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Article

Which Role Shall I Perform? The Doctoral Experience of Women

Abstract

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Doctoral women experience disparities in self-efficacy, degree completion, and mental fatigue compared to men-identified colleagues. Women pursuing doctorates express hardships mirroring those reported in the 1970s. Applied qualitative methodology yielded emergent themes, contextualized by the frameworks of role theory and academic resilience theory. The experiences shared by the women in this study support that the expectations of women regarding the doctoral process do not align with the situational reality, specifically regarding imposter syndrome, mentorship, family-planning, financial support, and social expectations. Recommendations for departments and universities are provided to create a more just experience.

Keywords: women, doctoral student, role theory, academic resilience theory, imposter syndrome



Introduction

Women enter doctoral programs with multi-faceted identities encompassing a variety of roles and responsibilities. Doctoral training is an inherently complex experience, functioning as both a personal choice and a necessity for certain career paths. Women choosing to enter doctoral programs typically do so with employment history, commitments to family, and self-care practices; all create a unique intersection of priorities (Jovic et al., 2006; Kilminster et al., 2007). As women transition into their role as doctoral students, a major challenge for university services and professionals is understanding the decisions, supports, and resources necessary to ensure their well-being (Schmidt & Umans, 2014; Stubb et al., 2011).

Doctoral students have expressed difficulty navigating the social and political structures of their programs which, is experienced as a burden and stressor (Stubb et al., 2011). In this sphere, women doctoral students face greater difficulty in creating boundaries for school, work, and personal life (Ziegler et al., 2017). Despite being a globally documented issue for women doctoral students, the same challenges that women have historically experienced in these roles continue to be prevalent at present. While the challenges experienced by women doctoral students, and early-career academicians have been documented, the literature lacks a thorough exploration of the modern-day collective lived experience of these women, the unique stressors they experience, and the ways in which academic institutions can tailor their resources to provide support.

Since the 1970's, the experiences of women in doctoral programs has received critical attention. Early studies tended to focus on the disparity between the rising numbers of women awarded doctoral degrees and the percentage of women faculty members in departments (i.e. Acker, 1977; Harris, 1970). Harris (1970) noted that while Columbia University demonstrated increasing numbers of doctorates awarded to women candidates, 25% of all doctorates awarded compared to the 14% national average, women still held only 2% of graduate faculty tenure-track positions. The disparity between women doctoral students and women faculty mentors was studied by Acker (1977), who found of 33 women (N=92), only 17% of these women had high eminence ambitions, compared to 54% of men.

Between 1973 and 1988, the aggregate number of women candidates earning doctorates rose from 18% to 35%, yet the share of tenure-track positions held by women did not



demonstrate a commensurate increase (Ehrenberg, 1992). Rather, the likelihood that women would complete their degrees was influenced by the decline of men completing doctoral degrees (Ehrenberg, 1992).

As research in this field progressed from the 1970s to the present day, the disparities between women and men doctoral students have been more deeply probed and unpacked. Recent research has found that doctoral attrition rates are as high as 50% for all individuals regardless of gender (Carter et al., 2013; McAlpine & Norton, 2006; Mendoza, 2007). However, individuals who identify as women are less likely than individuals who identify as men to complete their doctoral programs (Matthews, 2017; Stiles, 2003). Some maintain that this gender discrepancy may be in part due to traditional feminine roles such as passivity, domesticity, and subordination that impede the doctoral process (Carter et al., 2013; Matthews, 2017). Others argued that this disparity exists based upon the inequitable social structures and supports offered differentially to men and women during their doctoral programs. Dever et al. (2008) found that women graduates “reported significantly less encouragement than males in those areas relevant to building academic careers . . . [and] were significantly less likely than males to interact with professionals outside academia and with visiting scholars during the course of their PhD studies” (p. ii). The reality of the current state for women attempting to earn their PhDs has changed very little over the past 50 years.

Imposter Syndrome

Historically, women academics were treated as less-than, or as other, by male-peers and professors. In the 1970s, it was widely thought that women were incompatible with high-powered careers because of conflicts with normative gender roles. Women expressed feeling pressure to value the importance of their husbands’ careers over their own (Acker, 1977). In more recent years, it has become clear that one of the most significant impacts on women doctoral students’ relationships to imposter syndrome, a condition experienced by many doctoral students that is characterized by feelings of fraudulence and self-doubt, has been their interactions with mentors or primary investigators (Villwock et al., 2016). Subscription to traditional gender roles, as well as societal pressure to adhere to those roles, has hindered women’s progress by heightening feelings of inadequacy necessary to pursue the doctorate in the first place.



