create informal conditions to gain some measure of control”, usually through cultural activities such as controlling how and when they work (Apple, 1995, p.87). Even doctoral students equate to the role of “worker”; in the hierarchy of doctoral education students are very much at the bottom of the ladder with little to no control over the content or the form of their education, just like school children.

Within any group of students there are further inequalities, these could be related to class, race, gender, and age in doctoral education. Doctoral students can and do work to resist and gain some power over their doctoral experience. A very simple form of resistance comes in the form of doing as little as possible to get by. Doctoral students have to implicitly understand the expectations of each of their supervisors and instructors, and as students who have mastered the game of school before getting to their doctoral degree, doctoral students quickly ascertain the hidden messages behind each instructor’s words and actions (Eisner, 2002). For example, one instructor might say she only requires a student’s perspective in an assignment but later grades the assignment based on specific facts identified; instructors often say one thing and mean another, even at the doctoral level. Students eventually learn these hidden messages and then pass them onto each other so they can succeed with both the formal and hidden expectations inherent in doctoral study (Bergenhenegouwen, 1987).

Margolis and Romero (1998; 2001) found that when women of color felt that they were being treated unequally, they resisted in a variety of ways, such as inviting guest speakers on gender and race topics to their department, enrolling in classes outside of the
program, or conducting sociological research into their own experiences. When students resisted by discarding mentors who had tried to mold them in ways that endangered their identities, the authors noted negative consequences for the students. Just as with Willis’ working-class lads and Apple’s labor workers, the use of agency to resist supervision can in many ways feed the cycle of social inequality in doctoral education; without a formal supervisor these students may miss crucial experiences and benefits that would help them gain the cultural capital to become faculty and supervisors themselves one day, taking away their opportunity to try and change the unequal hierarchical structure of mentorship and supervision from a position of power (Margolis & Romero, 2001).

Discussions of the hidden curriculum are steeped in the notion that schools are sites of (re)production of cultural norms and values. Interestingly, the literature on doctoral education is also immersed in a discussion of reproduction – the reproduction of the traditions of the academy. The notion of reproduction of structure and values is one area in which hidden curriculum and doctoral education seem to be intrinsically intertwined.

**The Hidden Curriculum in Doctoral Studies**

Just as in K-12 schooling, the hidden curriculum in doctoral studies comes in many forms and fulfills many purposes; purposes that are often unconscious even to those who perpetuate them. One of the primary influences of the hidden curriculum, whether consciously planned or not, is the reproduction of the academy and some of the “more conservative aspects of academic life” (Acker, 2001, p. 77). Reproduction is encouraged implicitly through various forms such as supervision, completion of the
traditional milestones in doctoral education, and in the ways doctoral students are
socialized to their program and field of study.

**Supervision.** Doctoral education is traditionally based on an apprenticeship model of teaching whereby a student works closely with a supervisor (Walker et al., 2008). Acker (2001) suggests that supervision and mentoring have different connotations, and students and supervisors may not always be clear which model to follow. Both formal supervision and informal mentoring in their many forms are often outside the realm of accountability for a professor, and there are few guidelines or policies on how doctoral students should be supervised (Acker, 2001; Hall & Burns, 2009; Margolis & Romero, 2001). Because supervising or mentoring by faculty is a very personal element of curriculum design based on the supervisor’s own perspective on how a student should be guided (Gilbert, 2004; Hall & Burns, 2009), a supervisor is imbued with a great deal of power regarding the norms and values that are deemed important in doctoral studies and communicated to doctoral students (Acker, 2001; Gilbert, 2004; Hall & Burns, 2009); supervision is essentially outside the explicit curriculum and is therefore hidden in many ways.

It is likely that supervisors and faculty mentors have never deeply reflected on or examined the values and beliefs about education that they themselves hold, or considered what how they define a ‘successful’ academic or student (Hall & Burns, 2009). Supervisors should not be too harshly judged for this lack of reflection on their own values and beliefs and their place within the academic hierarchy, after all women faculty especially, may have lived with messages that have kept them silenced for some time.
(Miller, 2005), while younger, less experienced faculty may just keep their heads down and “shape his or her work and personality to match the dominant ethic in the institution” (Acker, 2001, p. 77); matching the dominant perspective can be a strong form of self-preservation for both faculty and doctoral students. Even forward thinking and reflective supervisors can struggle to reflect deeply on their part in communicating inequality, but it is essential that supervisors consider “to what extent and in what manner…layers of societal and cultural expectations and stereotypes become ‘personal expectations’” (Miller, 2005, p. 61). In many cases, supervisors and mentors are themselves products of the hidden curriculum they have experienced throughout their educational lives (Townsend, 2011).

Any one-on-one relationship between a faculty member and a student not governed by formal curriculum procedures is necessarily steeped in issues of power. The onus is on students to identify and approach a dissertation supervisor who can decline or accept them on any basis and with no real justification needed (Acker, 2001; Hall & Burns, 2009; Margolis & Romero, 2001). Once working with a student, supervisors “seek to reproduce the identities they value most for them in their figured worlds” (Hall & Burns, 2009, p. 55). In other words, whether consciously or not, supervisors often try to mold students into academics that share the same beliefs and values that they themselves hold.

If a student does not initially fit with the notion a supervisor has of a ‘good’ student, or does not agree with some of the inherent values displayed in the relationship, the student has only three options: to alter their own position, identity, and values so as to
comply with the supervisor and thereby once again feed into and recreate the hierarchical and unequal values of doctoral education (Hall & Burns, 2009); oppose their supervisor explicitly and risk being marginalized and losing all of the opportunities for research and networking that go with pleasing a supervisor (Margolis & Romero, 2001); or look for another supervisor, which is especially difficult once a student has been labeled a ‘trouble-maker’ because they do not have the cultural capital to appeal to a wide range of academics.

Finally, the supervisory model communicates one other form of hidden curriculum, which can also be found in K-12 school settings – competition (Margolis & Romero, 1998). There are only so many supervisors or mentors for each doctoral student in a program (Acker, 2001), and therefore, whether explicitly recognized by supervisors and students or not, there is a competition between students to entice a supervisor that will best assist in academic endeavors (Acker, 2001). This kind of competition again includes the danger that students may feel a pressure to “give up aspects of their cultural identity” in order to become more appealing to supervisors (Hall & Burns, 2009, p. 58). In other words, students can begin to talk and act and think in ways that buy them cultural capital in their field and institution, but this involves a deep and painful sacrifice of core values and beliefs (Acker, 2001; Hall & Burns, 2009: Margolis & Romero, 1998). As I suggest later, I believe that an area for further discussion regarding the hidden curriculum in higher education centers on not just encouraging doctoral students to examine the hidden elements of curriculum they encounter, but also urging faculty to reflect on the
hierarchical structures of the academy they have been a part of and how their current role acts to (re)produce inequality.

Supervisory relationships are not the only form of hidden curriculum in doctoral education. Many of the forms the hidden curriculum takes in higher education mirror those that exist in K-12 schooling, such as fostering compliant behavior through the use of grades (Eisner, 2002) and the structure and organization of classes (Margolis et al., 2001). However, there are some key curriculum and pedagogical approaches unique to doctoral education and these also contain elements of hidden curriculum, such as encouraging students to take a somewhat detached attitude to research, students feeling they must put on a façade of confidence and ability (even though this is not always felt) (Bergenhenegouwen, 1987), and moving through the traditional milestones that have remained unchanged in the academy for many years.

**Doctoral milestones.** While it is hard to make generalizations about doctoral education because of the variation in students, their motivations, disciplines, and institution and country approaches, there seems to be certain milestones that most doctoral programs include in one form or another (Walker et al., 2008) and these can send hidden messages. For example, the way a university structures candidacy exams communicates the implicit values of the program, although these hidden values are not always negative. The suggestion is that when candidacy exams are designed so that students in a course sit for a timed exam with similar or the same questions as everyone else, that the program is sending a message that standardization should be valued in education, whereas a candidacy exam that encourages students to study together and
design questions in collaboration with faculty clearly values collaboration (Townsend, 1995).

The dissertation process is another structural element of the doctoral program that conveys hidden messages. When students who have been involved in a taught PhD program are suddenly told that they must work independently in isolation from peers, a “survival of the fittest” mentality is communicated to students (Townsend, 1995); the message is that independence and isolation are valued in academia. Other messages can be sent by the structure used for the dissertation process, for example while many would argue that the detached, objective, scientific mode of inquiry is no longer the only valued approach in the social sciences where students are encouraged to undertake self-reflection and explore the way the personal interacts with research (Miller, 2005), most dissertation committees still communicate the patriarchal view that a dissertation cannot be artistic, personal, or even collaborative if it is to be of value.

There are “residues” of patriarchy in the structure of educational institutions today (Miller, 1990, p. 116). In many ways, the “polarized and discrete categories of objectivity and subjectivity” reflects the male domination in education (Miller, 2005). In other words, men have traditionally been viewed as objective and distant observers while women have been seen as subjective and caring, and the objective was very much valued over the subjective in education for many years. While on the surface it may seem that the objectivity-subjectivity debate has abated, the fact that dissertations concentrating on the self, creativity, or other ways of knowing more associated with female academics are still rare and frowned-upon suggests that there is still an element of patriarchal structure
in the academy that sends hidden messages about the value of objectivity and researcher distance. Hidden messages then, whether positive or negative, can permeate the content, structure, and organization of the doctoral curriculum. It becomes particularly important to examine these hidden messages when we consider the possible influence they might have on doctoral student socialization.

**Socialization.** Doctoral education is currently preoccupied with high attrition rates of students (Bagaka et al., 2015; Gardner, 2008a; Gardner 2007; Golde, 2005; Walker et al., 2008; Stubb et al., 2012). One of the reasons suggested for the high incompletion rate is that doctoral students are not being sufficiently ‘socialized’ into the academy. Hidden curriculum in K-12 schools often works to socialize students to the educational norms and the way schools work in our society, and Margolis and Romero (1998) suggest that one of the primary ways students are socialized into their field of study in doctoral education is through an ‘intended’ hidden curriculum.

In their study of the experiences of women of color in a sociology program, Margolis and Romero (1998) identified two strands of hidden curriculum, which they labeled ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ hidden curriculum based on previous work of Apple and King. Weak hidden curriculum is the process by which students are socialized into their professional field (Margolis & Romero, 1998). The authors explain that as students are encouraged through formal and informal student and supervisor interactions to take on a professional and academic identity, they are stripped of their other identities, such as those of practicing teacher or worker (Margolis & Romero, 1998). While an analysis of identity literature is required before such a strong statement about identity can be argued
for (which is not within the scope of this exploration) it is clear that there are informal and implicit, i.e. not written down, elements of doctoral student socialization that occur through “department culture, cliques…group interactions, mentoring, and the allocation” of assistantships and rewards (Margolis & Romero, 1998). In some instances, these weak forms of hidden curriculum may be more visible than others.

Strong hidden curriculum is the process that reproduces “racial, ethnic, and gender hierarchies” (Margolis & Romero, 1998, p. 11). As an aside, I am not convinced that the labels of ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ hidden curriculum are appropriate. These labels suggest that one form is more prevalent or more important than the other. I also believe that the various forms of hidden curriculum in doctoral education cannot be tidily classified into two categories; the very nature of the hidden curriculum is that it is contextual and fluid in nature – hidden curriculum which acts to professionalize students to a discipline will necessarily intersect with and alter the hidden curriculum communicating the inequalities of the academic hierarchy. However, the notion that socialization is inherently linked to elements of hidden curriculum is clear (Margolis & Romero, 1998).

Once enrolled as a doctoral student, students experience a number of intersecting cultures and undertake a variety of identity transitions (Foot, Crowe, Tollafield, Allan, 2014), for example they become a graduate student, a member of the academy, and affiliate with a particular discipline (Austin, 2002). While identity transitions can be far from easy, struggling to navigate the hidden curriculum can make the doctoral socialization process more difficult. Confused students must learn the concealed ‘rules’
and skills needed to negotiate the doctoral experience. If we want doctoral students to succeed, students must not only come to understandings about the institution and their discipline’s hidden curriculum, but we must encourage doctoral program coordinators and instructors to consider the “vestiges of inappropriate and discriminatory practices” that lie hidden, but still powerful in the hidden curriculum (Margolis & Romero, 1998, p. 29).

**Hidden Curriculum Summary**

Over time the conversations on the hidden curriculum in education have developed and built upon each other. While Jackson (1968) introduced the idea of the hidden curriculum, various theorists have taken the notion to different places. Apple (1995) has explored how educational institutions are not just sites of cultural reproduction but how they are in fact sites of production and we should acknowledge them as such, while Eisner (1992) posited the implicit curriculum as a way to recognize that schools cannot teach everything, but by necessity the knowledge and forms of teaching used in schools suggest a devaluing of the knowledge and forms not selected. Finally, while Miller (1990; 2005) never explicitly mentions the hidden or implicit curriculum, through her discussions of how she and colleagues have strived to examine their place within a patriarchal education system, we begin to see how the hidden curriculum can work to silence certain individuals’ voices. By reflecting on the space we each occupy in higher education and the resulting influences on our identities and practices, perhaps through collaboration, dialogue, and self-examination, we can begin to create places and spaces
where hidden values and norms can be brought to the surface, examined, and voices can be once again heard (Miller, 1990; 2005).

With each new discussion on the hidden curriculum we come to understand more of how the hidden aspects of curriculum work to (re)produce social, cultural, and institutional norms, and how students and teachers sub-consciously and consciously accept and resist those messages. It is important that theories and discussions of curriculum do not reside in one place and stagnate, but that they should continue to explore new perspectives and ideas (Miller, 2005). Apple (1995) explains that his view of curriculum never changed dramatically over time; instead he simply examined, expanded, and built upon his original assumptions in order to create a broader more detailed perspective. I see the development of scholarship in the field of hidden curriculum in much the same way; we have developed knowledge and learned a great deal about the hidden messages in K-12 education and it is now time to expand that knowledge further as we discuss and attempt to reveal elements of the hidden curriculum in doctoral education.

Traditional hierarchical structures and models of doctoral education not only discriminate against students based on unequal ideologies, but also work to (re)create future faculty who possess a particular form of ‘cultural capital’ (Hall & Burns, 2009; Margolis et al., 2001). As doctoral students who have learned not to “rock the boat” (Acker, 2001) and not question the existing culture of the academy go on to work in the academy and mentor their own doctoral students, the cycle of reproduction will continue. By exploring the hidden curriculum in doctoral education. The field of higher education
can leave behind the “received heritage” of the academy (Howe, 1976 as cited in Miller, 2005, p. 62) and move beyond the political, racial, and gender biases embedded deep within it. Only then can all doctoral students to have a voice and a space to critically examine the structure they exist in.

**Doctoral Student Socialization and Identity**

Successful doctoral student socialization is connected to the development of a specific sense of self identity (Austin, 2002). Culture and identity are also connected; as students interact with others and engage in tasks within a very specific academic and disciplinary culture, they begin to develop roles and identities within that culture. As one might expect then, the context of where students undertake doctoral studies can influence their identity development. However, I have already noted that academia represents a site of many intersecting cultures (Holley, 2011) and doctoral students may have to deal with contexts and hidden curricula from the institution, their specific college, their department, their discipline, their supervisor, and the many cultures and contexts that exist within individual classrooms as part of a taught PhD (Foot, et al., 2014). Each of these cultural contexts will include elements of both explicit and hidden curricula, which influence how doctoral students create their academic identities.

Holley (2011) investigated how culture impacts identity development, suggesting that academic cultures contain certain “codes” (p. 79), which define the membership of people within a culture. These codes apply meaning to actions and mold actions and behaviors. Based on the previous discussion of hidden curriculum in schools and how the curriculum influences the way students act and behave, I suggest that these codes can
also be considered part of a curriculum within a doctoral program. As students enter the new environment of a doctoral program they need to “decipher” the environment, strive to learn particular tactics, and ascertain how to use those tactics in order to fit in and succeed (Holley, 2011). Students may be more likely to persist in their studies if they integrate to the academic culture (Holley, 2011), so if students do not learn the norms and values about how to think and act within the academic and doctoral program culture they may not succeed.

The intersecting contexts of doctoral programs can be understandably confusing to the uninitiated. Socialization of doctoral students has traditionally not been part of the formal, explicitly designed curriculum; instead doctoral students have learned messages about the various cultures they must reside in through formal activities of learning not aimed at socialization, informal activities with peers (Austin, 2002), and I would suggest also through messages communicated by the hidden curriculum. The lack of structured socialization means that students must take messages from a variety of contexts, which often may contradict each other. For example, a doctoral student could be part of an institution and department that highly values teaching over research. However, if that student works with a supervisor who believes research is more crucial than the practice of teaching, the student will receive mixed-messages about the research norms in the programs and the types of research valued and not know which message to internalize as s/he strives to take on a scholarly identity (Austin, 2002); with so many contexts intersecting at the site of a doctoral program the chance of confusing mixed-messages seems high.
As well as the variety of contexts described above, institutions often send mixed messages about their values and objectives (Boyer, 1987 as cited in Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Mixed messages within an institution’s objectives can negatively influence college student development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 287). When an institution has clear objectives they tend to permeate all areas of the institution so that as students take part in various activities in their departments and the institution, they are receiving messages that reinforce each other (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Doctoral students observe the culture around them and select elements of identities to ‘try on’; however, this is a very difficult process if the student is bombarded with different messages about what it means to think or act as a doctoral student or scholar within an institution.

Institutional or academic cultural influences play a part in the theory of identity-trajectory, which states that students use their agency to decide what cultural aspects they choose to take and internalize and then act on, thereby directing their own identity development in some way (McAlpine & Lucas, 2011). Identity-trajectory theory suggests that intellectual, social, and academic or “institutional” elements of identity intertwine to influence a student’s identity-trajectory. The “institutional strand represents responsibilities…and resources” – the duties a doctoral student undertakes and the environment in which they work physically (McAlpine & Lucas, 2011, p. 697).

One crucial cultural element of the institutional strand, which can influence identity-trajectory, is the common structure of doctoral studies, i.e. those milestones or ‘rites of passage’ that most doctoral students must go through (Hall, 1968; McAlpine &
Lucas, 2011) and which are usually part of both the explicit and hidden curricula of doctoral studies, as discussed earlier. A student’s perspective of him/herself changes after each rite of passage (Hall, 1968). One of these milestones occurs when doctoral students in the USA complete candidacy exams and become a ‘doctoral candidate’, “marking an individual’s changing status and potential to access more resources both institutionally and beyond” (McAlpine & Lucas, 2011, p. 697). For example, doctoral candidates may have access to more assistance and services from the institution’s research assistance services or doctoral candidates may have the right to rent a library carrel that doctoral students do not have access to prior to passing the exam and becoming a candidate.

Externally, becoming a doctoral candidate opens up more job opportunities and academic connections, as doctoral candidates are very much seen in the same way as new faculty. The milestones of doctoral study are not easy to navigate though. How positively or negatively these “rites of passage” are viewed by the student as well as how they are perceived by others in the academic environment influence whether students can move successfully through these milestones or if they actually “limit their [doctoral students’] development” (McAlpine & Lucas, 2011, p. 697).

Employment goals also influence how students perceive doctoral milestones and identity development. McAlpine and Lucas (2011) explored the identity-trajectory of eight doctoral students through interviews taken from two larger studies. The authors found that doctoral students who intended to become faculty and stay in academia tended to look further into the future in terms of their development and identity-trajectory, believing that their work would be important beyond the dissertation and requirements of
the course (McAlpine & Lucas, 2011). Much of the doctoral socialization literature suggests that the purpose of doctoral study is to immerse students in the culture of the academy in order to nurture a faculty identity (Austin, 2002; Austin & McDaniel, 2006; Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Baker & Pifer, 2011).

When students enter doctoral programs there is often an assumption that they are being prepared to work as faculty (Austin, 2002; Austin & McDaniel, 2006; Baker & Pifer, 2011; Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Janke & Colbeck, 2008). This means that as students struggle to find and assert a doctoral student identity, they are also having to consider and take on the identity of future faculty; in other words, doctoral students are encouraged by the explicit and hidden curriculum to experience several socialization experiences at once (Austin & McDaniel, 2006; Baker & Pifer, 2011).

Doctoral students are assigned certain institutional roles that they strive to internalize and take on as an identity, but student roles bring a certain hierarchy and social structure that students must adhere to (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009). The institutional hierarchy places students firmly at the bottom of a power structure. At the same time, students are also trying to become academics in their field and to learn the “discourses and habits of mind of the groups” of which they are a part (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009, p. 112). This hierarchy is not seen or often times acknowledged by doctoral students or faculty and therefore represents a key element of hidden curriculum in doctoral studies that may influence student identity development.

How does the assumption that doctoral students will all work in academia influence the trajectory of students who do not wish to, or who cannot, take that career
path? Do these students simply exist in a liminal space, not taking on any identity within their chosen field and profession, or are they forced into taking on a role and identity that is not appropriate to them because so much of the doctoral curriculum sends messages that they should be preparing to become future faculty? While there was some discussion in the literature that students may not undertake doctoral education with the intention of entering the professoriate, I was surprised by the strong thread in the research that assumed doctoral students would work in the academy after graduation (see: Austin, 2002; Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Baker & Pifer, 2011; Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Janke & Colbeck, 2005).

Finally, in regard to the influence of the culture of the learning environment on student identity, I noticed a less prominent but important strand in the research – a discussion of the hidden curriculum and its relationship to identity transition. The traditional culture and structure of the academy sends hidden messages about values and norms as part of a hidden curriculum. While the term ‘hidden curriculum’ was never explicitly used in the doctoral student identity literature, descriptions of how culture and structure in the academy influence identities was clear. Much of the literature acknowledged the difficult nature of doctoral education (Baker & Pifer, 2011; Gardner, 2008a; Hopwood, 2010; McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009) and one reason suggested for this is that doctoral students do not understand the requirements and expectations they must follow (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009); the requirements of a doctoral program are often hidden in a mountain of administration.
The traditional hierarchical structures of higher education institutions were also noted as “favoring reproduction, which could impact negatively one’s sense of agency” (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009). In other words, it is hard to act in ways required to create an effective identity if hidden messages in the structure of an institution tell you that you are valued ‘less than’ others (Jazvak, Chen, & McAlpine, 2011). In higher education, which has traditionally been patriarchal and based on a male emphasis on subjectivity (Miller, 1995; Valimaa, 1998), it can be hard to create an academic identity if you are not a white, middle class, middle aged male. Interestingly, Valimaa (1998) goes as far as to state that “class or ethnic origin may be the most important core in formulating academic identities” (p. 133); we could also add age and gender as among the core elements influencing a student’s transition to an academic identity.

While the cultural environment clearly influences identity development, learning environments are not only made up of institutional structure, physical environment, and hidden messages; learning environments are made up of various groups of people, and a doctoral student’s relationship with others as they build social connections is another pivotal theme in the literature on identity transition. Much of the literature on doctoral student identity focuses on identity as socially constructed, whereby communities of practice in the academic environment and social networks assist students as they transition into the culture of doctoral studies (Austin, 2008; Baker & Pifer, 2011; Lave & Wenger, 1993).
Communities of Practice

I have mentioned previously that learning and identity are intertwined in the literature, with some authors explicitly stating the relationship between the two (Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Barnacle & Mewburn, 2010; Erickson, 2001; Janke & Colbeck, 2008). One theory that specifically describes how learning and identity are connected is Lave and Wenger’s theory of Communities of Practice and the accompanying idea of Legitimate Peripheral Participation. (1991). In very simple terms, Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that learning is a situated activity; people learn as part of various communities of practice. When doctoral students enter a PhD program they have to learn the knowledge and skills necessary to move from the role of “newcomer” and strive to move to the center of the social community to become full participants. When students eventually become a full member of the community of practice, they are well versed in the “activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29), and become “old timers” (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Within this framework, newcomers do not learn about culture through explicit instruction or curriculum design, instead, learning occurs in a more social, natural, and holistic way; through a hidden curriculum. For example, within this framework, if a student “fails” some kind of test in class, the assumption is that while they may not have ‘learned’ the knowledge from that class learning of some kind has still taken place, although it may not have been the intended learning designed by the explicit curriculum and the assessed by the test (Lave & Wenger, 1991).
While students begin their time in a new community of practice as a “newcomer”, their position and membership in that community will likely change multiple times. There is no linear process to proceed to the center of a community. Instead, students become “old timers” where they have a great deal of knowledge about the community of practice and become “full members”. Once an old timer though, communities of practice can alter and change so that old timers can once again move further out toward the periphery; legitimate peripheral participation is a dynamic process where group members move around regularly (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In terms of identity, Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) “is about being located in the social world” (p. 36), and where we are located influences our identity formation – the way we construct our own identity and how others see us. LPP involves members of a community moving positions regularly. With each move of position, e.g. from the periphery to full participation, membership and identity are altered and developed (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The notion of moving from the periphery to the center of a community provides a useful concept for studies of doctoral student identity.

Communities of practice also overlap, which I see as closely connected to doctoral student identities because students are struggling to move from the periphery of multiple communities (or cultures to put it another way) - the department community, the discipline community, the graduate assistant community etc. Each of these communities of practice does not exist in isolation, but they all influence each other, once again highlighting the dynamic nature of Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory.
As students learn and change identity within a community of practice they too have an influence on the community as a whole, and begin to not just experience the hidden curriculum but begin to reproduce certain hidden curricula. Students are therefore not passive vessels, but are instead part of a collective, and their position and identity within that collective adapts as they learn, or synthesize messages from the hidden curriculum, which then alters the way they act. Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that as we learn, whether through explicit instruction or through the more natural occurrences of informal (and often unintentional) learning in a community of practice, we become a different person “with respect to the possibilities enabled by…systems of relations” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). Identities are essentially the connections between “persons and their place and their participation in communities of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). In other words, identity, knowledge and learning (curriculum), and social membership are intertwined, and one primary group that doctoral students connect with regularly who may influence their identity development are supervisors.

**Supervisors and Identity**

Supervisors seem to hold a key influence in regard to doctoral student identity transition, acting as “an institutional gatekeeper” (Jazvak, Chen, & McAlpine, 2011, p. 23) and encouraging positive identity development in students who are allowed and encouraged to make an authentic contribution to research alongside a supervisor (Holley, 2011). McAlpine and Amundsen (2009) report that students feel most positive about their identity development when supervisors give them the chance to put their point
across and when advisors allow students the space and freedom to contribute to academic work (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009).

Because of the important role supervisors play, albeit in conjunction with other social networks, Chickering and Reisser (1993) say that supervisors must be cognizant of the things they say and do when with students and should even have a “clear focus and intentionality” (p 316) in supervisory interactions. Because you cannot tell someone who to be or who they should become, messages about identity are communicated through both explicit and hidden forms of curricula. However, when supervisors themselves have coherent beliefs with clear reasons for their beliefs and actions in academia (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), they can and should be able to verbalize and communicate explicit messages about identity development to doctoral students. Supervisors, however, are not the only academic actors to influence identity development.

**Social Networks**

Social networks ‘socialize’ students to new roles, and the social networks that students have access to can influence the roles that they decide to “try on” and whether those identities will last (Baker & Pifer, 2011). Faculty outside of the supervisor-student dyad can be just as, or even more, helpful in terms of identity transition than supervisors (Baker & Pifer, 2011; Jazvak, Chen, & McAlpine, 2011). As students interact with other students and faculty in professional development activities, organizational meetings, and conferences these people become “bridges” that can link students to other people and forms of support (Baker & Pifer, 2011).
When students develop relationships with a variety of academics outside of the supervisor-supervisee dyad they also benefit from observing the various roles that different academics embody. In other words, students can take part in “role learning” from a variety of social networks, in this case, academic networks, which they need in order to successfully enter a similar academic role in future; the role of academic has to be modeled (Baker & Pifer, 2011, p. 10).

As doctoral students work with and interact with various people within the field of education they begin to see and expand on their ideas of what cultural values exist in academia and later these interactions and relationships will become “associated with variations in what is learned, valued, and accepted” by that student (Baker & Lattuca, 2010, p. 815). However, it is also important to note that students will learn cultural messages from their relationships with others in academia that are both intended and unintended messages about what it means to work in academia; once again coming back to the hidden curriculum.

When doctoral students take part in academic activities such as working as a teaching assistant or graduate assistant, attending conferences, and reviewing for journals, this can have an extremely positive effect on the way they perceive their doctoral and scholarly identities (Baker & Pifer, 2011). While there are likely elements of agency in these experiences that influence identity transition positively, i.e. students may feel like they are making authentic contributions to their field when they assist professors with research as graduate assistants or present at organizational conferences (Baker & Pifer, 2011; Jazvak, Chen, & McAlpine, 2011; McAlpine & Lucas, 2011), these
experiences also involve students interacting with a variety of social networks that can influence the identities students begin to consider taking on and internalizing. If students get the opportunity to learn crucial networking skills, not just within their department but in broader communities from their disciplines, they are more likely to be confident and successful in the early stages of their academic careers (Baker & Pifer, 2011).

The other primary group of people in academia that students have social connections with are their doctoral peers. The broader identity literature suggests peers might be the most important group in regard to college student identity development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Doctoral peers are also transitioning into new roles, and while these experiences and transitions will be necessarily unique for each person, peers can provide support through times of socialization and identity transition (Baker & Lattuca, 2011; Baker & Pifer, 2011).

Peers and more advanced students can assist doctoral students through the uncertainty they may feel in various stages of doctoral studies (Baker & Pifer, 2011) because advanced students likely do not bring the same pressure to struggling students as supervisors because they do not feel they need to impress other students as much. Baker and Pifer (2011) call the support that advanced doctoral students give to less advanced students, who then learn and develop and offer their support to new doctoral students, “the family tree effect” (p. 15); I see this as being another way of looking at Lave and Wenger’s Community of Practice and the way students move through Legitimate Peripheral Participation. It does, however, emphasize once again the importance of peers when one views identity as a socially constructed process – full-time students interact
with their peers probably more than their supervisors on a daily basis. As students interact with peers and more advanced students change in individual identity is not the only process taking place; collective student identity can also be created (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009).

I have mentioned numerous times that doctoral study is definitely not an easy process. Doctoral programs can seem even more challenging when students feel isolated and alone, or if they feel they cannot learn and identify with their peers (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009). Collective identity can help students to feel less isolated and part of a community, which then leads to students developing their individual identities (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009). For example, if a student is working within a collective of peers from the same discipline, perhaps serving on a committee, the student will begin to feel more like a “real” scholar in the field (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2005).

As students collaborate with peers from their disciplines they begin to focus on “what made them similar” and they begin to “feel they belonged” and “had similar intentions” (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009). Feeling a sense of belonging and similar cultural values to those around them in the academic environment can encourage students to identify with their new academic identities. It is important to note that in order for collective identity to be truly helpful to students’ individual identity development the activities they undertake have to be “authentic” (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009). In other words, students working with each other on a research project for a class that will likely not be published and is ‘assigned’, is less authentic and will therefore not likely impact identity development as much as a student serving on a ‘real’ committee for his/her field
and making a ‘real’ contribution. As students begin to develop a collective identity, a form of culture is developed within groups of peers. Based on the previous discussion of hidden curriculum, it is possible that another form of hidden curriculum that students need to internalize and understand is created within these collective identities of doctoral students.

Doctoral students’ existing identities when they enter the program play an important part in identity transitions. If existing identities do not match well with the new identities doctoral students are expected to internalize, students can struggle (Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Baker & Pifer, 2011; McAlpine & Lucas, 2011). People tend to work through this difficulty by experimenting with different identities within a culture until they find one that suits (Baker & Pifer, 2011; McAlpine & Lucas, 2011), and the existing social networks that a doctoral student is part of can influence which identities they select to try (Baker & Pifer, 2011; McAlpine & Lucas, 2011). In other words, doctoral students are unlikely to experiment with an identity that does not fit in with their existing social networks and the kinds of norms and values valued in those networks.

Gee (2000-2001) argues that identity cannot exist without someone deciphering that identity in some way; every kind of identity characteristic that exists will be understood and interpreted differently by individuals. Because identities and their associated traits are understood and constructed differently by people, individuals can work to “negotiate” how their identities are viewed by others and also how they are perceived by individuals internally (p. 108). If students can try on various identities and
select those that feel suitable to them and their existing frame of identities, we must acknowledge that there is an element of agency in doctoral student identity development.

While it is clear that relationships with others are a key area in doctoral student identity transition, we cannot ignore the role that individuals themselves play in any community of practice or social situation as they develop and transition to various identities. The central message throughout this whole review of literature has been that identity development is multi-faceted including facets of social interaction, the cultural context in which we reside, and the essential element of self.

**Agency**

While the literature suggests that agency is an under-explored area in relation to identity development in doctoral studies (Hopwood, 2010; McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009), it was a theme that I noted in many articles, although it was not always framed as agency or determined action on the part of an individual to control identity development. First, there is an argument to make that if identity development is socially constructed then it must inherently contain some element of agency. People do not passively take part in social situations; they act within those situations to mold and create social interactions. I wholeheartedly agree with Jazvak, Chen and McAlpine (2011) when they state that “identities are experienced and socially constructed through action and interaction” (p. 22).

Doctoral students are often described as being at the mercy of the hierarchical structure of higher education (Hopwood, 2010; McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009). However, in an examination of agency in doctoral students’ social networks, Hopwood (2010)
argues that more attention needs to be given to doctoral students’ agency. Agency for Hopwood (2010) is defined as “a person’s way of being in, seeing, and responding to the world (Edwards, 2000) and in the notion of purposeful human activity – that what people do is (at least partly) shaped by their intentions” (p. 105). Using Hopwood’s definition, agency can be seen throughout the aspects of identity development already discussed. For example, on the surface it could look like a student’s identity development is in the hands of others (supervisors, faculty, peers) when in fact the way a student internalizes and reacts to situations in the doctoral program is connected to a specific kind of agency (Hopwood, 2010). This raises an important question about how doctoral students and other educational stakeholders act and embody elements of the hidden curriculum through their agency. While doctoral students, and likely faculty and administrators, have not examined the influence of the hidden curriculum on their actions, it is possible that messages about the important values and social norms in doctoral studies are internalized and then enacted by doctoral students themselves.

College settings provide undergraduate students with an excellent opportunity to try on a variety of identities as they undertake different roles and responsibilities (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) and the doctoral environment provides the same opportunities for emerging scholars (Baker & Pifer, 2011). I have argued previously that identity and culture are linked, and one way in which they are connected is the way that individuals can use their agency to experiment with elements of a cultural group and see how those elements correspond with their values before transitioning further into an identity; students essentially try on “provisional selves” (Baker & Lattuca, 2010). As
Hopwood (2010) suggests, the structure and culture of an institution do not have to always have a negative influence on doctoral student identity. Doctoral students are not passively being forced into one identity or another. Instead, doctoral students can, and often do, use the culture around them to build their own unique identities (Holley, 2011). Culture and identity in doctoral studies are symbiotic in many ways, the culture of doctoral study definitely impacts doctoral student identity and doctoral students can also use their experiences and identities to shape the doctoral student culture (Holley, 2011; McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009), although I think it is fair to say based on my own experiences as a doctoral student and after reviewing the literature that the latter part of the process is where many doctoral students struggle.

During doctoral study “individuals are shaping an understanding of the academic self based on a constant dialogue with the communities with which they wish to become identified”, but these same communities can also cause “tension” for doctoral students (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009). I think it is a responsibility of doctoral education to concede that identity development is inherently intertwined with the goals of doctoral study and work to provide students with the time, space, and tools to begin dialogue with the communities they hope to join, including the community of doctoral study and the academy as well as communities they hope to work with in future.

**Doctoral Socialization and Identity Summary**

Doctoral student identity is an important topic for exploration, as illustrated by the difficulty involved in doctoral study and the high attrition rates and time to completion in doctoral study (Bagaka et al., 2015; Gardner, 2008a; Gardner 2007; Golde, 2005; Walker,
et al., 2008; Stubb et al., 2012). While the goals of doctoral education seem generally to be ill-defined, there does seem to be some consensus in the doctoral research community that identity development is a primary goal of doctoral education (Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Erickson, 2001; Janke & Colbeck, 2008). The wider literature on identity development suggests that we need to provide faculty and other educational stakeholders with knowledge about college student development in order to enhance students’ identity development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), and there are suggestions that doctoral curriculum should strive to encompass more activities related to identity development (Austin, 2008; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). However, there seem to be fewer examples calling for an examination of the hidden curriculum and how it relates to identity development. Based on the importance of identity development in becoming a scholar, as described in the doctoral student literature, it seems only logical that college student identity research and activities should not stop after the undergraduate stage, but should continue throughout graduate school and into the doctoral context. One important element of this should be examining the influence of hidden curricula on doctoral student development.

**Literature Review Summary**

The existing body of literature suggests that higher education in general, and doctoral education specifically, has been notoriously under-examined and researched in the past. Today, more interest is taken into doctoral student experiences, specifically socialization experiences and identity development, because of the continuing high attrition and time to completion rates in doctoral programs worldwide. However,
curricular influence on socialization and identity have yet to be examined in any great
depth in doctoral education. We do know from the existing literature on the hidden
curriculum in K-12 schools and the small amount of research that exists on higher
education hidden curricula that hidden messages in curriculum can have a profound effect
on the satisfaction and success of students at any level of education. This study therefore
examined how doctoral students experienced the curriculum within a doctoral program
and attempted to illuminate the forms that the hidden curriculum may take in doctoral
programs.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I describe the methodology used to answer my research questions:

1. How do doctoral students experience the hidden curriculum?

2. What forms of hidden curriculum can be identified in a PhD program?

I begin by describing the theoretical framework of the study before outlining my research design decisions related to: selection of the study site, sampling approach and participant recruitment, data collection procedures, and data analysis process. I conclude by describing the ethical considerations that influenced my methods in this study.

Methodology

A methodology encompasses more than simply the methods used in a study. A methodology is a stance taken by a researcher or a framework encompassing the research, which includes the theoretical basis for the research question and study design, implications about the researcher’s epistemology and ontology (the way we view knowledge and reality), and a description of the researcher’s place and position within the research (Feldman, Paugh, & Mills, 2007; van Manen, 1990). This section outlines my theoretical framework, methodological stance, and how my stance influenced the research questions and study design, including how I view my position as doctoral student and researcher (insider-outsider) in the study. A discussion of methods including sampling, data collection, and analysis are then outlined in more detail.
Theoretical Framework

This research project is based on a social constructivist framework. Like so much in education, there is no single definition of constructivism (Schwandt, 1994). The basis of constructivism is the belief that knowledge is something that does not exist outside of people waiting to be passively discovered. Instead, people actively construct knowledge based upon their previous knowledge and experiences. Lincoln and Guba describe constructivism as “a wide-ranging eclectic framework” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 128), and the specific area of constructivism that I work from is specifically that of social constructivism. As you might expect, social constructivism highlights the importance of social interactions and the context of the environment in which learning takes place (Lui & Matthews, 2005). I believe that the social environment of learning and the interactions that take place between students, their peers, and their instructors (as well as everyday informal interactions with others) is just as important as the internal construction of knowledge that takes place. Social interactions take the internal process of constructing knowledge and bring an active element to learning, which I believe is fundamental.

Working from a social constructivist framework influences the questions I am drawn to in educational research, the type of knowledge that I believe can be created, and the ways in which data should be collected. A constructivist framework takes the stance that “particular meanings are shaped by the intent of their users” (Schwandt, 1994 p. 118), and it is for this reason that a constructivist framework is appropriate for research that concentrates on the lived experiences of the people involved.
In regard to this study, my theoretical framework meant that in order to answer the research questions I needed to examine and take part in certain social interactions to create knowledge and examine the lived experiences of doctoral students. Every student and every learning context is unique, suggesting that the hidden curriculum will be constructed differently in each context and for each person. If each context, situation, and person is unique, then some may ask: what is the point of studying the hidden curriculum in only one setting? In order to answer this question, I turn to a description of my beliefs about reality and knowledge (ontology and epistemology). My ontology and epistemology are fundamentally the basis for all the decisions I have made in this research project.

**Ontology and epistemology.** A researcher designs a study in alignment with their view of being in the world and their perspective on knowledge creation (ontology and epistemology respectively). Research can be said to exist on a continuum from the more positivist perspective, which posits the belief that research is outside of the researcher at a distance to be discovered, to those with the perspective that knowledge is created socially and through interaction with others, to those who suggest that the person conducting and describing the research requires inclusion in the research (Ellis, 2004). As described in my social constructivist theoretical framework, I believe that knowledge is socially created and that I, as the researcher conducting the research, also have a position in the research. I am a social constructivist who believes that previous experiences influence how we experience every new situation and that knowledge is created between people through dialogue and interaction.
Epistemologically, qualitative researchers attempt to remove the distance between themselves and their participants, collaborating and interacting with them as they create knowledge within their social interactions (Creswell, 2007). Epistemologically speaking, “we research what we believe to be knowable and in ways that we believe will be effective” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 12). The research topic in question came from my own experiences as a doctoral student, and as I looked for elements of hidden curricula in doctoral education and talked to doctoral students, I inevitably had an influence on the knowledge that was created. I also selected the questions to ask and the way they were worded, which would elicit certain responses from my interviewees; a different interviewer, asking differently worded questions would create different knowledge with the participants. It was my intention with this study to use a naturalistic approach with elements of phenomenology, which I describe later, to “understand[ing] social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of the people involved” (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 189 as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 5).

