

2017

Enacting Efficacy In Early Career: Narratives Of Agency, Growth, And Identity

Elizabeth K. Niehaus

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, eniehaus@unl.edu

Jillian Reading

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, reading,jillian@gmail.com

Crystal E. Garcia

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, ceg0051@auburn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehsedadfacpub>



Part of the [Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#)

Niehaus, Elizabeth K.; Reading, Jillian; and Garcia, Crystal E., "Enacting Efficacy In Early Career: Narratives Of Agency, Growth, And Identity" (2017). *Faculty Publications in Educational Administration*. 32.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehsedadfacpub/32>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Educational Administration, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications in Educational Administration by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.



Journal for the Study of Postsecondary and Tertiary Education

An Official Publication
of the Informing Science Institute
InformingScience.org

JSPTE.org

Volume 2, 2017

ENACTING EFFICACY IN EARLY CAREER: NARRATIVES OF AGENCY, GROWTH, AND IDENTITY

Elizabeth Niehaus *	University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE, USA	eniehaus@unl.edu
Jillian Reading	University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE, USA	reading.jillian@gmail.com
Crystal E. Garcia	University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE, USA	crystal.garcia@huskers.unl.edu

* Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	To explore how early career faculty in the field of higher education administration develop and enact their personal and professional identities.
Background	Participants sought to understand themselves, to understand their environments and the “rules” of the academic “game,” and to reconcile conflicts between their own values and identities and the expectations and culture of their environments.
Methodology	In-depth case studies of seventeen early career scholars in the field.
Contribution	The participants’ experiences underscore important implications for mentoring and socialization that takes into consideration the unique motivation and identity development of aspiring and new faculty members.
Findings	Identifies the early career period as one where new faculty are working to develop a strong internal foundation upon which they can manage the many challenges of their personal and professional lives.
Recommendations	The findings point to implications for practice, both in graduate education and in departments hiring new faculty members.
Keywords	early career faculty, graduate students, professional identity development, mentoring, socialization

INTRODUCTION

Early career tenure-track faculty members are perhaps the most widely studied group of faculty in the current literature, with good reason. Institutions put tremendous resources into recruiting and hiring new tenure-track faculty and supporting them through the first few years pre-tenure. In an Accepted as an Research Article by Editor Sydney Freeman, Jr. | Received: August 30, 2016 | Revised: November 30, 2016 | Accepted: December 10, 2016.

Cite as: Niehaus, E., Reading, J., & Garcia, C. E. (2017). Enacting efficacy in early career: Narratives of agency, growth, and identity. *Journal for the Study of Postsecondary and Tertiary Education*, 2, 43-58. Retrieved from <http://www.informingscience.org/Publications/3623>

(CC BY-NC 4.0) This article is licensed it to you under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/). When you copy and redistribute this paper in full or in part, you need to provide proper attribution to it to ensure that others can later locate this work (and to ensure that others do not accuse you of plagiarism). You may (and we encourage you to) adapt, remix, transform, and build upon the material for any non-commercial purposes. This license does not permit you to use this material for commercial purposes.

ideal world this investment would result in personal and professional benefits for the new faculty member that would in turn benefit the institution (Austin, Sorcinelli, & McDaniels, 2007). Yet, as Austin et al. argued, these positive outcomes do not happen automatically – “Institutional leaders and established professors need to understand what new faculty need and what strategies support their growth and success” (p. 40).

So what do new faculty members need? The world of academia requires its members to understand and navigate the “rules of the game” in order to progress through its ranks. This process of understanding and navigating an academic career is complex and highly influenced by socialization experiences in the doctoral program and the early career, personal and scholarly identity development, and the challenges of forging one’s own path within the academy’s constraints. One does not become a faculty member without at least some efficacy for the core academic and research responsibilities of the job, but how do faculty members maintain and enact that efficacy in the face of the many challenges facing early career faculty? How do early career faculty members establish a strong and sustainable sense of personal and professional identity to carry them successfully through an academic career?

TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF GRADUATE STUDENT SOCIALIZATION AND EARLY CAREER EXPERIENCES

Part of why the early career period is so crucial in determining faculty members’ later success is that during these first seven or so years post-graduate school, individuals “transition from dependent to independent research” (Laudel & Gläser, 2007, p. 387). The early career phase is a time of personal and professional development for faculty, where they are both developing their own skills and abilities and figuring out how they fit into their broader institutional and disciplinary contexts (Austin et al., 2007). However, this personal and professional development does not begin with one’s first faculty position, but rather is a continuation of the socialization process integral to the graduate student experience.