Supported by role theory, the pull between personal career goals and personal family goals felt by women doctoral students has seemed to ebb and flow during their academic lives, increasing mental stress and ambivalence in decision making (Biddle, 2013). Women doctoral students cited their classmates and faculty as support systems that enable them to evolve into confident academics (Gray et al., 1997; Heinrich, 2001). One hindrance to self-efficacy may be the process by which doctoral students are traditionally socialized into their programs. Ellis (2001) reported that, while most women did not feel completely isolated from their departments, some women respondents stated that more opportunities would have been available to them if they had felt welcome and included into traditionally men's circles.

Experiences of imposter syndrome have a pervasive effect on the stereotyping of women's social roles beyond the campus culture; it extends through American culture. Women have found themselves playing roles to accommodate the mentors available to them, often embodying restrictive stereotypes (mother/caretaker) in order to operate successfully within departments (Krefting, 2003). The impact of ambivalent and hostile sexism may be that women have few opportunities to view themselves as successful academics, leading to feelings of isolation and inadequacy. England et al. (2007) found that when academic fields tip toward becoming women-dominated, male-academics tend to avoid that field. This again can impact feelings of imposter syndrome, as American culture historically values men's participation over women's.

Women Doctoral Students and Family Planning

Academia's historic neglect of women's biology has been a thread that runs through critical analyses of women in doctoral programs (Acker, 1977; Ehrenberg, 1992; Gray et al., 1997; Harris, 1970; Mason et al., 2009). Harris' (1970) prediction that paid maternity leave would be met with resistance has been confirmed by current scholarship on women's experiences in doctoral programs (Gardner, 2008; Krefting, 2003; Mason et al., 2009). Modern scholars' findings are consistent with Harris (1970) and Acker's (1977) historical findings that higher-powered academic careers were more accessible to graduates who are men, partially because women bear the responsibility of pregnancy and childbirth.

Studying aggregate data from 1973-1988, Ehrenberg (1992) similarly concluded that women doctoral students were placed in a double-bind in choosing between families and



careers. Even into the late 1990s, women doctoral students reported making painful sacrifices including their personal time and hobbies, family life, and finances, in order to fully engage with and benefit from their doctoral programs (Gray et al., 1997). A 2018 study of mental health in graduate students found that incidence of anxiety and depression was significantly greater in women than men (Evans et al., 2018).

Both men and women doctoral students expressed concern about the well-being of their families during their doctoral programs (84% women, 74% men), and were either somewhat or very concerned (Mason et al., 2009). Today, women doctoral students (54%), more than their male counterparts (36%), believed doctoral programs and families are incompatible, that having children will impede expected progress toward degree (51% of women ; 34% of men), and that maternity leave would be unavailable (Mason et al., 2009).

Theoretical Foundation

Role theory and academic resilience theory serve as the underlying theoretical frameworks to predict, describe, and explain women's experiences within doctoral study. Role theory is defined as the internalization of pressures a person receives from performing multiple roles, leading to strain in two forms: overload and interference (Kelly & Voydanoff, 1985). Kelly and Voydanoff (1985) define overload as occurring when an individual is provided with a larger amount of duties than they can comfortably handle. Interference, in contrast, is the resulting feeling when required to do two or more tasks at once, with the inability to meet expectations because the competing priorities are at odds with one another (Kelly & Voydanoff, 1985). Identity tied to gender can further influence role theory through gender norms constructed and upheld by cultural and social norms; academic culture is no exception.

Academic resilience theory postulates a theory of change model wherein an individual who encounters one or more risk factors and overcomes the challenges, then develops resiliency. This resilience translates into the capacity to succeed in an academic environment (Morales, 2008). Morales (2008) found that adaptability was inherently necessary for promoting academic resilience. This is the ability for students to recognize dangers or impediments to their success, analyze how to mitigate these impediments, and remain motivated toward an academic goal. Academic resilience is the product of successfully managing roles and overcoming challenges.