Since the research questions were developed based on my own experiences as a doctoral student, I felt it was essential to follow a methodology that valued the researcher’s place as a co-constructor of knowledge in the research study. It was also crucial to listen to other voices – those of other researchers in the field as background in the literature, and those of my doctoral student participants. Through an exploration of doctoral students' experiences with hidden curriculum and the meaning they attributed to those experiences, I hoped to not only investigate ways that the curriculum intersected
with doctoral student experiences, but I also hoped to also embark on a biographical “journey of understanding” alongside my colleagues (Henderson & Gornik, 2007).

**The role of the researcher.** There are a variety of qualitative methodologies that concentrate on the self, such as autoethnography, narrative inquiry, and oral history research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). While it was not my intention to explicitly include my own lived experiences as data in this study, I do intend to make explicit and public my own meanings and actions in order to build a credible argument that what I learned from this work should be considered by others. The inclusion of the researcher in a research study has to have a specific purpose and cannot merely be included to attend to the researcher’s ego. Agar (1996) argues that the primary purpose of including the researcher in research should be to consider the “social identity” of the researcher and the subsequent impact on the research. For others (Behar, 1996; Rosaldo, 1993), the inclusion of personal experiences in relation to the topic under study can help to make the research topic more accessible to readers. I am a doctoral student researching a doctoral student program; I am therefore necessarily an ‘insider’ in the research, and it would therefore seem incongruent to examine and discuss doctoral students as if I were an ‘outsider’.

Much of the doctoral student experience literature relates to the importance of identity development in becoming a scholar (Baker & Pifer, 2014). In order to make my own role as doctoral student researcher transparent in this research, I will describe my own scholarly identity development in the form of an image (Figure 1). However, it is
important to first situate myself demographically in terms of who I am in the world, which I have done with an “I Am” poem.

I am a white, British woman.

I wonder how my identities influence my view of the world.

I hear judgment.

I see struggle.

I want equal doctoral education for all.

I am a white, British woman… and a doctoral student.

I pretend to be a confident emerging scholar; I feel like an impostor.

I worry about how ‘the academy’ influences me and how I perpetuate the culture of the academy. I weep for those doctoral students who are beaten down by the process of doctoral education.

I am a white, British woman, doctoral student… and an adult educator.

I understand that we live in a society with values and norms that trickle into public institutions such as universities.

I say we must uncover the hidden social and cultural values and norms in doctoral education.

I dream of faculty and educational stakeholders that examine themselves, the hidden curriculum that has influenced them, and the world they perpetuate.

I try to uncover the hidden curriculum in doctoral studies, both for my own good and the good of my colleagues. I hope higher and doctoral education are open to change.
I am a white, British woman, doctoral student, adult educator…..and researcher of the hidden curriculum in doctoral studies.

Figure 1 is a visual representation of my own educational history. As a small child I loved the school environment as it was a place to meet other children and I loved to learn. I was a high achieving student, but there were always a handful of students academically ahead of me, which I found frustrating. As I moved into the secondary school system in England (ages 11-16), I was once again a high achiever, striving hard for the positive reinforcement from my teachers and working for awards rather than the intrinsic motivation of learning. My college and university years continued in much the same way. I was not the best student in the world, but boy was I good at playing the game of school. I was a first generation college student, but university had always been an expectation both internally and from my family. Even during my graduate degrees, education was always a means to another end, such as gaining a job or seeing the world. It was only recently in my doctoral journey that I truly found my calling to help adult
students in higher education. More specifically, as illustrated by the prologue to this
dissertation I have become a more confident scholar during my doctoral degree, as
indicated by my willingness to even call myself a scholar. In the early days of the
doctoral program I talked to other doctoral students near graduation and found it hard to
believe I would ever develop such an identity, but to all of us it comes, eventually. There
are still insecurities, elements of imposter syndrome, and anxiety; that is the nature of the
world of scholars. For me, it was finding my research topic that allowed me to focus and
develop as a scholar. I had always had an interest in education, but now my ability to play
the school game so well could be used as the basis to help others less skilled in the
educational context. This is important to consider as I describe my place within this
research. My own experiences led me to examine the hidden curriculum in higher
education, but my goal with this research is to help other doctoral students to navigate
what I consider to be a unique stage of formal education for which students are under-
prepared in many cases. This is an assumption I bring with me, but I acknowledge this
may not be the case for every student. My educational history, educational identity
development, and demographic characteristics all work together to place me in a position
to explore doctoral students’ experiences with them in a research setting. These
characteristics and my position as an insider/outsider researcher make it important for the
sake of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to explicitly consider my own
assumptions as researcher. Trustworthiness will be addressed in more detail later in this
section.
**Researcher assumptions and bracketing.** Constructivists believe that “knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by mind” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 125), therefore, every researcher brings characteristics, background knowledge, and ideas to a research situation that interacts with the participants to create knowledge. The important element within this framework for me as a researcher, was to strive to become and remain aware of the elements I bring to the research situation and to reflexively examine them throughout the study. It was important to consider any assumptions I had about the study before I began. As mentioned previously, I used some tenets from phenomenology in my research approach. In phenomenological research, tracking of hidden assumptions and bias is described as “reduction and ‘bracketing’ of assumptions and views on the research at hand” (Finlay, 2008). A misrepresentation of bracketing, however, is to suggest that it is “an effort to be objective and unbiased” (Finlay, 2008, p. 2). Instead, bracketing is when researchers acknowledge existing assumptions they might have before they begin the study and then attempt to put those aside (Moustakas, 1994).

van Manen (1990) explains that there are various layers to reduction, such as attempting to put aside preconceptions in order to open the self to the “wonder and amazement” of the world (p. 185). However, I do not believe that any researcher can completely set aside assumptions and ideas before research begins. Instead, I think the researcher (I) can carefully examine assumptions, note them explicitly, and then attempt to track them while staying open to the phenomenon, not as interpreted through assumptions, but based on the descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants. For my reduction and bracketing process I attempted to identify and put aside
expectations that might stop me from being able to see the experiences of the participants as they were lived through, and attempted to look past the specific individual experiences of my participants to the broader “essence” of those experiences (van Manen, 1990, p. 185); identifying the essence of the phenomena in question is the goal of phenomenology. In order to acknowledge that the object under study, while ‘real’ to the researcher, may not exist in the same way to the participants (Girogi, 2006), I had to attempt to “put aside how things supposedly are, focusing instead on how they are experienced” (Finlay, 2008, p. 2).

I acknowledged at the start of the research and throughout that I held a belief that there is a hidden curriculum that exists within any doctoral program, and that I have witnessed examples of hidden curricula in the setting, procedures, and interactions of my own doctoral program. After reflecting on and acknowledging this perspective, I also strived to put those assumptions aside as my participants and I created knowledge together. To do this I attempted to not explicitly mention the hidden curriculum in any of the one-on-one interviews; instead I elicited general stories about elements of the doctoral experience in the hope that I might identify possible experiences related to the hidden curriculum. As I did this I reflected on and acknowledged that the forms of hidden curriculum I might identify in my participants’ experiences of doctoral study may differ from what they would define as hidden curriculum. Therefore, I tried to use the research from this literature review to base my analysis, while remaining open to new ideas related to the topic being studied.
Methods

This study followed Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) naturalistic research paradigm. While the naturalistic paradigm was eventually re-envisioned and re-named as the constructivist paradigm I chose to name this study naturalistic and follow the original framework of the approach because of the method’s appropriateness for studying phenomena within the natural context of the thing studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The naturalistic approach aligns well with my epistemology and ontology; the naturalistic method outlines five axioms of naturalistic inquiry, or “‘basic beliefs’ accepted by convention or established by practice as the building blocks of some conceptual or theoretical structure or system” (van Manen, 1990, p. 33). I briefly examine these five axioms, or beliefs, in turn to demonstrate the ways the naturalistic paradigm connects to my epistemology and ontology.

Axiom 1. The nature of reality. I outlined earlier that I do not believe in a single reality that can be uncovered; instead I view reality and knowledge as something that is constructed by individuals as they interact with others around them. This matches well with Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) assertion that those involved with naturalistic inquiry believe in more than one reality and that our realities are constructed creations in which researchers can only examine in an “holistic” way (p. 37).

Axiom 2. The relationship between knower and known. In naturalistic inquiry, this axiom suggests that the person who is knowing and the thing that is being known are not two separate, discrete objects but instead interact and influence each other. This also relates to my socially constructivist theoretical framework, which says that there is not
some truth or knowledge outside of ourselves to be found, but instead knowledge is something that is created by people.

**Axiom 3.** Generalization. Naturalistic methods do not attempt to create research and findings that can be ‘generalized’ to other settings, times, and contexts. Instead, naturalistic inquiry is context specific and attempts to create “working hypotheses” that relate to the study in question and may provide a starting point for further research (p. 38). Because of my stance on the social creation of knowledge, which is context dependent at any given time, my theoretical framework aligns with this axiom.

**Axiom 4.** Causal links. Naturalistic researchers do not believe that cause can be directly connected to an effect. Life is not linear; it is in a constant “state of mutual simultaneous shaping” (p. 38). Once again, for someone who believes in multiple realities that are context dependent and socially constructed it would not be possible to suggest that an action could linearly and directly cause a specific effect - there are too many other factors that influence lives.

**Axiom 5.** The role of values. The naturalistic paradigm believes that research cannot be value free. This means that the researcher influences the study being undertaken, all of the choices made in a research study direct the findings, and the specific context of a research situation also plays a value-laden part in any research setting. I have stated previously that I do not believe the researcher can be removed from the research, and as this research project originated from my own experiences and observations as a doctoral student this research is very much value-laden; this is acknowledged and considered reflexively throughout the study.
Qualitative research is a field with multiple ideologies, methods, and tensions (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). While the primary method for this study is naturalistic inquiry my research question explored issues that could be best addressed with other, complementary forms of qualitative inquiry. For example, research studies that concentrate on 'lived experiences' of participants are often categorized as phenomenological studies (van Manen, 1990). My research study can best be described as a naturalistic study utilizing elements of phenomenological methods.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology informed my perspective on and methodological approaches to this naturalistic inquiry. Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a methodology (Groenewald, 2004; Maxwell, 2005). Husserl is one of the first theorists to be credited with discussing and using phenomenology in philosophy. Husserl believed that nothing in the ‘external’ world could exist with any certainty; instead a human’s perceptions and conscious experiences of an object make it real (Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). In other words, we can only be sure of how things “appear in, or present themselves to…consciousness” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 4). The reality of the external world is therefore based in a person’s “personal consciousness” and these realities are the starting point for examining experiences (Groenewald, 2004, p. 4). This perspective aligns well with my constructivist framework because both concentrate on the internal construction of knowledge within a person's consciousness as opposed to knowledge outside oneself to be discovered.
As a researcher I am drawn to the foundations of phenomenology because it fits well with my constructivist view of what can be known in the world. I do not believe in a single truth that can be uncovered by research, because I do not believe that a single truth exists. I believe that truth is different for every individual based on the way the world is perceived. Each person’s unique experiences and perspective alter the way they perceive every situation and experience in the world, which aligns well with Husserl’s assumptions that the external world does not exist independently but exists only in people’s perceptions of the external world (Groenewald, 2004).

Phenomenological philosophies and approaches are fluid and constantly developing (Finlay, 2008). Heuristic phenomenological research emphasizes the role of the researcher as part of the research process. Essentially heuristic phenomenology allows for the researcher to look both inward and outward simultaneously, collecting data from participants in the study but also paying close attention to his/her own feelings throughout the research process (Moustakas, 1994). A study that follows a heuristic approach has distinct phases (Moustakas, 1990; Williams, 2000): “framing the question; carrying the question within; listening to other voices; tying it all together” (Williams, 2000, p. 7). While this is not a phenomenological study, these phases are similar to my experiences with this research project. I have had the original framing of my question in mind since the second year of doctoral studies when I began to notice differences among doctoral students and how they acted and seemed to identify themselves as students, scholars, and researchers. I carried the question with me over the next year until I was
able to begin exploring the topic of doctoral student identity in my dissertation research, and this dissertation is the culmination as I tie it all together.

**Study Site and Participants**

The institution chosen for this study was a four-year public university based in the mid-western USA. The Carnegie Classification system lists the site as a comprehensive doctoral institution, indicating that it awards “research doctorate degrees in the humanities, social sciences, and STEM* fields. The institution also offers professional education in fields such as business, education, engineering, law, public policy, social work, or health professions other than medicine, dentistry, or veterinary medicine” (Carnegie Foundation).

Research on doctoral student experiences has identified the department in which students reside as a key factor in how students interpret their doctoral journey (Gardner, 2010). However, research has also shown that doctoral students face difficulties in negotiating competing or contrasting messages from the overlapping cultures of the institution, the school or college in which their department is housed, the department, and even an instructor’s values and beliefs (Jacob & Jordan, 1996). In order to examine the possible influence of such overlapping cultures, the site selected for study was one doctoral degree program with multiple specializations in other fields so that some of the participants would have experiences with both a core programmatic culture and a specialist subject culture.

The doctoral program selected for study was a PhD program in the field of education. Upon admission to the program doctoral students were assigned to two initial
faculty advisors. Doctoral students were interviewed during their application to the program by at least two faculty members. The program director explained that “as much as possible, I tried to match applicants with faculty members who shared similar research interests”, and after interviews faculty evaluated the students and were able to specify if they would like to work as that student’s initial advisor. If these interviewing faculty did not wish to serve in an advisory capacity, the program director would reach out to two faculty to serve as advisors. In these cases, the program director attempted to include one senior faculty member with a more junior faculty member. However, the program director highlighted the fact that these advisors were only to be “initial” advisors, stating “all of this was only to get new doctoral students off to a good start. They made the final decision on who they would ask to serve as their two program faculty advisors” (Program Director, Personal Communication, June 20, 2017).

The website for the doctoral program indicates that it is possible to specialize in up to 20 different specializations (Doctoral n.d.). To concentrate in a specialization results in a doctoral student receiving a PhD in the core program with an emphasis in a particular discipline. Based on the research regarding the difficulties with overlapping cultures in education, and the importance of the department culture in doctoral study (Jacob & Jordan, 1996), I recruited students from the education program who considered themselves ‘generalists’ as well as those with designated concentrations.

Data were collected in Spring 2014. The demographic characteristics of the students enrolled in the program at this time can be seen in Table 1.
Table 1

*Program Student Demographics Summary: Spring 2014* (L. Stafford, Personal Communication, June 20, 2017).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age</td>
<td>41.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 1 shows, over 75% of the students enrolled in the education program used for this study were female and 72% of the student population were Caucasian. It is especially important to consider that as a white, female, international student I am part of the higher demographic percentages in the program and to reflect on the ways those characteristics may impact my own perspective of the program and the stories told to me by the participants. My position in this demographic milieu was important to consider in terms of collecting data and how comfortable participants may have been sharing their experiences with me. However, my hope was that by using multiple techniques to interview students and building trust over three interview sessions, that I could build trust with all participants. In actuality, the participants who volunteered to take part in the study were demographically very similar to me.
Participants. I attempted to recruit a theoretically diverse sample of doctoral students to participate in the study. By sampling in this way I could select participants who would best inform my research question(s) based on specific characteristics (Creswell, 2007). I recruited participants from the education program with as many different specializations as possible, and doctoral students who had diverse characteristics in the following areas: (1) age; (2) gender; (3) stage of doctoral study; (4) part-time or full-time student status; (5) GA (graduate assistant) or non-GA. I chose these characteristics because I hoped they would provide a wide variation in experiences.

I emailed all doctoral students from the education doctoral program via the program director, who provided access to the program to conduct the study. The email (Appendix A) briefly outlined the purpose of the study, a request for participation, and an online demographic survey. The purpose of the online survey was to ask students questions that would allow me to identify participants based on the aforementioned characteristics.

Twelve participants responded by completing the survey. I analyzed the surveys and selected all respondents to take part in the study because while demographically the students were not as diverse as I had hoped, the participants were varied in their programmatic characteristics. Ten females and two males, including one international student, aged between 26 and 60 were recruited into the study. Though the volunteers were not as diverse as I had hoped, the sample was representative of the program enrollment in terms of gender. While 12 participants may not seem like a large sample, qualitative research can generate a large amount of data and the collection and analysis
needs to be achievable (Hycner, 1985). I emailed the students to explain the research and provided the consent form (Appendix B). Once participants agreed to participate I arranged for the first interview via email and began collecting data. Table 2 summarizes the characteristics of the participants selected for this study; however, in order to ensure anonymity for each participant, the characteristics are not associated with the participant’s pseudonym in the study. I have also used a * to indicate my own demographic characteristics to illustrate how I fit with the participants in the study.

Table 2

Participant Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Range</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage in Doctoral Study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coursework</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation research and writing</td>
<td>3*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

Data collection in naturalistic studies rely on the researcher as an instrument of collection, meaning that naturalistic researchers often utilize “techniques such as interview, observation, unobtrusive measures, document and record analysis, and non-verbal cues” (p. 240).

The primary method of data collection for this study was semi-structured interviews. An interview in naturalistic inquiry is a “conversation with a purpose” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 268). I am drawn to conversational interviews because of my view that knowledge will be co-constructed between the researcher and the participants. Interviews in general act as an effective “meaning-making partnership between interviewer and respondents”, giving participants a chance to “share their story, pass on
their knowledge, and provide their own perspective on a range of topics” (Hesse-Biber & Levy, 2006, p. 128). I wanted to learn about doctoral students’ individual experiences of hidden curricula through what Rubin and Rubin (2005) call “responsive” interviewing; this type of interviewing acknowledges that a relationship is developed between the interviewer and interviewee, which goes on to impact the collection of data. Interviews can be helpful to collect information on participants’ experiences of events and occurrences, reconstructing experiences and feelings they had in the past, and to project the way things might be in the future (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

For this study, I examined doctoral students’ experiences of the hidden curriculum within a single education doctoral program. The interviews were used to examine and reconstruct experiences and feelings that doctoral students had in their past as well as their current thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate method of data collection because they allowed me to design a set of guidelines for each interview while also affording space for a more natural social interaction to occur between the participants and myself. I think it is important to clarify here that I do not believe it is possible for participants to relay an experience or event exactly as it occurred. Naturally, stories change with every telling; stories are never final (Bloom, 2002). It is not the purpose of naturalistic interviews to extract a precise and factual depiction of experiences from participants, but instead to work with the participant to create a reconstruction of those experiences. Data collection consisted of three sets of semi-structured interviews, which acted as an interviewing guide that would not transfer my own perspectives on hidden curriculum onto the students (Rubin &
Rubin, 1995). Each interview had a different focus and approach in order to gather different types of data from the students. Table 3 summarizes the format of each interview and how it relates to the research questions for this study.

**Interview one.** The first set of interviews acted as both a fact-finding mission and a place to develop a relationship with my participants and “reflect” with them (van Manen, 1990, p. 65). Each interview lasted for approximately one hour as I asked general questions about the participants’ experiences as doctoral students. I designed this interview to act as a basic fact finding mission about the participants’ experiences in the PhD program. I did not want to cloud the participants’ perspective by asking about or explaining what the hidden curriculum was during this interview. Instead I asked the students open-ended questions about their PhD experience in the hope that they would talk about experiences and contexts that might be part of a hidden curriculum. For example, the first question in the interview was, “Overall how would you describe your experience in the doctoral program so far”. As a semi-structured interview, questions after that followed a basic structure, but were adjusted based on each participant’s stories and experiences. At the end of the first interview I provided students with a sheet outlining the prompt for Interview 2, which asked participants to prepare a visual representation of their thoughts about their educational history prior to attending Interview two.

**Interview two.** Prior to the second interview, I provided students with the following prompt:
Questions for the second set of interviews are prompts to encourage you to visually represent your thoughts about your education. Please take a few minutes to think about your educational journey up to this point. How might you describe the process? Once you have taken a few minutes to think back on your educational life, please follow the prompts below prior to our second interview.

1. Either visually or in words (whatever you are more comfortable with) please capture in some way the first part of your educational journey during kindergarten-high school years.

2. Either visually or in words (whatever you are more comfortable with) please capture in some way your undergraduate college experience.

3. Now visually or in words (whatever you are more comfortable with) please capture in some way your doctoral journey so far.

Please bring your responses to the 2nd interview where we will discuss your representations and educational history. Questions will be based on the artifacts students bring with them” (Interview two prompt).

The second set of interviews were similar to life history interviews. Life history interviews should not be conducted merely to understand our participants better; instead biographical or life history stories can “contain rich ore of lived-experience descriptions for phenomenological analysis or for converting into anecdote or story” (van Manen, 1990, p. 72). I conducted a form of educational life history with the participants. A life history interview that concentrated on the participants’ educational journey was an important way to start getting to the essence of these individuals and their previous
experiences with curricula and hidden curricula. While I was primarily interested in the hidden curriculum in doctoral education, students’ previous educational experiences could conceivably influence how they experienced the hidden curricula in doctoral education and the meaning they attributed to that. While data in phenomenological studies are analyzed in small pieces, the context of the interview or narrative as a whole is used as a “control” for understanding participants’ meaning; phrases can have multiple meanings, but within a specific context it becomes easier to assign meaning (Hycner, 1985). While this approach is concerned with a single set of data, conducting an educational life history as part of my naturalistic inquiry provided a more in-depth picture of my participants’ educational and curricular experiences and gave me a broader context in which to analyze the data and stories from the other interviews. Interview 2 acted as a frame to hold the data for each participant together (Moustakas, 1994).

In the educational life history interviews I used a similar approach to Nyquist et al. (1999) who in their exploration of graduate students’ experiences asked participants to “capture visually” their experiences of graduate school (p. 18). van Manen (1990) states that creating art is “giving shape to lived experiences”, and in this way the art that participants create in an interview are “lived experiences transformed into transcended configurations” (p. 74). Tesch (1999) suggests that “the phenomenon rises to clearer awareness by approaching it from different angles, for instance from a metaphorical, or a mythical, or a poetic perspective” (p. 70 as cited in Williams, 2000, p. 6). By using interviews with different media and approaches I was able to come to a clearer
understanding for students’ experience of the hidden curriculum as both them and I came
to the experiences from different perspectives.

**Interview three.** The third interview acted as a final, follow-up interview and
gave me an opportunity to member-check the first two interviews (Lincoln & Guba,
1985). The hidden curriculum relates to unintended or intended but hidden messages
about the beliefs, values, and norms inherent in the culture of a program. As part of the
messages students receive, the literature suggests students may adjust their identities in
some way (Margolis et al., 2001). With this in mind, I designed Interview 3 to explore the
participants’ identities and the ways in which the culture of the program may impact or
influence those identities. I began by asking students to name all of their identities and
write them down onto small circles of paper; once again, using the visual process to
enhance the interview. I had a list of likely identities for PhD students on hand, such as
family member, PhD student, and PhD candidate (see Appendix C for details).

Once the participants had listed their major identities, I asked the students to
arrange the paper circles in a number of patterns in regard to how the institutional culture,
program culture, and specialization culture valued each of those identities. My goal with
this interview was to ascertain possible differences in cultural messages from each of the
major cultures the participants came into contact with, and to have the participants begin
to explore how their identities may or may not be influenced by those cultures.
Table 3

*How the Data Informs the Research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do doctoral students experience the hidden curriculum?</td>
<td><strong>Interview 1:</strong></td>
<td>A one-hour semi-structured interview with each participant recorded using Audacity computer software and later transcribed and annotated. Notes were taken during the interview of key phrases, intonations, and emerging ideas that I noted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What forms of hidden curricula can be identified in a PhD program?</td>
<td><strong>Appendix C</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interview 1:**
Initial Questions

This interview explored the educational history of the students to ascertain ways the hidden curriculum may have influenced their educational experiences to this

**Interview 2:**
Prompt Questions

At the end of interview 1, participants were provided with a single sheet of paper with a prompt to begin thinking about, and to prepare a written or visual representation, for interview 2. For the second interview, participants brought artifacts (written or visual) they created related to their educational histories. The interview was semi-structured with some questions designed ahead of time, along with space for an informal discussion using the artifacts as the foundation.

Each interview lasted approximately an hour and was recorded using Audacity, as well as artifacts kept or photographed. Transcriptions were used for analysis; artifacts were used where the participants made a strong connection between what they were
point, to provide context for RQ1 saying and the visual they had brought.

1. How do doctoral students experience the hidden curriculum?

2. What forms of hidden curricula can be identified in a PhD program?

This interview was designed to encourage the participants to begin thinking about their identities and the culture(s) of the institution, program, and specialization.

**Interview 3:**

**Questions, Example Visual Appendix C**

For the third interview students were asked to list their major identities and write them on small circles of paper. This was a one-hour semi-structured interview with each participant recorded using audacity computer software and later transcribed and annotated.

Notes were taken of key phrases, intonations, and emerging ideas. Photographs were taken of the identity patterns to supplement analysis in case students did not describe the visuals for the tape. In most cases, the transcriptions yielded enough detail without the photographs being needed.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis began during the data collection process as I took field notes, which I reviewed between each interview (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Hesse-Biber & Levy, 2006). This allowed me to remain immersed in the data even when collection was not occurring, and provided a chance to consider my thoughts on emerging findings and steps
forward. I analyzed the data in multiple ways before I decided on a procedure that allowed me to visualize and analyze the data in a way that felt most useful.

The first step in analysis was to put all of the data into a written form that could be coded. I typed the hand-written notes I had taken during interviews, and I transcribed most of the first set of interviews myself. I had most of the second and third set of interviews transcribed by an external vendor to save time, and I created abbreviated transcripts for the remaining interviews; abbreviated transcripts were similar to full transcripts except that I omitted small talk and unnecessary chatter. In all cases I listened to the interviews multiple times to become familiar with the data. I then read the transcription data for all three sets of interviews and reviewed the artistic creations from Interview 2 multiple times to become “intimately” knowledgeable with the data (Hesse-Biber & Levy, 2006).

I began using QSR International’s NVivo software to complete an initial stage of open coding, which involved me reading the data and categorizing student experiences with codes. I started with the one participant, Alex, and coded Alex’s first interview to create a starting point. I then analyzed Alex’s second interview to see whether the initial codes were present and to identify any new codes. I did this a third time with Alex’s final interview. At this stage I reviewed my codes and integrated similar ideas together and used this list to begin coding the next participant’s first interview, while still open to new codes. By the time I had completed coding two participants I had a set of codes that I used for analyzing the remaining participants. Figure 2 shows an example code set from this first analysis.
**Figure 2.** Example of Coding from First Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking Control of A Situation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing Not to Take Part</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying For Jobs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD Program Design</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD Milestones</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation Research and</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation proposal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coursework</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Orientated Activities</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic Activities</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Exams</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD as Different from Other Level</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path to Completion</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Scholarly Activities</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major versus Minor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes outside of departm</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA Work</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified people</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD Peers - General</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other PhD Students - In Class</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other PhD Students - GA Rela</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instructors or other faculty</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family &amp; Friends outside of Sc</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues in Field</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisors</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Dissertation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>academic communities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At this stage I returned to the literature on the hidden curriculum and utilized Martin’s (1994) definition of hidden curriculum to focus my analysis. Martin (1994) suggests that hidden curricula must involve a learning state from a student, which she describes as “some state a learner is in (for example, a state of knowing or believing or being interested or being cautious), and something which may be called the object of that state-provided "object" is construed broadly enough to include not just physical objects but such things as the theory of relativity” (p. 137). Feeling that computer software was acting as a barrier between the data and my understanding, I printed all transcripts for this stage of analysis and began marking them by hand as I attempted to pull learning states from the student experiences. I then used computer software to create a table of learning states I had identified in the data, the categories of hidden curriculum they were connected to, a definition for each category, and the participants who had experienced them (Figure 3). While this analysis was useful, and the categories I identified were similar to the initial codes from my first analysis, I did not feel that I was sufficiently answering both research questions. I therefore set about a third and final analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning State Identified</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th># who discuss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructors have power over students</td>
<td>[advisors/program/institution]</td>
<td>Experiences where the participant describes not being able to think or act in a certain way because of his/her place as a student.</td>
<td>I felt it wasn't my place to be like, why aren't we sending this research article out.</td>
<td>8 students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Example of Coding from Second Analysis

For this final analysis, I revisited my literature review and the definition of what constitutes a hidden curriculum - a communication of hidden cultural values and norms (Hafferty & Franks, 1994 as cited in Mutabdzic and Azzie, 2016) - and examined the data...
with that definition and my research questions as the frame to guide my analysis. I then specifically analyzed the data by looking for experiences that could be related to norms and values within the program. I read each interview in turn using electronic notes in the text as I read to mark experiences related to norms and values and the associated contexts of those experiences. I categorized each experience as I found them and after analyzing each interview I wrote a short summary describing the participant’s experiences related to norms, values, and beliefs within that interview (Figure 4). I analyzed each interview one by one for each participant, and then used the short interview summaries to create a composite description of each participant’s data in an attempt to “accurately capture the essence of the phenomenon” of the hidden curriculum (Hycner, 1985, p. 294) and to act as a summary for each participant.
I then reviewed each participant summary and created a list of categories. When I completed this process, I completed a cross-case analysis. A cross-case analysis compares data across participants to find “commonalities and difference in the events, activities, and processes” (Khan & Van Wyensberghe, 2008, para 2). I examined the list of categories I had created for each participant and interview and then looked for similarities, differences, and nuances within those categories. The analysis allowed for a
more in-depth perspective of the data and helped to “further articulate the
concepts…discovered or constructed from the original cases” (Khan & Van Wynsberghe,
2008, p. 2). This first stage of analysis yielded the following categories:

- Part-time students are valued less than GAs.
- Students have the ability to create their own path through the PhD program, but scheduling conflicts and class offerings impact how unique each journey may be.
- There is an unwritten course sequence that needs to be followed by students.
- The advisor is a key support.
- There is a community of practice within the student group that teaches about the culture of the program.
- The culture of a specialization can complement or interfere with messages from the core program.
- There are inherent social structures in the academy that impact a student’s experience.
- Students are used to tracking success by grades and there are mixed messages as to how important grades are at the PhD level.
- Research is valued over practice, but many students struggled to identify as a researcher.
- Changes in thinking and identity occurred during the program, including the identity of imposter.
- Some students could and did resist messages about what they should value from the program.
I then reviewed the categories and began to group them under thematic headings. I made adjustments to control for any redundant categories and created a final list of emergent themes related to experiences with norms, values, behaviors, and identities in the PhD program to answer RQ1. The three main themes or contexts found in the data were:

- The structure of the program (use of grades, part-time students less valued than GAs, unwritten course sequence, the need for the advisor to guide course planning, research valued over practice).
- The social structure of the program and interactions (Importance of advisors, the social structure of the academy, peers, communities of practice).
- The self (changes in thinking and identity, imposter syndrome, resistance) and agency.

According to Martin (1994) there are two ways to identify the hidden curriculum. The first is to identify specific learning states in students and then draw them back to the setting that caused those learning states. The second is to examine a setting and identify what learning states seem to be created by that setting. While I examined my data for ‘experiences’ and not what Martin calls learning states, I used Martin’s suggestion to connect the experiences identified back to elements of context and setting, such as the environment, actors, and activities in order to answer RQ2 and identify possible forms of hidden curriculum. This second stage of analysis resulted in the following themes, which mirrored closely the themes from RQ1:

- The structure of the program.
  - Course planning.
Stages of the PhD.

Independent studies.

Specializations.

Grades.

The graduate assistant program.

Social structure and interaction with others.

Advisors structures.

Instructor structures.

Peer interactions.

The self as a lens.

While this was a naturalistic study, it was informed by phenomenology in which a theme is not just a tool for organizing data but is a way to attempt to locate a deeper meaning in participants’ stories; we ask ourselves, “what is the essence” of this data and “how can I capture the essence…with thematic reflection” (van Manen, 1990, p. 86).

Phenomenological approaches also remind us that researchers are not blank slates who can remove all notions about the research, but Hycner (1985) suggests that reflecting on presuppositions about the research at this stage and undertaking dialogue with researcher colleagues about suppositions can be a helpful way to stay open to the experiences. At this stage of analysis, I communicated with my advisor and multiple critical friends to discuss the themes I had identified, the possible meanings within those themes, and how my own presuppositions could be interacting with the data as I undertook the analysis process.
**Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that qualitative studies should strive for “trustworthiness” rather than the more quantitative, scientific, or positivist approaches, which discuss validity and reliability. Trustworthiness is how naturalistic researchers convince the readers and scholars in their community that a study is “worth paying attention to”, essentially that the findings can be confidently accepted, that they can be applicable to other contexts and settings and that the study can be replicated, and that bias has not unduly impacted the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Some ways to enhance the trustworthiness of a qualitative study include: engaging in “prolonged engagement” in the field (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 p. 301), ensuring triangulation of data, peer debriefing, and theoretical sampling for participants.

**Longitudinal studies.** While the study itself was not longitudinal, I had been informally part of the study site considering hidden curriculum for three years when the study began. This allowed me a greater sense of the research site context and time to consider elements of the program that might benefit from this research. Data collection also took place across the course of an entire semester in order to conduct three sets of interviews with busy PhD students. This may have provided for richer data as the students likely had a myriad of experiences across the course of a semester.

**Triangulation.** In terms of triangulation, I collected data through three types of interviews: 1) semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, 2) a creative educational history interview, and 3) an interview where students used notecards to consider their existing identities. The different collection techniques were purposefully selected to allow
participants to examine their experience of doctoral study in different forms more deeply, which in turn helped me check findings from one interview against findings in the second and third interviews. This also helped yield comprehensive details and thick description needed to help others reading the findings to determine if the study is transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Peer debriefing.** Three peers in the field of education, who are not experts in hidden curriculum, acted as ongoing peer debriefers during the study through informal discussion and texts, as well as emails and draft readings. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest for trustworthiness, I had multiple “no-holds-barred conversations” (p. 283) with these peers throughout the study in order to share ideas and help clarify my thoughts as I worked with the data. When I came across new findings or meaning in the data, I would contact my peers to relay these findings and they would ask critical questions, which helped guide my thinking. Conversation with these peers provided a space to track any biases or assumptions I might have been making as I examined the data and provided a space for verbalizing my thinking and the connections I was seeing in the data. These informal peer debriefing sessions kept me “honest” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308) by allowing me to vent and reflect on the process of data collection and analysis, which helped me to balance the tightrope of insider-outsider in the research. They also allowed me to test ideas from the emerging findings as I worked (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Purposive/theoretical sampling.** Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that purposive sampling (also known as theoretical sampling) allows researchers to uncover the “full array of multiple realities” (p. 40). The purpose of this type of sampling is not to
strive for generalizations, but to give thick description on a topic being studied. I sampled PhD students with specific characteristics in order to gather the most information possible on doctoral students’ experiences of the program. I selected both full-time and part-time students, graduate assistants and non-graduate assistants, students in different specializations, and students at different stages of study in order to “give the context [I was studying] unique flavor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 201).

**Ethical Considerations**

As well as ensuring the study is trustworthy, I believe it is crucial for any study to explicitly illustrate that it has been ethically designed. Any study involving people requires an examination of ethics, and in my case my role as an insider doctoral student researcher required an in-depth ethical examination. The first major ethical consideration was my dual role in this study. Schram (2006) says that researchers need to "construct[ing] an intellectual orientation" (p. 40) in the field, which was difficult because I was already so immersed in the setting as a participant and not a researcher. Schram (2006) explains that "as a researcher you simply cannot gloss over the need to clarify how and why you are positioned to view ideas and relationships in a certain way" (p. 40-41). As Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest, with more researchers today understanding “that we study the other to learn about ourselves…we seek a new body of ethical directives fitted to postmodernism” (p. 1022). Ethically, I felt it was crucial to be a reflexive researcher, that is, to be clear about my “personal investment” in the research project and to be explicit about my “biases” and the possible ways I might “avoid[ed] or suppress[ed] certain points of view” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 1027). One way I
achieved this was with personal reflexive rough notes during the collection and analysis process, where I explored my own experiences with hidden curriculum and the forms and experiences I was identifying in the data. I asked myself if my own experiences in doctoral education were impacting the way I was interpreting the data, or if the data provided sufficient evidence for the connections I was making. It was essentially a self-questioning dialogue with myself to bring my assumptions to the service and to ensure they were not impacting the data.

As mentioned previously, I am a current doctoral student, I am enrolled as a doctoral candidate in one PhD program at the research site, and I was recently a Coordinator of a Doctoral Student Group at the site. The site of study was selected because of my previous experience in the field. My enrollment in the site raises questions about insider and outsider research ethics and knowledge. In research terms an insider is someone who has “intimate knowledge of the research site and the community within that site (Drake & Heath, 2011, p. 1). Researchers who are insiders may move fluidly between the role of insider within a community or site, and they can encompass the roles of both an insider and an outsider when conducting research (Drake & Heath, 2011). A crucial element of conducting research as an insider-outsider is to acknowledge that fact and be explicit about my fluid roles and any difficulties that arose as I conducted the study (Drake & Heath, 2011).

There are certainly political and ethical difficulties with conducting research as an insider, for example in my case I was a member of the community and worked at the site I studied, therefore, I was already placed within a structural hierarchy in that site and I
could be influenced by the “political ideologies” present in the site, just as my participants could be; it was therefore crucial to acknowledge this as a fundamental part of the research project (Drake & Heath, 2011, p. 23). As a doctoral researcher striving to navigate the insider perspective (my role as doctoral student at the site of study) and the outsider perspective (the doctoral researcher role and all the requirements and politics that contains), it was imperative that I kept a firm hold on my identity as self (Drake & Heath, 2011). As I mentioned previously, I utilized rough notes to track my reflections and experiences related to my place in the hierarchy of the research site and how this might influence the data I collected. I also used these notes to consider my own role and how I was positioned throughout the study as both insider and outside (Drake & Heath, 2011). The reflexive notes I created were used as a basis for ongoing conversations with my peer debriefers to discuss the data collection process and any political elements from the site that could have influenced the data collection and analysis.

However, being a student at the research site was also beneficial in terms of trustworthiness. I possibly had more opportunity to gain access to participants than an outsider would have had. I had existing relationships and rapport with many of the faculty and students in the college, which meant that much of the relationship building required in research studies, such as connecting with gatekeepers to reach participants and building trust with participants, was already underway in many cases at the start of the study.

As I began to complete the analysis of data I became aware that the participants in the study could be easily identified by a number of elements revealed through their
interviews. The program under study is small, and some specializations have only one or two students enrolled, so the very characteristics I used to gain my sample such as specialization, gender, ethnicity, could easily make my participants identifiable. With this in mind, I took steps to further hide the identity of my participants in the following description of findings. First, I altered the pseudonyms that participants had picked for the study so that all participants had gender-neutral pseudonyms and I used gender neutral pronouns for discussions of each student. I decided that using a combined s/he and him/her was the best way to hide the gender of participants without stemming the flow of the narrative. Whenever possible, I tried to use direct quotations in the findings section; however, when quotations would easily identify the participant I abbreviated the quotation to hide the participants’ identity.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

In this naturalistic, qualitative study I explored doctoral students’ lived experiences of hidden curriculum in one doctoral program in the field of education in a mid-sized 4-year public institution in the USA. I asked participants about their formal educational experiences, identities, and doctoral program experiences. Twelve PhD students and candidates within a single program were interviewed three times as described in Chapter III. Data analysis occurred both during and after data collection to answer the following Research Questions:

**RQ1: How do doctoral students experience the hidden curriculum?**

**RQ2: What forms of hidden curricula can be identified in a PhD program?**

The participants in this study had unique experiences in their program, their own goals and motivations for enrolling in the program, varied family lives and situations, and different paths through the program. However, within these unique stories there were recurring themes related to the norms, values, and beliefs that were an inherent part of the program and the contexts through which these cultural messages were received. The themes for both Research Question 1 (the experiences related to the norms, values, and beliefs in the program) and the themes related to Research Question 2 (forms of hidden curriculum) mirrored each other closely. The messages from the hidden curriculum are inherently intertwined with the context and form those messages take. Therefore, I examine the themes in two ways. Firstly, by reporting the themes within the context of the participants’ individual experiences and then by exploring the forms of hidden
curriculum found across the participants’ experiences.