Traditional ideas of how researchers develop generally start in graduate school and focus on socialization, or “the process through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career” (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001, p. 5). This process requires “internalize[ing] behavioral norms and standards” (Weidman et al., 2001, p. 20) of one’s chosen field. Throughout one’s career one must continuously “abandon previous roles and values and adopt the values, attitudes, beliefs, and identity of a new professional that, in certain instances, conflicts with one’s preexisting character” (Weidman et al., 2001, p. 33).

Once a graduate student has been fully socialized into the profession, the next major developmental task is to transition from the dependent researcher status of graduate school to the independent status of an academic career (Laudel & Gläser, 2007). Unfortunately, there is often a substantial disconnect between graduate school and the realities of faculty positions (Austin et al., 2007). In part this comes from graduate students’ own motivation for pursuing academic careers, which is often driven by ideas of “autonomy, freedom, being part of a community of scholars, security, reasonable workload, the good life” – what Rice, Sorcinelli, and Austin (2000) refer to as the “myth” of faculty life (p. 8). This idyllic vision is often at odds with the reality of academic careers, which involve high workloads, stress, competition, isolation, and uncertainty (Rice et al., 2000).

There is a great deal of research highlighting the challenges that faculty members face in transitioning to their new faculty roles, including three main areas of stress – unclear performance expectations, lack of collegiality and community, and finding balance among various professional obligations and between one’s personal and professional life (Austin et al., 2007; Rice et al., 2000). Time demands are particularly challenging for new faculty, as developing new courses, teaching, and administrative and service obligations often distract from the development of one’s research agenda (Laudel & Gläser, 2007). Researchers have also documented additional challenges facing minoritized faculty members,

including extra service commitments, lack of respect, and lack of community (Alexander-Snow & Johnson, 1999; Rice et al., 2000). Sorcinelli (2007) asserted that concerns for balancing family and work are particularly pressing for female faculty members “who often face the press of biological clocks for childbearing at the same time as they are trying to start their careers” (p. 5).

AN ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE: AGENCY, IDENTITY, AND GROWTH

As O’Meara, Terosky, and Neumann (2008) explained, the “narrative of constraint” (p. 2) reflected in the research summarized above has helped us understand important dynamics influencing faculty members’ lives and careers. Yet, O’Meara et al. asserted that this dominant narrative also “obscur[es] another far more important line of conversation: an image of faculty members growing, or as having potential to grow, regardless of career stage” (p. 2). They challenged researchers to study how faculty members “craft themselves” (p. 18) and how they pursue their own goals and objectives in spite of these constraints.

Just as traditional views of early career experiences begin with the graduate student socialization experiences, so too does a more agentic view of early career faculty members begin with rethinking their graduate school experiences. One of the problems with the traditional view of professional socialization (reflected by Weidman et al., 2001) is that it positions individuals as passive recipients of socialization – very much in conflict with O’Meara et al.’s (2008) personal growth and agency perspective. Tierney and Rhoads (1994) proposed that socialization within an organizational culture (e.g., a department, institution, or discipline) is better viewed as a two-way street – culture shapes the activities and behaviors of organizational members, yet it is also shaped by those members. Similarly, socialization as a cultural process is bidirectional, “a process that produces change in individuals as well as organizations” (p. 18).

Building on Tierney and Rhoads’ (1994) critique, Antony (2002) critiqued traditional views of socialization as having “a congruence and assimilation orientation” (p. 350), whereby newcomers to the organization are expected to internalize and adopt “the profession’s norms, values, and ethics to the point of defining the neophyte’s own professional identity and self-image” (p. 396). Antony noted that this orientation is problematic in that it excludes individuals who do not “fit” the traditional notion of who “belongs” in a particular organization and restricts “the overall breadth of doctoral students’ knowledge; the extent of their practical experiences; and the applicability of their competencies to non-research institutions and to the private sector” (p. 351). He argued for a view of socialization that “distinguishes between developing an awareness of, versus developing a personal acceptance of, a field’s content, values, and norms” (p. 373). In this socialization perspective, students recognize characteristics of the profession, but are not obligated to conform to these patterns.

These more agentic and bi-directional views of graduate student socialization also help us to think about the ways in which early career faculty members continue to shape their own experiences and interact with their own environments. New faculty members tend to be drawn towards autonomy and intellectual stimulation and to be looking for meaningful work; early career satisfaction generally derives from internal motivation (Austin et al., 2007; Rice et al., 2000). This is particularly true for minoritized individuals, who often view their academic work “as part of a life mission to contribute in substantive ways that better their communities and society” (Austin et al., 2007, p. 56). Faculty satisfaction is strongly related to this type of internal motivation and sense of purpose (Rice et al., 2000).