Within academic resilience theory, risk factors include women fulfilling multiple roles, and lack of same-sex mentors (Evans et al., 2018). However, women have continued to persevere, complete doctoral programs, and find routes to thrive. The lived experiences of women doctoral students present an ideal opportunity to analyze academic resiliency. Rather than ponder the mechanisms that lead to mental health crises (Evans et al., 2018), academic institutions are called to universally provide support structures that aim to help women navigate academic barriers in order to achieve academic resilience.

Methodology

At a mid-size university located in the Midwestern United States, referred to herein as the University, a group dedicated to women in doctoral studies was established to provide support to women doctoral students as they faced the challenges and isolation often experienced by PhD students. Organized by women and for women, the group hosted social, educational, and peer-support opportunities intended for all departments at the University. In the years following the group's establishment, the number of participants dwindled, prompting the staff of the University Women's Center to assess the organization in relation to the needs of women doctoral students. From informal discussions, the staff understood that the group in the current iteration was not meeting the expressed needs of the women.

Focus groups were coordinated and facilitated to invite women to talk about their experiences, wants, and needs, and to determine how the University could better meet those needs. The focus groups were an open forum to understand women's current experiences and solicit information to how the women's doctoral student group to could better meet their needs. The Center recruited a doctoral student who had professional experience with focus group facilitation (first author herein) to facilitate focus groups and compile a report to express the views and experiences of their peers (all authors). All authors continued to be active members of the peer support group.

The focus groups, held between January-March 2017, were the core component of an IRB approved research study. The results of these focus groups are presented herein, to better explain and explore the relationship between women's roles as doctoral students/candidates and their experiences in their roles, guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the collective lived experience of women in doctoral programs across campus?



2. What are the predominant stressors and/or strains experienced by women in doctoral programs across campus?

The authors used methods of qualitative content analysis by directly reviewing the transcripts from the focus groups and written responses from completed online surveys. A complete report using a qualitative research lens of phenomenological methodology (Creswell, 2009) was created and submitted to the Center and University, then content was integrated into this manuscript to disseminate findings to the larger community.

Women (N=397) were recruited, by an email invitation sent individually. The email list was a list generated by the Director of the Professional Development Center for Graduate Students and Postdocs. A total of 42 individuals participated in the focus groups. All identifying information was removed; thus, all information included herein is masked.

Focus Group Conversations

The participants were offered two meeting times to attend a face-to-face focus group held in the Women's Center on the University's campus. Both were times when no other programs ran in the Center. The sessions were scheduled to last 90 minutes. Group attendance ranged from 5-8 women for a total of 14 participants in natural science, social science, and humanities doctoral programs. The participants' time in doctoral programs was equally divided between two years or less, and five years or more.

The facilitator of the focus groups recognized that a subset of women invited did not have access to the in-person focus groups, and therefore shifted the data collection via an online survey. Some departments do not require on-campus presence for students who have advanced to candidacy, meaning many women doctoral candidates do not spend time on campus. Thus, the use of the online forum with the same questions asked in the face-to-face facilitated conversations provided access for women who could not physically attend the focus groups. A link to the forum was sent with a message to the 370 women who did not respond to the face-to-face conversations. Eighteen women responded via the online platform.

Upon completion of focus groups, a final anonymized report was produced and sent to all doctoral women, just as with the original invitation, asking women to read, review, and make contact if the report did not reflect their personal and professional experiences. Women responded in affirmation of the final report, supporting and validating the findings.



Coding

The researchers utilized an inductive approach wherein the generation of new perspectives emerged from the data analysis. Notes taken during focus group sessions were uploaded to Atlas.TI, the software that was then used to track coding and emergent constructs. Saturation was reached when the ability to obtain additional new information and themes was attained (Guest et al., 2006) and further coding was no longer feasible (Guest et al., 2006). Upon completion of coding, themes were assessed across focus groups and participants to determine which were the most salient and pervasive. Interactions between themes and experiences were documented and are described in the following sections.

Both types of focus groups were coded using qualitative content analysis. This methodological approach is used to assess, and document shared, lived experiences of a community or group (Creswell, 2009). Utilizing qualitative content analysis, the focus-group data was first read in its entirety as a narrative, then coded for thematic lived experiences as articulated by the participants (Saldaña, 2015).

Following coding, role theory and academic resilience theory were then reviewed as a framework to understand the emergent themes against the existing theory. Finally, an additional literature review was conducted through the lens of emergent themes to contextualize and validate qualitative findings. The content analysis methodology presupposes this order of analysis to ground emergent constructs and themes in prior literature, or to identify new perspectives not yet addressed (Saldaña, 2015).