The presentation of findings begins with an overview of the themes identified across participant interviews and follows with an analysis of the experiences described by participants. While all twelve participants’ data were analyzed, I present three case analyses for review in this findings section. The three participants were selected because they experienced a variety of hidden curricula and provided examples that were representative of the general themes identified during analysis. Reporting on a representative sample of three students in this section allows for a more concise and focused discussion of the hidden curriculum. The findings related to the remaining participants can be found in Appendix D, and all participants were used as a basis for the cross-case analysis. Following the case summaries, the remainder of the chapter describes themes identified in the cross-case analysis to answer Research Question 2 and identify the forms that hidden curricula take in a doctoral program.

**Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 asked: How do doctoral students experience the hidden curriculum in their doctoral program? The data indicated that there were three broad contexts within the program where students experienced messages related to the values, norms, and beliefs embedded within the doctoral program – the hidden curriculum.

- The structure and organization of the program.
- The social structures inherent within the program and academy.
- The self.

Within each of those contexts there were experiences related to particular programmatic
elements:

- The structure and organization of the program.
  - Experiences related to course planning.
  - Experiencing the differences between graduate assistants and part-time students.
  - Experiencing the difference in culture between the core program and specializations.
  - Experiences related to the post-coursework stages of the program.
- The social structures inherent within the program and academy.
  - Experiences with the Advisor.
- The Self.
  - Enacting agency.
  - Research identities.
  - Family identities.

Table 4 provides an overview of these themes as discussed by each participant. In Table 4 an O indicates that the participant mentioned a theme in some way, for example most participants discussed their advisors, but not all talked about the social structures within that relationship. An X indicates that the participant discussed a theme in more depth specifically resulting in my interpreting that experience as part of a hidden curriculum.
Table 4

Overview of Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structure of Program</td>
<td>Social Structure</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Course Plan</td>
<td>GA PT</td>
<td>Special-iz</td>
<td>Post CW</td>
<td>Advisor</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>Rsch Identity</td>
<td>Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessie</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>O</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peyton</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reese</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td></td>
<td>O</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the intention of including case descriptions for only three participants, I have selected Alex, Reese, and Peyton as a representative sample covering most of the themes identified during analysis. Alex had a particularly unique perspective of the different experiences part-time and graduate assistants had in the program as s/he was part of both groups during his/her time in the program. Alex was also not planning a career in higher education, which impacted his/her discussion of research identities. Reese was probably the participant most aware of the social structures and power dynamics at play within the program, which influenced his/her advisor relationship and the ways s/he felt able or not to enact agency. Reese was also typical in his/her goal to eventually work in higher education. Finally, Peyton represented the part-time participants and discussed how the part-time status impacted course planning and research identity. Peyton was also not
intending to work in higher education upon completion of the program. What follows is a brief description of each of these participants including an analysis of the forms of hidden curriculum they experienced. The descriptions include gender-neutral pseudonyms and pronouns in order to protect the participants’ identities. While I use participants’ words and stories as examples, I have replaced any direct quotations that would easily identify the participants with my own summarized words.

Alex

Alex was a full-time PhD student with a designated specialization. Alex was in dissertation proposal phase and working as a full-time graduate assistant (20 hours per week) during data collection. Alex identified as a parent, spouse, sibling, family member, teacher, PhD student, PhD candidate, researcher, activist, and mentor. Alex noted that his/her identities were in flux and that different identities took precedence in different times of life.

Alex’s educational history was one of achievement and praise from both home and school. From an early age, when grades were given for assignments, Alex began to identify as an academic and continued to do so throughout high school and undergraduate study noting that, “how I'm looking at academic success is good grades. But, I always felt that I knew things, I liked to learn” (Interview 2). While Alex did not specifically talk about grades at the PhD level, in terms of undergraduate education Alex explained that:

You want to please your instructor, your teachers. Getting a good grade means you have pleased them. You have met what they set out for you. Sometimes I learned a lot. Sometimes I didn't, but I still achieved what their parameters were, I
guess. That's the following of the rules. (Interview 2)

While Alex did not discuss grades at the doctoral level, they do still exist in the program, suggesting that the reward system present elsewhere in formal education is possibly an element of hidden curriculum used to encourage students to strive for instructor affirmation; however, if that is the case it was not a message Alex vocalized. Instead, for Alex the act of learning was the ultimate reward, as shown when s/he discussed a class that was a less than positive experience, yet even still, “it wasn’t a waste of my time because I can always learn and say that I read something” (Interview 1).

**The structure and organization of the program.** As Alex began the doctorate it seemed the program norm was for students to follow a standard sequence through the curriculum by following the plan of study set out for the program and for individual specializations.

Our program is pretty prescribed. First you have to take all the requirements, which is about half of the 60 hours I think or so. And then in my specialization there were the 4 seminars, so there are 4 classes that cut out electives, and so I really only had a few classes as electives. (Interview 1)

This is in contrast to other students who felt the plan of study was a little more open-ended and valued more freedom of choice in how students navigated the program; however, those students were not in Alex’s specialization. Alex also had trouble locating classes appropriate for his/her line of inquiry, but used the advisor’s connections and support to complete independent studies. “There were no actual real classes that would help me...so I took independent studies. I took three independent studies that I made up
with professors that would help me” (Interview 1). Alex made the program unique to his/her line of inquiry. So while it was not easy to make a unique path through the program, it was possible with independent studies and the support of the advisor.

Alex started the doctoral program feeling confident, in part because of the clear plan of study s/he was given to follow, but doubt started to creep into the once solid academic identity when s/he had to deviate from that path. Alex used the metaphor of Wizard of Oz to describe the doctoral experience in Interview 2.

To me it was just like okay…you could do this, this, this, and here are the phase and steps and you go. You just follow this road… Then the middle was like oh my God, I don't know what I'm doing and I need friends around me...I realized that it isn't just follow this path. You kind of have to forge your own. It takes different turns, but you need people. You need to find a few people that you can really rely to help you through it. (Interview 2)

Once classes were selected, Alex felt some were more effective than others, but all provided a learning experience of some kind. Alex noted that the most effective classes were the ones with authentic experiences where students could research or prepare for future milestones such as research classes that allowed students to undertake real research activities. Discussion and reflection in classes were highlighted as being present in some of Alex’s favorite classes and they seemed to be part of the planned curriculum, suggesting that collaboration and discussion were valued as part of the program. For example, when asked why Alex liked some classes over others the answer was “the way they set up the classes for more intellectual discussion and thinking about the teaching”
Also the classes that most related to Alex’s personal interests were viewed as the most helpful and this was a theme identified for many of the participants.

Alex noted that some people view PhD students and candidates differently. When asked about the difference Alex said, “I continue to learn. I mean, as a candidate. I’m getting the research part but I continue to learn...I just mean it’s in stages. In this stage, I’m still a student, but now I’m labeled a candidate so it’s the next level of learning” (Interview 3). Even though in Alex’s case a strong identity shift was not described as s/he changed from student to candidate, as a candidate Alex identified as a researcher, while as a student that was not the case because research work was assigned and not independently conducted. Alex explained:

Well, when you’re in the candidate phase at least how this institution does it, if you’re done with your coursework and you are now preparing to do your dissertation research. Even though I was involved in a few small research projects prior to that as a graduate assistant, I mean, I could consider myself a researcher then but to me … I was and participating in some research projects and classes and things like that but to me the candidate phase. That’s really what it is. You are preparing and conducting your research and wrapping that all up because I am not going to be a professor, research isn’t probably going to be a big part of my life when I finish. It doesn’t mean I won’t continue to do things on my own or just for my own sake or if I want to write articles or whatever. For me, because I’m not going to be a professor and don’t have to research for my job, I associate it more closely with the candidate phase, I think because of that. (Interview 3)
This quote demonstrates the differences Alex saw between student and candidate research. The quote also suggests that the norm of the program, as understood by Alex, is that there is a linear, step-by-step process through the program. This is not surprising considering the design of PhD programs in the USA, which have milestones at various stages of the program.

I asked Alex specifically what would happen to the researcher identity, which s/he had listed without prompting during the interview, once the PhD ended, and Alex explained,

That’s just a temporary label. ...I think I’ll still be interested in certain areas and possibly do some other projects but I won’t be associated with the university so I don’t exactly know how that’s going to work... I had some ideas for some other things I might want to pursue but I won’t be associated with the university. I have a lot to still learn if I’ll continue to be a learner about that. (Interview 3)

Alex’s comments suggest that researcher may in fact not be a temporary label, but that s/he is unsure how to conduct research when not part of a specifically academic community. This could suggest a hidden curriculum related to the assumption that all PhD students will continue to work in the academy as Alex does not seem to have received any kind of explicit curriculum directed at how to conduct human subject research outside of an academic research setting.

Alex held a unique position in the PhD program as someone who had been both a part-time and full-time student during his/her time in the program, and Alex talked about both experiences during our discussions. As a part-time student Alex noted that there was
no time to stay and socialize with others after class,

   Well I started out as part-time and so that was a lot more lonely...because I was
still working and then commuting here and I met people that I really liked but I
would leave and I never stayed for anything.... I would come to class and go
home. And so I didn’t really feel part of things (Interview 1)

From a part-timer’s perspective Alex viewed graduate assistants as a community within
the larger PhD student group; graduate assistants seemed to have more connections and
support.

   Most of the people I met were graduate assistants and so they had their own
community and I didn’t really feel part of that. It’s not anything they did or didn’t
do, it’s just because I wasn’t here all the time I couldn’t socialize or any of that. ... They would talk and they would reference things. And I knew, I would visit some
up in the graduate assistant office and they just, everybody just knew each other
and it just seemed like a nice atmosphere. Everybody, y’know, they had people -
even if they weren’t friendly outside of the graduate assistant office, they had that
group in there and then others grouped together outside socially. They were
always there for each other, and I’m not saying they shut me out, it was just when
you’re not there, physically present, it’s different. (Interview 1)

When Alex became a graduate assistant there was finally a space to vent and connect
with others, which s/he found to be beneficial, “I felt a lot more part of things. I like that
socialness. So, that was a big deal, the social piece of it. I just felt more a part. I had
people who were going through the same thing and it was kind of cool to be able to vent
or celebrate or whatever” (Interview 1). The value of peer interaction in the program was noted in all of Alex’s interviews, except in the post-coursework phase.

Alex noted feeling isolated when reaching dissertation phase and not having the peer support that came with seeing colleagues in the graduate assistant office every day.

I’m out of the course work and in the proposal, it’s kind of more lonely again. I mean I’m still seeing my friends socially and it’s great to have that, but I don’t see them on a regular basis like I did every week I’d see them in class or whatever and it’s harder to get motivated to do work without deadlines, and so I’m kind of feeling in a slump at this point in the proposal stage. (Interview 1)

Alex also found it difficult to complete the dissertation without deadlines, which had helped during the coursework phase. Alex’s experience suggests a stark difference between the coursework and dissertation phases. While there was a strong emphasis on peer interaction during coursework, Alex felt isolated and alone during the dissertation. There is a possible hidden curriculum here, which values the independent forms of research traditionally found in the academy over the peer interactions clearly valued in the earlier stages of the program.

**The social structure of the advisor relationship.** While Alex did not discuss the research benefits of being a graduate assistant, there was discussion of the research benefits that came from working so closely with his/her main advisor.

I get a lot of positive reinforcement from my advisor. S/he treats me with great respect to my experience that I’ve had...and the success that I’ve had, and s/he demonstrates that through a lot of different things...as we’ve gone on together. I
mean s/he asks me questions like about, y’know, what do I think about certain things, and s/he treats me as a professional {laughs} and I know that’s in contrast to other people who had not such great experiences and so that’s very positive to me - the relationship that I have with him/her and how s/he treats me as an adult and as a professional. As someone who actually knows something. S/he’s asked me to contribute work to his books, y’know, so that’s very positive just in kind of a professional way. (Interview 1)

While the advisor/advisee relationship is usually part of a clear hierarchical social structure in the academy, Alex’s advisor treated him/her very much like an equal colleague and there was a sense that they made decisions together. Alex did note that the advisor was still in a leadership role in regard to course planning. “As a graduate assistant s/he gives me work to do – s/he’s very cognizant of my time – s/he’ll tell me, you know if this is too much for right now it doesn’t have to be due until whenever, ’but as my academic advisor s/he’s more – s/he’s a little bit more in a leadership role because s/he’s guiding me through this, but yea s/he’s always – s/he never tells me what to do s/he ‘suggests’” (Interview 1). However, while Alex used the word ‘leadership’ role, the experiences s/he conveyed told a story of collaborative advising. Alex explained,

My advisor told me, because when I was talking to him/her and I said I have some electives and I’d like to take some classes dealing with things that are going to push me forward but there’s nothing, and s/he suggested independent studies and I said with whom. Like s/he didn't tell me what to do, but we brainstormed together some different things. (Interview 1)
This quote demonstrated that for Alex and his/her advisor the usual social structures of the academy were muted or non-existent; they collaborated together to make course planning decisions. Alex did however note that the advice was necessary,

Because you don’t know what order to take things and s/he sort of helped me out in the beginning and then when it was time for me turn...in the prospectus/plan of study, my other advisor sort of looked through like what was being offered when and sort of helped me plan out the rest of it. (Interview 1)

Alex experienced most messages about values and norms in the program based around the organization and structure of the program as seen in the experiences s/he had as a full-time graduate assistant and as a part-time student, the anxiety related to initially planning his/her own path through the program before realizing there was a relatively prescribed sequence in his/her specialization, and the new feeling of isolation in the dissertation phase of the program.

Reese

Reese was a full-time student with a designated specialization. At the time of the study Reese was completing dissertation writing and working as a full-time graduate assistant in the program. Reese identified as a teacher, a researcher, a scholar (scholar was defined as being the thinking part of being a researcher), imposter, and upper-middle class person. From the outset, Reese’s educational history was one of conflicting emotions. Reese disliked school early on and saw little relevance in the curriculum during the K-12 years, but still did relatively well at school to appease familial pressures. Reese
also struggled with the social element of education, but began to come out of that shell during undergraduate studies (Interview 2).

**The structure and organization of the program.** Reese was part of a specialization that seemed to have different values than the core program. The specialization was very positivist, while Reese described the core program as progressive; Reese stated that the specialization valued research only, while the core program was perceived by Reese as valuing research as a basis for teaching. The contrasting messages caused an identity struggle for Reese as s/he tried to manage values from both worlds.

I wanted to identify with the core people more than I wanted to identify with the [specialization] people. I also felt like I didn’t fit in particularly well in either world. My identity could not be both. Therefore, I was crappy at each thing.

(Interview 3)

The disconnect between the cultural messages of the core program and the specialization caused Reese to reside in a liminal space where s/he did not know which messages to take on as part of his/her scholarly identities. The hidden curriculum here is seen in the difference between the norms and values of the core program and the specialization, demonstrated by Reese’s discussion of the difference in the types of research that were valued and how research should be undertaken. The program did not seem to provide any support or guidance for the student who resided in two academic worlds, leaving Reese stranded between both. It could also suggest that there is a hidden curriculum communicating that the core program culture is more valued than the specializations, as
shown by the lack of any explicit attempt to bridge the gaps between the interdisciplinary curriculum.

It seemed like the cultures from the program and the specialization were hard to manage for Reese in practical terms, which left Reese residing in a liminal space. However, over time Reese learned to manage the differences by striving to incorporate values from one culture into the other, which in turn broadened his/her own perspectives, and s/he was able to educate others within the cultures while doing that. In practical terms though, the lack of connection between the culture of the core program and the specialization left Reese in a difficult space when trying to find a job in a specific field.

I try and bring something from the other world into each of the worlds. Instead of saying I'm in this world now, I have to be this way, I try and bring my [core program identity] into my designated specialization world. I try and talk about it with people...I always negotiate between this...this is an idea that I like but this might be not be an idea that will make me successful. I don't want to ever go all in one direction. I'm always like, I like this idea so I will take that one, and this idea will make me successful, so I’ll take that one also. Even though they might pit against one another. I try and take from both. (Interview 3)

While the disparity in values between the specialization and core program may have caused a great deal of difficulty for Reese when looking for a job, Reese seemed at the time of the study much more internally comfortable with the differences in culture and values between the specialization and the program. Yet Reese believed the job search process was particularly difficult because of the differences others perceived between the
core program and the specialization, demonstrating the consequences of this element of hidden curriculum.

Before I did my original job search I thought that made me awesome because I’m much more broad than other candidates in my specialization. I think about things differently and not the same as everyone else. Apparently that makes you not as good. (Interview 3)

While Reese came to terms with his/her interdisciplinary nature in the program, there was no guidance on how to frame that kind of identity within a job search. It seems that very little intended curriculum existed in the program for those in specializations that had vastly different values and norms to the core program.

Reese was a graduate assistant who worked for both core program instructors and those in his/her specialization. The graduate assistant work for the core department was challenging because it had nothing to do with his/her specialization, “I worked with so many people, but because I’m not in their specialization they had me do tasks that are just tasks [not research]” (Interview 1). Officially graduate assistants are supposed to take part in work that provides some kind of appropriate professional development and serves the need of the university (PhD handbook, n.d.). Yet Reese felt unable to request any changes to his/her experience; the hidden curriculum was that graduate assistants must do the tasks they are assigned even if they do not include valuable experiences. The assistantship experience for Reese was one steeped in power issues with his/her assistantship supervisor. Even when working as an assistant in his/her specialization,
Reese was unsure why some research work did not yield publications, but s/he felt there was no avenue to ask his/her supervisor for more details:

I felt it wasn’t my place to be like, why aren’t we sending this research article out.

Because s/he does so many things at once that I don't want to...but at the same time I’m like as a grad student we count I think on working with faculty to get some publications. (Interview 1)

Reese also struggled with overworking to try and become more valuable to his/her assistantship supervisor. This experience indicates a clear social structure at work - as a student Reese could not explain to his/her supervisor that the work assigned was unfulfilling or ask for more responsibilities. While this may seem like an obvious structure when working for someone, I think the supervisor relationship in academia is less clear than an employee/employer relationship in the workplace. For example, when Reese was assigned to a supervisor within his/her specialization, that supervisor was also his/her advisor. This added an additional layer of hidden curriculum related to social structures that impacted how Reese was able to act.

Reese also discussed the importance of connections with other graduate assistants in the office they all shared, but like many of the other assistants in the study there was a sense of isolation once the dissertation phase started and Reese was no longer on campus regularly. During coursework, graduate assistants were placed together in an office environment and encouraged to communicate with and support each other. Yet during dissertation and candidacy exam phases Reese reported a move to isolation. During the post-coursework stages Reese craved more interaction with PhD colleagues, stating,
I feel disconnected from everyone. I really liked that social aspect and now I’m craving it. I want to join a book club or something just so I can discuss with people and be around other humans. I feel like now all I do is sit at home and work on my couch. (Interview 1)

The curriculum during the coursework stage, where students work together as assistants, suggested that peer interaction and support was encouraged, while the lived curriculum during the post-coursework phases suggested isolated and independent work were valued. The mixed messages here constitute a hidden curriculum that Reese experienced whereby the program sent mixed messages. The collaborative process of knowledge creation and peer support was the norm in the coursework phase, while the more traditional, isolated ways of research culture were found in the dissertation phase. Once again, the doctoral program seems to be a story of two halves with very different values and norms.

The dissertation phase of study was described by Reese as having language and milestones that had “aggressive” undertones. For example, Reese stated that the word ‘defense’, which is something students do at candidacy exam and dissertation phases, could be called a ‘discussion’ instead. Reese explained, “I don't know of anything else in academia that is a defense so why at PhD level” (Interview 1). The hidden curriculum is clearly demonstrated in the language of the post-coursework stages. The language of the dissertation stage is clearly different than the language in the coursework stage of the program, with the word defense being more aggressive. This language could also be described as more masculine, once again denoting a particularly masculine, positivist
element to the later stages of the program that seemed not to be present during Reese’s experiences in the coursework stage.

**Social structure of the academy.** Reese indicated feeling more at home in the doctoral program than in previous educational stages because at PhD level there was a space for “being a thinker and being reflective” (Interview 1). Reese also identified as researcher. However, without “the bit of paper” confirming his/her PhD, Reese did not feel s/he could be a true researcher. In fact, Reese described being a student researcher as less than or not “as important” as other researchers (Interview 3). For Reese, someone with a PhD seemed to have more ‘power’ in the academy. “In order to be all of these things: the researcher, the practitioner, and the scholar, I feel like I need that piece of paper that says I’m a legitimate person before people will take me seriously” (Interview 3). Yet Reese was still a PhD candidate at the time of the interview, and even though Reese was close to graduation, s/he found this identity frustrating in many ways, “Right now, it’s like all the frustrating parts…I’m realizing that I’m so frustrated with because I have to deal with them another year” (Interview 3). The social structure of the academy is steeped in hidden curriculum about what doctoral students should and should not do and say. The hidden curriculum communicated to Reese that even though s/he identified as a researcher the identity was not real until s/he had the PhD certificate and moved upwards on the social ladder the program and academy. There was a sense that research work did not matter as much without having a PhD.
Reese explained that students could be told “your thinking is wrong. You have thought the wrong thing” (Interview 2) and reported that the advisor/advisee relationship was steeped in power issues, making it a difficult relationship to navigate.

I guess if you were just friends on an equal round you could candidly ask [your advisor] to help you in a certain way or be like, ‘I need a grant or ‘I literally have no idea what I’m doing’. They would not turn around and use it against you at some point in the future when you need letters of recommendation and they’re like, ‘this person has no idea what they are doing’. (Interview 2)

It is not clear if Reese’s view that doctoral students cannot be truly honest with their advisors was something learned during a long educational journey, or if it was introduced or reinforced by the program. The written curriculum of the program structure emphasized the importance of the advisor relationship, but the hidden curriculum reported by Reese is that there are hidden social structures within that relationship, which require navigation on the part of the student. What is not clear, is how students are prepared to work with advisors within that social structure.

**The self.** Reese verbalized explicitly that s/he identified as an imposter. In the quote below it is interesting to note that Reese was worried someone would notice that s/he was an imposter. It is not clear whether the fear was related to advisors and faculty or peers, but it seemed that the imposter syndrome for Reese was connected to the perceptions of others.

I feel like a huge imposter all the time because I am like, ‘What if I don’t know what I am doing, what if I don’t know all the things I need to know about [my
specialization]?... What if I don’t know all the things I need to know about curriculum studies, and what if someone notices that I shouldn’t even be here? (Interview 3)

The imposter syndrome for Reese was closely tied with academic identities in particular, even though Reese said his/her imposter syndrome also existed outside of educational environments, “it’s other areas too. Previously it’s always been whatever school thing I’m doing, I feel like an imposter. Also socially in a social situation” (Interview 3). The imposter syndrome reported by Reese was likely brought with him/her into the program, but that does not mean it was disconnected from hidden curriculum in the program. Reese blamed his/her lack of confidence on his/her personal character and traits, and not messages received from the hidden curriculum, but at the same time s/he also explained that rejection was something inherent in the life of a doctoral student.

You’re in the business of rejection but it’s still meaningful and you’re not only being rejected with your manuscripts and your proposal, but I feel like sometimes you're being rejected by your advisor when you request time and time again, ‘I need to work on grants’ and when no one is offering you to work on grants, it feels like a rejection. (Interview 2)

There is a hidden curriculum that the doctoral program and the academy is steeped in rejection and that this can come in many forms. There is a sense that rejection is something to be expected and accepted. Reese explained that to him/her doctoral students are a little like the adolescents of the academic world; doctoral students (and adolescents) are insecure and unsure, and interactions with faculty and instructors can devastate or
elate based on a mere word or two, “one word in an email and you’re like, Oh my God, what does that word mean, what are they saying?” (Interview 3).

Imposter syndrome for Reese was complicated and integrated with the pressure related to working with a successful advisor, as well as interactions that occurred in classes. For example, Reese explained that his/her advisor’s curriculum vitae “has so much more stuff on it than mine. How did s/he get all these publications? What have I been doing?” (Interview 1). Reese also described a coursework scenario where in one course, existing doctoral students further along in the program were brought in to talk about their experiences. For Reese this was particularly stressful as the students described vast numbers of publications and conference proposals they had achieved, which made Reese feel like that was what s/he had to strive for. “S/he came and talked to our class. S/he was like, ‘I have 18 publications’. I’m like Okay. Then I just felt like giving up because I’m never going to have that. It’s already too late” (Interview 1). In one case an instructor also declared to Reese that his/her student had multiple publications, “you need to be presenting, look at my student, this is only her second semester and she is presenting as [inaudible]. Okay, I’m also presenting at my specializations major conference, but just point out your student for everyone” (Interview 1).

This instructor’s declaration made Reese feel like s/he was not good enough. While the intended curriculum of bringing students into the course was likely intended to be positive and helpful by providing new students with insights from more experienced students, in Reese’s case it was interpreted as a hidden curriculum that created a sense of comparison and competition between the existing students and Reese. Similarly, the
instructor comment about his/her student’s number of publications could have been intended as nothing more than a proud comment or an expression of what can be achieved by the students, but the hidden curriculum was that a bar of success had been set and Reese had to live up to that expectation. While Reese explained imposter syndrome away as a personality trait, and it may well be something s/he brought to the program, it seems that the social structures in the program and the advisor/advisee relationship, alongside the constant rejection inherent in the academy and the curriculum that encouraged comparison between students, acted together to create a hidden curriculum that enhanced an imposter syndrome.

Reese described hiding his/her imposter identity and worked to not draw attention to other identities during his/her time in the program. For example, Reese felt his/her social identity as an upper middle class person in society would be frowned upon in the core program so s/he hid that part of self, stating:

I feel progressive when I’m here and I feel socially progressive in all of my life. Then there’s the hidden part of my political views that I don’t...that’s part of my identity that I don’t bring to school; that I’m from an upper middle class family. I feel like I’m upper middle class but I don’t want to tell that to people. (Interview 3)

For Reese, part of this message may have come internally, but it was reinforced by an instructor interaction when discussing personal, home life. The interaction made Reese feel shame about his/her class identity, causing him/her to decide to hide that identity in future. “I don’t talk about anything that has to do with my home life really” (Interview 3).
For Reese this single interaction acted as a hidden curriculum that his/her identity related to social class would be negatively received.

Reese’s experience of hidden curricula in the program mostly surrounded the social structure within the program. While the written curriculum highlighted the importance of the advisor/advisee relationship, for Reese the relationship included multiple, hidden elements related to power that had to be navigated. In most cases Reese was silenced by these power structures, resulting in some less than satisfactory experiences. Reese was also influenced by the hidden curriculum communicated by the difference in the values of the core program and the specialization, causing Reese to reside for much of his/her experience in an uncomfortable liminal space between the two cultures. While Reese was able to eventually negotiate the two cultures, the lack of coherent identity between the program and specialization caused difficult job searches. Finally, Reese identified as an imposter, suggesting that this was simply an aspect of his/her personality. However, experiences relayed by Reese suggest a hidden curriculum encouraging students to compare themselves to others in the program, thereby reinforcing any existing imposter syndrome.

**Peyton**

Peyton was a part-time student, with no designated specialization near the start of the candidacy exam stage. Peyton identified as a presenter, reader, parent, teacher, researcher, PhD candidate (almost, as s/he had not yet moved to candidacy), PhD student, and the title related to his/her job. Peyton noted that s/he had been good at playing the school game in the earlier stages of his/her formal education, ‘I wanted an A+, I wanted
to be the best of things and I was good at being the best. I always wanted to please everybody” (Interview 2). Peyton had good grades in school but noted that the types of learning changed throughout the educational journey. Using assessments as an example, Peyton explained that during K-12 education the emphasis was on a very low level knowledge, “basic things I need to learn to exist”, while at undergraduate level this developed further into the types of learning related to the whys of education. Then at PhD level, Peyton noted that the learning was completely different. “The basic things are still there, but my understanding of why it existed in the first place is different. It is not only my knowledge that is different, but now I can look back on how and why things were like that in K-12. It’s all different now” (Interview 3).

The structure and organization of the program. Peyton was a part-time student and discussed how this influenced the way s/he approached course planning. Peyton had to load up on summer classes because of his/her full-time job, but noted that often the courses s/he needed were not available. Peyton felt that the difficulty in scheduling courses felt like the opposite of an invitation to be part of the program, “It uninvites people” (Interview 1). Peyton also felt the courses offered after 7pm were uninviting for everyone but very local people because of the additional driving time required later at night. Peyton also noted there were not any Saturday classes offered for students working full-time. There were very few choices for Peyton in terms of sequencing, s/he mostly registered for any course that were offered; if Peyton missed a course, s/he may not have been able to take it again for another academic year in some cases. There is a clear hidden curriculum here. The course schedules, both in terms of the time and days courses are
offered and in terms of how often courses are offered, prohibited the journey that Peyton could take through the program. While part-time students should receive a comparable experience to full-time students, the lack of scheduling opportunities for part-time students suggests they are less valued in the program and have to simply enroll in courses that they can, rather than creating their own journey through the program.

Peyton also stated that, “this whole program is about relationships” (Interview 1), and that was stressful for Peyton because s/he was a part-time student and was not on campus as often, and therefore unable to make some of the connections that were being encouraged. “I can’t just be in the library three days in a row, I have other obligations” (Interview 1). While Peyton was able to make additional efforts to arrive to class a little early to connect with his/her advisor, and connect with some students after classes, s/he still noted that the experience was not the same as for the full-time students. Once again noting the value the program put on peer support, Peyton commented that,

Everyone keeps talking about critical friends and things and I think it's easier to have those people when you're here all the time or a graduate assistant. It's hard all the time when you're working and you can't be here. (Interview 1)

There is clearly a hidden curriculum in the program that peer support is valuable and a norm of the program, and this is likely an intended element of hidden curriculum. However, for part-time students this hidden curriculum sends an additional message that they either have to make additional room in their lives for outside of class peer connections, or they may not be living up to the norms of the program. This also suggests
that the responsibilities of part-time students, who are often women and parents, may be less valued in the program.

Peyton noted that the graduate assistants in the program seemed to have their own community, “they know each other so it's different” and s/he noted that the assistants socialized in an office they all used. Peyton also explained that it was easier for graduate assistants to find out about program resources and support in the program building because they were on campus all the time.

It’s different for people who are on the outside to create any sort of group…because they are not on the inside. But the people who are graduate assistants, they had offices by each other or something, so they all came to class together and it was like, y’know they know more about the way things function.

(Interview 1)

The key word in Peyton’s quote is ‘outsider’. The community of graduate assistants that came to class made Peyton as a part-time student feel like an outsider. Without knowing it, by continuing to interact within their assistantship groups in classes, the assistants themselves may have been reproducing an element of hidden curriculum that valued part-time students as less than full-time graduate assistants.

The self. Peyton noted that there was “a lot of focus on becoming a researcher” in the program, and that “everything keeps coming back to doing more and more research” (Interview 1). This was clear to Peyton in the number of the courses and the focus on research within those courses. Peyton saw him/herself as more of a “translator”, explaining, “I want to take it [research] back and implement things” (Interview 1). In
discussions with instructors Peyton had been sent the message that researcher
conferences were more highly valued than practitioner conferences.

Dr. X said you’ve got to stand outside of a practitioner sandbox and be in that
academic sandbox for a while…but somebody has to be in both sandboxes or the
research just sits there and goes nowhere. (Interview 1)

Peyton’s practitioner preference for research did not seem to be valued in the program.
There was a disconnect between the ways Peyton wanted to disseminate knowledge and
the forms of dissemination valued in the program. For Peyton, the primary goal of
research was to take knowledge back to teachers in a clear and understandable way, and
for Peyton this was not in researcher-led conferences and publications. Peyton described
how in particular, the plan of study form did not value newer forms of disseminating
research that s/he valued. Peyton had experience disseminating knowledge to teachers on
social media, but felt that the plan of study would not find that form of communication
with teachers acceptable. While social media is a useful way to connect with teachers on
the ground in today’s online world, it seems that the culture of the program has not
cought up to this new way of disseminating knowledge, and the hidden curriculum for
Peyton was that traditional, academic ways of disseminating knowledge at conferences
was more highly valued than connecting with teachers online.

Peyton also saw the hidden curriculum emphasizing traditional, academic
research over practitioner research in the demographics of students in Peyton’s courses in
the program. Peyton explained that most students s/he interacted with were not
practitioners, and if they had been they had been out of the classroom for some time,
which likely made them less able or willing to see the value of practitioner research work. The student demographics may also have been one reason why the hidden curriculum existed; without students pushing for more varied forms of research in the program, the hidden curriculum valuing traditional, academic research may have become more entrenched.

Peyton experienced a number of forms of hidden curriculum in the program. Peyton was a part-time student, but the hidden curriculum of the program suggested that part-time students may be less valued than full-time students. This was communicated to Peyton by the difficulties s/he found in course scheduling; courses were often not offered during the summer, on Saturdays, or regularly enough that Peyton had any kind of real choice with course sequence and scheduling. While Peyton specifically stated that his/her family identity was valued in the program, some of the issues Peyton noted related to being a part-time student could represent a devaluing of family identities. Most part-time students, though not all, are working parents, so a curriculum that does not allow many options for scheduling could be seen as a hidden curriculum that in fact does not value family identities. Peyton also strongly identified as a practitioner. However, while the written curriculum in the program did not specify the types of research that students would learn in the program, the hidden curriculum that Peyton experienced through course content, instructor communication, student demographics, and the types of activities s/he could include as professional research development on his/her plan of study all suggested that traditional, academic types of research were valued over practitioner research.
Summary

These case analyses show that while each participant’s experience in the doctoral program was unique, there were elements that were common across the cases. Participants described experiences connected to the structure and organization of the program, social structures inherent in the academy, especially in relation to advising relationships, and experiences that related to the self, such as identify development or difficulties. Broadly these messages were related to three contexts or forms of hidden curriculum within the program: the structure and organization of the program, the social structures in the program, and the student’s own experiences, which acted as a lens through which all new hidden curricula were understood. I describe these forms of hidden curriculum within the context of the cross-case analysis in the next section.

Cross-Case Analysis: Research Question 2

Across the participants’ experiences there were cross-cutting themes related to the messages that students received about the norms and values of the program and the forms of hidden curriculum those messages took. Martin (1994) explains that in order to identify forms of hidden curriculum we must first analyze the students’ experiences, or learning states as Martin (1994) calls them, and from there draw the data back to identify the forms that communicated the hidden curriculum. By reviewing the contexts of the participants’ experiences, specific forms of the hidden curriculum emerged related to the organizational structure of the program, the social structures and relationships involved in the program, and the self.
The Structure and Organization of the Program

The participants in the study discussed many experiences related to messages about and from the structure and organization of the program, including the process used to schedule classes, the way success was tracked, the hidden elements of post-coursework phases of study, and the structure related to part-time student experiences versus full-time graduate assistant experiences. While these elements may seem like innocuous administrative elements of a doctoral program lacking in curriculum to some, the data suggest that the structure and organization of the program is a fundamental aspect of the program curriculum and sends messages about the culture, values, norms, and beliefs of the program.

Course planning. The PhD handbook states that “doctoral programs are highly individualized” (PhD Handbook, n.d.), suggesting that students should have a certain amount of freedom to select electives that will create a unique path through the program. However, in many cases the lived experience for students was that they had to follow a particular sequence of classes and that there were few options to make the course individualized. As Dana explained, “the simple task of scheduling is a conflict…scheduling and the idea of scheduling is really what eventually affects what you will end up doing or doing well” (Interview 1). Depending on the students’ specializations, students in the program were required to enroll in required courses along with elective courses. The plan of study document all doctoral students completed stated that there were only two prerequisite courses that must be taken prior to other courses. However, both Jessie and Blair found that there was an unwritten ‘best’ sequence of
courses in the program. Blair enrolled in a class in his/her first semester and found, “it was like taking a class without any kind of – not necessarily guidance from my advisors, but it would have been helpful if someone would have said, ‘hey you shouldn’t probably take that class until you’re a little more experienced” (Interview 1). While it could be argued that any first class in a doctoral program would be overwhelming, following a particular sequence can be useful. Alex, for example, described how in an advanced research course s/he was able to complete an authentic research study that would inform dissertation work because s/he had enough experience in the program to already know the sort of research s/he intended to undertake, while other students in the class who were newer to the program “did not feel that way because they were not at the point that I was, and had to just pull something out of their ear” (Interview 1).

The message from the explicitly written curriculum was that there were required courses that needed to be completed at some point in the program, yet beyond that students could select courses that met their interests and moved them towards their unique goals in any sequence they chose; it was normal for students to create unique paths through the program. However, in reality there was an unwritten sequence that would best scaffold the required courses and create the most successful path to complete the program. This sequencing path was not written anywhere, but students learned about the sequence, too late for Blair and Jessie, from peers in the program. Therefore, the course planning documents are a source of hidden curriculum that do not give the whole picture. One possible reason for this may be that the program intended to value and encourage a unique journey through the program for each student, encouraging students
to concentrate on their doctoral program learning process, rather than checking-off required courses; however, the curriculum as lived by these students suggested a ‘best case’ sequence through the program, which if not completed, left some students struggling.

It should also be noted that independent studies were mentioned by a number of participants (Dana, Alex, Reese, Sam, Jordan, Blair, and Taylor). Independent studies provided students with the opportunity to work individually with an instructor to study a topic that they had a specific interest in that may not have been part of the formalized coursework. The format of individual studies varied from instructor to instructor based on the needs of the student. Alex’s advisor suggested an independent study when they concluded there were no formal classes related to Alex’s proposed research. Alex explained,

I took independent studies that I made up with professors that would help me. One instructor let me have access to his class and to make it doctoral level he and I negotiated some other things, and I wrote a proposal as an independent study. I did two of those with him. I did one where he let me have all the articles he gives his classes but I did my own reading and wrote up summaries and talked with him, along with a final project. And then my second one with him was more along the line of my own literature review, and then I did another independent study going out into schools. (Interview 1)

Similarly, Dana and Blair enrolled in independent studies to conduct research with their advisors. For Dana this mostly involved working independently and then checking in
with the advisor when necessary. Sam, however, described taking an “independent study to replace a class that wasn’t going to be offered when I wanted to do it or needed it” (Interview 2) as did Reese. “A lot of the time my specialization classes got cancelled because there weren’t enough people. I would have to do an independent study and for me that’s worthless because everything good that I get out of class comes from discussion with other humans” (Interview 1).

The use of independent studies suggests once again that the program values students making an individualized program that meets their goals and motivations. However, when this option is used primarily as a filler to fix scheduling issues, as was the case for Sam and Reese the independent study became part of a hidden curriculum, suggesting that course scheduling is a restrictive and difficult process that requires a filler course, such as an independent study.

There is also no mention of independent studies on the course planning documents or in the program’s PhD handbook for students, yet there is a course number in the scheduling system for independent studies, making it seem like it is an intended part of the curriculum, but one that is hidden from students. Whether students are told about independent studies seems dependent on each individual advisor and whether they see fit to provide that as an option in course planning. In some cases, perhaps, the students hear about another student taking an independent study and bring it to their advisor to discuss, meaning that this option of study is reliant on information that is unwritten in places a student is likely to find it. Independent studies may therefore constitute a form of hidden curriculum, because while they are intended as unique
independent experiences for students to gain knowledge in a specific area, they are not always used in that way; the intended curriculum with independent studies does not always match with the lived use of independent studies making it a part of a hidden curriculum. The fact that independent studies are an intended tool in course planning, but that they rely on advisors and peers to communicate that to students means that while intended, there is a hidden element to this curriculum.

**Grades.** One element of the program structure discussed by some participants was the tracking of achievement by the use of letter grades in the program. Participants in this study had traditionally assessed their achievements in formal education through the use of grades. For example, in a discussion on grades and why grades may be an important indicator for success, Kerry said “it stems from kindergarten, first grade, I was always a good student” (Interview 3). Other students also conflated grades with being a good student. Alex stated that s/he identified as an academic person, and when asked where that identity emerged from Alex stated, the first time you start getting grades in school. I was always successful...I always got whatever was the highest” (Interview 2), and Sam remembers grades as being “super important. I think that they’ve always been very important, definitely in K-12 and then as an undergraduate” (Interview 2).