THE PRESENT STUDY: IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CAREER

Although much of the literature on professional and academic socialization has focused on graduate students (e.g., Antony, 2002; Weidman et al., 2001), as Austin et al. (2007) asserted, the early career period “constitute[s] a developmental period in which faculty strive to develop their personal abilities and skills as well as to decipher expectations for performance in a new institutional context” (p. 53). Pfifer and Baker (2013) noted that in recent years there has been increased attention to identity as a theoretical construct for understanding academic life and careers, including attention to both person-

al and professional identities. Reflecting the literature on the bidirectional nature of socialization, they called for an examination of “the ways in which individual entrants are mutually influencing and influenced by the conditions of the academic career” (p. 118). They further asserted that future research should include “the process by which people become academics, and how their personal and professional identities are enacted, problematized, supported, and changed through the doctoral education process” (pp. 128-129). The purpose of this study is to extend this focus on identity development beyond doctoral education to also consider how early career faculty develop and enact their professional and personal identities.

CONTEXT: THE FIELD OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION

As the disciplinary context is important for understanding the experiences of both graduate students and early career faculty (Laudel & Gläser, 2007), this study focuses on one particular field of study – that of higher education administration. Wright (2007) defined “higher education” as a field of study as “programs of organized learning experiences, leading to a master’s or doctoral degree, with a focus on leadership in two and/or four year colleges, or related settings” (p. 32). Within the field of higher education administration there are a number of diverse specializations, including student affairs, policy studies, community college administration, educational administration and leadership, and P-20 education (Hyle & Goodchild, 2014). The field does not have one particular common methodology or “agreed upon knowledge bases for the field” (Freeman, 2014, p. 6), reflecting in part the fact that scholars in the field draw from a variety of disciplines in their work, including psychology, sociology, economics, philosophy, and history.

The diversity in the field also means that faculty members often follow unique pathways to the professoriate. Students who enter doctoral programs generally do so with significant administrative experience and administrative career aspirations (Haley & Jaeger, 2012), so those who end up becoming faculty members often were socialized as administrators first, rather than being trained purely as researchers (Dressel & Mayhew, 1974). Most doctoral programs, although emphasizing research, focus on educating “scholar practitioners” (Hyle & Goodchild, 2014) and enroll primarily part-time students who are interested in administrative career advancement. Despite the broad emphasis in the field on training administrators, though, there are a handful of prestigious institutions/programs that produce the majority of faculty in the field.

There is a small body of research that has focused on the experiences of faculty members teaching in higher education graduate programs. Generally their experiences and stressors mirror those of other early career faculty – managing unclear expectations, balancing different demands on their work time, finding work/life balance, budget cuts, changing student demographics, generation gap between senior and junior faculty, extra service commitments for faculty of color, and extra work/family stressors for women (Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008). Although faculty coming out of higher education administration doctoral programs often study faculty issues and academic governance, like most other early career faculty members they often do not fully understand the nuances of faculty life (Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

This study is part of a larger research project focusing on how higher education scholars develop and enact self-efficacy in conducting research. Although our initial intent was to examine participants’ graduate school experiences, during our interviews we asked a series of questions about participants’ work environments and how they would assess their efficacy in conducting research. From these questions we gathered a wealth of unexpected data about participants’ early career experiences and personal and professional identity development; this data serves as the foundation for the present study.

For both projects, we employed multiple case study methodology (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2011), wherein we considered each individual participant a bounded case. This approach allowed us to examine each

individual's experiences in-depth, while also looking across cases for both convergent and divergent themes (Stake, 2006).

Sampling

We employed purposeful sampling techniques to identify “information-rich cases” (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006) who could best speak to how early career faculty developed a sense of efficacy in conducting research. We limited our sample to pre-tenure faculty members within the first seven years of their careers (Austin et al., 2007) who demonstrated some level of efficacy in their research. As research efficacy has been linked to research productivity (Hemmings & Kay, 2010), we identified the recent winners of a number of research awards and examined top-tier higher education journals to identify early career scholars with multiple publications in these journals. Through this we identified an initial list of thirty-five scholars who met our sampling criteria, which narrowed to seventeen who ultimately participated in the complete study. Seven participants identified as men, ten as women. Five identified as people of color, twelve as White. Participants worked at a variety of different types of institutions, utilized a range of methodologies in their research, and investigated an array of different research topics. To protect participant confidentiality, we are unable to provide a more specific break-down of participant characteristics.