Findings

Findings from the data analysis supported six emergent themes that were consistent across focus groups and participants, including: sexism, mental stress, family matters, creating support, mentorship and mentoring, and advocacy. Participants expressed that their doctoral experience was not necessarily how they anticipated it would be, though the degree of negativity or frustration varied. Women expressed positive features of the doctoral experience that they had not anticipated, such as the camaraderie and team mentality that permeated their departments.

Those who were studying or working away from the University had divided perspectives about their experiences. Either they were struggling with isolation while working to complete



their degree, or the University and colleagues had been the foundation to launch their career. For example, even when declining to participate in a focus group, one woman responded with an isolation-resonating comment:

I am unsure how I could participate in the focus group as I live in [location]. I am forever looking at ways to decrease my isolation; however, I don't think I can participate in something that takes place on campus. It's a bit much of a commute.

However, three women shared the support they received while on campus as launch points for their careers. One woman who was unable to attend shared her recent experience in the content of her email:

When interviewing for tenure-track faculty positions I was very intentional about asking how each school supported female faculty in their career and leadership endeavors. It's amazing how many did not have anything formal and assumed that the opportunities to advance were equally attainable between genders. Looking back, having been involved in Graduate Student Senate/Council and having had an amazing female advisor and mentor, I was very spoiled at [the University]. Women need support and I'm glad to hear that the women's group is trying to meet the needs of graduate students on campus.

Inherent to the conversations was ongoing frustration about the lack of space and accessibility for support. Responses confirmed that without clear expectations of roles, women internalized a lack of fulfillment in their doctoral experience (Horner, 1972). Women volleyed between roles of student, teaching assistant, instructor of record, doctoral candidate, research assistant, and higher-research positions; all of which have a varying hierarchy but were often simultaneously experienced. As such, women expressed the feeling of being pitched in a grey space, constantly wavering between roles, without enough support to be entirely successful within any singular capacity. The implication was that the “administration does not know what to do with us.”

Women shared their internalized frustration with the misconception that they felt from others about the value and quantity of their work. The typical doctoral degree is not comparable to a non-academic office job; women expressed that work completed outside of traditional workhours is perceived to be of lesser value yet is ultimately required. Participants in the academic sciences expressed frustration that the additional time spent in lab often went



unnoticed. The social sciences mirrored this sentiment, but through the experience of completing work independently, and often in social isolation.

Whether a discrepancy between internalized feeling, or legitimate perception, the feelings women expressed were exasperation, frustration, and a perpetual need to prove their effort in addition to the outcome of their effort. The following sub-themes provide a deeper analysis into the larger themes that emerged from the focus groups.

Sexism and Connectivity

In the online forum, women shared their experiences in relation to challenges based on gender, race, religion, or other identity markers. Fourteen out of 18 women explicitly stated experiences with overt sexism. Only two respondents stated that they had not encountered any challenges based on their gender while in their doctoral program. One woman stated that she felt the need to pretend that having children was not a desire and a goal, stated in the context of need to feel like she was “one of the men.” Another stated that she felt that her team purposefully avoided offering invitations to social gatherings because she was the only female.

When speaking to the women about their experience within their department, most felt connected, though to varying degrees. The construct of connectedness read as a facet of safety and security within the department. The department became its own community or ecosystem. Future research could explore if there is an association between perceptions of sexism and connectedness.

Navigating Barriers

Related to the concern of sexism and connectedness was the topic of support and mental stress. An overarching concern for students’ financial, mental, physical, and emotional health appeared almost universally in participant’s responses. A recurring concern was the lack of an authority within administration to whom departmental issues could be reported without fear of reprimand or retaliation. This concern was a perception of the authority in a department and a lack of staffing. Social isolation, financial hardship for research and fellowship funding, and craving mentorship were common themes across departments.

Family Matters

Women wrote and spoke at length about the impact of family on their motivation to complete their programs. The inevitability of relocation, an acknowledged consequence of



committing to a doctoral program, was a common concern among participants. It was mutually understood between students and departments that attending a doctoral program is not indicative of future employment within that department. In fact, most women acknowledge that moving for a doctoral program was also a commitment to relocating again 3-7 years in the future for a prospective career.