What was particularly interesting in the data was that many participants discussed grades as unimportant at the doctoral level. For example, Jamie stated, “I didn’t realize grades didn’t matter” (Interview 1). When asked where this message came from, Jamie explained that it came from “graduate assistants that are further into the program”
(Interview 1). However, other students reported that instructors communicated to them the message that grades at the PhD level do not matter. Robin explained,

Doctor X has really been pivotal in that. He explains how grades really aren’t what’s important and I find that freeing and fantastic and right. Because the demands of the doctoral program, I’ve had to worry much less about grades. If we were being graded, I’d be fine with a C now. (Interview 2)

Here Robin suggests that the devaluing of grades provides a sense of freedom to worry about the product less and concentrate on the journey as a whole. It is important to note though that the program has a formally communicated curriculum suggesting that grades do in fact count. Grades are used to track student success in each course and to calculate a Grade Point Average (GPA), and each student must maintain a certain GPA (3.0) to move forward in the program (Graduate Handbook, n.d.). Though the official curriculum has an expectation that students will obtain a certain grade level, there is also clearly a hidden curriculum that grades do not matter communicated in the contradiction between the course design, syllabi, and handbook and the interactions with instructors and stories by peers. Once again there seem to be two disparate worlds here. The hidden curriculum, which may be intentional but is not written anywhere, is part of a world where grades are not important and students are encouraged to concentrate on the process of their journey, while the written curriculum suggests a traditional, structuralist world of formal education where grades are used to pitch students against each other in competition and stratification.
**Specializations.** Ten of the 12 participants were enrolled in designated specializations. For some of these students there was little to no discussion of the specialization as a primary impact on their experience, but for others there was a definite sense that being enrolled in a specialization during the coursework phase impacted their experience a great deal. As described in their case summaries, Jordan and Reese were both impacted by being enrolled in a designated specialization. For Jordan the impact was mostly related to how those within the core program department viewed his/her specialization, while for Reese there was a clear sense that being enrolled in a specialization with very different norms and values to the core program caused an internal identity struggle.

While the intended and explicit curriculum is that students can enroll in a number of designated specializations to enhance the education degree and match students’ interests (the course website lists a possible 22 specializations), there seems to have been little consideration of how the culture of each specialization may match or contrast with the core program, and what kinds of cognitive dissonance this might cause for the students. Jordan noted that the norms of the core program valued teacher research in particular, while this was not the focus that s/he wanted to take in relation to his/her field, and Reese also discussed the fact that different types of research were valued in his/her specialization versus the core program. The source of the hidden curriculum here is the conflict between the two sets of cultural messages and the lack of any written curriculum on how students should manage those cultures in the creation of their scholarly identity.
**Stages of the PhD.** As might be expected, some participants did not understand what a candidacy exam or dissertation was when they first entered the program. Jessie explained, “you come in...and you don’t know anything. I didn’t, I mean, I didn’t know what a dissertation was. I didn’t know. I had no clue so everything was a surprise to me” (Interview 1), while Kerry agreed, “if you had asked me before I started...I didn’t know what a dissertation was, and then what are you going to write a dissertation on?” (Interview 1), and Blair said that s/he “didn’t know what to expect” (Interview 2) at the start of the program. However, once socialized to the program, students had more of an idea about the basic format of the post-coursework phases, but there was still a great deal that was not known by the participants about the candidacy exam and dissertation phases. For example, Sam explained that s/he needed to learn more about the candidacy exam phase before that milestone was upon him/her in the following semester, while Kerry explained that s/he had not thought about the post-coursework phase until s/he was done with classes. “You're going along and not thinking about it and now we're in our last semester going, "Oh my God. We've got to do this?" (Interview 2).

Even with a handle on the expectations of the post-coursework phases, Reese still noticed the differences and contrast in norms between coursework and candidacy exams and dissertation. Reese couldn’t “even imagine getting to that place (post-coursework).” As s/he explained,

How am I supposed to write my candidacy exam and pass them and defend them? The defending things was and still is this hugely fearful thing for me because I don’t like confrontation. The word defense in itself is like, well you’re
automatically going to fail so you defend yourself before we throw you in the snake pit...it’s not like discussion, which it should be called, but it’s like we already think you’re horrible so you better come up with a good defense.

(Interview 1)

The participants also discussed differences between the coursework and post-coursework stages of the PhD. One difference discussed was the isolated nature of the candidacy exam and dissertation phases as opposed to the coursework phase, which encouraged peer interaction. During the coursework phase there was a sense from participants that peer interactions and collaboration with other students was highly valued by the program and was an expected norm. For example, Alex said that classes were “set-up for more intellectual discussion and thinking”, while Jordan explained that one professor in the program was “trying to get a critical group” up and running. Peyton, Dana, and Kerry all discussed the fact that they needed (or were encouraged to seek out) critical friends as part of the coursework phase of study. However, the encouragement for peer connections in the coursework phase was missing in the post-coursework phases. Though faculty may have expected that the relationships developed in coursework would carry on, there was no structure in place to prepare students for the more isolated nature of the post-coursework stages, which meant that students felt alone during the dissertation stage.

Jordan explained that not being in a central location may have been part of the issue, but that being disconnected was almost part of the expectation at this later stage of study. For Jordan there was separation from peers s/he would have previously interacted with daily in classes. For some, the experience of no longer having the connection to
other graduate assistants in the office on a daily basis and students in class regularly was very isolating. Reese felt “disconnected from everyone. I really liked that social aspect and now I’m craving it. I want to join a book club or something just so I can discuss with people and be around other human beings. I do miss the socialness and feeling like I belonged to a certain group within the doc student collective” (Interview 1). Alex stated, “I mean, I’m still seeing my friends socially and it’s great to have that, but I don’t see them on a regular basis like I did” (Interview 1).

While not written anywhere, it was clear from the hidden curriculum communicated by course content and instructor strategies that peer interaction and collaboration were an important element of the coursework stage, yet the candidacy exam and dissertation phases were by their very nature individual activities. In this case the two contrasting curricula constitute a hidden curriculum; students are taught that the norm during coursework is collaboration and interaction and then the post-coursework stages completely changes that and values the norm of completing research in an independent fashion. The additional element of hidden curriculum is that students do not have sufficient knowledge of the post-coursework stages before they are undertaking them, therefore students cannot prepare for the more individual nature of the curriculum.

By shrouding the curriculum of candidacy exams and dissertation in hidden curriculum, the program raises the stakes for and stress levels of the PhD students, which works to separate the students who are more likely to persevere and succeed versus those who will drop-out from the pressure (Golde, 2005, p. 693). While none of the participants in my study dropped out because of the unknown elements in the post-coursework stages
of the program, it is also not clear if this hidden curriculum “spurred some students into a period of introspection and reassessment” (Golde, 2005, p. 694) or if it simply made for years of anxiety prior to the completion of coursework. This hidden curriculum could also relate to the assumption that students will become faculty after graduation. By leaving later stages of the program hidden, the curriculum may be preparing doctoral students for the anxiety and stress that will be part of working in the academy. The two contrasting curricula in each stage of the program could also constitute the types of work that students who become faculty working in higher education will need to undertake. Most faculty undertake collaborative work in one form or another, but the tenure process in the academy requires an individualistic perspective to succeed.

Whatever the intention, the post-coursework stages of the doctoral program also differ drastically from the coursework phase in the terminology and language used within the context of those phases, adding to the hidden elements of this curriculum. Reese was only participants who explicitly noted this, when s/he commented that the word defense, which is generally not part of the coursework phase lexicon but which is part of both the candidacy exam and dissertation stages of study, is a somewhat aggressive term bringing to mind the need to defend oneself when they “throw you in the snake pit” (Reese, Interview 1). One possible reason for this more competitive language could be because of the masculine influence on the academy. The academy originated and was organized around men (Smith, 1995), and it was only later that women began to be admitted to higher education. The language used in relation to the candidacy exam and dissertation defenses may illustrate a residual value from the male creation of the academy.
If we consider the history of the academy where traditionally objectivist knowledge that was “factual, measurable, and replicable” and often associated with males (Bai, Cohen & Scott, 2013, p. 7) was valued over female, subjective ways of knowing connected to “human values, desires, intuition, and feeling” (Bai, Cohen & Scott, 2013, p. 7) it may be that the isolated, independent nature of the current dissertation format devalues collaboration and social connections that are more closely aligned with subjective ways of knowing. This could be one way that the curriculum in the program emphasizes the “values of an established predominantly white, male-oriented, middle class academic environment” (Gair & Mullins, 2001, p. 36). Examining the program curriculum as a whole based on the students’ experiences, it seems that the coursework phase of the PhD program has evolved to the place where the curriculum embraces and emphasizes peer interaction in various ways and for different purposes while the candidacy exam and dissertation phases remain artifacts from a time when objective knowledge created in isolation and presented in a traditional written form was valued over subjective, collaborative knowledge and different ways of knowing, researching, and reporting. There are two hidden curricula at play in the program sending different and contrasting messages about what it means to be a scholar.

**Graduate assistants valued over part-time students.** There were five part-time doctoral students in this study and four of them discussed experiences related to feeling the program treated part-time students differently in some way than full-time students. Peyton, a part-time student, explained that s/he had to load up on summer classes because s/he did not have the time to take a full class load each semester with a family and a full-
time job, while Robin and Blair discussed how the structure of classes made life difficult as part-time students. Many of the students discussed the importance of peer relationships (Kerry, Dana, Alex), and Peyton noted that instructors encouraged the idea that connections were important, but that was more difficult as a part-time student:

From the beginning, Dr. X. talked about relationships and this whole program has been about that, and that has been a huge stress for me. Because how do I build relationships and get into the building and be on campus when I’m not?

(Interview 1)

Robin agreed, explaining that for a part-time student to meet another student before or after class they had to add an additional task to their daily schedule. However, the one area where part-time students seemed to feel most devalued was in comparison to full-time students who were also graduate assistants.

Graduate assistantships in the program “are designed both to serve the needs of the University and to assist in the professional development of the student” (Application, n.d.), and it was the professional development opportunities provided to graduate assistants that the part-time students noted as a component missing from their own doctoral program experience. Kerry, for felt the graduate assistants “had a little bit of an upper hand...they had more research done” (Interview 2), suggesting a certain amount of competition between graduate assistants and part-time students in regard to completing research. Peyton agreed and explained that graduate assistants also seemed to know more about the resources available in the building the program resided in.
Alex’s experience as someone who started the program as a part-time student and then became a full-time student demonstrated the stark contrast in the experiences between part-time students and graduate assistants. As a part-time student Alex felt lonely and not a part of things, yet when Alex became a graduate assistant, s/he described a very different experience, where s/he became more social and could connect with others going through the same things in the program.

There was a written curriculum in the program that students must complete a ‘residency’ requirement. The handbook states that:

The purpose of residency is to provide doctoral students professional experiences in addition to their programs of coursework and previous employment activities. Residency is directed toward enabling the doctoral student to move beyond coursework toward internalizing and personalizing scholarship. (PhD Handbook, n.d.)

The handbook acknowledges that residency may look different on a program by program basis, and notes that it may be particularly difficult for part-time students to achieve:

The traditional definition of residency (living in the academic environment for a full academic year) assumes that the student will acquire the attributes of a scholar and professional through acculturation. While such an experience is of great value in developing colleagueship and providing opportunity for more intensive study, it does not by itself guarantee synthesis. For part-time doctoral students whose roles and responsibilities make it virtually impossible to engage in full-time, campus-based study, achieving synthesis is an especially great
challenge, and the need for programmatic assistance is particularly acute. (PhD Handbook, n.d.)

While the written intended curriculum suggests that part-time students will receive additional programmatic support to conduct research and produce residency, in many cases the data from part-time students suggested that this did not occur, with the discrepancy indicating a form of hidden curriculum. However, it should be noted that one part-time student reported a great deal of independent work with his/her advisor (Dana), so this may not be the case for all students. The data in this study suggest that part-time students generally do not feel they are achieving a comparable research and professional development experience to their graduate assistant counterparts. It is important to note that the disparity here is not between full-time and part-time students, but between graduate assistants and part-time students.

There are very few full-time non graduate assistants in the program, and the nature of a graduate assistantship provides a desk and area for students to work daily. This work environment along with the tasks students undertake as a graduate assistants supporting faculty are the main characteristics that part-time participants described as different from their own. It is possible that opportunities for additional research and professional development exist for part-time students in the program and they simply do not take them because of their other life commitments. However, while additional professional development and research activities may be offered to students it does not provide the same experience as being immersed in the environment of the institution on a nearly daily basis, as with graduate assistants.
Part-time students also felt that they were less valued because of the curriculum in the coursework phase, which valued staying after class or conducting group work outside of class, which was much more difficult for part-time students. While the written curriculum suggests programmatic elements are in place to provide additional experiences for part-time students, the lived experiences of the doctoral students in the program suggest that these experiences are not fully built-into the program; the hidden curriculum of coursework suggests that the norm is to stay before and after class to connect with peers, and that full-time students who can create more outside of class connections with peers may be valued over part-time students because of this. There is a hidden curriculum that part-time students are not the primary focus of the PhD program, which can be seen in forms such as instructors telling part-time students that they should connect with peers outside of class, having course requirements for out of class meetings and group work, and the additional residency requirements in the program. While part-time students felt they missed some of the opportunities afforded to graduate assistant students, they did note that they connected with their demographic group of part-time students in a similar way to graduate assistants and that each created small communities within the broader student group.

**Social Structure and Interactions with Others**

For all students, regardless of specialization, it became clear in the data that many of the participants had experiences connected to the fact that as students in a PhD program, they were part of a normative social structure that placed students very near the bottom of an academic hierarchy. A hierarchical structure is a part of an academic culture
we learn from a young age when we attend formal schooling. Dana, Robin, and Reese in particular drew attention to the structures in place when they all described doctoral students as ‘peons’ in the academic hierarchy. Reese also highlighted how a supervisory relationship can be complicated by power structures when s/he explained, “this person [the supervisor] is acting like they are your friend. But there could come a time when you do bad work or something and then the power relationship will unveil itself.” (Reese, Interview 2).

Jamie and Jessie, who considered their advisors (and in Jamie’s case assistantship supervisors) mentors and friends, also noted the social structures involved in those relationships. Jamie explained that s/he had to adjust the way s/he worked to meet his/her assistantship supervisor’s needs “because that’s my job...I work FOR him/her essentially” (Jamie, Interview 1), while Jessie explained that s/he had to hold back parts of herself for fear of offending his/her advisors. While doctoral students are encouraged to build relationships with their advisors, the power that advisors have within the advisory relationship seemed never far from the surface, whether openly acknowledged or not.

While the social structure of the academy is something that seems inherent in formal education and expected when more experienced individuals, faculty, are paid to impart knowledge to their less experienced students, one of the primary areas where the hidden social structures of the program can be found is within the advisor/advisee relationship. Advisors have power over a student, and the data suggest that students have a variety of experiences with their advisors, both positive and negative. Participants experienced collegiality, collaboration, frustration, lack of communication, and power
dynamics in various forms, and it soon became clear that each advisor/advisee relationship was unique.

**Working with an advisor.** The advisory relationship is crucial to a doctoral student’s success. As already discussed, during coursework students rely on advisors for course planning guidance, but advisors can also provide research experiences, conference presentation support, they write candidacy exam questions, and assist with dissertation planning. The advisor is fundamental to the whole doctoral program process, and never more so than in dissertation phase when students work with their advisor more than anyone else. However, the nature and helpfulness of that relationship relies on the compatibility of the advisor and student and a negotiation of expectations (Acker, 2001). Blair summed up the importance of compatibility with an advisor when s/he stated, “I don't know if there has to be a certain kind of chemistry between advisors, but there really wasn't between us” (Interview 1). Blair was also unsure how to proceed when s/he realized the advisory relationship was not working, implying that there could be negative consequences if a successful relationship with an advisor was not created. Other participant experiences, such as those had by Alex, Dana, and Jordan reported successful relationships with their advisors, but even in those cases there was an indication of pressure for students to adjust their work and identities to match those of their advisors.

Jordan and Reese reported a certain amount of pressure to adjust their practices and identities to match those of their advisors. Reese stated that s/he was told s/he “had to do what my advisor was doing for my dissertation. I had to do this. I wanted to do this and they told me I can’t, that is not part of the specialization…. because I’m stubborn I
did it anyway” (Interview 3). When students worked with assistantship supervisors (this was sometimes the same person who was the assigned academic advisor) there were additional power issues at play. Jamie talked about having a strong relationship with his/her graduate assistant supervisors, one of whom was also his/her academic advisor, saying that “they’re fabulous, I love them” (Interview 1). However, when problems arose because of the different working styles between Jamie and one of the graduate assistant supervisors, Jamie adjusted the way s/he worked to better match the style of the supervisors and did not consider for a second that the supervisors might make a change.

This change in behavior is an expectation of being a student subordinate to a faculty member and illustrates the social structure inherent in the assistantship supervisor, and to a lesser extent the academic advisor relationships; an advisor has power over a student and a graduate assistant supervisor especially is seen as less an advisor and more as a ‘boss’. This situation becomes even more complicated when one or more of the academic advisors also act as graduate assistant supervisors to their advisees, as in Jessie, Jamie, Reese, Alex, and Jordan’s cases. This adds an employer/employee element to the already complicated social structure. Reese seemed more aware than most of the normative structures involved in the advisor and assistantship supervisor relationships, noting that as a graduate assistant s/he did not feel able to ask for different kinds of work, and that when it came to planning projects and research with supervisors “because we’re graduate assistants, we don’t count as full people, so we don't get to be involved” (Interview 2).
The benefit of a successful advisory relationship was discussed by Jordan who described an instance when his/her advisor’s colleagues supported him/her at a recent conference. “Seeing people who you respect, and you read their work, and their ideas changed your mind and your life, and they come to your conference presentation...And you think well maybe I can do this” (Jordan, Interview 1). Jordan’s description shows how the relationship built with an advisor can have long-lasting implications for the success of the doctoral student; advisors are clearly a crucial part of a doctoral experience.

The written and explicit curriculum in the program is that the advisor relationship is very important, but the hidden curriculum suggests that there are multiple structures involved in the advisor relationship that students have to learn to navigate. There is no guidance on this for the students, making it a part of hidden curriculum. The disparity in each participant’s advisory experiences may be connected to a hidden curriculum connected to how advisors are assigned. When students enroll in the program they are assigned to one or two advisors. Later in the dissertation phase there is a single advisor who acts as a chair of the dissertation committee, but in some cases there may also be a co-chair. Most participants when discussing the coursework stage spoke primarily about one of their two advisors, suggesting there was a primary advisor who influenced their experience, but there were experiences that mentioned the second advisor. Alex, for example, discussed occasions when the second advisor was particularly helpful:

My other advisor, s/he sort of looked through like what was being offered when, and sort of helped me plan the rest of it. I don’t see him/her much, s/he’s my
secondary advisor, but s/he’s the one who was kind of pushing, you’ve got to get this course in, you’ve got to get this course in, so s/he sort of helped me push the plan of study through (Interview 1).

For other students who discussed two advisors there was a sense that when one advisor was unhelpful, the other could be relied upon to assist. Jessie explained that as s/he developed relationships with both advisors, a stronger relationship seemed to develop with the second advisor, though s/he valued both relationships highly. “Interestingly in the last few months, the second advisor has kind of helped me; we’ve helped each other synthesize both of these strands of research” (Interview 1). Jessie’s advisors seemed to utilize different approaches to advising. In one case the advisor embraced a mentorship model for advising, meeting with the participant outside of class and becoming a confidant of sorts. The second advisor approach was more academic in nature, but still helpful to Jessie. In a more extreme example, Blair described an experience where, “one advisor does not respond to my communication at all and when s/he does choose to respond, it’s very limited feedback...but with the one advisor, I’ll send him/her an email and I get an immediate response” (Interview 1). It seems then that there may be no single approach or framework used for advisor support in the program. Blair also pointed to a possible element of hidden curriculum related to the assigning of advisors:

I think personal and/or professional interests are getting in the way of the advisor’s obligations to me. S/he was appointed to me, s/he was not selected by me, and I wonder if…. now my other two advisors...I picked them, I asked them, but s/he was unfortunately someone that was appointed to me by the university.
When I came in s/he was my advisor, so I don't know if it’s like they pick them randomly, like here’s the next set of doctoral students coming in, you’re assigned to these four or whatever. (Interview 1)

Blair explained here that s/he does not know how the advisors were assigned, suggesting that the assignment of advisor to advisee is a form of hidden curriculum. Students do not know why they were assigned to their specific advisors, or if they have any common ground on which students can try to reach out and connect with their advisor. This adds an additional layer of hidden structure to the advisor/advisee relationship.

In most cases, when students enter the program they are assigned to two academic advisors, but there is no indication in the PhD handbook how these advisors are assigned. Students who have difficulties with their advisors are able to change them at any point in the coursework stage, also called the advisory phase. However, approaching an advisor to ask to change to another advisor is not an easy thing for a student. I have already discussed the clear social structure of the program hierarchy, where students feel like “peons” and instructors and advisors have power over students, so changing advisors is not as easy as the handbook may suggest. Blair went through the difficult process of considering a change in advisors, reporting that s/he was concerned that there would be no going back from that kind of decision, and that s/he only became aware that changing advisors was a possibility after hearing it from peers. The PhD handbook states that, “if a plan of study has been filed and the student wishes to change the Advisory Committee, an Advisory Phase Committee Revision Form must be submitted” (PhD Handbook, n.d.) but provides no other guidance on this process or how normal it is to change an advisor. As
students move from candidacy to residency (from the coursework phase to the dissertation phase) they may select a new advisor, as stated by the PhD handbook.

“Normally the advisory phase major advisor serves as the dissertation director, but the student may change to another faculty member from the same doctoral program area” (PhD Handbook, n.d.), but again there is no formal advice for dealing with the social structures involved as a student essentially dismisses an advisor. The handbook also does not state clearly whether and how students should approach changes prior to the submission of the plan of study, leaving students in the very early stages of coursework in an unknown space. The PhD handbook does not address the interpersonal elements of changing advisors, or how it will impact a student’s place and reputation in the program. While the written curriculum states that students can change advisors as they see fit, there is no guidance on how to do that within the social structures of the program. This is therefore an element of hidden curriculum in the advisory curriculum that may dissuade students from leaving a negative advisory relationship.

**Advisor support in course planning.** The plan of study for the program explains that the, “committee members guide candidates through courses and professional experiences. Committee members ensure that candidates exceed requirements and receive a full, well-rounded education, specific to their interests and inquiries” (Program Prospectus, n.d.), and the PhD handbook explains that an advisor will “play an important role in the planning of the doctoral program” (PhD Handbook, n.d.). Working closely with an advisor to design a plan of study is clearly an important part of the advisor/student relationship. As already noted, navigating the required courses in a
particular sequence is important to success, and advisors can guide students on how to do that. Advisors can also communicate information not written elsewhere, such as how to enroll in independent studies, and help students navigate the often complicated paperwork and administration that goes with moving through the milestones in a doctoral program. When advisors worked closely with students in course planning, participants report appreciating the support and help. For example, Sam explained that his/her advisors “are helpful with course planning” and that “they’re very good at reminding me if I have anything I need to turn in” (Sam, Interview 2), while Dana explained, “my courses are driven by what I want to know and what my advisors say I may need to know” (Interview 1), and Taylor realized after the first semester that “uh oh, I should keep in touch with my advisors more, and I cannot just hear what other people say because my advisors are actually the people who will give me the most helpful answers and information” (Interview 1). Yet in some cases there was little support for course planning from advisors. Blair explained that s/he had “little guidance” when enrolling in his/her first semester’s courses so s/he just:

   Looked at what was required of us. I think I had the prospectus in front of me and that’s how I chose the two classes. Class A was required before you could take Class B, but Class C didn’t have any prerequisites, and I don’t know, it was available...so I just picked it. (Interview 1)

Jessie had a similar experience and explained that the reason s/he signed up for one course early on in his/her sequence was because his/her advisor never returned an email
requesting advice. These data illustrate the importance of advisor guidance in course planning.

While the explicit and written curriculum in the program states that students are required to meet with their advisor by the end of the first semester, the amount and type of support they will receive is not written anywhere. Participants in the study had a variety of experiences when working with their advisors, some were very positive, some satisfactory, and others negative. One reason for this could be the lack of negotiation on the part of the advisor and advisee about the boundaries and nature of the advisor relationship. The participants in my study did not specifically discuss negotiating expectations with advisors or being provided with guidelines or assistance in traversing this complicated relationship. In general, in doctoral programs students and advisors are given little guidance on what is expected of them and the boundaries of the advisor/advisee relationship. These issues then “lurk, unaddressed” (Acker, 2001, p. 67) as part of a hidden curriculum. The participants in my study did not discuss how they became aware of the expectations in the advisor/advisee relationship and I could find no mention of expectations or negotiating boundaries in the PhD handbook. It appears that there is an intended curriculum related to the advisor in the program curriculum, but that there are hidden elements inherently intertwined with the social structures in the academy, the way advisors are assigned, and the expectations of both advisor and advisee, which makes this a form of curriculum hidden in “plain sight” (Gair & Mullins, 2001). While the importance of the advisor relationship is intended, the structure of that relationship and how that relationship plays out for each advisor/advisee partnership is
only loosely planned and is hidden to doctoral students (and in some cases to the
advisor).

**The Self**

As described in the methodology for this study, knowledge is something that is
socially constructed; there is no one true experience, there is only each person’s
interpretation of every lived experience understood through the lens of the self. The
participants’ educational selves had been developed and nurtured over a long formal
educational history, culminating in their doctoral program experience. In many ways that
educational history, as well as other factors such as gender, culture, age, race, and
religion, impact how the participants interpreted both explicit curricular messages and
those from the hidden curriculum. The self was most clearly seen in the data related to
the students’ identity changes and development during the program and the occasions
where some participants used their agency to resist some of the messages about values
and norms in the program communicated by the hidden curriculum.

**Research identities.** Only four of the participants identified as researchers
without any prompting (Jordan, Alex, Reese, and Peyton). When I asked the others about
a possible researcher identity most of the respondents noted it was part of the doctoral
student or candidate identities (Jessie, Dana, Kerry, and Blair), or it was an identity that
had not yet fully emerged but participants hoped it would in the future (Jamie and
Taylor). Sam commented that s/he did not identify as a researcher because s/he had not
been conducting what s/he called “big” research, the kind of research people do as a job,
while Robin thought s/he “should” identify as a researcher but it just was not something
s/he was that interested in. While it is difficult to know whether students brought their ideas about what constituted ‘real’ research into the program, or whether this was a message communicated by the program, the participants described the high value of research in the program. Alex commented:

I do think they [the program] value research...I know the professors I had were always trying to get people to come on articles with them or book chapters and researching things. Were they doing that because they had to produce? I think in the program that I’m in, I think it’s still the push that they have to research, then it trickles down to the candidate to do it with them or do it for them. (Interview 3)

Alex’s comment not only speaks to the value of research in the program, but to the connection between research and the faculty role that students may take after graduation. Alex suggests that faculty need to constantly produce research for their tenure files, which could indicate why research is so highly valued in the program; if the program is preparing future faculty, they would need to prepare students to produce.

The high value on research in the program was unproblematic for participants with a research focus, but for participants with a strong practitioner identity there was a sense that those practitioner identities were less valued. I suggest that the disconnect between developing a research identity and the research practices in the program may have been why so few students identified as researchers. For example, Jamie made the important point that s/he identified much more as a practicing teacher and so forgot that s/he was now a researcher, and s/he did not think that a researcher and teacher identity could go hand in hand. I argue that one reason why the participants did not identify as
researchers may be because the program did not value practitioner and others kinds of educational research as highly as it valued what I will call traditional, academic research forms, which usually exist within a positivist framework. Peyton, for example, described ongoing conversations with his/her advisor who encouraged Peyton to move away from translating research for practitioners and to move towards more traditional forms of research and dissemination, while Jamie also noted an emphasis on research over teaching. I suggest that this “mismatch” (Golde, 2005, p. 681) between the types of research students were interested in and valued, and the type of research included in the curriculum of the program may have been part of the reason why most participants did not identify as researchers.

One reason that the program may have so highly valued traditional forms of research over others connects to the origins of the academy, which traditionally valued more scientific, quantitative types of research and knowledge. For example, of the four required research courses prescribed in the program, two were quantitative based and one was qualitative based, suggesting a slight preference towards valuing a more positivist type of research.

Another possible reason for the concentration on a traditional forms of research in the program curriculum might be connected to the assumption that all students would go on to work in academia, where research is important. Jamie explained that “there’s certainly much more of a focus on research, obviously, than there is on teaching...I think they’re pretty point blank - if you want to get a job, the first thing they’re going to look at is...where have you published” (Interview 1). The mission of the PhD program on the
website simply states that “educational research” is an integral part of the program (Doctoral, n.d.), while the residency plan in the PhD handbook states that each program provides, “personalized scholarship through the following broad types of intensive activity: 1. Examination / analysis of various forms of investigation. 2. Examination/analysis of issues, problems, and trends within and across practice and research” (PhD handbook). These descriptions act as a written curriculum that seems to value practitioner research along with other types of research. However, the participants in this study reported a lived experience that included messages from course content and faculty communications that doctoral students need to move beyond their practitioner identities to be successful. Intertwined with the hidden curriculum valuing traditional forms of research over practitioner research, is a hidden curriculum that students are being prepared for employment as professors in the academy, and not to become educational leaders in non-university positions.

Jamie was not the only participant to note that there was an expectation in the program that students would graduate and continue working in higher education. Alex stated that “everyone just assumes you're going to pursue university positions, I think” (Interview 1), and indeed more of the participants than not discussed career aspirations related to the academy (Reese, Jessie, Harley, Sam, Jordan, Dana, Jamie, Blair). However, other participants had aspirations outside of the academy (Peyton, Alex, Taylor, Kerry). The written curriculum of the program does not specifically state that all students will go on to work in academia where they will conduct research. The program website explicitly states that “the Doctor of Philosophy program prepares students for a
wide range of possibilities in higher education employment” (Doctoral, n.d.), and the program plan of study says that the program is “the process of attaining a PhD….academic in nature and understood as rigorous preparation for a future life in, or in close relationship to, research and scholarship” (PhD Prospectus, n.d.), though it does not specify the type of research students are being prepared for. Leaving these vague descriptions aside, the message communicated to students in the program seemed to be that most students would (or should) enter higher education as faculty upon graduation. Part of this assumption is that students need to be prepared to complete specific forms of research, and this could be another reason why traditional forms of research seemed to be more highly valued in the program over practitioner-based forms of inquiry. Four of the 12 participants expressed goals to work outside of the academy upon completion of the program, yet their goals seemed not to be represented by the written or lived curricula in the program. Those participants who want to stay firmly in the practitioner research field do not see their work valued as highly as other kinds of research in the program. The curriculum communicating how students might use research after graduation and the types of research present in the program represent hidden curricula that could explain why participants did not identify as researchers even though most of the participants specifically mentioned research classes as the most enjoyable and worthwhile in the program.

**Family identities.** During Interview 3 participants discussed their various identities, discussing both academic identities and those valued outside of their academic work. While students did not explicitly describe any identities that were devalued or
rejected by the curriculum of the PhD program, it was interesting to note the ways that some ‘outside’ of the program identities were kept separate by students from the identities related to the PhD program. In particular identities related to family life and roles were described as quite separate to academic identities.

Once again it is hard to ascertain whether the participants brought with them the belief that family identities did not belong in the classroom or whether these were created as part of a hidden curriculum in the program. The participants were quite evenly split on how well they thought the program valued family identities. About half the participants who discussed this said that family life was valued in some way (Blair, Peyton, and Dana) while about half said it was not (Alex, Kerry, Sam). In each case these messages came from individual interactions in class with instructors. In most cases participants talked about family schedules as occasions where family life might interfere with attending classes or their work in the program and how likely instructors were to understand those issues. While Dana and Taylor experienced a curriculum that they felt valued them as whole beings with multiple identities, most of the participants seemed not to view family identities as something that could inform their scholarly identities and work.

While it is not clear if this is a hidden curriculum students brought with them to the program, there could be a hidden curriculum here in what is missing from the program. Only two students discussed family identities as more than a scheduling conflict, suggesting there is no visible curriculum in the program that encourages students to think about how their multiple identities might intersect and inform their scholarly
identity development. Family identities are often interconnected with gender norms and roles in the academy making it an important element to discuss here no matter where the curriculum originates. While the data is not sufficient to ascertain to what extent the curriculum, hidden or otherwise, might be encouraging students to leave their family identities at home, the fact that students so readily separate their family and academic identities reinforces the notion of a patriarchal system where students, often women, have learned over time to hide or mask the more caring and overtly female elements of their identities.

**Imposter syndrome.** While only two participants specifically described themselves as having the identity of an imposter (Reese and Jessie), other participants described a number of occasions of feeling like they did not belong or were unworthy in some way (Dana, Kerry, Jordan, Alex, Blair); the identity of imposter was, or had recently been, known to many of them during their times in the program. In some cases, the imposter syndrome was of a general nature, with participants wondering if they were good enough to complete the program, while in other cases it was seen in the ways participants compared themselves to other doctoral students or their advisors, and in yet more cases it was related to the final candidacy exam and dissertation phases of the program.

Reese was one participant who specifically identified as an imposter, stating that:

> Then I’m like maybe I’m not supposed to be here. Maybe I’m not a good enough writer and everyone else is a better writer. Everyone else knows what they’re doing and I just feel like an imposter pretty much all of the time. At conferences,
I’m always really nervous about talking… because I don’t want to be pointed out by those mean people at conferences who like to do that. I don’t want to be pointed out… That’s my biggest nightmare from my job talk.

(Interview 3)

For Reese, there was a more practical element to his/her imposter syndrome that went beyond the anxiety of being a good doctoral student, and rested on the problems that might arise post-graduation due to not having a stable scholarly identity firmly based in a single field. However, for Robin the imposter syndrome rested on whether s/he was meeting expectations:

I do still struggle with feeling that you know you're not … when people hear you're in a PhD program, they expect you to know or you know, whatever. And like, "Oh, I don't really understand that, I'm sorry." You know, that kind of thing. So you still struggle with it, but you know that it is okay because there's so much, not one person could ever know. (Interview 3)

While Robin acknowledged that s/he cannot know it all, there is still an expectation that even those on the doctoral should know a great deal, and this is hard to live up to. The participants who described elements related to imposter syndrome were all at the end of their coursework phase or in Reese’s case post-coursework phase, yet the sense of imposter was still present. Jessie, who was also in dissertation stage, used the word imposter to describe him/herself.

I think I’m insecure and I try not to be competitive, but I’m… like right now I beat myself up, two of my doc cohort are much further along in the dissertation and it
depresses me. It makes me like – there’s a certain imposter syndrome. (Interview 3)

Jessie’s statement suggests a certain sense of competition that impacted his/her identities as a scholar, and this was seen with other participants as well. Blair explained,

I wish there was something about being a doctoral student that you were informed about how you could be successful without having to compare yourself to others. Or, if there was a way for them to incorporate this idea that your own journey is your own journey and to not compare yourself to other doctoral students, or advanced doctoral students, or students that have publications and students that have this and they've done all these…This person's taking 5 classes. Great. I wish there was a way you could, not that you could be isolated in the way you pursue your journey, but people knew. Like, you were informed to just stay focused on your own path and not care so much about others. (Interview 1).

It seems then that much of the participants’ feelings of imposter syndrome were connected to how they stood in comparison to other doctoral students. Again, this could be part of a hidden curriculum students bring with them to the program. Through years of formal education, students have been stratified and streamed based on abilities and grades, and that likely impacts imposter syndrome at the doctoral level. However, some forms of hidden curriculum in this cross-case analysis also suggest elements that could reinforced notions of imposter syndrome. For example, the continued use of grades in most courses of the program encourages students to compare themselves to each other based on a letter grade, while the ways that full-time and part-time students may have to
compete for outside of class research opportunities with faculty could encourage negative comparisons with each other, and the messages students received from faculty boasting about their own advisee’s experiences caused anxiety for some of the participants. These elements of hidden curriculum likely work to reinforce any elements of imposter syndrome doctoral students bring with them to the program.

Imposter syndrome can impact a student’s actions and can interrupt identity development (Foot et al., 2014), making it an important consideration in any examination of doctoral student experiences. The data in my study suggest that the participants took their imposter identities for granted as personal character flaws, suggesting that there was little self-examination of how the hidden curriculum in doctoral students’ educational histories and in their current program experiences worked to create and reinforce that imposter syndrome, and how this particular identity influenced and impacted their doctoral student experience.

Agency and resistance. Finally, in relation to the self, it is important to describe the occasions in the data where students used their agency to resist certain messages from the program. While agency is not specific to an experience with the hidden curriculum, in some of the participant cases it seemed that agency was used in some way for the participants to exert some kind of control over their experience in the doctoral program. Agency is often discussed in relation to theories of hidden curriculum that view formal education as producing and reproducing social structures and norms related to race, class, and gender inequalities. While some of these more critical issues were not obvious in the data, there were still occasions where students could be seen using their agency to resist
messages related to the ways they were expected to think or act in the program.

In most cases the agency was related to participants taking control of their experience in some way. For example, Taylor used his/her agency to change advisors when s/he realized there were other faculty more aligned to his/her research interests. Taylor stated, “Dr. X, I probably can learn more with them” (Interview 1), while Jessie found him/herself with a combative graduate assistant advisor and used agency to try and resolve the situation. Dana used agency in a positive way to create additional research experiences with his/her advisors and to develop as a scholar, and Jordan probably used agency more than the other participant. Jordan described how s/he was going to have to “fight” not to complete his/her dissertation in a particular format, and s/he used agency to resist the messages from others that s/he should be less invested in the culture of his/her specialization and more assimilated into the core program.

Though some participants acted to take control of their experiences, agency is not easy to enact. Jordan explained that “being comfortable with not doing teacher research, or research on teacher education…I like had to get more confident in that” (Interview 1). Jordan also noted that s/he did not want to get a reputation as a trouble-maker, an idea echoed by Blair when discussing the ramifications of changing advisors. While agency and resistance can be a useful approach in altering the “sociology, not just in theory and methods, but in the functioning of the hidden curriculum” (Margolis & Romero, 1998, p. 27) of a program, it brings with it inherent dangers for the students enacting that agency. Yet, the use of agency and resistance is one way that the reproduction of the academy and the production and reproduction of “social order stratification by class, gender, and race”
(Margolis et al., 2001, p. 12) may be disrupted. The disruption of traditional academic norms and the reproduction of those norms can be best illustrated by Jordan’s experience of completing research separate from his/her advisor and in a non-traditional form. I have already described how there may be a hidden curriculum related to the type of knowledge creation valued by the dissertation process, that of a scientific, objectivist approach that removes the researcher from the research and values a single truth, and with Jordan’s experience we see a doctoral student resisting that norm and “fighting” to create knowledge in a new way that emphasizes his/her own beliefs and ideas about knowledge creation. While this was a single element of resistance to academic norms, more students undertaking such agency and resistance could make a real difference to the social structures inherent in the academy. Once again, while this finding does not specifically relate to a form of hidden curriculum posited by the program, it is an important theme fundamental to any discussion of the hidden curriculum.

**Summary**

Considering the cross-case analysis and student experiences as a whole, there seemed to be a disconnect between the culture that the program wanted to have and the one that existed for the participants. This was demonstrated in the hidden curriculum surrounding course planning where the written curriculum suggested a valuing of process over product and students were encouraged to create their own path through the program, while the lived curriculum for participants demonstrated that scheduling elective courses was often difficult and suggested that there was an unwritten best sequence courses that students should follow. This was also illustrated by the difference in norms and values
between the coursework and post-coursework phases, where the coursework phase seemed to highly value peer interaction and collaboration, while the post-coursework phase seemed to value independent research.

This cross-case analysis of the experiences of 12 PhD students indicates that there were multiple hidden curricula experienced by students in various forms throughout their time in the doctoral program. Hidden curricula communicated messages about the types of knowledge valued in the program, the appropriate ways to create and disseminate knowledge in the academy, the social structures surrounding relationships in the academy, and the ways each participant’s self might impact the doctoral curriculum. In most cases the forms that these messages took were hidden below the surface of an already existing, written curriculum. The forms the hidden curriculum took, based on the participants’ descriptions, were within the structure and organization of the program, for example in course planning documents and sequencing guidelines, in the program design related to part-time experiences and graduate assistantships, and in the integration of specializations into the general core program; within the social structures of the program, most obviously seen in the advisor/advisee relationship; and within assumptions that the students brought with them into the program. In Chapter IV I discuss the meaning and implications of these findings in more depth before recommending ways doctoral programs can adjust their existing curriculum to address the elements of hidden curricula identified in these findings.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter I discuss the findings in more depth, drawing them back to the literature and considering them within the broader context of higher education curriculum, doctoral socialization, and doctoral success. Implications for doctoral curriculum design, recommendations for future research, and limitations of the study are then discussed.

Overview of Study

The purpose of this naturalistic, qualitative study was to investigate doctoral students’ experiences of hidden curriculum within a single doctoral program in the field of education and to explore possible forms of hidden curriculum within that program. The study was based on a number of assumptions related to doctoral student experiences as something different from both the K-12 educational environment and from higher education undergraduate and master’s level experiences.