Data collection

Data came primarily from three in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each participant, all conducted by the primary investigator and also an early career higher education scholar. Interviews ranged from just under one hour to over two hours each and covered the topics of participants' early research experiences, experiences in graduate school, current department environments, and perceptions of their own strengths and weaknesses as researchers. Consistent with case study methodology (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2011), we also consulted multiple other sources of data, including participants' CVs, professional web sites, published research articles, and other supplemental materials volunteered by the participants themselves (e.g., prior versions of CVs or e-mail exchanges with journal editors), in order to gain a broader understanding of each individual and to triangulate data.

Data analysis

Because the emphasis of our study was on participants' life stories, we borrowed from narrative inquiry in our data analysis. Our approach proceeded in two steps – within-case followed by cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006). First, in the within-case analysis, we employed narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995), which “moves from elements to stories” (p. 12), in order to construct comprehensive narratives of participants' experiences and development as researchers. To construct these narratives, a secondary investigator carefully reviewed all data for an individual participant, coded each interview transcript using an inductive open-coding process, and then used those codes to develop a narrative case summary for the participant. To ensure accuracy and thoroughness, the primary investigator then listened to the interview recording for each participant and reviewed and edited each case summary. After both the primary and secondary investigators were satisfied with a participant's narrative case summary, it was sent to that participant for feedback.

In the cross-case analysis we drew from the technique of analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995), or moving “from stories to common elements” (p. 12), where we examined the content and structure of each narrative case study to identify convergent and divergent themes (Stake, 2006). We were interested in the tensions that participants experienced early in their careers, and how navigating and resolving those tensions (or not) influenced participants' identity development. We engaged in two rounds of coding (Saldaña, 2016). In the first cycle of coding we identified the major tensions within each participant's early career experiences – for example, tensions between personal and professional identities, between internal values and external expectations, or between perfection and reality. We

then combined these main tensions into a master list and coded each type of tension to identify themes and patterns in the content, cause, and resolution of each tension.

Trustworthiness

We employed a number of strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of our findings. First, we engaged in constant reflection and peer debriefing on our own experiences and identities and how those were influencing our interpretations of the data. Second, we conducted multiple member checks throughout the research process. Feedback from participants during interviews provided key insights into how we could best make sense of the data, and as described above, each participant had the opportunity to read and respond to his or her own case summary. Fifteen of the seventeen participants provided feedback and approved their case summaries; two participants did not respond. We also sent an initial draft of this paper to participants to ensure that their experiences were reflected in the findings; twelve participants responded with feedback, which we incorporated into the final draft of the findings. Finally, we triangulated our data across multiple interviews and multiple sources of data.

FINDINGS

As expected, all of our participants exhibited high levels of efficacy in conducting research. Early in their faculty careers, though, many struggled to enact that efficacy. In exploring our participants' experiences, we overwhelmingly saw that the early career period was a time where participants were working to develop a strong internal foundation upon which they could manage the many challenges in their professional and personal lives. Participants sought to understand themselves, to understand their environments and the "rules" of the academic "game," and to reconcile conflicts between their own values and identities and the expectations and culture of their environments. Although no participant experienced all of the tensions described below, these findings reflect the major themes and commonalities across most participants, and all participants who responded to our member check were able to see their experiences reflected in at least part of the findings.

UNDERSTANDING SELF

One of the main themes in our analysis of participants' narratives was that of finding themselves by defining who they were as scholars, identifying their values, and defining the type of life they wanted, personally and professionally. Some participants had a clear sense of who they were as scholars. Anne, for example, started her doctoral program with a strong orientation towards advocacy for her particular community, a commitment that she maintained into her faculty career and that was central to her sense of self and purpose. Robert and Jess similarly came into their doctoral programs with a clear sense of wanting to be faculty members and researchers, and found their motivation and sense of purpose easily in the research they conducted. Others, however, struggled to define their sense of purpose. As David poignantly described, "I don't know what it is that drives me ... I desperately want to win tenure and get promoted ... [But] I'm not quite sure what it is I really push towards."

In addition to trying to identify their purpose and maintain their motivation around their research, many participants were struggling to define their values as scholars, particularly around epistemology and methodology. Some participants were already strongly committed to one particular methodological approach. Robert, for example, identified strictly as a quantitative researcher, and said he couldn't "qualitative my way out of a paper box." Kelly, on the other hand, was a staunch advocate for qualitative inquiry. Both of these participants, and others like them who were committed to a particular methodological tradition, saw themselves as having a consistency in their methodology that other participants did not.