Engaging in relationships with the ever-present knowledge of moving is not only stressful, but it is restrictive to engaging in new partnerships and particularly salient to anxiety regarding childbearing/rearing. Furthermore, being a woman who is also working to support a family means having children enrolled in a school system, with friends, and social lives. The need to uproot and relocate post-dissertation can have a profound impact on the family unit; the women agreed that this is oversimplified and remains largely unspoken.

Women receiving fellowships vocalized that they do not provide adequate financial support for them to feel at ease with the prospect of childbearing. The cost of childcare alone is prohibitive. The lack of maternity and sick leave, coupled with traditional costs, make it nearly impossible for women to plan for pregnancy while in a doctoral program. Yet, participants noted that they carry out family planning goals, showing resilience despite numerous conflicts.

The experiences of the participants are, however, ambivalent. Some confirmed that their advisor/principal investigator played a supportive role in advocating for their needs during and after pregnancy. Others detailed the deeply restrictive policies that a department and advisor can enforce. In the doctoral process, the women felt that pregnancy places women in a contentious situation that requires clear guidelines from the University.

Women detailed the multitude of stressors that they encountered raising children. Conversations focused on the need for childcare and advocacy for child-rearing needs. Women felt that the Women's Center should play an active role in advocating for their needs, including support for on-campus, affordable, and accessible childcare. With the Center taking the lead, the women stated that they would be comfortable using their voices to support the cause.

Creating Support

Participants explicitly stated their desire for a community group, though there were differing functions proposed: support, accountability, processing, reading, and writing. Recognizing the mentally taxing nature of the doctoral program, the women mentioned the need



for increased access to mental health services at the University's wellbeing center. Specifically, women advocated for a facilitated, peer-support processing group open only to doctoral level women.

Participants expressed feeling that the culture of their departments was invasive, leading to negative feelings toward their studies. One woman stated that "The culture here is a culture of stress and fear and gossip and not at all a supportive culture." Even when discussing campus professional development opportunities, women shared that they are not often "enticing enough" to draw women away from their labs predominantly to avoid asking permission to leave an advisor's watchful eye unless attendance was specifically recommended by their department. Women, especially those in the natural science (i.e. those with laboratory positions) expressed that they would not ask permission to attend a mid-day lunch and learn because "[i]t is just not a conceivable option."

Women expressed concern that campus and community events feel large and well attended, requiring them to be "on," evoking additional stress due to networking pressures. An unanticipated finding was the lack of interest in social events that include alcohol and drinking (i.e. happy hours). Women shared internal contention with how to use their time, dictating that "unless it's a meal, I shouldn't be doing it" when referring to social activities. Women explained that "happy hours do not meet the needs of doctoral women." To some, a happy hour event felt geared towards a younger age group. For others, alcohol consumption was described as an intimate activity that is preferred in the company of others with whom they have established relationships. Women expressed that they would feel guilty taking time away from "prime working hours [to] meet strangers and drink alcohol."

Mentorship and Mentoring

While all agreed on the importance of mentorship, the women had mixed responses about their current engagement in a relationship that constituted mentorship. Despite the vocalized importance of mentorship, there is still a vast discrepancy between access and quality. While some were outspoken about the critical need to find a mentor, others felt that their adviser or principal investigator fulfilled the role. Still other women felt that they had mentors for certain areas of their life, predominantly their academic persona, but would benefit from the advice of an elder, more experienced individual not directly affiliated with their department. For



example, some noted a desire for a mentor who has previously completed a doctoral program and was genuinely able to enquire about their mental health, without the mentee having to worry about the ramifications of such an interaction. Some stated interest in becoming mentors to under/graduate students who aim to enroll in a doctoral program as a rewarding way to support women in academia.

Advocacy

Women expressed that they wanted the Center to serve as their primary advocate. There was consensus that the Center should be at the forefront of organizing and educating the campus community about resources and opportunities. Furthermore, women wanted the Center to be a vocal advocate for gender equity on campus. In addition to political advocacy, women emphasized the opportunities that they would find meaningful, including personal budgeting, cost-efficient child-care, increasing access to lactation rooms that are not in public restrooms, and creating a consistent maternity leave policy. Clearly stated, the Center should “[advocate] for changes that can be made at the university level to make life better for women.”