The first assumption in this study is that doctoral study in the USA has a high attrition and time to completion rate; students often take a long time to graduate or drop-out completely (Bagaka, et al., 2015; Gardner 2007; Gardner, 2008a; Golde, 2000; Keefer, 2015; Walker et al., 2008). The second assumption of this study is that while much of the research on doctoral programs concentrates on socialization experiences (Gardener, 2008; McAlpine, 2012), not enough research has been conducted on the impact of the curricula on doctoral student success (Gonzalez-Ocampo, et al., 2015). Finally, it is assumed that there are multiple layers of curricula involved in any kind of
formal education setting, and in doctoral contexts those layers impact doctoral student experiences and completion. The different layers of curricula are: the intended, visible curricula (curricula planned with intent and written in course documents), intended, invisible curricula (curricula planned for but purposely hidden from students for various reasons), and the unintended curricula, with the final two types falling into the definition of the hidden curricula used in this study. Based on these assumptions, this study explored doctoral students’ experiences to identify possible forms of hidden curricula in doctoral programs and to investigate the impact those curricula had on the student experience. This led to two research questions: 1. How do doctoral students experience the hidden curriculum? 2. What forms of hidden curricula can be identified in a PhD program?

Social constructivism was used as the theoretical framework for the study because this approach values the participants’ interactions with the world as an influence on their experiences, and posits that “meaning is hidden and brought to the surface through deep reflection” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129) and is brought to the surface through social interactions with the researcher as “language and other social processes” work together to create meaning (Schwandt, 1998, p. 240). Using three types of semi-structured interviews, I asked 12 doctoral students about their experiences in a single doctoral program, and examined their responses for messages related to values, norms, and beliefs in the program and the forms those messages took. My findings indicated that there are three main experiences and contexts in a doctoral program that communicate the values, norms, and beliefs of the department: the structure and organization of the program, the
interactions and social structures inherent in the program, and the participants themselves. Participant experiences related to these contexts provide an important lens for examining ways we can improve the experience and completion rate for doctoral students, and the following section highlights and explicates the findings from the study.

Margolis and Romero (2001) draw “parallels” between the hidden curriculum and the story of the Wizard of Oz, because “elements of curriculum might be thought of as hidden behind the scenes, like the mechanisms run by the bumbling Wizard of Oz” (p. 3). Interestingly, one of the study participants, Alex, also used the Wizard of Oz as a metaphor for his/her experiences in the doctoral program; therefore, the following discussion uses quotations from the Wizard of Oz as an organizational framework for expounding upon the initial findings of this study, critically examining the findings’ importance to the field of doctoral student success, and considering the wider implications for the field of doctoral education.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Come out, Come out, Wherever you are**

The research on doctoral education has made it clear that there is a high attrition rate that needs to be addressed (Gardner, Jansujwicz, Hutchins, Cline, & Levesque, 2014). While the participants in this study persevered throughout their program, their struggles and experiences provide important information on elements of the curriculum that can influence the doctoral student experience, contribute information to help alleviate high attrition rates in future, and possibly work to bring back students who have stepped away from the program or are on the way to leaving. As Keefer (2015) explains, “some
similarities arise out of this doctoral mix, and doctoral learner experiences often manifest in common challenges” (p. 17). It is these common challenges that I discuss here. The first research question in this study asked: How do doctoral students experience the hidden curriculum? In order to uncover experiences with the hidden curriculum I analyzed cultural values, norms, and behaviors students reported as part of their doctoral experience. Students described experiences related to the structure and organization of the program, the social structures inherent in the doctoral program, and their self-identities. The second research question asked what forms the hidden curricula that send these messages might take in the program. Interestingly, the forms of hidden curriculum can be organized into three categories that mirror the experiences students discussed. Forms of hidden curriculum found within the data were messages, documents, content and interactions connected to the program organization and structure, social structures in the program, and the lens through which students experienced the hidden curriculum; a lens which was likely influenced by 15-20 years of hidden curriculum in their formal education prior to the doctorate. These themes are so intertwined that I will address both research questions together in the following discussion.

**Pulling Back the Curtain**

Before going any further, it is prudent to consider whether the findings in the research can be drawn back to hidden curricula versus intended and/or visible curricula. Gair and Mullins (2001) conducted interviews with 21 faculty and administrators around the USA to explore how academic scholars “perceive how hidden curricula work within the context of higher education” (p. 22). The authors found that participants’ descriptions
of hidden curricula varied, but the authors themselves assert that the hidden curriculum usually includes “social relations like race and gender hierarchy, social class reproduction, the inculcation of ideological belief structure, and so on” (p. 22), and it is these “socialization processes” (p. 22) of hidden curricula that I would like to elucidate in this discussion chapter.

Hidden curricula may bring about connotations of “intentional acts to obscure or conceal – a conscious duplicity” (Gair & Mullins, 2001, p. 23), yet often times hidden curriculum is unintentionally planned or it is hidden “in plain sight” (Gair & Mullins, 2001, p. 23); in some cases, the hidden curriculum exists as a visible element that people simply do not take notice of. This was something that clearly came through in my study’s data. For example, there is a clear element of intentional curriculum connected to the advisor student relationship, as demonstrated by the PhD handbook’s emphasis on students having to work with advisors to create a plan of study and for advisors to approve the major milestones within the program. However, there were other, more hidden elements of the advisor curriculum, such as how students are assigned to advisors, how students should navigate the unwritten rules of the advisor/advisee relationship, and the lack of details about changing advisors. The curriculum surrounding the advisor in the doctoral program is therefore both intended and hidden, because there are messages hidden within “plain sight” (Gair & Mulligan, 2001) of the intended curriculum.

Acker (2001) provides an excellent analogy for these variations in hidden curriculum, that of an iceberg with “the more overt requirements above the water and the rest submerged, though visible to a keen eye” (p. 62). This metaphor is demonstrated in
my study within the context of course planning. On the surface the program described itself as being “highly individualized” to each student (PhD Handbook, n.d.), yet students like Alex and Dana noted that “Our program is pretty prescribed” (Alex, Interview 1) and “there's not a lot of freedom. There are choices but there's not a lot of freedom” (Dana, Interview 2). While the written curriculum suggests individualized paths through the program are the norm, in reality the hidden curriculum related to program structure is that there was much less freedom than there first appeared to be for students to create their own path. Scheduling difficulties (as noted by Kerry, Dana, and Kate) and unwritten norms related to program sequence (see Jessie and Blair) all influenced the freedom participants had to create a unique program path. It is important to remember, therefore, that hidden, intended, unintended, and visible curricula co-exist to send messages to students about the culture, norms, values, and beliefs of the PhD experience.

It is also important to note that the hidden curriculum does not always denote a negative experience and can often have a specific purpose in socializing students to the academy, which is a unique context that students need to learn to work and exist in. As one example of this, Jordan and Reese talked about how an academic life is one steeped in rejection. On the surface this seems to be a particularly negative message about the norms of the academy learned through the doctoral program. Yet, the fact is that there is a great deal of rejection inherent in the research processes that most full-time, tenured faculty will undertake in their careers in academia. Learning how to deal with such rejection during the doctoral program and how to persevere and find new approaches when faced with such challenges, can therefore be a useful socialization process
communicated by the hidden curriculum. I think it would be naïve to suggest that all rejection might be one day removed from the academic environment when so many faculty are competing for research grants and teaching positions, but I would also argue that simply accepting that rejection is part of the context of the academy perpetuates a hidden curriculum and ensures the academy and those within it will continue to reproduce the same culture on an ongoing basis, stunting change in doctoral programs. By acknowledging that such a hidden curriculum exists, even when it relates to a useful socialization processes, doctoral students can become aware of how the curriculum influences their development and begin to explore new and innovative ways to manage the norms and values that exist in the academy, and perhaps over time create a new culture.

**Follow the Yellow Brick Road**

The first theme identified in the study was the hidden curriculum surrounding the structure and organization of the program. While much of the written curriculum suggests students can create their own path through a transparently designed program, the hidden curriculum suggests students must follow the yellow brick road without being able to see all the way to the end of the path. The first experience PhD students likely have with the hidden curriculum is in relation to course planning. The written curriculum in the form of the PhD Handbook and plan of study suggest that there is no set sequence of enrollment students should follow, and that they can select any relevant electives that suit their needs (there are only two courses listed as having pre-requisites, and I do not believe this constitutes a ‘sequence’). However, participants Jessie and Blair found that when they
enrolled in first semester courses without obtaining advice from their advisors first, they felt they had missed important elements of scaffolding provided by other courses in the program. Both participants also reported learning informally from peers that the course sequence they had embarked on was not the most useful; there was a hidden curriculum that some courses should be taken before others. The less structured context of a doctoral program is very different than the structure students may be used to from their previous experiences in formal education. Bagaka et al. (2015) interviewed doctoral students at a mid-western university and found very similar results. In a positive way this hidden curriculum may act to teach students to look beyond written sources and teach students to create their own useful learning experiences while managing the bureaucracy so prevalent in higher education settings. These skills will be invaluable both to doctoral students who go on to work in academia and those who work within any bureaucratic structure. However, doctoral students in the Bagaka study noted “program structure” was important to their success, and participants described the frustrations that occur when required courses cannot be scheduled appropriately (Bagaka et al., 2015, p. 332). Holley (2011) also explains that “the formal academic curriculum, including core classes and seminars, is significant to student development… the curriculum of a doctoral program is an explicit structure for organizing student knowledge and cultural engagement” (p. 86). Pifer and Baker (2016) suggest that the first courses students take in a doctoral program, provide “foundational content knowledge, and communicates faculty expectations for student engagement and performance” (p. 17). While in the program I studied there is an introductory course that students are expected to take during their first academic year,
this single course may not be enough to introduce students to the expectations of the program and scholarly life. The first year of the doctoral program is when “students learn the sociocultural norms and expectations of their fields, as well as the requirements and structural guidelines of their programs” (Pifer & Baker, 2016, p. 17), and so the early course sequence should not be left to chance.

We're Not in Kansas Anymore

The second finding related to program organization and structure was the way in which the complementary or disparate cultures of the specializations could impact the doctoral student experience. It is well documented in the research that students become socialized to and develop identities related to their program or department, and their specialization or field (Acker, 2001; Gardner et al., 2014; Holley, 2011; Keefer, 2015) and that “students are learning the…habitus of a particular field - the set of essentially cultural understandings that allows them to consider themselves and be considered by others to be bona fide sociologists or anthropologists, or biologists” (Acker, 2001, p. 62), so understanding how these socialization processes work together is crucial.

While Gardner et al. (2014) explain that socialization to a single field can be difficult, and therefore socialization to multiple fields is more challenging, most of the participants in the study did not discuss any issues with navigating the two cultures of their specialization and the core program. It is important to note at this point that in my study the core program and the specializations attached to it were all part of the field of education. However, within that field there are specializations that can have very different cultures and therefore the literature on managing socialization to different fields
can be useful in this context. It is possible that most participants in this study did not
discuss difficult experiences managing dual cultures because some specializations have
similar or complementary cultures to the core program. When “discipline-specific content
and their related approaches to a field may not be readily transferable between
disciplines” (Keefer, 2015, p. 18) difficulties can occur for the doctoral student, as seen
with Reese and Jordan who described discrepancies between the messages they received
about values, norms, and behaviors in their specializations versus the messages from the
core program. For Reese especially, this caused him/her to enter a kind of “liminal
space” (Keefer, 2015, p. 18) where s/he “didn’t fit in particularly well in either world”
(Reese, Interview 3). Not fitting, or not belonging, can cause students to feel like they
will not be able to create appropriate learning opportunities, make important connections
with others, or be successful in the program (Pifer & Baker, 2016). This was clear in
Reese’s comment that “my identity could not be both. Therefore, I was crappy at each
thing” (Reese, Interview 3).

Jordan’s experiences were more political in nature, as the nature of writing in
his/her specialization and a core program class collided. The political situation Jordan
found him/her self in is not surprising. As Acker described, department practices are
“more akin to politics” and “lodged within the deepest levels of the iceberg” (2001, p. 62)
and Jordan experienced the political nature of the conflicting practices between the core
program and his/her specialization. The academic world involves the “intersection of
multiple cultures, including the discipline, the department, the institution, and the
profession”, and students need to learn and use particular “strategies” for managing those
different cultures and the spaces where they intersect (Holley, 2011, p. 81); learning to exist in multiple spaces is part of the doctoral socialization process (Holley, 2011). We know that socializing students to the doctoral program is one way to examine and work towards curtailing the high attrition rates in doctoral education (Gardner et al., 2014), yet Reese and Jordan’s experiences demonstrate how difficult it can be to socialize students to two contrasting cultures. It might be useful to use the work on interdisciplinarity in doctoral programs to examine this issue further.

In a discussion of interdisciplinary study, Gardner et al. (2014) explain that there can be benefits to encouraging interdisciplinarity during the graduate and doctoral phases before academics become “too entrenched” in a particular field. However, they also acknowledge the argument that doctoral students are at a tentative stage in their cognitive development as scholars, and encouraging interdisciplinary work at the wrong time could be detrimental to their identity development. In their examination of faculty and student experiences in an interdisciplinary programs, Gardner et al. (2014) found that students in general were very open to the idea of interdisciplinary work and the ways of thinking that involved. The data in my study support this idea, as some students discussed the high value they put on the opportunities they were provided to take classes with students from other disciplines or specializations. Jessie, Taylor, Robin, and Kerry all commented on the benefits they found from interacting with students from other fields in courses that cut across programs, such as the research courses. The participants found it helpful and refreshing to gain new and different perspectives, suggesting that even for students who do not have a cultural dissonance between specializations, integrating some form of
interdisciplinarity could be of benefit to the program. However, in order for doctoral students (and indeed faculty) to gain the most from an interdisciplinary approach to the curriculum, training and support for effectively straddling multiple academic worlds and integrating differing approaches to such things as methodology, language, and dissemination of knowledge is needed.

The general structure of a PhD program, which has a time to completion requirement, makes interdisciplinary work more difficult and means that for students to succeed across disciplines they need to be “highly self-directed and independent students” (p. 268). Support from faculty was also found to be an important aspect of the doctoral socialization process into an interdisciplinary world, though it is interesting to note that faculty reported more time constraints on their ability to take part in interdisciplinary work. Faculty also reported a more entrenched perspective of disciplines, with the authors reporting that: “faculty members, for the most part, were socialized to understand that their discipline and its respective methods, language, and world view were the most appropriate (and perhaps even the only) approaches to examine the problems they studied” (Gardner et al., 2014, p. 267).

Gardner et al. (2014) suggest that the advisors and faculty within the specialization and core programs may be the key to creating a more cohesive bridge between the cultures of two specializations. By creating a more structured relationship between specialization and core program, and by allowing PhD students space and time to explore both fields, students may be more successfully socialized to the program as a whole and have a more satisfactory experience.
As Plain as the Nose on My Face

The third finding related to the program organization and structure was the hidden nature of the post-coursework phases, and the isolated nature of the dissertation experience as a contrast to the peer-centric coursework phases. The coursework phase of study is the phase perhaps most familiar to doctoral students; doctoral students are well versed in the classroom structures related to learning. However, participants reported a great deal of mystery surrounding the post-course work stages of PhD study including comprehensive exams and dissertation phases, which supports Pifer and Baker’s (2016) assertion that later stages of the doctoral program can bring “significant fears and self-doubt” (p. 20) as students move to a stage less familiar to them with less structure involved (Pifer & Baker, 2016). The lack of knowledge about the later stages of the program was clear in the data. Sam stated that s/he did not yet know enough about the requirements of the upcoming stages of study, while Reese could not even imagine “getting to that place”, and Sam talked about learning the unwritten rules of the comprehensive exam in his/her program from peers rather than his/her advisor. All doctoral students, regardless of their career motivations, need to learn how to locate information independently and think for themselves. One positive framing of this element of hidden curriculum is that by covering post-coursework stages in mystery it could encourage students to think and plan ahead and locate the information about these stages in the program handbook without being told the information. The problem with this framing though is when the written curriculum states one thing and the hidden curriculum states another. For example, in Sam’s case when s/he had planned to take his/her
comprehensive exams home but only later found out through informal discussion with peers that the program prefers students to take a sit-down, timed exam. While expectations that are hidden but clear can provide an opportunity to encourage doctoral students to become independent in learning about the program, hidden expectations that are also contradictory set students up for failure.

Golde (2005) examined the impact the department processes and culture might have on student attrition at one university and found that any kind of program requirement that is shrouded in the unknown is a contributor to doctoral student attrition. Golde (2005) suggests such a hidden curriculum may be designed to act as a “screening function” to separate the wheat from the chaff (2005, p. 693). However, Golde also notes that a hidden curriculum may cause attrition of both students who would not have made it through the difficult next stage of study, and those who would have succeeded, but decided not to deal with the stress of the unknown. It is not clear from the data in my study whether the hidden nature of post-coursework phases is intentional, but I think the connection of the hidden curriculum to attrition noted by Golde (2005) is cause for concern. The post-coursework phases of the dissertation, as students eventually learn, also differ drastically from the peer-based coursework in the program.

It's So Kind of You to Visit Me in My Loneliness

A number of participants in my study stated that they felt isolated during the candidacy exam and dissertation phases of the program. Alex noted that in dissertation phase “it’s kind of more lonely again” (Interview 1), while Jordan noted that once s/he was in the dissertation phase it was an intense experience not completed in a central
location, which made it difficult to connect with peers as they used to during the coursework stage. The sense of isolation was especially reported by graduate assistant participants who had more daily peer contact than other students during the coursework phase. While learning to work independently on a dissertation research project is a fundamental part of the PhD process, which teaches doctoral students how to become independent scholars, integration theory suggests that both socialization to the academic world and to the social world is needed to be successful in doctoral study and that nearer the end of a student’s program in when the two contexts combine to enhance student success (Golde, 2000). Tinto (1993) explains that near the end of the doctoral program academic and social integrations combine as “social membership within one’s program becomes part and parcel of academic membership, and social interaction with one’s peers and faculty becomes closely linked not only to one’s intellectual development, but also to skills required for doctoral completion (Tinto, 1993, p. 232 as cited in Golde, 2000). Therefore, it seems strange that the program would isolate students from their peers at a time when social interactions have become so ingrained and fundamental to academic work.

Pifer and Baker (2016) also support the finding that post-coursework stages are more isolating, explaining that the absence of structure provided by regular class or graduate assistant work can be difficult to navigate, and that students’ “relationships both within and outside the academic program, must evolve to accommodate this transition” (p. 20). Interestingly, Pifer and Baker (2016) suggest that “recognizing and understanding this stage can help students manage its challenges effectively” (p. 20), yet my findings
and Golde’s (2005) work suggest that the post-coursework stage is often hidden to students, meaning they cannot be fully prepared for the change in norms and values. If we can therefore prepare students more effectively for the post-coursework stages, and encourage students to continually connect with peers and advisors while undertaking this stage of study (Pifer & Baker, 2016), we may disrupt some of the isolation students feel and remove the hidden nature of these stages of the program.

Another reason to disrupt the hidden nature of the post-coursework stage is to disrupt the reproduction of academic norms. Gair and Mullins (2001) describe how “many academics talk about hidden curricula in higher education as a way to assimilate individuals into the class structure, practices, and values of an established predominantly white, male-oriented, middle class academic environment” (Gair & Mullins, 2001, p. 36), and the dissertation experience may be one example of the hidden male-oriented paradigm. It seems that the coursework phase of the PhD program has evolved to a place where the curriculum embraces and emphasizes peer interaction in various ways and for different purposes, while the comprehensive exam and dissertation phases seem to remain artifacts from a time when objective knowledge was created in isolation and presented in a traditional written form, which was valued over subjective, collaborative knowledge and different ways of knowing and researching. By hiding the nature of the dissertation stage until students are immersed in it, and by not preparing them sufficiently for managing that stage, or indeed for allowing them to create collaborative work for a dissertation, the program is reinforcing the positivist nature of the academy.
They Have One Thing You Haven’t Got

Another finding related to program organization and structure was connected to the very different experiences in the program provided to part-time students and full-time graduate assistant students. Part-time students in the study like Kerry, Peyton, and Alex all talked about the community of graduate assistants as separate from other, usually part-time students, and the types of research experiences those graduate assistants had access to. While the PhD handbook suggested that the written and intended curriculum in the program was that part-time study was difficult, but that the program was structured to provide the research and professional development activities automatically experienced by many full-time graduate assistants, the lived experience of the curriculum for part-time participants was very different. As Robin explained, there was less time for part-time students to undertake any additional tasks outside of coursework, and any tasks they did take on meant necessarily letting something else important go.

The idea that part-time study at the doctoral level is difficult is not new. Part-time students have been traditionally seen as ‘less than’ full-time students in the academy, but in fact they bring a vast wealth of knowledge and resources with them to the program (Bircher, 2012). This is even inherent in the doctoral research, which has traditionally examined full-time students (Gardner & GoPaul, 2012). The research that has been conducted on part-time students shows that they are in general “less satisfied” with their PhD experience, have disparate experiences to full-time students, and are “less scholarly” (Gardner & GoPaul, 2012, p. 65). However, despite the difficulties associated with part-time doctoral study and the fact that part-time students may be “discouraged” from
enrolling in many doctoral programs (Bagaka et al., 2015, p. 334), part-time enrollment continues to grow (Gardner & GoPaul, 2012).

In my study the part-time students might be what Acker (2001) would call “detached” based on a study of British part-time students; students working full-time outside of the institution and enrolled part-time (p. 71). While the British doctoral system is quite different to the USA system, some of the part-time students’ experiences in this study are strikingly similar to those in the British study analyzed by Acker. “Part-time students got little by way of material benefits…they were rarely given desks, lockers, or access to facilities; they knew few other students or faculty members” (2001, p. 71). Part-time students in my study noted how the graduate assistants in the program had an office where they could socialize, had more contact with faculty on a daily basis, and knew more about the facilities provided in the department. There was clearly a disparity between part-time and full-time, graduate assistant student experiences.

Part-time participants in my study talked about balancing the program with their home and work lives (Peyton, Sam and Kerry), supporting Gardner and GoPaul’s (2012) assertion that for part-time students, balance “is profoundly different and significantly more intense than [sic] their full-time peers” (p. 69). Some of the difficulties for the participants related to struggling to stay late after class to work with students and create peer connections, scheduling classes late at night on weekdays, or having fewer classes to enroll in over the summer. Gardner and GoPaul’s (2012) study found that part-time students felt like they might be “missing out on something” with part-time students feeling that “full-time status enabled a greater learning experience that encompassed
more opportunities for reflection and sustained engagement with theories, research, and readings as well as focused interactions with peers and faculty members” (p. 71). The findings from my study support this, with Kerry stating that s/he thought graduate assistants were “pushed more” and might have more opportunities for things like publishing.

Gardner and GoPaul (2012) suggest part-time students in education programs are not prone to feeling different than their full-time peers, but this was not the case in my study, with four of the five part-time participants in my study highlighting their different experience in comparison to full-time graduate assistant students. I also think it’s important to note that there is a research base comparing full-time and part-time students (Bircher, 2012; Gardner & GoPaul, 2012; Zahl, 2015) but I could find few studies focused specifically on part-time student versus graduate assistant experiences. However, I argue the themes related to part-time and full-time doctoral student experiences can be more fully explained by the graduate assistant role. For example, Zahl (2015) interviewed 10 part-time students about their experiences and found themes very similar to my study. A sense of community was important to the part-time students in Zahl’s study, but it was often difficult to make peer connections; “proximity” (p. 311) or not being immersed in the environment of the program made it difficult for Zahl’s participants to connect with peers and faculty; and “lack of research opportunities” was reported as an issue for Zahl’s part-time students (p. 312). Within the context of my study, all of these elements relate more to a graduate assistant status than a full-time student status as the differing factor between experiences.
Based on the data in my study, I think the graduate assistantship status of many full-time students is the key factor in the differing participant experiences. Alex, Kerry, and Peyton all discussed the fact that graduate assistants have an office and are more immersed in the program environment on a daily basis. While full-time students in the program I studied have the opportunity to be on campus, they do not have a space to stay and work within the program building, making the element of proximity as difficult for them as for part-time students. The part-time students in my study also described a sense of comradery and community that they saw within the graduate assistant group, which was also described by graduate assistant participants like Jessie, Reese, and Jordan, and this would likely be a much weaker connection without “the office” environment that the graduate assistant participants discussed. Zahl (2015) also described part-time students feeling like faculty wanted to work more with full-time students, and that faculty believed full-time students “were more committed, would finish the program faster, and needed/wanted more opportunities to interact with faculty” (p. 311). The sense that faculty viewed full-time students as better in some way did not come through in my study, instead part-time participants pointed to the proximity issue as the reason full-time students had more faculty research opportunities, as demonstrated by Robin’s comment that “we don't hear about professors that want you to do studies or whatever, I think, as much” (Interview 1), suggesting that once again being on campus and having a space to work and interact with faculty and students was the defining factor in the different experiences.
Finally, my findings support Zahl’s (2015) assertion that part-time students feel they have less research opportunities. Zahl (2015) states that part-time students “indicated that their full-time peers had more opportunities for research with faculty through assistantships, conference presentations, and writing grant applications or articles” (p. 312). It is this finding that I think is the crux of why future research should specifically explore the notion of graduate assistant experiences in comparison to part-time students.

While most full-time doctoral students have some kind of assistantship, we cannot assume this is the case for all full-time students. A study exploring the three types of student, part-time, full-time, and assistant could yield useful results in regard to the different doctoral experiences.

The explicit, written curriculum in the program acknowledges that it can be harder for part-time students to have some of the same outside of class experiences as full-time students (and as I argue, more specifically graduate assistants) and this is supported by research. What is less difficult to find in the data for my study, is how the program curriculum addresses these differences. Part-time students are admitted to the doctoral program, but both my findings in this study and the research confirm that they have a less easy socialization process in the program, fewer opportunities for research and faculty collaboration outside of class, and make stronger connections with other part-time students over full-time students. Whether we take Zahl’s (2015) recommendation that part-time student socialization requires a different framework than full-time student socialization, or try and integrate part-time students into the current socialization framework, which clearly focuses on full-time students, it is important to review and
adjust the curriculum to ensure “academic programs…provide more equitable access to research” (p. 315) and outside of class professional development opportunities for all students in the program.

**Pay No Attention to That Man Behind the Curtain**

The next finding related to the theme of program organization and structure is connected to the importance of the advisor/advisee relationship. However, the curriculum surrounding the advisor also straddles the second major theme found in the study, that of the inherent social structures in the academy.

In one form or another, the literature recognizes that the PhD student-advisor relationship is an important one (Golde, 2005; Acker, 2001; Bagaka et al., 2015; Gonzalez-Ocampo et al., 2016; Zahl, 2015). Sometimes labeled advisors, supervisors, or mentors, the curriculum surrounding the doctoral advisor depends on the format of the doctoral program (i.e. whether there is a coursework phase) as well as the model of advising encouraged in the program. Among some of the advisor models available there are more structural styles related to “organizing and managing the research project” or more supportive models that are “facilitative or directive” (Benmore, 2016, p. 1252). However, no matter which model is used, the literature indicates the vital importance of the advisor/advisee relationship.

When doctoral students are in a satisfactory relationship with their supervisor, they make “good progress” and are more “satisfied” (Gonzalez-Ocampo, et al., 2015). However, an advisor/advisee relationship that does not work can cause dissatisfaction and attrition (Golde, 2005). In Golde’s (2005) examination of ways the department and
culture impact doctoral student attrition, science students in particular reported that “incompatible advising relationships, marked by a lack of interactions, trust, and intellectual support were the cause of much attrition” (p. 686). It is interesting to note that the humanities students’ experiences in Golde’s (2005) study did not discuss these advisor issue, and Golde suggests that one reason for that is that in the sciences “research project, research funding, career sponsorship, and publications are all tied to the advisor and thus to the advising relationship” (p. 687). However, my findings related to doctoral students in an education program suggest these issues are part of the advisor/advisee relationship in fields other than science. This was most visible when participants reported benefits to being in compatible advising relationships. Alex, for example, had a successful relationship with his/her advisor and reported that his/her advisor had “asked me to contribute work to his/her books” (Interview 1), while Jordan discussed writing a journal article with his/her advisor, and Dana reported that “my other adviser, I wrote a part in his/her book, and that is having a publication” (Interview 1). These experiences indicate that a successful advisor/advisee relationship can yield positive research opportunities for students.

The way that a program matches advisors with students can impact whether students will need to undergo the difficult process of changing advisors. Acker (2001) discusses what she calls “warm” and “cold” assignments of advisors in British and other institutions where coursework is not part of the program. A “cold entry” assignment is one where an advisor with similar research interests is simply assigned to a student, and a “warm entry” assignment is one where students research the interests and work of faculty
before connecting with those instructors to find the right advisor (p. 63). In a Canadian study, students would work with faculty for about a year and then “persuade” faculty to be their advisors (p. 63).

In my study the program had more of what I would call a ‘lukewarm’ approach to matching students with initial advisors; faculty advisors were assigned to students upon enrollment based on compatible research interests where possible, which could be described as a cold assignment; however, students were then provided with the opportunity to locate advisors more aligned with their personality or research requirements and change advisors. In one sense this seems to be the best of both worlds; students do not have to wait for advising during their first crucial semesters and then can more naturally get to know faculty, which results in less pressure to “persuade” faculty to become their advisors. However, in my study, even when students were assigned to an advisor upon enrollment they did not always receive the course planning guidance needed in the first semester (see Blair and Jessie), and it was unclear how they were supposed to navigate the etiquette and social structures of the academy to switch advisors without offending anyone or being labeled a trouble maker. Golde (2005) explains that changing advisors is something that happens “publicly” in the program; it is visible to many outside of the advisor/advisee relationship, and that students are “sensitive” to the message changing advisors sends to other, finding that some students switched schools rather than switching advisors in their current program (p. 687). In my study, Blair was the only participant to discuss the possibility of switching advisors, and s/he explained that “I didn’t really know where to go or who to talk to, and I had heard other people talk
about it” (Interview 1). Blair was also reluctant to change advisors because “as a new doctoral student you’re unsure of yourself, I certainly…didn’t want to burn any bridges” (Interview 1).

Golde (2005) suggests that one way to curtail the problems between advisors and students is to ensure there is a suitable match between student and advisor. The participants in Golde’s (2005) study indicated that “science advising relationships were best made when the student knew both the advisor’s research interests and supervisory styles” (p. 687), and as I will discuss later in the implications section, adjusting the assignment of doctoral students to advisors could provide more stable experiences related to the advisor curriculum. Once in the advisor relationship though, students need to work to negotiate expectations for success. Benmore (2016) describes doctoral supervision as a “mutually respectful” but “complex” relationship “through which complex changes in the student’s identity are played out through inevitable shifts in power between student and supervisor, throughout an ongoing process of negotiating” (p. 1252). Negotiation then is key. Acker (2001) found in studies of PhD students in Britain, Canada, and the USA that in the British work especially, students often discussed the disparity sometimes found in expectations between advisors and students. Some of the questions that need to be negotiated between advisors and advisees include, “procedural issues…how much direction the advisor should provide” and “conduct” related issues such as “how much should be expected from an advisor or how close the relationship should be between student and advisor” (Acker 2001, pp. 66-67). While the participants in my study did not explicitly discuss negotiating with their advisors, the experiences they described related
to advisor issues suggests negotiation of expectations did not take place. For example, we saw in Blair’s case that his/her expectation for meeting and response times from his/her advisor was not the same as for the advisor in question, and Reese discussed being unsure of his/her advisor’s expectations. “My advisor, I guess s/he wants very specific things from students and s/he doesn’t necessarily say what they are” (Interview 2). Yet, it is not easy for a PhD student to negotiate such things with an advisor when there is not a formal advisor curriculum in place and the advisor and advisee hold very different places on the social structure of the program.

The advisor curriculum is steeped in issues of power and social structure inherent in the academy (Acker, 2001; Margolis, 2001), likely making the negotiation of expectations in the advisor/advisee relationship extremely difficult. The power differential between students and advisor and faculty was discussed by multiple participants in my study. Dana explained that some students “are really peons for their professors”, while Reese confirmed, “you need to respect your advisors and professors and you are a peon and you’re not worthy yet. You have to do all of these things and all of these milestones because that piece of paper that says PhD means that you did all of this.” Grant and Graham (1994) argue that the advisor/advisee relationship can never be one that is balanced in terms of social structure, because for PhD students the dissertation is the primary work they will complete in their program, while for advisors each student is just one aspect of a job that has many parts and is not the major focus of the advisor’s work (Grant & Graham as cited in Acker, 2001); however, Acker (2001) argues that this representation of the advisor/advisee relationship does not consider that students are
usually striving to climb the ladder of the academic social structure, while advisors are also negotiating roles within the same social structure in other academic contexts. Acker (2001) also makes the point that “students and advisors are untied for their wish for a successful outcome” in the program and dissertation (p. 70). The fact, is neither students nor instructors are “interchangeable” (Acker, 2001, p. 70); every advisor/student relationship is unique and the data in my study indicate that there is a strong variation in the type and success of the advisor relationships. However, the data in my study did not suggest that the participants’ advisor relationships were highly impacted by characteristics such as gender, race, or class.

The literature on the advisor/advisee relationship suggests further power issues than the ones I have noted here. For example, Acker (2001) explains that issues related to gender, class, race, and registration status (i.e. part-time versus full-time) can all have an impact on the advisor/advisee relationship. However, these factors were not found in this study. In terms of gender there were a majority of female participants in the study. The field of education is one with a high number of female faculty and advisors, which may explain why gender issues did not arise explicitly. There were no students of color in the sample for the study, and one international student did not discuss any issues related to the advisor relationship that might stem from his/her status as an international student. Only in once case was class discussed in relation to an experience that included the advisor, but which primarily involved another instructor (Reese). The interaction involved an instructor questioning the student about elements of his/her private life that related to class. Reese concluded that the interaction “made me feel horrible” (Interview...
3), and while this was not an interaction directly involving the advisor it suggests that there may be elements of gender, class, and race that do exist within the program that could easily permeate the advisor/advisee relationship even though this was not found in my study.

The findings of my study then concur with the research on the advisor/advisee relationship that, while there is an intended and explicit curriculum related to the advisor, the advisor curriculum is hidden in “plain sight” (Gair & Mullins, 2001), with many unknown elements related to the structure of the advisor relationship. The findings also support the importance of the advisor relationship and suggest that a lack of structure and support for students in how to negotiate advisor relationships results in a strongly hidden curriculum.

Please, Sir. We've Done What You Told Us

The self was an important lens through which hidden curriculum was understood by participants in this study, and as I discuss shortly, was also a form of hidden curriculum that students brought with them to the program. The self was also discussed by participants in relation to the identities that were valued or less valued in the program, and I discuss these findings before examining the impact of the self as a catalyst for internalizing hidden curriculum. There were two major findings related to identity valued in the program, the first was that the organization and structure of the program encouraged students to form a researcher identity that in many cases did not meet their goals, motivations, and world views; and the second was that students segregated their family identities from their academic work in the program.
Most students in the study did not see identify themselves as having a researcher identity separate from their doctoral student or candidate identities (Jessie, Reese, Dana, Kerry, Sam, and Robin). Research is important when creating a scholarly identity because it raises students “productivity” and “self-efficacy” (Bagaka et al., 2015, p. 326) and successfully socializing students to scholarly identities is important to retention (Golde, 2005). It is therefore important to explore in more depth why the participants in my study did not identify as full researchers. I suggest that one reason participants in my study did not identify as full researchers was because of a lack of engagement with the research curriculum in the program.

When I explored some of the reasons why my participants did not feel like researchers, even though they had completed research tasks in a number of classes or as part of graduate assistantship work, they suggested that they either had not been undertaking what they considered to be “proper” research (Sam and Jessie) or there had been a disconnect between the type of research valued in the program and their own interests (Peyton and Jamie). In the case of Peyton and Jamie, both participants entered the program with a strong practitioner identity. While there are multiple kinds of research in the field of education, some of the participants in my study discussed identities specifically related to practitioner, which does seem to be a type of research often contrasted with the more traditional types of research valued in the academy. Practitioner research is often most desired by part-time students because of their connection to their job and a practical context, as was the case for Peyton. Practitioner researchers use the
same research “tools” as other academic researchers but are “uniquely placed to address problems of practice” (Storey & Maughan 2016, p. 216),

While Jamie intended to work in higher education after graduation, Peyton intended to return to his/her workplace to disseminate knowledge. This indicates that there may be what Golde (2005) calls a “mismatch” (p. 271) between “the students’ goals and expectations and the norms and practices of the discipline and department” (p. 681); some participants identified in one way but the type of research valued in the program may not have matched those identities. Keefer (2015) argues that the disconnect between research goals can create a liminal space that students will reside in, and I suggest this may be the reason for Jamie and Peyton to not identify as full researchers. Robin stated s/he just was not interested in research, though Robin also strongly identified as a practitioner so perhaps s/he just was not interested in the type of research in the program.

The rest of the students described the identity of researcher as being part of their doctoral candidate or student identities – not as a separate identity they had developed. I wonder if this could be because all of the students were essentially in a liminal space related to research. For Peyton and Robin, it was because of the disconnect between identity and research type, but for the other students it may be more related to the fact that they did not yet identify fully as scholars and could therefore not see their research experiences as valuable. Blair explicitly discussed that this was the case for him/her. Blair suggested the message from some instructors in the program had been that student research was never valuable as research from those with a PhD, and it could be that other students had internalized a similar message. While it was not within the scope of this
study to examine specifically the curriculum of the research experiences provided to participants, the data from their experiences suggest that the curriculum is not sufficiently preparing students to take on a research identity. We know that scholarly activities, such as taking part in research, are important for success (Bagaka et al., 2015), and we know that a disconnect between interests and goals of the student and the research experiences offered can cause difficulties for students (Golde, 2005; Keefer, 2015); therefore, we need to ensure a broad research curriculum is provided to students, integrating multiple forms of research and allowing students to integrate their own identities with the research curriculum instead of imposing a single research identity on the students. I suggest that when the integration between research and student identities occurs, more students will identify as full-fledged researchers, even prior to graduation.

Hearts Will Never be Practical Until They Can be Made Unbreakable

One identity that nearly all participants in the study reported having, was that of a family member, whether it was as child, spouse, sibling, or parent. However, when asked about the ways in which those identities were valued in the program, participants often stated that such identities were not part of their academic identities, and nor should they be. Participants talked about family identities in three ways in the data: in the ways the family identity could be shadowed by the academic/student identity, as with Kerry who stated, “my family will say, ‘that's all you do’, and I feel really guilty” (Interview 3); in the way that family identities should take a back seat when taking classes or undertaking doctoral work, as in Sam’s case when s/he stated that “I don't feel like those things are not valued. I do feel like some faculty members…this is not so high up on their own
priority list so it's not as valued when their students have things, like [family] issues” (Interview 3); or in the ways family responsibilities were valued by individual instructors, as described by Dana, Alex, and Taylor who said that some instructors understood the PhD student as a whole being. Participants were hesitant to say family identities were not valued in the program, and participants were split with half saying their individual instructors supported their family responsibilities and half saying they did not. However, there was still a sense that participants felt family identities did not belong in the classroom and were separate from academic identities. Alex for example stated outright that, “I’m not saying that they don’t care about your identity as a family member but this is the class. You knew what it was going to be. You signed up for it. You’ve got to do the work. You’ve got to do it” (Interview 1). Interestingly all participants though discussed family identities in relation to the time and scheduling commitments associated with having a family, and did not consider that a family identity could be integrated in the program beyond balancing school and life schedules, suggesting that the participants have never considered the ways their family identities might inform their academic identities.

The notion that family identities and academic identities are separate things is not a new concept. Acker (2001) describes Mazzuca’s (2000) work examining Italian-Canadian female doctoral students and found that students often “segregate their family and student lives” (p. 74) or are not forthcoming to peers about their families, perhaps because of an existing stigma about families in the academy. One possible reason for the segregation or downplaying of family identities could be related to gender norms. The
academy has traditionally been a patriarchal system where women have learned over time to hide or mask the more caring and overtly female elements of their identities (Miller, 2005), and it could be that there is a hidden curriculum remaining in the program that communicates this message to students. However, the data in this study suggest that while gender may be inherently connected to family identities, it was a hidden curriculum communicated to all genders. There were two male participants in this study, and one listed family as a highly valued identity outside of the program, but commented that he had to push the family identity away at times to be successful in relation to academic identities, similar to other female participants.

Family identities are important because they can inform the doctoral and scholarly identities being created by doctoral students. Pifer and Baker (2014) analyzed the experiences of 31 PhD students and found that there were three sets of identities that students drew upon in their lives: “professional”, “academic”, and “relational” (p. 17). The relational identity included family identities, and “personal” related to a “general sense of self” (Baker & Pifer, 2014, p. 17). The authors also found that these identities intersected and could not be easily separated when examining the development of scholarly identities. While much of the doctoral student related research describes the ways family identities might be othered in the academy or the ways in which PhD students balanced family and PhD life (Pifer & Baker, 2014; McAlpine, Amundsen & Turner, 2014; Ylijokia & Ursin, 2013), I found less research specifically connected to the importance of integrating family identities into the curriculum, which I argue is important for doctoral programs.
Maunula (2014) asserts that the “everyday contexts” (p. 2327) of a doctoral student’s life, including their family contexts, impact their success and the skills they develop; each life context informs the others. The field of andragogy, the art and science of teaching adults, also suggests that drawing knowledge back to outside of the academy identities are a crucial part of the curriculum (Cercone, 2008). In an andragogical classroom an instructor should “tailor coursework to meet the interests of adult learners” (Sato, Haegele, & Foot, 2017, p. 2), and the lives and experiences of adult students “form figurative hooks onto which new knowledge is placed” and these “hooks lead the learner to feel that he or she can relate to course materials effortlessly and make the subject matter easier to internalize” (Sato et al., 2017, p. 3). All of the participants in my study would be considered adults, with ages ranging from 26-60 years of age. This makes doctoral students the target audience for theories of andragogy. However, students in my study did not discuss any experiences related to curriculum being integrated with their familial identities. My participants instead discussed family identities only as interfering with academic class schedules, such as when they or other students missed class for some reason connected to family emergencies.

As stated previously, it is not clear whether the message that family identities and academic identities should be segregated was something students brought with them, or something created by a programmatic hidden curriculum. As with other elements of hidden curriculum, there may be an important benefit to socializing doctoral students to the fact that if they intend to work in higher education upon graduation, they will need to learn how to manage and separate family and academic life. Tenure track faculty
members are under a great deal of pressure to publish, teach, work in their community, and create a successful family life; no easy task. For students who intend to take this tenure track, it will be useful to become accustomed to balancing these identities. However, once again it is important to consider whether such a socialization process is beneficial or if it simply reproduced the notion that faculty cannot fully integrate family life with academic life.

Because of the interconnected nature of family and gender (Acker, 2001), the fact that family problems are one cause for high attrition (Golde, 1998), and the usefulness of reaching adult learners by incorporating their outside of school experiences (Cercone, 2008), this becomes an important topic for future examination of written and hidden curriculum in doctoral education. Family issues can cause students to drop-out of graduate study (Pifer & Baker, 2016), however, if family identities were emphasized as part of the doctoral program curriculum, this could help alleviate some of the issues that lead to attrition caused by family identities.

**Have a Little Courage**

There were occasions in the experiences participants shared when they enacted agency, meaning they chose in some way to make their own decision, act in a way not compliant with the norms of the program, or they held to their own beliefs or values in some way, often in reaction to an element of hidden curriculum. This was seen more often in Jordan and in Dana’s experiences as Jordan strived to complete a new form of dissertation and Dana used agency to create his/her own research experiences outside of class, but if we broaden the definition of agency to consider “individuals being agentive
in a range of ways: reporting efforts to be intentional, to plan, to construct a way forward given constraints” (McAlpine et al., 2014, p. 28) then any kind of perseverance shows a sense of agency. For example, Alex could not find electives that matched well with his/her research interests and so enrolled in independent studies to meet those elective requirements. While Alex’s advisor suggested this approach, there is some agency in Alex locating an independent supervisor and moving forward with the opportunity. This can also be seen in Jessie’s speaking up when in a negative relationship with a graduate assistant supervisor, in Peyton’s continued desire to conduct practitioner research while being told s/he needed to be more academically research based, or in Kerry’s determination that s/he would not follow the trend s/he saw in doctoral students working all hours and missing family birthdays. All of these choices are in a sense, the participants enacting agency.

Phyalto and Keskinen (2012) discuss the concept of relational agency, “to refer to the capacity of doctoral students to work with others in order to better respond to complex research problems” (p. 137), and the idea that students can enact agency by finding support from faculty and peers was something found by Portnoi, Chlopecki, and Peregrina-Kretz (2015). Portnoi et al. (2015) studied 440 doctoral students’ responses to an online survey about agency. They found that, “doctoral students were active agents in their own socialization. Indeed, over 70% of the 440 survey respondents reported enacting agency to initiate conversations about pursuing an academic career with fellow students, dissertation advisors, and other faculty” (pp. 9-10). The authors seem to be describing a form of relational agency, and this was something found in the doctoral
experiences reported by participants in my study. Both Blair and Jessie discovered early on that they had enrolled in the ‘wrong’ first courses and found their trajectory in the program to be slightly off because of it. The participants had little support from their advisors about course planning and instead used their agency to look to their peers for support in course planning. With this additional definition of agency including “enlisting peers” (p. 11) as support and assistance, there are many more possible examples of agency in the data.

In the doctoral student literature, agency is interconnected with notions of identity development and socialization to the doctoral program and academy. Holley (2011) suggests that becoming a part of a culture involves action and agency, and in order to understand doctoral program culture and how students socialize to it, we need to remember that “students make individual decisions that shape their experiences and membership in disciplinary culture” (p. 91); essentially students enact agency to decide in what ways they will become a part of and work to create the culture of the doctoral program. Agency is also an important concept if we consider that doctoral students are being prepared to become (in some cases) independent researchers and scholars who will enact agency in their work (McAlpine et al., 2014; Storey & Maughan, 2016). However, McAlpine et al. (2014) make the idea of enacting individual agency sound very easy when they state that, “by exercising ongoing agency despite constraints, individuals have some ability to decide which aspects of the practices they encounter they will engage in” (p. 958). In some cases, individual agency may be easy, such as connecting with peers or seeking advice from various faculty, while in other cases enacting agency may be more
difficult. For example, Blair did not want to “burn bridges” by enacting his/her agency to change advisors while Jordan, who enacted multiple types of agency, did not want to gain a reputation as a trouble-maker.

It is important to encourage doctoral students to enact various types of agency (Portnoi et al., 2015; Storey & Maughan, 2016), and one way to do this is to encourage doctoral students in “establishing and taking ownership of goals, obtaining clarity about expectations, and seeking help when needed” (Pifer & Baker, 2016, p. 24). The culture of the program needs to ensure there are multiple ways that students can enact agency and that the curriculum actively encourages agency by the students in terms of taking control of their doctoral experience. By helping doctoral students enact agency, we can improve their socialization to the program and academy (Portnoi et al., 2015) and hopefully reduce doctoral attrition.

**Toto, we’re Home**

While the doctoral participants in my study persevered and made it to Kansas (to successful graduation or close to that point), the messages they received from the hidden curriculum about the organization and structure of the program, the social structures inherent in the academy, and the self, all had an impact on their doctoral experience. Although the hidden curriculum “transforms itself like anything else…it changes, it moves…it doesn’t remain constant” (Gair & Mullins, 2001, p. 24), the themes connected to the hidden curriculum in my study are well supported by many of the existing studies in the doctoral socialization literature. This suggests that the hidden curriculum, oscillating or not, can be a useful framework by which to examine elements of
curriculum that impact doctoral students’ successful completion. It is also important to note that not every theme identified was experienced by every participant (see Table 4), in some cases only one or two participants experienced a particular hidden curriculum. However, as Martin (1976) explains, a hidden curriculum does not need to be experienced en mass to exist; “a hidden curriculum, like a curriculum proper, is of some setting, at some time, and for some learner” (p. 138).

The participant self lenses are important concepts when we consider messages related to hidden curricula. Students bring with them to the program a unique myriad of experiences, characteristics, and motivations. As Martin (1976) asserts,

I think it is too often forgotten, that our interest can be in hidden curricula for learners as well as of settings. And just as the hidden curriculum of a setting is an abstraction from the standpoint of learners, so the hidden curriculum for a learner is an abstraction from the standpoint of settings. The hidden curriculum for Mary ‘cuts across’ settings, so that to discover it we must look not simply at Mary's schooling, but at the other settings having hidden curricula in which Mary is a participant—or perhaps is simply an unwilling victim. (p. 39)

Doctoral students have experienced hidden curricula all the way through Kindergarten to their Master’s degree and internalized many of the ideas and messages from those hidden curricula. Often times when participants said things like “that’s just the way I think about things” it could be that they learned to think about things because of the hidden curriculum in schools. Doctoral students’ educational experiences have created a unique
self-lens through which they understand and internalize messages from the hidden curriculum in a doctoral program.

While it was the intention of this study to examine the hidden curriculum of a doctoral program, I attempted to gain some access to the participants’ existing experiences of hidden curriculum during Interview 2 to better understand the lens through which they experienced the doctoral curriculum. Even with this information, in some cases it was not possible to tell whether the participants brought a specific hidden curriculum with them, whether their unique selves acted as a lens to understand the program’s hidden curriculum in a particular way, or if they were experiencing a new form of hidden curriculum created by the program. However, what was clear was that in each finding related to hidden curriculum there was some element connected to the doctoral program, whether through a statement an instructor made, course content from a single class, or as part of the ongoing doctoral program experience.

The findings from my study support the existing literature on doctoral student socialization and reinforce the importance of socialization as “critical to student retention and success in graduate school” (Portnoi et al., 2015). However, to this point “it is relatively unusual to speak of “curriculum” in relation to doctoral education”, though it is occasionally hinted at (Gonzalez-Ocampo et al. 2015, p. 25); in a sense, we could say that curriculum is hidden within the doctoral student socialization literature. In reality though, the main topics from the socialization literature such as the importance of the discipline, the multiple identities of students, the importance of the advisor relationship, the importance becoming part of a scholarly community, are in fact similar to the topics dealt
with in discussions of the hidden curriculum (see Acker, 2001). While “a hidden curriculum can be found yet remain hidden” (Margolis 2001, p. 1), I believe it is crucial to uncover elements of the hidden curriculum to improve doctoral student socialization. As Apple contends in his interview with Gain and Mullins (2001),

> At universities the hidden curriculum must be brought to an overt level, it must be thought about, it must be talked through and the kind of norms and values you want to organize in the workplace…all of that should be brought to a level where people can participate in it, struggle over it, talk about it but it’s got to be done in a way where people feel they can speak honestly and where the norms that are supposed to be usually hidden are democratic, participatory and organized around critical intellectual and pedagogical work. (p. 37)

The following section takes up Apples’ gauntlet to make the hidden curriculum visible by discussing the implications of the study and describing recommendations for future research.

**Implications and Recommendations**

There is a high level of attrition and time to completion for doctoral students nationwide (Bagaka et al., 2015; Gardner, 2008a; Gardner 2007; Golde, 2005; Walker et al., 2008; Stubb et al., 2012). The experiences of doctoral student participants in my study indicate that while the written and advertised curriculum sends a message to students that they can make choices about how to organize their program, that advisors will offer a particular level of support, and that students can create scholarly identities to meet their unique needs and goals, the hidden curriculum suggests that students should
follow a set path through the program, that there is a social structure that must be navigated in order to create a successful relationship with an advisor, and that some student identities are valued over others. Just as Golde (2005) argued that one cause of attrition in doctoral studies is the “mismatch between the student and the discipline” (p. 680), I argue that the disparity between what is advertised in the written and explicit curriculum and what is communicated to students in the hidden curriculum is where doctoral student success lies in jeopardy.

The findings from this study indicate that there are three major forms of hidden curriculum in the doctoral student experiences explored in this study: the structure and organization of the program, the social structures inherent in the program, and the students themselves. These three forms of hidden curriculum impact students’ experiences in both positive and negative ways. The following sections take each element of hidden curriculum and describe the implications for doctoral program before suggesting the ways that administrators and faculty can address these issues from a curriculum standpoint.

**Course Planning Implications and Recommendations**

Students are not used to the lack of structure inherent in a doctoral program (Bagaka et al., 2015) where they are encouraged to choose a unique path through the required and elective classes and take courses in almost any sequence. The program studied had only two courses with prerequisites, but the hidden curriculum indicated by participant’s experiences and messages from peers was that there was a best approach to course planning and sequencing. This makes sense when we consider Holley’s (2011)
assertion that most doctoral programs have a specific structure aimed at scaffolding knowledge and orientation to the program culture. Doctoral programs need to provide some kind of structure in regard to course planning and sequencing. If curriculum developers feel it is too restrictive to prescribe a single sequence to doctoral students, they could provide examples of multiple sequences through the program, with suggested electives listed for each example. When programs, like the one studied, have a large number of specializations, an example sequence for each specialization could be useful.

One of the findings from this study was that there was often a disconnect for students who were enrolled in a specialization that was very culturally different to that of the core program, but Gardner et al.’s (2014) work on interdisciplinary research provides suggestions for how to encourage interaction between disciplinary cultures.

**Enhancing connections between specializations.** Doctoral student socialization to multiple fields can be challenging (Gardner et al., 2014), and while the participants in this study were all within the field of education, some of the specializations differed a great deal in the values, norms, and beliefs espoused by those in that field. In their discussion of interdisciplinary work, Gardner et al., (2014) explain that those who design and teach curriculum should be aware of how difficult interdisciplinary work can be. Curriculum designers in doctoral programs with specializations need to acknowledge the different cultures at play and create systematic plans to address such issues.

Instructors in each specialization likely teach in a silo, never considering how the messages they send interact with or disrupt messages from other specializations or the core program. Gardner et al. (2014) suggest that “ensuring that at least a minimal amount
of faculty members are trained in interdisciplinary methods or have the time and resources to acquire such knowledge is imperative in a successful interdisciplinary collaborative experience” (p. 269). I suggest awareness training should be provided to faculty so that they can understand the various specializations at play in the program. While faculty may collaborate across specializations for research, they likely do not consider collaboration related to teaching across disciplines, and should be encouraged to communicate with other faculty about the norms and values that act as the foundation or their field. Students may also benefit from an explicit examination of the different fields in education generally and the program specifically so that they can begin to reflect on the different cultures that influence the program, even if they are not part of each culture.

Simply encouraging faculty and students to be more aware of and to discuss explicitly the norms and values of the program and the specializations within it will achieve the transparent examination Apple called for when interviewed by Gair and Mullins (2001). Curriculum developers need to examine what drives the decisions they make in their curriculum, and then communicate those answers to students as part of the learning process. In this program this could be explicitly addressed in core courses such as the introductory course that all students must take in their first semester. Students could explore the foundations of their various specializations and report back to other students to start a dialogue and encourage understanding of other disciplines. Faculty are often invited to talk in the introductory course, and should be encouraged to address the cultural values and norms of their specialization and how that impacts the teaching and research in that field.
Make visible the post-coursework stages of study. Golde (2005) asserts that any element of curriculum that is hidden to students can cause high levels of anxiety and, therefore, attrition. It was clear in my study that there was a great deal of fear and anxiety related to the unknown nature of the post-coursework stages of study: the candidacy exam and dissertation phases. While Golde (2005) suggests this could be intentional to ensure only the strongest survive, it seems counterintuitive to leave these crucial elements of doctoral study shrouded in mystery. Pifer and Baker (2016) explain that in, what they call Stage 2 of doctoral study, there “is often no precedent for the type of activity and responsibilities students encounter” (p. 20) and that students’ relationships and strategies need to evolve to ensure isolation and stress do not overcome the experience.

The authors suggest that knowing the dangers of these stages and planning a strategy for managing them are crucial for student success (Pifer & Baker, 2016). Pifer and Baker (2016) suggest working with an advisor to “establish expectations and goals for the working relationship” in the new phases of study (p. 20). They also suggest “as students balance teaching, research, publishing, and the other facets of doctoral training, talking about these experiences with peers and faculty members becomes important and can ease the stress” of this new stage (Pifer & Baker, 2016, p. 20). Students need to be prepared for the post-coursework stages earlier in the program.

I suggest students should have a structured independent study during the coursework phase with an advisor or assigned faculty as a guide, where students learn to set goals as suggested by Pifer and Baker (2016) and learn to work independently on a research project. As part of this structure experience, students should meet regularly with
a seminar group of other students also undertaking research, and reflect on the experience of working independently and how to manage independent study. This could be explicitly connected to the upcoming curriculum in the dissertation stage, removing much of the hidden curriculum from this part of the program and preparing students for the change in the later stages of study.

Participants in my study also noted a strong sense of peer connection and collegiality that they appreciated, during coursework but which soon evaporated once they were working independently off-campus. Creating semi-regular, required seminars or workshops while students are in the dissertation stage would provide a chance for students to discuss progress with peers and a variety of faculty experts and give some much-needed structure to the later stages of doctoral study.

**Providing opportunities for part-time students.** Part-time students in this study, and in the research, describe often feeling like they are not part of the same community as full-time graduate assistants and note that they do not get the same kind of professional development and research experiences outside of the classroom as graduate assistants. There is no easy answer for this. As the PhD program handbook acknowledges, part-time student experiences are very different from full-time and graduate assistant experiences. It is usually not possible to ask part-time students to undertake additional tasks outside of the class experience, so the implication is that the existing curriculum needs to be adjusted in ways that allow part-time students to connect with each other and conduct research work with faculty.
Zahl (2015) suggests that “doctoral programs need to include purposeful required events and meetings with faculty to foster community” (p. 315). Because of the nature of part-time study described by my participants these required events need to be part of the formal curriculum. Similarly, “academic programs must provide more equitable access to research for part-time and full-time students. For example, adding research projects to topical courses or seminars would provide an opportunity to conduct research with a faculty member” (Zahl, p. 315). In my conversations with students, authentic courses with research elements were the most popular. Designing opportunities for research with faculty members beyond those teaching a course could be a useful way to limit the experiences that leave part-time students feeling like their full-time colleagues have more research opportunities and access to more instructors.

To meet the needs of part-time students in meeting more faculty, I suggest bringing multiple faculty to classes as guests to enhance the connection between part-time students and program faculty. Bringing guest faculty from other each specialization and other programs in the college would be particularly useful, as students in the program need to retain an outside member for their dissertation committee. Participants also reported having less research opportunities than full-time graduate assistant counterparts. One way to counter this would be to ensure each class has an independent research element as part of the curriculum. Part-time students simply do not have the ability to add more elements to their schedule without omitting something, so the only way to add additional research elements to the curriculum is to create more research focused classes or to have a research element as part of content courses. However, I noted earlier that
some participants did not identify as researchers because they felt in-class research was not as valuable as independent research. Therefore, I suggest the best way to both provide part-time students with research experiences and to encourage students to identify as researchers is to create courses that specifically focus on independent research with a mentor faculty member. This would provide additional experiences for part-time students, but would be part of the program sequence and would therefore not require an additional time commitment.

Finally, it is important to review the scheduling of courses in relation to part-time students (Zahl, 2015). In my study Peyton noted that s/he relied on summer courses, but often the course s/he needed were not offered in the summer. Peyton also felt that extremely late evening courses, designed to accommodate part-time students who worked all day, were in fact exhausting and impractical. Zahl (2015) suggests “program administrators could consider creating doctoral cohorts specifically for part-time students only” (p. 315), and this is one of my recommendations. A cohort model would allow students to create and maintain connections and community with the same group of students throughout their program, as well as provide additional scheduling options. Part-time student cohorts could meet on Saturdays and have a different sequence of courses than full-time students. One possible issue with the cohort model is that it often removes a lot of choice for course selection, so it would be important to allow students to move between different cohorts if needed. The institution could also provide additional facilities for part-time students. I am unaware if the institution has a daycare of any kind for part-time students, but providing additional support for students in the program in this
way would be a useful addition to remove the outsider status felt by some part-time students who are often parents.

**Advisors.** I found that the advisor/advisee relationship can be immensely beneficial to the doctoral student experience when it is a positive, well-structured relationship. However, when expectations are unclear or there is no compatibility in personalities, this can cause great distress and difficulty for students. The advising curriculum is often outside of the usual structure of accountability (Acker, 2001) and there are few guidelines on how advisors should supervise and build relationships with students, which further exacerbates problems with the advisor relationship. Creating a more structured advisor curriculum and making clear the boundaries and expectations of the advisor/advisee relationship is crucial to doctoral student success.

Students in the program I studied are assigned advisors (on what criteria, we do not know) upon entering the program; students then have to take responsibility for contacting their advisors and creating a plan of study. Contacting faculty advisors that they do not yet know can be an incredibly difficult task for first year doctoral students not yet socialized into the academy. Instead I suggest a more academic type of student advisor, like those found in undergraduate study, could provide entering doctoral students with guidance on enrolling during their first courses. Students could then take one or two semesters to research and get to know various instructors in their program before approaching an instructor about becoming their advisor. While this approach may cause a greater level of competition among students striving to impress a small number of faculty (Margolis & Romero, 2001), in the program I studied often times students decide to or
are forced to find new advisors later in their program anyway, and this design would take away the inherent social structures involved when students have to switch advisors. By giving students space and time to locate an advisor they want to work with, likely with similar interests and research agendas, much of the unknown nature of the advisory relationship is removed.

Once a student and an advisor have agreed to work together, it should be a requirement of the program that an initial meeting be set and that a contract between the advisor and doctoral student be filed. Acker (2001) tells us that students and advisors rarely negotiate such things as how often they will meet, what kind of advice is expected or will be given by the advisor, and what the expectations are for the relationship. By requiring an initial meeting with a set of questions to be discussed and filed, students and advisors are forced into confronting these expectations early on. I also recommend providing training for faculty on student advising, and having both advisor and advisee evaluate the experience at the end of each academic year. This is similar to the way graduate assistants and supervisory relationships are handled in the program currently, and while some may argue that it adds constraints onto a relationship that should evolve naturally, I believe formalizing the advisor curriculum is one way to bring the hidden nature and social structures inherent in the advisory relationship to light. Filing a contract of expectations protects both the doctoral student and the advisor and will reduce the high attrition rates in doctoral programs.

**Valuing identities and agency.** There were three major themes related to student identities in this study. Students did not identify as researchers, students’ academic
identities were not integrated with the family identities, and the importance of doctoral student agency. I address these themes together because they are interconnected in their implications and recommendations. It is important for students to conduct research and other scholarly activities in order to create and develop scholarly identities (Bagaka et al., 2015), yet I found that few of my participants identified as researchers. One reason I posited for this was a disconnect between the types of research valued and encouraged in the program and the types of research that matched students’ past experiences, goals, and motivations as scholars and researchers. The data suggested to me that the students’ own motivations and values were not being included in the program curriculum. In a similar fashion, students did not discuss their family identities as in any way integrated with their academic identities, yet we know that family identities can inform scholarly identities (Pifer & Baker, 2014). Taken together, these findings suggest that the doctoral curriculum is not working to draw in and utilize doctoral students’ multiple identities even though it could improve the experience for doctoral students.

Pifer and Baker (2014) discuss the interrelational nature of three sets of identities they found in doctoral students: the professional, academic identities; the personal, sense of self identities; and relational identities including family and other relationships. The authors assert that “the enactment of one’s identity as an academic is deeply tied to many aspects of one’s sense of self in ways that are more meaningful and complex than professional identity alone accounts for” (p. 17). It is therefore vital that the doctoral curriculum explicitly addresses students’ personal and outside of the academy identities, and this could be done in multiple ways.
First, the program needs to create spaces for identity related self-reflection for doctoral students. The introductory course in the program would be a perfect context to introduce students to the idea that they are involved in an identity process in doctoral education, and provide a structured process to help students examine their identity transitions. A self-study curriculum could be integrated into the introductory course that could be built on with each course and semester of the program. Students would work with various faculty and students further along in the program who would be “facilitating open dialogue with students in terms of needs, expectations, opportunities, and challenges” (Pifer & Baker, 2014 p.28). This self-study and identity reflection element could be a thread that connects every experience the doctoral student has in the program, which would make the whole identity process more transparent to the doctoral students.

Doctoral students also need to be exposed to multiple forms and types of research in the program and encouraged to consider how different forms of research and knowledge might relate to contexts outside of academia. The self-study recommendation introduces doctoral students to practitioner research. Other ways to enhance the research context in the program would be to actively work to connect research experiences to students’ own identities and goals, and explore multiple forms and dissemination of research. I have already suggested that building independent research studies into the program would enhance the part-time student experience and prepare students for the post-coursework stages of study, but it could also allow students to explore multiple forms of research. Students could utilize their agency to decide on the type and form of research they wanted to complete in the independent study course and disseminate
research in appropriate way. If there was a research course like this at multiple points in the semester, students could experience multiple forms of research. The hope is that when students realize that all of their identities are important in relation to their academic identities, and when they have curriculum choices connected to the kinds of research and knowledge creation that exist, they can use their agency to make informed choices about the progression of their academic identities and careers.

Overall I have noted that there seems to be a disconnect between the culture of the coursework stage of study and the post-coursework stages, and between the culture of the core program and the specializations. By creating additional, formal requirements in the coursework stage, students can be better prepared for the post-coursework stage. Creating a course that allows students to complete independent research would provide opportunities for full and part-time students to gain equal research experiences, would allow students to complete research related to their own motivations, and goals, and would prepare students to work independently after coursework is completed. Having multiple faculty facilitate and mentor students in this study course would provide students with different perspectives across disciplines. I have also suggested that encouraging dialogue and collaboration between faculty and students in the program could enhance the interdisciplinary nature of the program and benefit all doctoral students, especially those who specialize in a field for different from the core program. Taken together these recommendations work to create a culturally cohesive program that recognizes and embraces the different cultures at play across specializations and stages of the program.
Summary

While much of what I found in this study is supported by the literature, and there is much research into doctoral student socialization and how to reduce the high attrition rates that still exist, “there remains a need to strengthen the application of lessons from research to the behaviors of students and others engaged in the doctoral process” (Pifer & Baker, 2016, p. 15). One way to achieve this application is through adjustments to the curriculum in doctoral program. The implications and recommendations arising from this study can be summed up simply - hidden curricula, whether intended or not intended, exist within doctoral programs, and they impact a doctoral student’s experience and success. If curriculum developers and instructors take steps to reflect on all aspects of the curriculum and students’ lived experiences of the curriculum, the hidden curriculum will become more visible and can be addressed to enhance doctoral student success. Curricular adjustments will make hidden processes transparent, encourage students to reflect on their doctoral experiences as part of the broader contexts in their lives, and provide an experience where students take ownership and agency within their new found scholarly identities.

Limitations

The purpose of this research was to explore the lived experiences of doctoral students related to the hidden curriculum and identify possible forms of hidden curriculum. As is the case in any research study, the findings of this study have been subject to certain limitations. I now discuss these briefly.
The first potential limitation of the study relates to the sample. For this qualitative naturalistic inquiry, I recruited a theoretically diverse sample of 12 doctoral students to participate in the study. However, of those 12 doctoral students there was not a great deal of diversity in terms of gender, race, or ethnicity, resulting in an almost homogeneous sample; the sample included mostly white Americans who identified as females. One non-American student and two males participated in the study. Much of the existing work on the hidden curriculum relates to the reproduction and production of social constructs and biases connected to ethnicity, gender, religion, socio-economic status, but many of these issues were not identified in my study, likely because of the nature of the sample. However, it should be noted that this demographic make-up reflected the demographics within the program I studied.

The second limitation of the study relates to the length of time between data collection and the completion of analysis. During the time it took to write the study many of the doctoral students graduated, making member checking an impossible task with many of the students no longer contactable. This means I have been unable to share my findings with my participants for their interpretations and reactions. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, other elements of triangulation were used to support trustworthiness. As Martin (1994) suggests, any curriculum is part of a context of a particular time and place, so the hidden curriculum of the program uncovered when data collection began may not be the same as when this dissertation is published. However, the close alignment between the findings of the study and the existing literature on
doctoral student experiences suggests that the hidden curriculum identified in this study likely persists and continues to cause difficulties for doctoral students.

**Future Research**

This study was the first step in investigating the hidden curriculum in a doctoral education by examining the lived experiences of doctoral students in a single program. Future studies can build on this study in multiple ways. To begin with, future studies focusing on the doctoral student experiences can build on this study by examining student experiences from multiple programs and with a more diverse sample of students. To continue the research started here with a more diverse sample will likely build upon and further develop more critical findings related to ways doctoral students with different characteristics experience the hidden curriculum. Also considering the high levels of attrition that occur in doctoral programs adding those who do not complete programs to a study, as none of the participants in this study dropped-out, would complement and enhance the current study.

It will also be important to take the research beyond the student experiences to try and gain a more complete picture of the hidden curriculum in doctoral studies. To do this, I believe an ethnographic study would provide powerful data. By immersing oneself into the environment of the doctoral culture and observing the language used, content selected, and the student and instructor interactions that take place in the classroom, alongside an analysis of the written and advertised curriculum in mission statements, course documents, and syllabi, would provide a much more comprehensive understanding of the hidden curriculum in doctoral education.
Much of the hidden curriculum relates to the reproduction of the academy, and the findings from my study suggest there are many elements of hidden curriculum that students internalize without reflecting or analyzing on how that curricula impacts them and how they then may become part of reproducing those hidden curricula. Interview 3 asked students to consider and describe their various identities. In many cases the participants reported that they had never undertaken such an activity, or considered their identities and how they influence the doctoral student experience. Undertaking a study based on questions like this at different stages of doctoral education may provide insights into how doctoral students’ identities develop and evolve over the course of the program, as well as encourage a sense of important self-reflection in doctoral students.

The findings from the study also highlight the importance of the advisor’s interactions with students. Therefore, I think it will be crucial to any research agenda on the hidden curriculum in doctoral studies to explore the lived experiences of doctoral advisors and supervisors. The data generated from a study such as this would not only provide important information related to the motivations and curricula that impact advisors’ actions, but it would provide a space for advisors to begin to explore how they might be a part of a hidden curriculum; self-reflection is crucial to bringing elements of the hidden curriculum to light.

Finally, I intend to re-analyze and build upon the work from Interview 2 from this study. The data suggest that there may be certain elements of hidden curriculum that students bring with them based on their own assumptions and previous educational experiences. I would like to revisit Interview 2 to examine the messages students received
from earlier stages of their formal education in more depth and explore how those experiences formed their perspective on education. Depending on the results this yields, expanding the research to include multiple modes of representing their experiences, and including questions about both formal and informal education could provide data about the educational experiences that form us as scholars.

These future studies will allow me to take the foundational information identified in this study and build upon it to gain a more detailed and comprehensive idea of the forms of hidden curriculum found in doctoral studies and the ways that curriculum influences the experiences of doctoral students, advisors, and instructors.

**Conclusion**

This study explored the lived experiences of 12 doctoral students and how those experiences might connect to forms of hidden curricula. After conducting three interviews with each doctoral participant, it became clear that hidden or “hidden in plain sight” (Gair & Mullins, 2001, p. 23) curricula existed below the surface of the written, overt curriculum. In many cases the hidden curriculum provided a message about the values, norms, or beliefs of the program that were contrary to the written curriculum, resulting in cognitive dissonance for students, even if they were consciously aware of it. The forms of hidden curriculum identified related to the structure and organization of the program, the social structures inherent in the program and the academy, and the hidden curriculum and assumptions that students brought with them to the program. While the participants in this study persevered, and successfully graduated or were writing dissertations at the time of writing this, the hidden curriculum caused an element of stress
and anxiety that was not necessary. Doctoral students are essentially the cream of the crop of students (Golde, 2005), yet they are also very likely to leave their doctoral program before completion, and the existence of a hidden curriculum that sends mixed messages about the various cultural norms, values, and beliefs of the program and the specializations within it is likely one reason for the high levels of attrition. If we can remove the invisible cloak of the hidden curriculum and make the doctoral journey a more transparent and reflective experience for all involved, it can only be of benefit to the field of doctoral education.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

Study Title: *Examining the Hidden Curriculum in Doctoral Education*

Principal Investigator: *Alicia R. Crowe*

Co-Investigator: *Rachel E. Foot*

Email to doctoral students

Dear Doctoral Students,
I would like to invite you to participate as a participant in my dissertation study titled: Examining the Hidden Curriculum in Doctoral Education.

I am hoping to recruit participants who are currently enrolled at any stage of a X degree with a specialization in any discipline. The study will be conducted over the course of the Fall 2013 semester and participants would need to be available for three separate interview sessions and one focus group session with other doctoral students. Interviews and the focus group will be scheduled for dates and times convenient for you. The first two interviews will take no more than 30 minutes each. The final interview and the focus session will be no longer than an hour in length. In total, I would be asking for 3 hours of your time over a number of weeks.

I would like to make it clear that this study is not part of the EHHS Doctoral Student Forum activities that I am associated with, and is not at all connected with the X doctoral curriculum. For detailed information about the study and participant requirements, please see the attached consent form. If you are selected to participate in the study the researcher will explain the consent form to you in person and you will have the opportunity to withdraw from the research at any time during the study. Participation in this project will not impact your graduate standing or course grades in any way and that you are under no obligation to take part.
If you are interested in taking part, please complete the attached demographic survey (all responses, whether you are selected to take part in the study or not, will be kept confidential).
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Amendment to Original Consent Form

Study Title: Examining the Hidden Curriculum in Doctoral Education

Co Investigator: Rachel E. Foot, doctoral candidate
Principal Investigator: Alicia R. Crowe, Ph.D.

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what you will be asked to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision about participating. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to investigate what forms the hidden curriculum might take in doctoral study and then to explore how doctoral students experience the hidden curriculum.

Procedures
If you choose to participate in this study you will be asked to take part in three interview sessions and a focus group session over the course of the Spring 2014. Interviews 1 and 2 will each last about 30 minutes or less. The final interview session will last for one hour or less. The interviews will ask you about your doctoral student experiences and your educational history. The interviews will be audio recorded and the interviewer will take notes. General demographic information will also be collected about you for background information at the start of the study.

The final focus group session will be with other doctoral students participating in the study and the session is estimated to last for an hour. The focus group session will be audio recorded and analysed. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the session so no identifying information can be ascertained from the recordings or transcripts.

Audio and Video Recording and Photography:
The interview and focus group recordings will be transcribed and the raw data of these recordings will be accessible to the researchers and an outside, third-party transcription service. If you desire to listen to the recording you are welcome to do so (please see the audio consent form provided to you at the first interview). The files will be transcribed by a third-party transcription service not affiliated with Kent State University, and these transcriptions will then be used for analysis. When the transcriptions are complete I will request the third-party service delete all audio files. Upon completion of the project (publishing of dissertation), the audio files will be deleted by researcher permanently.

No identifying information will be placed on any artifacts, interviews or transcripts; pseudonyms will be used throughout to assure confidentiality. It is our intention that data from this study may be presented at an educational research conference, or included as part of a journal article. If you consent to take part in this study you are indicating agreement that your data can be used in each of these situations – I would once again like to...
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

Study Title: *Examining the Hidden Curriculum in Doctoral Education*

Principal Investigator: *Alicia R. Crowe*

Co-Investigator: *Rachel E. Foot*

The first two interviews for this study are semi-structured interviews. The first interview will be conducted at the start of the study as a fact-finding interview and to develop rapport. The second interview will be art-based and asking about the doctoral students’ educational history. The questions listed below are *preliminary questions* to guide the researcher. However, depending on students’ responses these questions may be amended, and follow-up questions not listed here may be used.

**Interview 1**
1. Overall, how would you describe your experience in the doctoral program so far?
2. Would you describe a positive experience from your doctoral experience program so far?
   a. What made it positive?
3. Would you describe a challenging experience in the doctoral program so far?
   a. What made it challenging?
   b. How did you manage to overcome the challenge?
4. What are your current career aspirations?
5. Have your career aspirations changed since you started the doctoral program? If so, how?
6. How do you go about selecting courses to take?
7. Are there one or two courses or classes that have stood out for you as particularly enjoyable?
   a. What made them enjoyable?
8. Are there courses, classes or experiences that have stood out for you as particularly helpful to your doctoral work?
   a. What made them helpful?
9. Are there courses, classes or experiences that have stood out for you as particularly helpful toward your future career goals?
   a. What made them helpful?
10. Are there one or two courses or classes that have stood out for you as particularly boring?
   a. What made them boring?
11. Are there courses, classes or experiences that have stood out for you as particularly challenging?
   a. What made them challenging?
12. Are there courses, classes or experiences that have made you question your future career goals?

**Interview 2**

Questions for the second set of interviews are prompts to encourage participants to visually represent their thoughts about their education. They will be provided with these prompts at the end of the first interview and asked to bring the responses to the second interview for discussion.

1. Please take a few minutes to think about your educational journey up to this point. How might you describe the process? Once you have taken a few minutes to think back of your educational life, please follow the prompts below.

2. Either visually or in words (whatever you are more comfortable with) please capture in some way the first part of your educational journey during the kindergarten-high school years.

3. Either visually or in words (whatever you are more comfortable with) please capture in some way your undergraduate college experience.

4. Now either visually or in words (whatever you are more comfortable with) please capture in some way your doctoral journey so far.

Please bring your responses to the 2nd interview where we will discuss your representations and educational history.

*Questions will be based on the artifacts students bring with them.

**Interview 3**

- Start by asking students to list their identities.
- Ask them to rank those identities by value (most valued at top, least at bottom, or in any pattern that makes sense.
- Then ask them to rank them from the perspective of doctoral student.
- Ask them to rank in the ways they see the institution, college, core program, and specialization value those identities. Discuss each decision.
APPENDIX D

CASE SUMMARIES

Jordan

Jordan was a full-time PhD student with a designated specialization within the program. Jordan was in dissertation phase when taking part in the study and working as a full-time graduate assistant (20 hours per week), primarily teaching in the department. Jordan identified as researcher, practitioner, family member, feminist, and multiracial person.

The Structure of the Program

Jordan’s specialization was a small one in terms of enrolled students, which perhaps created a more isolating experience as there were fewer students undertaking the same journey as Jordan. Jordan also noted that there was an expectation that his/her work should mirror his/her advisors, but Jordan resisted that expectation, “I think I was expected, because my advisor’s research is in one field….and so not doing research on that …I had to get more confident….that actually helped me” (Interview 1). It was not clear where the messages came from that Jordan’s work should match his/her advisor’s, but there is no written rule or expectation that this is the case, so it could be from a hidden curriculum; students and advisors often work on research studies and publications together, so this could be where the message comes that the advisor and student’s research agendas should intersect, but there is no requirement for this in the program. However, Jordan used agency to make a choice to follow his/her own research agenda.
While there was pressure to align with his/her advisor’s research there were also benefits from working so closely with an advisor. For Jordan, one such benefit was becoming part of a broader academic community.

I’ve done lots of conferences...there’s a core group, of which I am kind of like a, I don’t know, some kind of weird third generation person now, because the people who started it were my advisor’s advisors. I met someone who...I introduced myself to him/her and she looked at me and I said, ’you know, I’m Jane’s student’ and she said, ‘I’m your grandmother’, and she hugged me. (Interview 1)

This extended scholarly family is a positive form of hidden curriculum. By the very association with an advisor, a student can be embraced by an existing, connected research community.

As well as becoming part of an academic community outside of the program, Jordan’s experiences also suggested that the program valued and encouraged peer connections. As Jordan talked about connecting with peers, it seemed that peer interactions were encouraged not just as an avenue for emotional support during a challenging doctoral program but also as one way to yield more publications and research experiences, which is highly valued in the academy.

I think that they really want you - they know how difficult it is and I think it comes from a really good place and they want you to stay connected and make sure you have support and not, y’know, be alone. Because you are kind of alone doing this, so...talk things out and have some camaraderie and make sure you have a network and you’re supported. S/he [the advisor] thinks you have to - you
need to kind of like make sure you have colleagues that you can write with and that you have a way of being productive and the more people you know and you keep in contact with the better the chances of that. S/he’s never said that explicitly, but it comes up a lot so I think that might be part of it. (Interview 1)

Like some other participants, Jordan also described how peers disappeared when s/he started the dissertation phase in the program.

Honestly I think it’s just because y’know you get to this point where you’re doing your proposal or you’ve defended your proposal and you’re working on the dissertation - so intense that you’re kind of off. You’re not all in a central location taking classes. (Interview 1)

Yet this isolation seems par for the course in Jordan’s opinion, “I also think there is this understanding - I sense there’s an understanding that everyone kind of knows that [isolation will occur]” (Interview 1). In this case, Jordan could have been internalizing a message from the program curriculum that communicated the message that coursework was something that should involve peer interaction and collaboration, but that the candidacy exam and dissertation phases are supposed to be individual and independent, and values a more isolated form of research experience.

**Agency**

Jordan also described a tendency by others to try and pigeon hole his/her work under the label of the core education program, but Jordan resisted that as s/he identified strongly with his/her designated specialization. In a sense, Jordan used agency to hold on to his/her specialization identity rather than an identity aligned with the values and beliefs
of the core program. The hidden curriculum here suggests that the core program culture may have been more highly valued than the specialization culture, at least by some people in the program, and that there was little integration between specializations and the core program. In one example of the two worlds intersecting, Jordan explained that “when I was writing my candidacy exams questions I had to have a core program question in order for it to get through..., which I was fine with and I enjoyed writing it”, but even though Jordan was forced to answer that question in the candidacy exam, s/he reported that “I am not using a lick of that for my dissertation” (Interview 1). Here Jordan was resisting messages to identify with the core program primarily. Jordan also explained that during the dissertation proposal defense a member of the committee asked, “where is the core program in this work”, Jordan simply answered “if it is not there, it is not there” (Interview 1), indicating a resistance to conform to expectations, even when those expectations come from the dissertation committee.