Participants vocalized hope that the Center would advocate/access additional finances where and when possible. Women shared candid information about financial support, or lack thereof, provided by their departments. Vocalized by the women, there was a great disparity across campus regarding financial resources provided to students for both cost-of-living and research. There were also different requirements and restrictions for what students are expected to complete to earn their stipend (i.e. sign a non-work policy for off-campus employment, number of required courses to teach, hours of work per week). Having the Center as an advocate would alleviate stress and aid in navigating barriers associated with campaigning for higher stipends.

Discussion

Findings from the focus groups provide evidence that current experiences of doctoral women echo experiences from prior decades. As noted by the literature, women’s experiences over the last 50 years ago have been burdened with consistent cultural, social, and interprofessional challenges. A new approach is needed to create supportive environments in which doctoral women can thrive. It is from this recognition that the authors took up the call to action and found empowerment through the experiences of others to disseminate knowledge



gained from qualitative analyses and to create a sustainable community network for women on campus by offering mental health services, professional development, writing accountability, research support, mentorship, and social support.

A direct result of the focus groups was recommendations proposed to the Center and the University. These recommendations may be a resource for other universities and women. Key recommendations based on this research would include:

1. Provide a doctoral-only accessible mental health support group for women facilitated by university counseling services, at no cost and with no limits on the number of sessions attended.
2. Create a university-recognized group specifically geared toward doctoral women, receiving financial support.
3. Implement mentorship programs, partnering women doctoral students with women in their field (academic or industry).
4. Develop language to support women doctoral students, allowing them to name the pain and joy inherent to the doctoral experience (e.g. academic resilience, imposter syndrome, spiraling process of becoming).
5. Ensure student access to an ombudsman who serves as an independent, neutral, confidential resource for women to voice academic and professional concerns.
6. Create a university-wide policy to employ doctoral students at a living wage for fellowship/research efforts.

The university in this study has successfully implemented the first two recommendations since 2017. A mentorship program is in development by the Women's Association (recommendation 3) and language is continually emerging that can be shared by doctoral women to articulate and share their experiences with others (recommendation 4). Recommendations 5 and 6 are current efforts of the Center.

Strengths and Limitations

The predominant strength of the study is that it addresses a significant gap in the current literature: the lived experience of the modern women doctoral student, and the recommendations she has for how the university can best support her and her peers. Concrete recommendations emerged from these focus groups, several of which have been enacted by the



Center and the University, provide evidence that change can happen in relatively short time. One recommendation, the implementation of an interpersonal-processing support group specifically for women doctoral students, was implemented successfully in fall 2017. The group filled in the first week, has remained full, and continues to have new participants join in each semester.

Regarding limitations, as often is the case with qualitative studies, the number of participants of focus groups was not as robust as ideal. However, the number of participants (N=42) was enough to conduct a rigorous qualitative content analysis. There is potential for selection bias in that certain women may have been more likely to respond and participate than others. The face-to-face and online survey data may have impacted the participant voices. Despite this, given the broad representations of departments and program years, results can and should be considered of importance.

Conclusion

Women doctoral students want to build relationships and rid themselves of isolation. Women have demonstrated that they recognize the burden of multiple roles, supported by role theory, and still embody the academic resilience to thrive. Women will continue to justify the importance of their schedules and relationships, all while battling imposter syndrome.

Common needs include opportunities to build community, accountability group(s), child-care/playdates, and events with meals. Food serves to be an incentive and an opportunity to network with other peers. Taken together, women are still navigating many of the same challenges of the doctoral process as women from 1970's. In the last 50-years, the number of women in doctoral programs has increased, yet resources to support their unique needs continue to be insufficient.

Women have, and will always have, multi-faceted identities encompassing a variety of roles and responsibilities. Transitioning to a framework of empowerment and empathy may increase individual and collective academic resilience and support professional achievement. Here, we present evidence for universities, departments, and faculty to act on these recommendations brought forth by the students they support. To create sustainable change, investment must occur from the institutional level (e.g. financial investment and adherence to recommendations such as those noted here), down to the interpersonal level (e.g. forgoing



imposter syndrome to invest the oneself and one's achievements). It is through genuine understanding of women's needs, in their current environment, that imposter syndrome may diminish, and women will flourish. Recognizing the collective weight of the lived experiences of this conversation, 50 years in the making, there is a collective reckoning to shift the culture of the doctoral process towards a more just experience.



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