Jordan also wanted to complete a dissertation using a format not usually used in the program, but Jordan had to once again use agency to get this dissertation accepted. The core program seemed to value research with teachers, so to research other groups involved agency and resistance for Jordan, “People are still like, ugh, it’s so inefficient what you’re doing, and it takes so long...and it took me a long time to be brave enough to say I wasn’t going to do research with teachers because that’s what everybody does here” (Interview 1). However, Jordan did note when discussing another issue, that at times when resisting the norm there is a sense that the reputation of being a trouble maker may follow students in the program. “Everyone has a reputation of who they are. I don’t want
to turn that into like s/he’s a whiner, a complainer, a troublemaker” (Interview 1).

Jordan’s experience seems to convey that there was a hidden norm for the type of research that should be completed in the program and that certain types of research were valued over others. There is also a hidden curriculum that it is not the norm to question the curriculum in the program, as doing so may cause negative results such as being labeled as a troublemaker.

**Social Structure of the Advisor Relationship**

Jordan’s graduate assistant supervisor was also Jordan’s academic advisor, and a respectful and collegial relationship was obvious when Jordan discussed working with his/her advisor on scholarly activities in their field, stating:

> My chair…has been really helpful to me [and] been with me since the beginning, so when I started the program s/he was kind of my advisor as I entered and s/he was on my candidacy exam committee, and now my dissertation chair, and I knew that, that was kind of not even a question. I knew that from the beginning - I kind of came here to work with him/her and s/he’s been very supportive. (Interview 1)

However, Jordan also noted that rejection is a huge part of the culture of academia and any kind of praise can be invigorating because it rarely happens.

> Y’know like as a doc student you get used to like - you don’t even need any praise because it’s just so much criticism right? So it’s kind of like if you don’t get criticism you think, no really, give me some criticism. (Interview 1)
Yet praise and support were welcomed by Jordan when they occurred. For Jordan, support by faculty was generally demonstrated by how quickly they responded to communications and not by praise. Jordan explained,

Like the other day - and this was honestly, this carried me through for a month and a half. I saw a member of my committee who was my methodology/research guru and s/he’s like how’s your research going? and I’m like I’m so excited about it, let me tell you what’s happening ...S/he was so like effusively complimentary, s/he was like I think - because my work’s weird and the dissertation’s weird. It’s gonna be - I’m gonna have to fight not to put it in a particular format and s/he was like, I just think it’s wonderful, you - I really see you as a...what did s/he say? you’re like, this is going to be groundbreaking, you’re so wonderful and it was like 30 seconds of praise and I was just like (swoons) and that carried me through for like weeks and weeks and that’s all it was, like that’s all. Because it’s so nice because you don't - I mean, your life is surrounded by critique, not praise, and so when you get something like that it’s great, it’s pretty nice. Like I told my [spouse] and s/he said that’s nice and I’m like NO. Let me tell you again what s/he said, it was so wonderful and s/he [spouse] was like that sounds ok, it’s not that great. And I was like no you don’t understand. It was life affirming. LIFE affirming. (Interview 1)

This quote from Jordan is telling of the fact that praise is not a norm in the program. Jordan’s experience seems to suggest that the hidden curriculum in the program is that
survival should be reward enough for doctoral students and to receive individual praise in this way is a currency a student will hold on to for some time.

In Jordan’s case the power hierarchy in the program was highlighted sharply when an instructor refused to accept a paper submitted in class. The paper demonstrated a difference in values between that instructor’s specialization and Jordan’s own specialization. Jordan explained,

It made me feel like it wasn’t so much about - like in some ways I was able to detach from it because it wasn’t so much about my work as I felt like there’s something else going on here. Are you trying to make an example out of me, do you not like my advisor…I think it was a little bit political. I also feel like it was also a little territorial because I was writing about [the instructor’s specialization] ... but in a different way. (Interview 1)

This experienced showed Jordan being caught up in differences between values in the specializations, and instructors from those specializations, within the broader core program. However, the structure of the program also helped Jordan use agency by providing an avenue where Jordan could demand to be treated appropriately.

I mean it was a pass/fail class and if I hadn’t gotten credit for that I wouldn’t have passed…. I knew it was gonna be yucky to handle, but at the same time I never really was fearful that I was gonna fail because I know s/he couldn’t do that. So I did have to say, well maybe we can talk to the Dean about it because you’re in violation of the syllabus and that’s a contract I signed. (Interview 1)
In Jordan’s example the hierarchical structure of the program allowed an avenue to resist against the hidden curriculum being enacted by a single instructor. It is not clear how other students, less used to enacting their individual agency may have come through this type of situation.

Overall, Jordan’s experiences highlight differences in the norms and values in his/her field and those in the core program, and the way actors in the program enacted those differences. Structurally, Jordan used agency to resist the norms of the dissertation in the program, to fight an unfair situation steeped in the power and social structure of the academy, and generally to make his/her own unique path through the program.

**Dana**

Dana was a part-time doctoral learner with no specialization. Dana was in the candidacy exam phase of the program and working part-time in higher education during data collection. Dana identified as a sibling, teacher, student, athlete, artist, parent, supporter, humanist, planner, caregiver, confidant, and spouse (Interview 3). Dana identified strongly as a teacher and therefore the word student had connotations that were seen to be demeaning so s/he preferred the term learner.

Because when I use the word ‘student’, that's what I use for my students….it feels demeaning when I've been in the profession of teaching for so long and I supervise student teachers and my future work will be with student teachers. (Interview 3)
The differences between the terms student and learner seemed to relate to a value that Dana brought to the program as there was no direct evidence in Dana’s interviews that this was a message from the program.

Dana was a reflective and energized participant who saw the benefit of looking at one’s educational history, “I like it because you forget that you're only in this part of your journey in education; there's got to be a beginning. I think we totally forget those early stages when they really would develop you and push you…” (Interview 2). Dana’s early educational life was in a private setting where there was freedom to be “creative” and “artistic”, and while sometimes punished for being “mischievous”, Dana received good grades (Interview 2).

**Structure of the Program**

As Dana moved through the education levels into university, s/he noted that the freedom once found in early education began to dissipate.

When I got to undergraduate work like Liberal Arts school, freedom, it was still there but it's… fading away and then you get to this level of education [PhD] and there's not a lot of freedom. There are choices but there's not a lot of freedom. (Interview 2)

I asked Dana to elaborate on the difference between choices and freedom, and Dana explained that while in the early stages of education,

Choices are made for you about what you will study, but there is a freedom to enjoy those choices, while at PhD level you make more guided choices with some freedom to select topics, but there are also more restrictions. (Interview 2)
Dana elaborated on the difference between freedom and choice, and also noted that there was a hidden element connected to many of the choices involved in the doctoral program. Dana specifically noted that while there may be choice about which classes to take, there was a clear step-by-step process to the program.

At this level, yes you do have a choice to do what you want to do and study but it's so guided, it's so ‘you do this, then you do this, then you do this’, which, I think a lot of people think that's not what happens in a doctoral program and once you start furthering your education. You do have a freedom in the choice of your topic of what you really want to do but there's a script. There's a clear script that takes away your freedom to do it, how you want to do it and a time limit you want to do it. That's what I mean by that. (Interview 2)

Dana’s experience with course selection and course planning indicated the dissonance between the surface level choices for doctoral students and the hidden curriculum that restricted many of the possible choices.

The doctoral program provides students with a “plan of academic work during the advisory phase” (Doctoral n.d.). Students in the program must take 18 credit hours of required courses alongside elective courses selected by each individual student based on their interests and goals. Dana’s experience suggests there was some choice in selecting electives, however, scheduling issues meant that there was not always the freedom in reality to select the electives that students wanted. Dana described the process of selecting courses as a “true beast when it comes to someone truly identifying and connecting with their doctoral program” (Interview 1). While students are encouraged to
create a unique path through the program using this process, a hidden curriculum seemed to exist restricting which electives students could select. However, even with course scheduling difficulties Dana described the doctoral experience as a step-by-step process but one that could be unique for each person. Dana’s artistic pieces from Interview 2 (Figure 5) represented the stage-based process in the program.

You do this then you do this ... you do this and there's no break from that. You break from it, you're off schedule then you have to move research and you have to move your candidacy exam and you have to move ... that swirl, you cannot have it and be successful. (Interview 2)

Dana’s comments suggested that deviating from the linear step-by-step path would have negative consequences.
However, Dana found that having separate steps in the program was one way to make the program more manageable. “I think a lot of people and professors that I’ve met and taken courses with have actually helped with me seeing it as step by step, instead of this really big vision of what I had to do” (Interview 1). However, even as a process with clear stages, Dana found these stages were not straight forward.

You're a stupid fool to think you start at point A and you end up at point B, dissertation. It goes A, and then you’ve got B1, B2, B3. You do this one, and then
you get to C and you realize you got to go back to 3B. It's like nothing is a straight trajectory of what you're actually going to do. (Interview 3)

Dana’s experiences suggest creating the plan of study was a very complicated part of the doctoral program with hidden elements. On the face of it, the plan was a guide to completing the program requirements with some choice involved, as represented by required courses and electives; however, in Dana’s experience the process was linear with iterative steps that each held their own challenges. While Dana found a certain level of choice, in the program it did not provide freedom to take any possible journey through the program; the choices were restrictive.

**Dissertation phase.** Dana noted that the core program valued creativity and multimodality in knowing and thinking, but then stated that writing was an important skill and valued by the program.

[The core program] really, especially here, is very, very imaginative and tactile. They really want you to be able to take your words and your vision and to create so that others can see that, so I think art is very big with our core program…. I think our program really pushes, because…it's education…that they want people to be able to reach multiple modes to describe what they want to see. …they want you to be able to write well. (Interview 3)

However, when asked about the discrepancy in his/her comment that the program valued multiple modes but specifically writing as a primary mode of representing ideas, Dana elaborated that it was his/her belief that writing can include multiple modes of knowing and stated that the program encouraged balance. Interestingly, the PhD handbook for the
program described the final dissertation as a “document” and notes that “all parts of the work must be included in typewritten form” (PhD handbook, n.d. p.20). This suggests a disconnect between the coursework stage and the dissertation phase of the program.

Dana’s description of the program highlighted the ways the program values multiple modes of representation, but the format of the dissertation seems to be primarily typewritten in a document. This suggests a hidden curriculum related to the types of knowledge creation and dissemination that are valued in the program, though it is not seen until the dissertation phase. This hidden curriculum indicates a disconnect between the coursework and post-coursework stages, suggesting that while the coursework curriculum of the program has evolved past the traditional notions of what constitutes knowledge in the academy, the dissertation phase has not.

**Self Identities**

While some part-time students talked about experiencing less research opportunities than their graduate assistant counterparts, Dana used independent studies to gain important research experiences. “I think my first research study on my own was scary but extremely valuable. It was extremely valuable because I was given all this guidance and then I was given all this freedom” (Interview 2). As well as these independent study research opportunities, Dana commented that the most enjoyable classes were those that involved authentic research experiences.

I think Research Class A, because it was my first look into taking research and analysis and ...having the idea of your research questions kind of meld together and form a vision of what research and scholarly research is. I think truly that was
probably the most important class for me because shortly after that I did my own independent study and I really wanted it to be independent in the sense that I was looking up stuff on my own and how to code and articles from journals that had used the method, and I think that independence allowed me. (Interview 1)

Dana’s experience demonstrates that s/he was able to build upon the authentic experiences in research classes to independently complete research. However, even though Dana clearly valued the research experiences in the program s/he did not fully identify as a researcher. For Dana the label of researcher had isolating connotations, so s/he preferred the label of ‘student researcher’ while hoping to one day become a faculty researcher.

I really think part of being a PhD student is researcher, but I would never classify myself as researcher until I'm done with the program. The identity of researcher is more a post-doctoral program; post-PhD feel to me. It also is not who I am. To me, very clinical, very cubicle, very isolated when you say, ‘Researcher’. Now, if you said ‘student researcher’, right now, totally acceptable. I don't want to leave this program and be considered a researcher. I want to be a professor that does research in so-and-so. This type of label is very, to me, terminal. (Interview 3)

Dana’s comments specifically describe research as “isolated”, yet there are many forms of research that involve collaboration with others. Much of Dana’s research during the coursework phase was conducted in isolation as part of independent studies, and this could be part of why Dana saw research as cold and isolating. The dissertation phase of the program also valued individual work, suggesting that Dana’s view of research was
influenced by a hidden curriculum in the program. Had the curriculum in the program included more collaborative forms of research, Dana may have more readily identified as a researcher.

Dana also described a pressure from the program to publish:

   The very first professor I had said a doc student should leave the core program with at least five publications... In my class last fall, we heard the same thing and my friend right next to me put her hand on my knee, squeezed, and she's like, ‘I've not written anything. I've not published anything’. I said, ‘Well, most people in this room haven't’…. now, my adviser says no [that’s not true]. (Interview 3)

Dana’s experience suggests that there are conflicting messages that came from individual instructors within the program. For instance, in the example above two instructors told Dana that students needed at least five publications, but Dana’s advisor said this was not necessarily the case. While Dana was confident enough to choose which contrasting message to listen to, less confident students may be swayed by the messages that put pressure on them to publish more or to do more than they are able. Dana described the impact that conflicting message can have on students:

   I think for me, I'm a confident person. I very much know who I am. I'm also confrontational and I don't back down from ... I think you've got to have that kind of personality to make the decision. I think someone that might be weaker or more easily guided is going to hear "five" and become fixed on five, and then start viewing their journey as failing because they've done none. (Interview 3)
Dana pointed out the hidden curriculum in these mixed messages and the negative impact this can have on students. This experience also shows that individual instructors have the power to communicate values and norms that can impact a student’s whole doctoral journey, and those values and norms may not always fully match with those of the program. Instructors are people with their own experiences and identities, and their actions impact the culture of the program. A department or program culture is represented by the people within it and the environment in which study takes place. When asked where messages about norms and values might be found in a PhD program Dana explained “I think it's professors, I think it's students. I think sometimes it's the visuals in the hallway” (Interview 3). Dana’s comments indicate that instructors are one of the primary tools for communicating program values, and if those messages do not match the overall culture of a program or the other messages being conveyed by instructors, it becomes part of a hidden curriculum that students have to try and interpret and decide which messages to synthesize and take heed of, and which to ignore.

While Dana did not describe hiding any identities in the PhD program, s/he said that to be successful in the program some identities had to be put above others. For example, Dana suggested that success in a PhD program entails leaving family identities outside of the academic life. “I feel like I've had to probably push [spouse] and family way out of the picture. I have to do that all the time…. that’s not my job right now. It's woven in there, but it's not my job. It's not really my identity right now, but I do have to shift that out” (Interview 3). Although again it’s unclear whether this was a message Dana brought into the program or one that came from or was reinforced by program
curriculum, it does provide an important insight into how family and outside of academia identities are valued in the program. It is important to note that Dana says that family identity is “woven in there” but then immediately states that s/he has to “shift that out”. It is unclear whether it is Dana’s own hidden curriculum that family has to be phased out, or whether that message comes from the program.

Family roles intersect with other identities as part of a whole person (Pifer & Baker, 2016), therefore it seems incongruent that Dana reports no explicit experiences of bringing the family identity into the program. Once again, this could be part of a holdover from the traditional, masculine nature of the academy where family was something associated with the too emotional context of women’s lives. While we cannot tell if Dana brought the hidden curriculum with him/her that family identities had to be a separate thing from the academic, it does seem that the existing curriculum did not fully encourage him/her to pull those identities together.

Dana’s experiences included more research experiences than many of the other participants and with that s/he experienced a hidden curriculum highlighting the norm that research was individual and isolated in nature. Finally, Dana reported a hidden curriculum, though it is not clear where this curriculum originates from, that it was necessary to separate his/her family identities from academic life.

Robin

Robin was a part-time PhD student with a designated specialization. Robin identified as a professional, leader, student, learner, and parent, and was in the coursework phase working full-time during data collection. Robin’s educational history
was one of achievement and boredom. While Robin enjoyed kindergarten, the small
religious school s/he attended left Robin feeling disengaged from the curriculum being
offered and “bored” with classes. Luckily Robin was “very internally driven” and simply
had a “pure love of learning” (Interview 2).

Structure and Organization of the Program

As a part-time doctoral student Robin explained that s/he often felt disconnected.

I would say definitely part-time is disconnecting. Because like last night I came
out - an hour and a half away, but I came to meet with another student and I
couldn't do any of my reading last night, and I couldn't do any of my writing
because meeting that student was my school work that night, so part-timers; it’s
hard. (Interview 1)

Robin also noted that there did not seem to be as many research opportunities for part-
time students as for students who were full-time graduate assistants, as s/he perceived
those students had more access to faculty conducting research. “We don't have - we don't
hear about professors that want you to do studies or whatever, I think, as much”
(Interview 1). This suggests that there is a hidden curriculum in the program that graduate
assistants get more opportunities to publish than other students in the program, but for
Robin part of the problem was placed firmly at his/her door when s/he stated, “I learned
you have to make the effort and I wasn't doing that at the beginning” (Interview 1).

Robin indicated that making more effort to connect with others was possible, but
this had to be part of his/her ‘homework’, meaning that additional interactions were part
of the requirements that s/he had to add to an already long to-do list; additional tasks for a
part-time student require particular planning and effort. While interacting with peers outside of class was an additional task in a busy schedule, Robin noted that the program clearly valued and encouraged connections between peers.

When I joined the Introductory Course, boy did I start connecting with people. Dr. X had all these people in. I set up coffee meetings with them, I came to the doctoral group during Introductory Course, I started connecting. S/he kicked me by the seat of my pants and said get out there and start connecting (Interview 1).

Robin also described the message s/he received about the importance of publishing. However, until the Capstone Course class Robin was unable to publish because s/he had to concentrate on class work. Over time, and having space in the Capstone Course to explore personal interests and topics s/he had not yet had a chance to study in other coursework, Robin explained that s/he had grown as a PhD student, “in Capstone Dr. X always tells us publish, publish, publish... And so I did. I submitted my first article... I’m exploring in a way that I wasn’t before” (Interview 1). Exploring new ideas and way of thinking was a theme throughout Robin’s interviews. However, the hidden curriculum suggests that for part-time students this requires additional time and energy, while full-time graduate assistants may make connections and gain experiences more naturally while on campus. This is important to note as part-time and full-time students are supposed to have the same opportunities to complete professional development activities.

The Self

Robin explained that the PhD program had been “freeing” (Interview 2) in terms of thinking in new ways. Even as recently as during the Master’s degree Robin described
the educational experience as “stifling” (Interview 2), but upon entering the doctoral program Robin felt s/he had an avenue to begin questioning and thinking “critically” about ideas and educational practices rather than just completing assignments for the sake of it. “It’s made me articulate in a way that I’ve always wanted to be be...I can show people research and say just because it’s printed doesn't mean it’s true - what do you think about that?” (Interview 1). This freedom of thought reached all avenues of Robin’s life. “It's not just contained at school; it's leading out into many different areas. Personal, my work, my confidence levels as in applying for new jobs. I wouldn't have done that before I was here. ... I'm having a voice” (Interview 2). However, while Robin felt free to think critically and question ideas, voicing opinions that opposed the primary rhetoric and values of the program was more of a challenge. For example, Robin explained, “If I were - and I’m not saying that I am - If I were to be a neo-liberal... I do not feel that I could share that in the classroom. Because I feel that I would be less than” (Interview 1).

Robin felt that talking too much about something that seemed counter to the values of the program would result in him/her being shunned by faculty and peers. Robin said that the core program specifically seemed to advertise itself as being open to all ideas, but yet s/he also received a message that it would be difficult to discuss certain perspectives or ideas. These messages seemed to come less from the formal curriculum and more from the null curriculum; the absence of any discussions or topics related to neo-liberalism were what sent the message to Robin that it was not to be discussed.

We never have those conversations. There’s never that - in all the time I’ve been here, nobody has ever bought up the alternative - well let's talk about
accountability - here's what I think is positive about it. It doesn’t come up, so that’s another part that informs me that you just don’t do this. Because nobody does it, and there’s one class I can remember in particular that the professor said - literally made a facial gesture like pffft when talking about OBD, so when those strong emotions come out, I tend to sit back. (Interview 1)

The hidden curriculum was interpreted by Robin from an interaction in class and also the lack of any discussions about certain topics, was that perspectives that differed from the norm of the program would not be well received. This is important to note in a doctoral program where students are being trained to become independent thinkers, yet the program sent Robin the message that certain ideas were not to be discussed.

**Social Structure of the Academy**

As well as experiencing a hidden curriculum that s/he could not discuss educational topics with values different than the program, Robin also specifically experienced the power elements at play in the hierarchy of the academy. In his/her first semester Robin was encouraged to attend a dissertation defense to experience the procedures present in that PhD milestone. At the first defense s/he attended Robin had difficulty locating a seat, and not yet familiar with the norms of the department and what s/he should do, Robin considered simply leaving the defense at that point, showing the anxiety that resides in gaps of knowledge about the values and norms of a new culture. However, Robin persevered, stayed, and found a seat at the table in the defense room.

I walked in and there were no instructions about where to sit, or how to act, or what to do, so I simply acted like the professional adult that I am. And you have
to understand. When I - this is a very interesting thing. I’m used to giving orders, taking command...y’know, messaging hundreds of employees so I’m used to being in charge so I come in, I do what any professional would do, I sat at the table and I was quite frankly told ‘all students need to move over there’ in a very dismissive manner, by whoever that professor was, and I thought you don't speak to me like that - who are you? But in his world he knew who he was and he was going to speak to me his way. Since then I’ve learned how to function in the little closed world that is [the institution] (Interview 1).

In this case, Robin assumed, quite reasonably, that a spare seat in the defense room could be used by anyone. There was no written rule that students could not sit at the table alongside the committee members in a dissertation defense, but for one committee member at least, there was an expectation that students should not sit with the committee. The result of this interaction with a single faculty member was one that impacted all of Robin’s future interactions with faculty. S/he explained that from then on s/he would wait and take a cue from an instructor before sitting in any unknown environment. “Yes, I will wait and take cues from the professors. For sure. I don’t want to be spoken to like that again” (Interview 1).

This experience indicates a hidden curriculum related to the social structure of a doctoral program where a student is not at the same level in the hierarchy as a faculty member. While it would be unfair to suggest from this one experience that the whole program devalues students and encourages putting students in their place within that social structure, this experience does seem to demonstrate that individual instructors
represent and embody the values of a program, and these experiences stay with students throughout their doctoral journey. Robin explained after telling this story that,

Since then there’s been many professors that have been - in fact, almost all of them except that man - have treated me with high regard and high respect and have - in fact, sometimes they allow us to talk too much and they’re very open, so that was just maybe a - it was probably a small example of maybe institutional arrogance. (Interview 1)

Nonetheless, the hidden curriculum sent the message that students should know their place on the program hierarchy and that there are normative actions related to that status.

Robin mostly experienced hidden curriculum related to his/her status as a part-time student in the program and connected to the social structure of the academy. As a part-time student Robin received the message that while full-time students were able to easily connect with each other while on campus most days, this also afforded them more research opportunities. While the written curriculum stated that part-time students would have a program design that allowed for additional research activities, the hidden curriculum suggested that the norm for part-time students was that they would have fewer research opportunities because they could not be on-campus often. Robin also noted that there were topics that were taboo in the program. While the explicit curriculum seemed to value ideas and dialogue, Robin felt strongly based on interactions with faculty and peers that if s/he even tried to discuss philosophies that were neo-liberal in nature, s/he would have been negatively viewed. Finally, while Robin viewed him/herself as a leader in his/her professional field, Robin was sent the message that s/he was valued less than
faculty members in the program, even in terms of where s/he could sit at the dissertation
defense and should adjust his/her actions accordingly.

**Kerry**

Kerry was a part-time student with no specialization in the last semester of coursework at the time of the interviews. Kerry identified as parent, teacher, educator, [specialized employment role], community volunteer, friend, and Christian, and valued family above all else. Interestingly, Kerry forgot to identify as a PhD student because this was a relatively new identity compared to the other identities, and because Kerry noted that it had a finite existence that would end at some point in the future. Kerry’s educational journey started out in a teacher-centered Catholic school where “they gave you the information and you sucked it in... there wasn't any type of discussion. That was it. Discipline was a priority” (Interview 2). This environment taught Kerry how to follow rules and to be disciplined with school work; in essence, Kerry learned to play the school “game” well (Interview 2). After an enjoyable high school experience and an “uneventful” undergraduate experience, Kerry enrolled in the PhD, program, describing it as the “ultimate test of perseverance” (Interview 1), mainly because of having to balance other responsibilities as parent and instructor alongside those of a doctoral student.

**Structure of the Program**

At the start of the doctoral program Kerry was scared by the freedom to pick his/her own electives and make a unique path through the program, which was very different from his/her previous school experiences. Kerry noted that there was a road map in the program, but there were many options available. As someone who thrived on
structure and discipline, Kerry found the idea of selecting a unique path through the program daunting, “it was kind of like getting a syllabus with nothing on it” (Interview 2). This meant Kerry used his/her advisor to guide any course decisions. On multiple occasions when Kerry tried to find elective courses that fit his/her line of inquiry, institutional rules on who could enroll for a course or scheduling issues meant that the Kerry could not enroll in that course, for example Kerry was unable to take sociology courses that related to his/her line of inquiry. It was then that Kerry realized that there was only a finite amount of choice in creating a unique path through the program “it's been limiting because there isn't a whole lot [of classes] that I can pick from” (Interview 3). Kerry was also a part-time student who also had to schedule courses around a work schedule.

Kerry explained that grades were not important at the doctoral level. Kerry remembered one instructor in the program saying that grades did not matter. “Some of the research classes that I took at the very beginning were like, ‘I have to give you a grade, but I want to see what kind of work you can do’” (Interview 2). There was also a sense from peers in the program that grades did not matter. However, the written curriculum of the program suggested grades were important in the program as seen in the way grades were submitted for most courses in the coursework stage of study, and as illustrated in the graduate handbook for the college that houses the program:

Only work of high quality is approved for graduate credit. Graduate students are expected to maintain a 3.0 average in all work attempted at Kent State. A student who fails to maintain a 3.0 average is subject to dismissal. In addition, in order to
qualify for graduation, students must maintain a 3.0 average for all graduate coursework. Grades below “C (2.0)” are not included toward completion of requirements for any graduate degree, but are included in evaluating a student’s grade point average. A graduate student who earns a combination of more than 8 credit hours of B- (2.7) or lower grades, or more than 4 credit hours of grades lower than C (2.0) is subject to dismissal. (Graduate Handbook, n.d.)

There is some disconnect between the written curriculum in the program related to grades and the hidden curriculum. It may be that the program wanted to be part of a culture that valued the process of education over the product, thereby suggesting that grades should not matter, but the requirements of the institution required that courses have grades, and doctoral students required a certain GPA to move forward with their doctoral work. It was also interesting to note that for Kerry grades added a motivating factor to courses. Kerry explained that in pass/fail classes with no letter grade s/he might not work as hard.

I think the grade forces you to work harder. I think it does. If I write a paper pass or fail, I'm not going to put nearly the amount of work into it if there's not a grade assigned….It's a hard sell, to not have to get a grade...Because I remember in the Introductory course, ‘Well, this isn't going to be a grade. It's pass or fail.’ The Capstone Course was also pass/fail, but what I did for that class I did so I could use it ...Even though it was pass/fail, I didn't cut corners because eventually I'm going to have to do this anyway, so do it now. (Interview 2)

So, for Kerry, if the course did not have an authentic element to it, the importance of grades was a clear motivating factor. This idea of grades as motivation may be another
reason why grades are still in place in the program, even though the hidden curriculum communicated by instructors is that the program values student progress over assigning a value to their efforts.

As a returning, older adult student Kerry reported socializing primarily with other older returning students in the program. Kerry was also a part-time student who gravitated towards other part-time students and enjoyed the ‘camaraderie’ with them. However, in terms of research experiences, Kerry noted that graduate assistants may have received more research experiences than part-time students. Kerry explained:

I found this semester, too, that a lot of people felt that the graduate assistants had a little bit of an upper hand...I sometimes I think that if I was a graduate assistant... and this is just my opinion... I think that sometimes the graduate assistants maybe get a tad more [research experience]. Because I think that...you probably published more. Presented more. It seems like the people in my class who are graduate assistants are always pushed. (Interview 2)

Kerry’s comment suggests a certain level of competition for the best research experiences in the way s/he used the phrase “get the upper-hand”. This suggests there could be a hidden curriculum in the program that sets the full-time and part-time graduate assistants against one another to obtain the best research experiences. The hidden curriculum as experienced by Kerry also suggests that the norm of the program is that while part-time students and full-time students should have comparable experiences, graduate assistants were able to gain more research experiences outside of the classroom. While there was no requirement to be a full-time student in the program, or indeed to work as a graduate
assistant, Kerry noted a hidden curriculum that created a distinct difference in experiences between graduate assistants and other students.

**The Self**

As a student Kerry stated that family identities would likely not be highly valued if there was something that took Kerry’s attention away from his/her academic identities. “I think there's a sense of, ‘Put your big girl panties on and deal with it’” (Interview 3). Kerry witnessed an incident happen to a student in class who had a family emergency and was told by an instructor to live with it. While this was an experience with only one instructor, it could send a message that family identities were not valued as an integral part of academic identities in the program. Kerry also had many other identities that s/he had to manage. Kerry explained:

> It's a big balance between teaching and being a student. I've learned that my balancing act consists of, during the week, I am an instructor and sometimes I overlap as my PhD but I spent most of my weekends as a PhD student. There's so much overlap there right now. (Interview 3)

It seemed that instead of integrating his/her many multiple identities, Kerry felt that separating and balancing them was necessary. “I'm thinking that they [faculty] are going to say, 'since this [study] is priority, how do you do this and this, and this, and this, and this?’ Because this is what we're all about. We're all about us being a student here” (Interview 3). Kerry’s solution to managing so many identities was to develop “almost a dual role ... during the week I am an instructor ... and I spend most of my weekends as a PhD student” (Interview 3). This is interesting, because research indicates that
integrating outside of school and academic identities can be useful in creating a well-rounded scholar, yet the hidden curriculum communicated to Kerry conveyed that his/her identities must be kept separate, and that the doctoral student identity should come first, though it is not clear if this was a hidden curriculum Kerry brought to the program or one that existed within the program. The absence of an explicit curriculum encouraging Kerry to think of him/herself as having intersecting identities could in itself a hidden curriculum encouraging students to view doctoral identities as separate from other identities.

The experience of meeting existing students in the Introductory and Capstone courses also brought with it messages about which identities should be valued, as the student guest speakers talked about the large amount of work and time needed to successfully complete the program. However, Kerry was able to overcome the anxiety related to those experiences because s/he had such a strong grasp on his/her own motivations for completing the program; Kerry was determined the doctoral experience would not take over his/her life even though the speakers brought in to the introductory course seemed to suggest that the program had to consume a student’s whole life if they were to be successful. But even with his/her own motivations clear in his/her mind, the guest speakers had a profound impact on Kerry.

It stays with you. People that said, ‘It took me nine years’, and it seemed to be all about ... ‘you've got to read every single day, you've got to write every single day. You've got to read X amount of hours.’ It sounded like people were spending every waking hour ... they were taking their books to the bathroom...I was like,
‘I'm not willing to do that’, because here's me and if you're going to say this is my priority, we gotta play here. (Interview 3)

The hidden curriculum conveyed by guest speakers in these classes was that the academic life was all encompassing and the norm, and that students should prepare for that. This was likely intended to prepare students for the expectations of the program, but seemed in fact to create anxiety and encouraged students like Kerry to compare themselves to students further along in the program. This could also be another way that the program communicated to Kerry that outside of academia identities were less valued, as the primary goal being communicated was that sacrifices of other identities had to be made to be successful in the program. However, Kerry resisted that message and used his/her agency to keep his/her own goals and motivations in mind and not take on the norm of working all hours of the day and night.

Kerry noted that the goal of the doctoral program for most people was to remain in higher education after graduation and work as faculty; this message came from the students s/he met who were brought into classes, like the introductory course, to talk about their experiences. Visitors to the capstone course also talked about life after the program, but Kerry noted that all speakers brought in worked in the academy, “It's pretty much, I think the thinking is, ‘you're going to get your PhD and you're going to be in some type of educational setting’… Other people in my class were those who said, ‘I'm a principal and I want to be the principal...or the administrator for a region” (Interview 3). Kerry experienced a hidden curriculum that doctoral students will eventually work in the academy after graduation, but even within his/her class demographic this was not the
case. However, the hidden curriculum did not take into account the goals of those students and instead worked to reproduce the assumption that the goal of the doctoral program is to prepare students for a job and life in the academy.

Kerry experienced hidden curriculum mostly related to the structure of the program. Kerry was a part-time student and noted a hidden curriculum that meant research opportunities were more likely to be granted to graduate assistants than to part-time students. Kerry also found that while there was an anxiety inducing amount of freedom in the written curriculum about course planning, in actuality the hidden curriculum communicated a much more restrictive selection of courses that Kerry had to choose from on his/her educational journey. Kerry did not feel comfortable bringing outside of academia identities into the program, and the hidden curriculum communicated that academic and outside identities should be kept separate as communicated through experiences with individual instructors and through the narrated experiences of existing doctoral students who visited various classes.

**Jessie**

Jessie was a full-time doctoral student with a specialization. Jessie was in dissertation proposal phase and working as a full-time graduate assistant (20 hours per week) during data collection. Jessie identified as a student, teacher, child, athlete, friend, a curious critical thinker, an inquirer, a comedian, and a liberal. Jessie initially identified him/her self as a doctoral student and then as a doctoral candidate. When asked if the doctoral student and candidate identities were interchangeable, Jessie confirmed that “there’s a distinction there. I’m a candidate; I identify as that” (Interview 3) and decided
to remove the doctoral student identity from the list as it was no longer applicable. Jessie went to a close-knit kindergarten and high school where the same 14 students in the kindergarten class graduated together. Jessie was also good at school, explaining, “good grades were easy for me. Too easy. I never learned how to study” (Interview 2).

**Structure and Organization of the Program**

When Jessie entered the program s/he felt that everything was completely unknown.

>You come in the first time you walk into the building as a doc student, you don’t know anything. I didn’t, I mean I didn’t even know what a dissertation was. I didn’t know and I didn’t, I just called everybody doctor, sir and I had no clue, so everything was, in a way, a surprise. (Interview 1)

This caused Jessie to unknowingly register for courses without considering how it would impact his/her whole journey. “In my first semester I signed up for classes kind of without a clue. I was just told you had to take some of these, some of those. So I took things that kind of sounded cool”. Then when the next semester came Jessie had learned from peers the importance of gaining course planning advice from an advisor, however, the following quote indicates how difficult it was for Jessie to get the necessary advice s/he needed for course planning:

>I think one of my small disappointments is, the advisor…proved to be not very reliable advisor when it came to responding to my necessary questions about course sequence…It came time to sign up for Spring semester. So someone [a peer] said you better take the qualitative research class… then someone said take
it with Dr. X, and I said ok. And so I went to, I actually sent an email to my advisor saying, ‘I need to know is this a thing to take should I take this’…I didn’t get an email back. So whenever I decided I would do it anyway, the class was filled. And it really did impact - well I don’t want to say negatively impact because I really believe that things all work out somehow…but I really had wished that I had taken that research class so that when I had another class, which was related to forms of research, it would have been a really good class to have had before that. And I could have taken the second research class earlier.

(Interview 1)

Jessie’s experience here illustrates multiple forms of hidden curriculum. Firstly, Jessie was able to enroll in courses that may not have been the most helpful at the start of the program because there was no written curriculum stating that students should take courses in a set sequence. However, Jessie soon found from his/her experience there was in fact a hidden curriculum, unwritten and uncommunicated to Jessie until after his/her first semester in the program, that there was a best sequence of courses to follow and to deviate from that sequence would cause problems throughout the rest of the program. The hidden curriculum here rests on the fact that certain courses act as foundation for other courses, but are not listed as prerequisites for students to follow. The program seems to want to encourage choice and freedom for students, but based on the content of the course and the knowledge of peers, there seemed to be a lived, hidden curriculum that highlighted the importance of following a particular course sequence. The second form of hidden curriculum in this experience relates to the importance of the advisor in course
planning. The PhD handbook explicitly stated that doctoral students should connect with advisors about course planning, and advisors need to approve a plan of study within the first academic year, yet Jessie was unaware of this fact in his/her first semester, and was unable to get the advisor support needed in the second semester. While the written curriculum asserted the importance of the advisor relationship, the hidden curriculum communicated that not all advisors enact that responsibility in the same way, and students have little to no guidance on how to manage such situations. The advisor relationship is also intertwined with power dynamics inherent in the social structure of the program and academy, meaning that even after Jessie reached out to his/her advisor there was no easy recourse for gaining the answers s/he needed.

The Social Structure of the Advisor Relationship

Despite the issues with course planning in the first semester, Jessie had very positive relationships with both advisors during the program. Originally Jessie was assigned Advisor A and an advisor who was not based on the main institutional campus. After getting to know a particular instructor through a class experience, Jessie felt able to ask that instructors to replace the second advisor that was too far away to connect with often. Jessie had very different relationships with each advisor. Jessie described Advisor B as a mentor and friend. “I guess I ended up with the other advisor more like a buddy in a mentor relationship”, while Advisor A was described as being social, “but it’s also very academic…it’s not like s/he treats me impersonally but I just don’t get as many invites to his/her house (laughs)” (Interview 1). There are clearly two styles of advising experienced by Jessie, one that was a close, mentorship relationship where Jessie and the
advisor met often outside of the program confines, and one that was personally close, but more academic. Research shows that advisors often use different models of support (Acker, 2001) and Jessie’s case illustrates that s/he may be getting the best of both worlds. However, it also suggests that there is not one particular model of advising utilized in the program, which could mean that students experience a wide variability in advisor experiences.

Jessie’s advisor relationship was positive and there was a sense of cohesive advising between the two advisors. Jessie explained that:

Since then, when I’ve gotten together with both advisors in the same room they, they sort of play off of each other in the best way, and seem to be concerned about what’s best for me and I always feel very supported. And this first advisor, it’s not lack of support. I realize now it’s like both my advisors are out of town probably three days a week doing consulting and stuff. They’re both full professors and this is what they do. (Interview 1)

It is very interesting to note that Jessie described the fact that his/her advisors may not always be available to meet because they had additional tasks and responsibilities. There is perhaps a hidden element of social structure in this comment, suggesting that Jessie had no right as a student to expect the advisors to be available when needed, or at least to be in town. The hidden curriculum related to the social structure of the program and academy were also very visible in other ways Jessie talked about his/her relationship with the advisors. During Interview 3, Jessie identified as somewhat of a comedian, using
jokes and laughter to lighten situations. However, Jessie noted that s/he tried to hold back some of that identity around the advisors as it may have seemed disrespectful:

> These people are all more accomplished than I am and deserve my respect. So, humor can sometimes be interpreted as disrespectful, even if I’m joking so there can be too much a sense of familiarity. It’s easy to be entertaining with people who you feel on an equal footing with. I think you have to be really careful because if you joke too much then we’re peers we’re buddies, and we’re not buddies. There has still gotta be this - even with Advisor B - know I spend a lot of time with him/her. In my mind I think of him/her as being 25 years older. S/he’s not, but academically s/he’s that much older. (Interview 3)

This quote from Jessie is saturated with elements of hidden curriculum related to social structure, though it is hard to tell if this curriculum comes from Jessie or is reinforced by the program. The first statement indicates that Jessie perceived academic accomplishments as deserving of respect, and that respect may not necessarily be based on the way the advisors act or treat people. Jessie then indicated that s/he held back a part of his/herself with the advisors in case it came across as disrespectful. While Jessie described a positive relationship with Advisor B as a sort of “buddy”, this comment suggests that there is a social structure and boundary within that relationship, which stops Jessie and his/her advisor from being true friends. Finally, Jessie suggested that while the advisor is of a similar age, Jessie saw him/herself as much younger because of his/her status as a student, and therefore, of less value. When I asked what it would take for Jessie to feel on a par with his/her advisor, Jessie explained that even with the PhD it
would take as long as 20 years of experience until s/he felt s/he was on the same level as the advisor. The hidden curriculum for Jessie was that there was really no way s/he would ever be on the same level as his/her advisors, and while on the surface the advisor relationship was very friendly and mentor like with Advisor B, Jessie had to hold back parts of his/her personality in order to make the relationship work.

Jessie’s readiness to remove his/her comedic side from the advisor relationship, and the sense that s/he will never be at the same level as the advisor seems to be particularly contrasted with an experience Jessie had with a graduate assistantship supervisor during his/her first semester. Jessie’s first assistantship supervisory relationship was less than positive. While Jessie reported that s/he learned a lot from this supervisor, s/he also noted that:

I felt mistrusted. That is to say I was asked to document my hours, and when I handed in my hours, I was questioned. Why did this take so long to do this? So I was saying a half an hour for this, 45 minutes for that so they all added up to…and I always - I felt, that I was, like I say mistrusted. (Interview 1)

Later when the supervisor sent Jessie an email berating him/her for the way s/he completed a task, Jessie took a stand and explained why s/he had completed the task in a particular way. I think this was an important element of agency for Jessie, especially when so much of the advisor experience shows Jessie’s hyper vigilance to the social roles of the academy, that Jessie took a stand when s/he felt s/he was being mistreated. It may be important to note that Jessie’s advisors are of the same gender and similar age, while Jessie’s assistantship supervisor was of a different gender and age range. These
differentials could account both for why the supervisor treated Jessie in a mistrustful way and why Jessie felt better able to take a stand.

Jessie’s experience with the hidden curriculum related mostly to the elements surrounding course planning and sequence and the social structures of the program. Jessie was unable to get the support s/he needed in the first semester for course planning and found that had a domino effect on the rest of his/her experience. Jessie’s experience suggested that a hidden curriculum exists in which there is a best sequence to follow in the program. Peers were also an important resource to Jessie, communicating this hidden curriculum and supporting him/her when the advisor was not available. Jessie had a rocky relationship with his/her assistantship supervisor but felt able to communicate with the supervisor to fix the issues. However, with his/her academic advisors, Jessie had one of the most positive experiences among the participants in the study, yet there was a clear hidden curriculum embedded within that relationship. The hidden curriculum placed Jessie on the lower part of a social structure where s/he did not feel worthy of being a peer on the same level with his/her advisors. This hidden curriculum caused Jessie to hold parts of his/her self back and stopped Jessie from enacting his/her full identities with the advisors.

**Jamie**

Jamie was a full-time student in the coursework stage of the program with a designated specialization. Jamie identified as a parent, a spouse, a teacher, a learner, a student, a writer, a reader, a child, a sibling, a grandchild, and a friend. For Jamie the teacher identity was synonymous with student and writer. Jamie's early educational life
was mostly social in nature; the academic side of school was definitely not as important to Jamie; however, Jamie still did quite well with grades, indicating that s/he may have been good at the school game despite not giving much attention to academics. Jamie explained that s/he was always good at writing and felt that s/he matured as a student during the undergraduate stage. While the undergraduate stage was still a social time for Jamie, s/he became more active in academics at this stage. When I asked about the social elements in the doctoral program Jamie explained there were still social elements in the doctoral program but it was different.

I've met some amazing people I hope will be lifelong friends… it's different because a lot of our conversations are associated with this…what we're doing, different classes, different expectations. I think the relationship is a bit more driven by what we all have in common right now. (Interview 1)

Jamie also stated that peer support was a part of the curriculum in the program, though it is not clear if this is written or hidden curriculum:

They talk about critical friends so much. You've got to have a critical friends. You've got to have critical friends. I remember in the introductory course the instructor said you've got to have critical friends, and I think it just naturally happens. (Interview 1)

While encouraging peer support may be an intended part of the curriculum, it is not clear if the importance of peer support is written anywhere. The PhD handbook and prospectus do not discuss peer interactions, but the curricula or syllabi of courses may do so – this
was not part of the study. However, there is clearly a curriculum that students need to connect with peers for support, at least during the coursework stage.

**Structure of the Program**

Jamie’s experience was that "nobody cares what classes you take and nobody cares what grade you get. They only care where you publish; where you present" (Interview 1). Jamie noted that this was a, "total shift in perspective” (Interview 1) to what s/he had been used to in previous levels of formal education. However, even though Jamie received the message that grades did not count from faculty and peers, grades were still attached to courses and for Jamie this was important. Without grades Jamie did not feel s/he would put as much effort into his/her studies. I asked Jamie how this effort would translate when grades were not attached to specific elements, as in the post-coursework stages and s/he noted that coursework was a requirement that had to be completed, but which held little interest in many cases, while the dissertation phase would be independent research on a topic of his/her choice that would be intrinsically more motivating.

This suggests a possible hidden curriculum that the coursework phase is just a requirement, or a checking off a box, that holds little interest to students. It could be that more connection between the students’ interests and required classes is needed to encourage a more intrinsic motivation. With regard to grades, there was a clear hidden curriculum in the program. While the written curriculum communicated that grades were important and students must receive a certain grade in each course to retain an appropriate GPA to move through the program Jamie experienced a hidden curriculum
that was communicated through interactions with faculty and peers suggesting that grades
did not count. Jamie compared this mixed message to a devil and an angel on his/her
shoulder. "You've got one telling you it's OK to get whatever just pass it, and the other is
like no. I think one is just habit and tradition it's what you're used to and the other is….
Jamie found it difficult to finish this statement but noted that the latter was very different
to the formal education s/he was used to.

The Self

Jamie listed family identities as the top of his/ her priority list, and as with most
doctoral students s/he noted a desire to have more time to concentrate on family
identities. Family identities influenced much of Jamie’s journey, for example s/he
explained that when scheduling classes, the primary motivation was to schedule in a way
that left the most time with family.

If I can get three classes in over two nights back to back, then that is what I do
because that is one less night that I have to be here versus with the kids. So I’ve
been trying to get all my coursework done in two nights and I try to be here three
days a week. (Interview 1)

When asked in what ways the program valued those family identities, Jamie noted that
the university should not be interested in personal identities.

If there was ever an issue, like someone is in a hospital I feel that if I went to
somebody they would care in the sense that, what can they do to help, but their
job is to…we’re paying them to give me an education. That’s their concern, not
that I have a baseball game tonight. That’s my responsibility. (Interview 3)
This indicates that Jamie was thinking about his/her family identity as completely separate from the academic identity. The hidden curriculum here is that family identities do not belong as part of the academic identity. However, it is unclear whether this is a curriculum Jamie brought to the program or if this was reinforced by hidden curriculum within the program. It is important to note that in this discussion of family identities and how they should be valued in the program, the way Jamie described these identities was in a very functional way; s/he gave an example where functionally s/he may need to miss a class because of family duties. What is not discussed is how family identities as a whole could inform academic identities in a more abstract way in terms of creating knowledge and becoming a whole being. I think it is important to note that there seemed to be an absence in the program of encouraging Jamie to integrate the two identities, as seen in the functional way Jamie discussed the interaction between family and academic identities.

Jamie also noted that s/he almost identified as a researcher. Jamie initially “forgot” the research identity (Interview 3) but then remembered it. One possible reason Jamie gave for forgetting a researcher identity was that s/he still primarily identified herself as a teacher, and it seemed that for Jamie the researcher and teacher identities were not intersecting. “When they asked me what I want to do I say I want to teach. I want to help people become better teachers. I still see myself more as a teacher than a researcher at this point” (Interview 3). Jamie described research s/he had undertaken in the classroom as a teacher as “informal” research (Interview 3), but noted that some class research projects and an upcoming independent project would make Jamie feel more like
a researcher. It seems then that the informal, teacher research role Jamie had undertaken was less valued than other types of research.

Again, it is not clear whether this message was part of a hidden curriculum in the program or one that Jamie brought to the program. However, it does seem that there was no specific message that Jamie’s teacher research was as valuable as traditional, academic forms of research. Jamie may have even alluded to the fact that practitioner researcher identities were less valued when s/he stated that eventually s/he wanted the learner, teacher, reader, writer, student identities to intersect with the research identity because “they are all really closely tied in my mind”, but then stated, "at least I want them to be tied, maybe they are not in the real world but I want them to be" (Interview 3). This powerful statement acknowledged the way these different identities could inform each other, but suggest the “real world” is sending a message through the hidden curriculum that this could not be the case; practitioner identities are not as valued as research and academic identities. One final point related to research identities experienced by Jamie was that there was a “push” in the program to research (Interview 3). Jamie noted that conversations about research were often connected to the idea that students would graduate from the program, enter academic employment and need to research and publish effectively in that environment.

I think the professors have been very good about saying what it is like if you want to get a job and you want to teach at a university…to get the job the only thing people are gonna care about…they are not gonna care about your grades, they are not gonna care about what classes you took, they are gonna go straight to see what
you’ve published and where you have conferences. And that that also ties into funding. You have got to follow the money trail…that brings in funding and notoriety…you have to publish and present to get your tenure sometime down the road. (Interview 3)

This quote suggests an additional level of hidden curriculum related to the assumption doctoral students are being prepared to become higher education faculty. It is well known that there are fewer academic jobs today than any time in the past, and the mission statement on the program website talks about creating disciplined scholars, it does not state that those scholars have to work in the academy. This is therefore a form of hidden curriculum. A message from the instructors and research content in the course is that students are expected to enter the academic workforce upon completion.

Jamie experienced hidden curriculum mostly connected to the types of identities that were valued in the program. Jamie felt strongly that his/her family identities were the most important thing in his/her life, but that they should not be part of the academic world. However, there seemed to be no indication that Jamie had been encouraged to look beyond scheduling issues in relation to family identities or that s/he had been encouraged to connect those identities to scholarly identities in order to enhance his/her development in the program. Jamie also noted that s/he hoped that one day his/her practitioner, teacher, student, writer identities would be more integrated with a researcher identity, but that this may not be possible in the “real world”. Jamie noted that there was an obvious emphasis on research in the program, but the fact that the researcher identity in the program was so closely related to an assumption that all students would go on to
work in the academy, and the fact that Jamie reported not yet fully transitioning from practitioner to researcher suggests a hidden curriculum that did not value practitioner forms of research. Finally, Jamie noted a hidden curriculum related to assessment and grades in the program. The written curriculum in the program was similar to what Jamie was used to in K-12 education and for Jamie this provided additional motivation to put effort into courses s/he may not have otherwise been interested in. However, the hidden curriculum communicated through instructor and peer interactions was that grades did not matter in the program, and this was a difficult concept for Jamie to internalize as s/he struggled to move away from what his/her experience and the written curriculum communicated about the importance of grades to what the hidden curriculum communicated.

Sam

Sam was a part-time student near the end of coursework with a designated specialization. Sam identified as a teacher, a parent, a student, a friend, a mentor (mentor intertwined with teacher in Sam’s mind) and a Christian. For Sam school was a very social endeavor, although s/he approached school like a job, with responsibilities that had to be met. Because Sam was a part-time student with a job, that sometimes had to take precedence over learning as a job. Sam also noted there was more peer support in the early stages of formal education, while at the PhD level people had their own stories and responsibilities that made the support less focused.

I think that you have a lot more support with people that are at the same point in their lives in those K-undergraduate years whereas now, there are so many
different people coming from different backgrounds and different stages of their life. I don’t have a lot of support in the program from people that are at the same point in their lives [as me]. (Interview 2)

Sam instead found support from his/her family, which I will discuss in more depth later.

**Structure of the Program**

Sam’s specialization was one that was quite different from the core program in terms of values and norms, but for Sam this resulted in a positive experience where s/he was introduced to different perspectives. “I’ve learned a lot outside of that little world of my specialization that I live every day” (Interview 1). Sam’s specialization differed from the core courses in that there was, ”a narrow focus” related to the theorists and philosophers to whom Sam had been introduced. However, Sam felt that. “I’ve been opened up to whole other ideas about education” by interacting with the core courses in the program (Interview 1).

Sam also described that his/her practitioner identity was valued in both the specialization and core courses in the ways s/he was able to connect course research experiences to his/her work as a higher education instructor. Sam’s experience was positive, but still may indicate some hidden curriculum connected to the differences between the culture of the core program and the culture of the specializations. It was not clear whether Sam made an individual effort to integrate the two worlds of the core program and the specialization or if there was encouragement for that in the program, though his/her positive experience indicates that a bridge can be made across the difference cultures of the specialization and core program. It was also interesting to note
how valued Sam’s practitioner identity felt. However, Sam was a practitioner within the field of higher education; the same field that students in the program were being prepared to eventually teach in. The complementary nature of Sam’s specialization to the types of research and identities valued in the program may well account for why his/her experience with this hidden curriculum was so positive.

While Sam was in his/her final semester of coursework s/he indicated that s/he was still unaware of some of the requirements around the post-coursework stages of the program. For example, Sam’s specialization allowed for a choice of candidacy exam format. Sam could sit the exam at home over a longer period (take-home), or take the exam in a short time period at school (sit-down). Sam noted that when s/he completed his/her plan of study at the start of the program, s/he had no guidance on which format to choose and so selected his/her first choice, the take-home exam, because it better suited his/her way of learning. However, Sam soon learned from peers in the program, and this was then confirmed by a faculty member, that students in the specialization usually took the sit-down exam. Once Sam had been informed of this, s/he stated, "I would be very nervous to do that [take the exam home]" (Interview 1).

This experience suggests two forms of hidden curriculum. The first form is in the hidden nature of the post-coursework stages. Even though Sam was so close to his/her candidacy exam s/he was not sure of the requirements and had not explicitly discussed his/her options with the advisor. One reason the later stages of the program may be kept a mystery could be to identify students who would buckle under the pressure before they got to the post-coursework stages. While Sam did not buckle, not knowing more about
the post-coursework stages likely caused some anxiety. Secondly, while the written curriculum stated that students had a choice in regard to the candidacy exam format, the hidden curriculum of the specialization was that the norm was for students to complete the sit-down exam. Following the written curriculum, Sam felt that the take-home exams would be best for him/her, but later when s/he found out the hidden curriculum valued sit-down exams s/he had to rethink his/her approach, which would perhaps cause him/her to take the exam in a format that was not the most appropriate. Even though Sam was very close to the candidacy exams stage at the time of the interviews, it was shrouded in mystery and the choices s/he needed to make in relation to the candidacy exam were not real choices as there was a hidden curriculum that communicated the expectation in his/her program.

**The Self**

Sam’s identity as a part-time student was clear in the data. However, unlike part-time students who discussed the differences between themselves and full-time graduate assistants, Sam’s part-time identity was most often discussed as interconnecting with his/her identity as a family member. Sam noted that it could be a struggle to be a part-time student, especially as it left little time outside of class to connect with his/her advisor, "I guess I'm not just going to drop by his/her office or see him/her in passing and have a conversation, which is unfortunate it's really just been communication via email” (Interview 1). However, one way Sam found to connect with his/her advisor was through independent studies. As part of an independent study Sam valued, "just working one-on-one with [my advisor] being able to directly communicate ideas and ask him/her if I want
to” (Interview 1). While it is very positive that Sam was able to connect with his/her advisor through independent studies, connecting with an advisor is not the primary purpose of independent studies. Independent studies are designed to allow students to explore specific topics that are not covered in the existing curriculum. The fact that Sam could connect with his/her advisor as part of that was a positive side-effect, but also suggests that the curriculum in the program did not sufficiently allow for a part-time student and instructor to connect in the same ways or as often as full-time students and advisors could. This suggests a hidden curriculum that part-time students are not as valued in the program and have to find additional ways to connect with their advisors.

Sam noted that the most challenging thing about being a doctoral student was balancing family life with the program. Sam was quick to state that family identities were not devalued in the program, but s/he did note that if family issues arose s/he thought that was something s/he would just have to deal with. As with other students, it is not clear if Sam brought this hidden curriculum with him/her or whether it was created or reinforced by the program. However, Sam relayed an experience in class where an instructor, “bluntly said that children were just not his/her thing, so I thought well I'm not going to march into this class and talk about my children” (Interview 3). However, Sam had already introduced him/herself as a parent in that class, “because it's one of the things I identify with”, and while s/he stated that s/he would continue valuing that identity, Sam commented that, “I'm probably not going to say anything about my kids again” (Interview 3). Sam was also concerned with what the instructor had been thinking while Sam discussed his/her children. While this was an interaction only with a single
instructor, it does suggest a hidden curriculum, which communicated to Sam that his/her family identities might not be highly valued.

The hidden curriculum also came through in the third interview about identities. I asked Sam to list his/her identities and then to rate them in order of importance. As Sam listed Christian and family identities at the top, and doctoral student identities at the bottom, s/he laughed and said “don’t tell my advisor” (Interview 3). While this was a joking remark, it does suggest that Sam’s advisor and perhaps the program in general would expect Sam to place his/her doctoral identities above his/her other identities. Taken along with the instructor comment about not liking children, this suggests a hidden curriculum communicating to Sam that family identities were not as valued in the program as scholarly identities. Instructors are often the mouthpiece for the cultural messages of the program and in this case, while there was no written curriculum that family identities were not important to the program, it was a message that Sam received, even if s/he was quick to state there was no devaluing of family and part-time identities.

When asked if s/he identified as a researcher Sam stated, “I guess I don't identify as a researcher because I'm not doing research. I think of research as big, like a job. I see it as slightly above [what s/he does as a PhD student]” (Interview 3). While it is unclear where the message came from, Sam seemed to think that the research undertaken as part of his/her coursework experiences was not as valuable as research done as part of employment. Interestingly, Sam wondered whether having a graduate assistantship may have helped him/her identify more as a researcher. Sam also stated that s/he might identify more with being a researcher if, “it was my job, part of my job description… if I
was doing it with somebody else I would” (Interview 3). These two statements are quite telling. The first suggests that while Sam did not feel part-time students were less valued than his/her full-time counterparts, Sam had received the message that graduate assistants may get more research opportunities that would help them identify as researchers. This is part of a hidden curriculum illustrating a disparity between the experiences of part-time students and full-time graduate assistants. The hidden curriculum suggests graduate assistants may do more research as part of their “job”. In talking about possibly feeling more like a researcher if it was part of his/her day job, Sam noted that doing research with someone else might help him/her identify as a researcher. This could suggest that the research Sam had conducted so far in the program had been primarily an individual activity, suggesting a more traditional, positive form of research may be valued in the program.

Sam’s experiences with hidden curriculum related in part to his/her identities as a part-time student and family identities. While Sam stated that none of his/her identities were de-valued in the program, an interaction with a faculty member communicated the idea that s/he should not talk about his/her family identities, constituting a possible hidden curriculum. Sam identified strongly as a family member, yet there was no indication that Sam was encouraged to bring that family identity into the program as part of the intended curriculum to create a more developed, holistic scholarly identity. Instead, there was a hidden curriculum that Sam should be careful about talking too much about family issues. Sam was also a part-time student, which was closely tied to his/her family identity. While part-time students and full-time students should have comparable
experiences according to the written curriculum, Sam noted that it was extremely difficult for him/her to connect with his/her advisor for face-to-face communication. One way Sam eventually achieved that connection was through an independent study. This was a very positive experience for Sam, but suggests a hidden curriculum that for some students, especially part-time students, the close work of an independent study is needed in order to fully connect with an advisor. Sam’s experience also suggests that the post-coursework stages of study are relatively hidden to students. While the written curriculum in Sam’s specialization directed students to select from two forms of candidacy exam, Sam learned through a hidden curriculum communicated by peers and an instructor that the norm in the program was to take the sit-down exams. This suggests a hidden curriculum related to the types of knowledge valued in Sam’s specialization, the product perhaps being more important than the process that would be undertaken with a take-home exam, and it suggests that there is little communication to students about post-coursework phases.

Blair

Blair was a part-time student near the end of coursework who was not enrolled in a specialization. Blair identified as a parent, child, sibling, spouse, instructor, friend, doctoral student, colleague, and peer. After some initial problems during high school Blair graduated as the most improved student, and was motivated from thereafter to have a successful educational experience.

Structure and Organization of the Program
Blair entered the doctoral program and found that there was “little guidance” on which classes to enroll in. Blair felt strongly that the class s/he enrolled in as his/her first course was a more advanced course in the program, though there was no sequence in place to suggest that was the case. Because of that Blair said it was “all a little overwhelming” and “intimidating” (Interview 1) during the first semester. Blair found the course on his/her own noting,

I had the plan of study in front of me, and that’s how I chose two classes. One class had a prerequisite that you had to take first and the second class [the one s/he enrolled in] didn’t have any prerequisites, and I don’t know, it was available, so I just like picked. (Interview 1)

Blair was not comfortable in the first class s/he enrolled in, feeling that the rest of the students were more advanced.

Though it turned out to be a good experience, it was such an advanced class and I took it my first semester as a doc student, and I don’t know if my thinking is skewed because of that. Maybe if I had taken it later on I would have had a real different experience and felt that people were reacting to me differently, but I remember this idea of looking at my identity as a doctoral student being very much shaped by that first impression. (Interview 3)

Blair reported a lack of confidence in the first semester, though his/her confidence eventually grew as s/he developed as a scholar. However, in the first semester Blair felt that the rest of the students in his/her first class were looking down on him/her in some way. The first experiences for doctoral students are important and impact the whole
educational journey. While there was nothing in the written curriculum that suggested Blair should not take the course s/he enrolled in as his/her first, the experience s/he had suggested very much that it should have come later in a sequence of courses. This suggests a hidden curriculum that communicated there was in fact a best way to sequence courses in the program that was not written anywhere or formally communicated to students. In order to scaffold knowledge and help create a stable growth in terms of confidence and identity development this curriculum needs to be made explicit for newly enrolled doctoral students. Blair did reach out to his/her advisor a few months after the start of the semester to assist with course planning, but Blair had far from a stable advising relationship during his/her time in the program.

Social Structure of the Program

Blair had a less than positive experience with his/her advisors. Upon meeting his/her advisor Blair noted that there was little chemistry, but did not have the confidence to know how to deal with that situation.

I don’t know if there has to be a certain kind of chemistry between advisors, but there really wasn’t. But I wasn’t sure…at the time, I think as a new doctoral student, you’re unsure of yourself…I didn’t want to burn any bridges. I didn’t even know that it was an option to change. (Interview 1)

It was only later through hearing peers talk about the norm attached to easily changing advisors, and guest speakers in the introductory course saying that changing advisors was something they had done, that Blair realized s/he could change advisors. Blair had initially been assigned two advisors, and one remained on his/her committee during the
candidacy exam stage. It was interesting that Blair particularly stated that when s/he considered the possibility of changing advisors, s/he felt s/he could not ask her second advisor about how to approach that, “I was like, I don't know who else to ask because I wasn't going to ask my other advisor at the time. I didn't know who to talk to” (Interview 2).

There is a clear hidden curriculum at play here for Blair. There was no chemistry between Blair and one of his/her advisors, but there was no written curriculum indicating how Blair should approach changing advisors. The hidden social structure was such that Blair could not even ask Advisor A about changing Advisor B. While Blair did not elaborate on why s/he could not do so, I suggest it would have been seen as a slight to even question that an advisory relationship was not working; it was not the done thing. It was only through the communicating of the hidden curriculum from peers that Blair was able to learn about the normative nature of changing advisors. Blair also noted that there was no transparency in how the advisors were selected to work with him/her. “When I came in s/he was my advisor, so I don’t know if it’s like, they pick them randomly, like here’s the next set of doctoral students coming in, you’re assigned to these four or whatever” (Interview 1).

Later in the program Blair had developed relationships with class instructors that s/he could ask to be his/her advisor instead. However, the initial assignment of student to advisor is steeped in hidden curriculum, with no indication of how the assignments were made or how the advisor and student might connect with each other because, the student at least, had no prior knowledge of the work, interests, or expectations of the assigned
advisors. It was also interesting to note that later in Blair’s experience, close to candidacy exam stage, s/he wanted to remove another advisor from his/her committee; however, Blair felt that this would not be practical so close to the candidacy exam stage. While it is not clear when that relationship began to break-down, the organization of the program seems to have made it difficult for Blair to consider a change even though it was fully his/her right to do so.

Blair was a part-time student and indicated that this influenced his/her time in the program. The first way Blair’s part-time status influenced his/her experience was in the lack of time.

There’s just not a lot of time to really make connections…just after class I have got to go. I drive an hour home, so I have got to go. I really don’t have time to stick around and talk…it comes off as rude. (Interview 1)

The time issue related to the part-time status in Blair’s case meant that s/he could not make important peer and faculty connections in the program. Though there was no written curriculum that stated students had to stay after class, the hidden curriculum seemed to suggest Blair should stay, making Blair feel like s/he was not enacting cultural norms by wanting to go home after class. Blair also noted that “there’s a kind of a lack of familiarity with what’s available to you. You don’t really have that connection with the resources” (Interview 1). Again, this suggests that there is a hidden curriculum that perhaps does not value part-time students as highly because they were not as familiarized and orientated to resources in the program by being immersed in the environment.
At one point Blair commented that “there’s a lot of hidden things that you don’t find out until the end” (Interview 1). When asked to provide an example of this, Blair discussed the hidden curriculum surrounding the candidacy exam phase in the program. Like knowing that candidacy exams, that there are benefits, pros and cons to taking the sit down versus the take home. You know thinking all these things that I’ve really been stressing about if you will for the last year and a half, just having the knowledge a little earlier in the program I think would kind of made other things less stressful. Not stress. I mean, maybe its stress. Even in the way that right now that we kind of dissect arguments and the way we think about dissertation. I wish those things would have been shared with you. It’s almost like they’re hiding things. They’re hiding things from you until they feel you’re ready to know them. Why can’t you just tell me so I know? (Interview 1)

Blair picked up on an important element of hidden curriculum here. The post-coursework stages of the doctoral program are not openly communicated to students until they are almost at that stage of the program, meaning that the curriculum related to the candidacy exam and dissertation are part of a hidden curriculum. Blair stated that one reason the program might have been designed in this way is so students do not learn about post-coursework stages until they are “ready” to experience them; however, it may be that these later stages of the program are hidden in order to see which students can withstand the stresses and strains of not knowing what is to come in the program. There is also a sense of power and control involved in withholding knowledge from students. For Blair the hidden nature of the post-coursework stages and the lack of forthcoming information
meant that s/he could not prepare for the future, which caused anxiety and stress that
could have been avoided by providing information and guidance in the written
curriculum on how to prepare for the post-coursework stages of the program.

The Self

Blair identified as a researcher, but with the caveat that it was integrated within the
doctoral student identity. Blair did indicate that one day s/he hoped the research identity
would be fully fledged, but Blair stated that this could not be possible until Blair had
received the doctorate:

Eventually I hope researcher will be a separate identity, but I include that in doctoral
student as a researcher and emerging scholar because I know that we, as doctoral
students, are not as valued by the academic community in terms of our research or
things we might get published…I know that one day that category of researcher and
scholar will be a separate category but for now it falls under the umbrella of doctoral
student because your work is considered to be – there’s this hierarchy, they like to tell
you you’ll be a junior faculty for the first 8 years or something…there’s always a
professor that likes to point out that your work is not as good as or it is less than, so
your abilities as a researcher are elementary. (Interview 1)

For Blair, there was a hidden curriculum in the course suggesting that research from
doctoral students was not as highly valued as research from faculty or those with a PhD.
Blair also reported that the primary goal in the core program was to prepare students to be
researchers and scholars.

They are training us to become researchers. I know there’s this PhD hurdle that I
need to get over to say I am a researcher and the program wants you to know you’re not yet a researcher scholar, you’re a doctoral student and when you’re done, then you’re a researcher scholar, when you have proven yourself in the academy community and you have written a dissertation and you have published and you have done all of these different things to prove yourself. (Interview 3)

The written curriculum stated that students would become researchers and scholars, it did not state that students had to complete all of the milestones in a doctoral program before they could call themselves researchers, but there seems to be a hidden curriculum that was communicated to Blair that this was the case. This message came from communication by faculty that there was a social structure on which students were at the bottom, and for Blair this also included the research identity.

Blair relayed a story from his/her first introductory course where students were introducing themselves to the rest of the class. One student identified his/herself as a professor at another institution. The instructor in the course stopped and stated that the student was not a professor. The student disagreed and stated that his/her job title was ‘professor’. The instructor proceeded to explain that the student was not a professor, and outlined the clear boundaries between the different levels of professor in the academic hierarchy. Interestingly, the introductory course instructor told the story of when s/he had been a student and another instructor had sent the message to him/her about the boundaries in the academy, publicly causing the instructor some embarrassment. Ironically, the introductory course instructor was doing the same thing to his/her student and reproducing the social structures of the academy. Blair observed that “they
[instructor] wanted to make sure “their students knew there were defining lines between us and them” (Interview 3).

While the social structure of the academy is not written anywhere, the hidden curriculum sent a message to Blair that there was a clear defining line between scholarship as a doctoral student and scholarship with a doctorate. Blair went as far as to say, “it’s almost like, you’re a piece of excrement while you’re a doctoral student, but when you get a PhD you’re awesome” (Interview 3). Blair noted that a number of professors communicated this message by seemingly devaluing students’ opinions in classes. Blair was keen to point out that “95%” of the instructors in the program did not devalue student perspectives or send the message that “students are at the bottom of the totem pole” (Interview 3), and that s/he did not let it change the way s/he viewed herself. But at the same time, “I was conscious of it. In many ways it did negatively impact me, but … I learned to let that kind of thing go. It is still in my mind; I remember it vividly. It won’t ever leave me, but I am not letting it shape every experience that I have” (Interview 3). However, the hidden curriculum that student research was not valued did seem to shape Blair’s identities. After discussing research identities for a while Blair during our interview, Blair seemed to realize that s/he did identify as a researcher as part of his/her work in higher education, but this did not translate into his/her identities as a doctoral student.

In my work I take what I do seriously. I believe myself to be a researcher but I know my work won’t be taken seriously so I group it under doctoral student …when I publish something from my work I get praise for that and it’s taken seriously.
(Interview 3)

For Blair then, s/he internalized the hidden curriculum that “in order for me to be completely comfortable in all my identities I need to have – I’m pretty sure I need to have that PhD to make me feel like I am credentialed to say I am indeed a researcher and scholar” (Interview 3).

Blair valued his/her family identities above all others, stating that should the doctoral program impede upon those identities, then s/he would leave the program. When asked how the program might value those family identities, Blair turned to the structural ways a program can value an identity, such as allowing students to leave if there are family emergencies. “If an emergency arose in terms of my personal life, they would excuse that absence”, or Blair noted that if s/he needed to postpone candidacy exams due to family issues it “would be met with understanding by every single one of my committee members” (Interview 3). What I found interesting was that when asked how the program could value family identities more, Blair stated, “I don’t know that they could make any more relevant experiences here for being a parent and a spouse. If I had to bring my kid to school….maybe. I don’t think they could value it more” (Interview 3).

Once again Blair seemed only to be thinking about scheduling matters related to including family identities. The hidden curriculum here can be found in what is missing. Blair seemed not to have been encouraged by the curriculum in the program to consider how family identities might intersect with scholarly identities beyond scheduling matters. There can be a great deal of benefit to incorporating a student’s multiple identities as they develop scholarly identities, but this does not seem to have happened in Blair’s case.
Blair experienced multiple forms of hidden curriculum in the program related to course sequencing and planning. Blair also experienced the hidden curriculum related to the advisor relationship. While the written curriculum in the program acknowledged the importance of the advisor in the doctoral student’s experience, there was no guidance or support for Blair on how to practically go about changing advisors. Blair had to look to hidden curriculum to decide how to act when the advisory relationship did not work for him/her. Blair also reported multiple ways that instructor comments communicated the hidden curriculum that research work conducted by doctoral students was not as valuable as research conducted by full researchers with a PhD, and even though Blair was experienced in conducting research in his/her work environment, the hidden curriculum in the program left him/her feeling like his/her research could never be as valuable without the final piece of paper upon graduating. Finally, Blair described the high value with which s/he regarded his/her family identities, and while Blair felt that was no way the program could value his/her family identities more s/he did not seem see the ways family identities could be valued in the program beyond them accepting scheduling conflicts.

Taylor

Taylor was a full-time, international student starting the candidacy exam phase. Taylor identified as a student, sibling, child, gender, caregiver, a ‘star’ (which meant s/he had faith confidence and belief in oneself) and a Buddhist. Throughout Taylor’s educational journey there was the sense that his/her family was with him/her. During kindergarten, Taylor found education boring, and realized that there was a social structure
of which students were a part. “I think probably teachers don't trust kids they just want them to do whatever they want you to do” (Interview 2). Taylor went to an authoritarian school outside of the USA. At times the authoritarian nature of the school left Taylor feeling very restricted and almost afraid to leave his/her classroom because the school was so large and s/he was worried about getting lost. At one point in Taylor’s educational history, one of Taylor’s instructors dislocated his/her shoulder from hitting so many students. However, Taylor also reported having some caring instructors.

**Structure and Organization of the Program**

Taylor was assigned two advisors upon admission into the program, but at the start of Taylor’s first semester one advisor was on sabbatical. Taylor checked with the second advisor about which course to take, and while Taylor’s course choice was approved by the advisor, Taylor found the course to be very challenging. Taylor later learned from other students that it was a challenging course to take in the first semester of the program. As with some of the other participants this suggests a hidden curriculum connected to course sequence. The written and advertised curriculum, indeed the curriculum communicated by the instructor was that the course was suitable as a first class. However, it was very challenging for Taylor. While any first course might be challenging, the hidden curriculum communicated by Taylor’s fellow doctoral students was that there was a best sequence to follow in the program, but this was not listed on any of the paperwork. However, as part of that struggle in his/her first course, Taylor communicated with faculty who provided support and guidance.
Course planning in general was very challenging for Taylor, who stated “I was very confused at the first semester. I feel there should be something like a guide telling me which courses were required, elective” (Interview 1), though there was a plan of study indicating the required courses, the electives were not listed on that form. For Taylor it was the academic paperwork that was difficult to navigate. For example, after multiple discussions with his/her advisor about filing a specific form, Taylor found out by chance that another form related to his/her candidacy exam had to be completed. Had Taylor and his/her advisor not communicated with the administrative office about one form, s/he may have missed the deadline for completing the second form. As Taylor put it,” if I didn't know that I had to do something, how would I even start the conversation” (Interview 1). Students do not know what they do not know, and their advisors are supposed to assist them in these matters. The written and explicit curriculum states that advisors are an important part of course planning and should be consulted before the advisor approves the plan of study. However, the hidden curriculum suggests that advisors, at least in Taylor’s case, may not have the requisite knowledge about the programmatic paperwork to successfully complete that role. The hidden curriculum here suggests that students must be proactive in finding out what they do not know in relation to the bureaucracy of the program, which is an almost impossible task. Taylor’s case also suggests that more training for faculty advisors on paperwork requirements could help stop this form of hidden curriculum from occurring.

Taylor also experienced a hidden curriculum when s/he tried to enroll in an independent study. Taylor was unable to take a research class that s/he wanted to take and
so decided on an independent study as an alternative. However, while independent studies were an advertised and written form of curriculum, the hidden curriculum in this case relates to the fact that in order to take an independent study, students must first convince a faculty member to supervise them. Taylor noted that s/he approached many faculty, but none would agree to supervise him/her for the independent study. This could have left Taylor missing out on an important part of his/her journey. However, one of his/her advisors was teaching a similar class and allowed Taylor to sit in on that class as a guest. This was a positive form of hidden curriculum related to independent studies, but still hidden curriculum; Taylor and other students have to rely on the goodwill of advisors to complete this element of study and if this does not happen, students may be left without an important educational experience needed to develop their programmatic journey.

Taylor also noticed a difference between the types of curriculum in the various stages of the program. Taylor stated that s/he was anxious about the post-coursework stages of the program, and that s/he had just got comfortable with the structure of the curriculum in the coursework phase when a new mysterious stage of the program was about to start. This is an interesting comment that could relate to hidden curriculum. While the coursework phase is very similar to the formal education most PhD students have gone through previously, there is still a certain amount of acclimatizing to the program that is needed. However, just as students find their feet with the coursework stage of the program, the curriculum shifts to a completely different type of curriculum with different expectations, interactions, and assessments. One possible reason for this
hidden curricula may be to keep students on their toes and not allow them to get too comfortable in the doctoral program. Luckily for Taylor, s/he was very excited about the new challenges, but other students may find the mystery more anxiety inducing.

**The Self**

Taylor noted that the program was one that valued diversity. Taylor gave the example that the program enrolled students from Saudi Arabia, and because of those students’ religious beliefs, often times the female students could not interact with male participants or take part in small-group discussions. Taylor experienced two separate instructors providing accommodations for these students. While it is likely intended that the program would value all students of all beliefs, I do not know if it is written anywhere. However, Taylor saw the valuing of diverse cultures and religions at play in this example. If this is part of an unwritten, hidden curriculum then it is a very positive one. However, it was interesting to note that Taylor described some mixed experiences related to the way family identities were valued in the program. While Taylor described the program as valuing his/her whole person and all his/her identities, s/he was also perturbed by a message communicated in class that his/her family could not understand the PhD journey. For Taylor, family had been a huge part of the educational journey since kindergarten and s/he could see no reason why family should not be part of the journey. Taylor explained that s/he would not be in the program without the support of family, yet the hidden curriculum in the program suggested that s/he could not gain support from his/her family related to the doctoral experiences. It is true that the PhD is a level of education unlike any other, and some people have difficulty explaining that to
their families, but this is not always the case. There was not an intended or written
anywhere in the program that families could not be a part of the doctoral experience, yet
instructors communicated a hidden curriculum to Taylor based on their own experiences
and experiences they had witnessed that families would not understand what doctoral
students were going through. This types of hidden curriculum could have the impact of
unnecessarily isolating students from their families at a time when they most need such
support.

**Research identity.** Taylor did not identify as a researcher, and when asked about
this s/he stated, “that's very interesting, we're supposed to be researchers right? We are
PhD students!” (Interview 3). While it is not possible to know if Taylor brought with
his/her the notion that PhD student identity equates to researcher, s/he did comment on
the high value on research in the program, which may well have reinforced this message.
Taylor noted that practitioner research was something valued in his/her specialization, but
more traditional, academic forms of research were valued in the core curriculum, though
Taylor could not verbalize where s/he saw these differences in the program. While Taylor
had undertaken certain research tasks in classes and part of his/her graduate assistantship,
for Taylor the researcher identity would not be fulfilled until s/he worked on some
authentic research. Taylor described research projects from advanced research classes
and the dissertation phase as authentic research s/he would eventually complete, while
the research s/he had undertaken as a graduate assistantship was not research s/he had
taken ownership of, and was therefore not part of his/her research identity. While
research seemed to be valued highly in the program, the hidden curriculum seems to
suggest that certain research tasks do not make someone a researcher and that only when independent, individual research is undertaken can someone identify as a researcher. This suggests that part of the culture of the program harkens back to the traditional forms of research in the academy when individualist, scientific research as seen in large, individual research projects were valued over newer form forms of research that do not require individual ownership to constitute research.

While Taylor was an international student in the program, the forms of hidden curriculum that s/he experienced did not differ dramatically from those of other participants in the study. Taylor experienced some hidden curriculum related to course planning, but for Taylor navigating the paperwork side of course planning was the primary form of hidden curriculum. While the written curriculum suggests advisors should be able to assist students with such paperwork, in Taylor’s experience that was not the case; the hidden curriculum suggested that Taylor had to take full responsibility for knowing which forms had to be submitted as part of the program administrative tasks. Taylor experienced a positive hidden curriculum where diverse cultures and religions were valued in the program, but also one that seemed to suggest that families could not be relied upon to provide support during the PhD process. Finally, the fact that Taylor did not feel s/he could identify as a researcher until s/he had undertaken a large, formal research project may suggest that individual forms of research are valued in the program, though it was unclear if this hidden curriculum was brought by Taylor into the program, or whether it was part of the program curriculum.
REFERENCES
REFERENCES

*The Hidden curriculum in higher education* (pp. 61-78). New York: Routledge.

Agar, M. H. (1996). *The professional stranger: An informal introduction to ethnography* 
(2nd ed.). Academic Press.

2(4), 27-40.


Routledge.


Presentation at the Second International Conference on Preparing Doctoral Research Students and Postdoctoral Researchers for Academic Careers. Oxford University, UK.

Austin, A. E. & McDaniels, M. (2006). Preparing the professoriate of the future: 
Graduate student socialization for faculty roles. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education handbook of theory and practice, Vol. XXI* (pp. 397-456). 
Netherlands, Springer.


https://du1ux2871uqv.cloudfront.net/sites/default/files/file/Graduate%20Handbo ok%202017.pdf


Hall, D. T. (1968). Identity changes during the transition from student to professor. *The


through the situate curriculum. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 113, 57-68.


Scary disturbances in a doctoral research preparation course. *Teachers College Record, 110*(8), 1541-1573.


Maunula, M. (2014). Building individual expertise in doctoral studies the significance of


NVivo qualitative data analysis Software; QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 10, 2014.


Pinto Zipp, G., Cahill, T., & Clark, M. A. (2009). The role of collaborative scholarship
In the mentorship of doctoral students. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning*, 6(8), 29-35.