Participants were often searching to define their own values – what kind of people they wanted to be and what they thought was important in their work. One key dimension of this for many participants was the relative value they placed on prestige and reputation. Some participants strove to be "superstars in the field," while others were content to make what they saw as smaller, but still meaningful

contributions. Part of how participants discussed their professional values was through the relative prestige of their institutions. Some participants who were at lower-prestige institutions embraced their “big fish in a small pond” positions, while others aspired to more prestigious positions. Conversely, some participants in higher-prestige institutions embraced the resources and high-pressure demands of their positions, while others questioned the impact they could really have working in privileged institutions with relatively privileged students.

Finally, participants struggled to define who they wanted to be as whole people, not just as scholars. One aspect of this struggle was participants’ attempts to manage stress and address their emotional and physical health. A number of participants described what they knew were unhealthy and unsustainable work habits, but often they struggled to identify different ways of being. Kathy described her sense of perfectionism and fear of failure, and how she had begun to find that immobilizing because she did not want to submit anything until “no one can find anything wrong with it.” Kathy thought, “no matter how afraid I am or how perfect I try to be something crazy happens.” This caused her to feel a sense of hopelessness and also spent some time with a “constant fear of being evaluated.” Eric had begun to question whether his process for dealing with journal rejections was actually as productive as he thought. He described recently reading a magazine article about depression, and realized that he met nine of the ten physical signs of depression. When Eric saw this he reasoned, “Maybe I get depressed about these rejections and then I try to mask it by just resubmitting them quickly somewhere else without actually dealing with the issue.”

Another aspect of participants’ desire to be whole people was that they wanted to have time to do their work but also to be good parents, partners, and friends. Jess described, “I have to be true to my own priorities ... I’m not willing to miss my kids growing up.” Mary similarly described making a conscious decision to take a job at a less prestigious institution while searching for “wholeness” in her family life. She described looking at notable scholars in the field and thinking, “yes, they’re doing incredible work but they have all experienced different things, whether that is relationships that have not worked out or health scares or whatever it may be.” Mary cared about her career, but added, “I’d like to maintain a lifestyle that is healthy and working all the time and showing my productivity by numbers or grants is not ultimately what’s most important.” Several participants tried to draw boundaries around work and home, but as Mary noted, prioritizing family was scary, “because I go up for tenure next year. It’s such a double-edged thing right now.”

In seeking to define their own scholarly and personal identities and values, participants faced a number of internal challenges. One of these challenges was in separating their past, present, and future potential selves. This was particularly difficult for participants who had close relationships with their doctoral advisors, and, in contrast, for those who saw overwhelming gaps in their research methods training. Kathy explained how she has realized the limitations of modeling herself after her mentor, who tended to use more traditional approaches to qualitative research. She wanted to draw from the work of other critical qualitative scholars in higher education, but reflected, “there are moments when my confidence has faltered as I’ve encountered newer approaches and then I’ve had to reframe for myself—no that’s your training.” While Kathy was actively trying to separate herself from these limitations, Emily felt more constrained by what she saw as a lack of adequate training in either qualitative or quantitative methods. She described, “I feel like I have efficacy in terms of doing some of the research methods I’ve already done or some of the data analysis methods I’ve already done,” but that it would take a tremendous amount of effort to go beyond that.

Another challenge that many faced was in reconciling their methodological choices with their own epistemology or worldview. Lucas, Jackie, and Wendy, all engaged in both qualitative and quantitative work, which often caused them a sense of internal tension. Jackie struggled to reconcile her attraction to quantitative research with the more critical worldview she embraced in her qualitative work. She explained,

even if I'm asking questions that I think are—that have the locations for social justice work, I still can't call it critical ... because those instruments weren't developed from a critical perspective ... so I can't claim that as much as I want to.

Although Jackie would have liked to engage in more critical quantitative work, she did not have a good model for what that would look like.

Similarly, many participants struggled to reconcile their personal and professional identities, particularly when it came to their own understanding and embodiment of privilege. Even those participants who were committed to a particular approach to research often struggled with how to enact their values within their research or how to reconcile their own privilege within the context of research that critiques that very privilege. Mary, whose research was strongly based in local communities, struggled to ensure that she was not engaging in “academic colonialism” in her work. Some participants, particularly those from less-privileged backgrounds, struggled to reconcile their professional identities with their family identities. Joe, for example, discussed coming from a lower social class background, but as a faculty member, he was not currently in a low-income home. He described struggling with “how to still have a relationship with your family when you've really changed in a lot of ways from how you grew up, at least in terms of the type of work that you do.” Sylvia, who identified as a racially minoritized individual, described how she had to physically move away from her family to pursue her PhD and then get a faculty position, something many in her family still did not understand or necessarily support.

UNDERSTANDING “THE GAME”

Although participants' own internal search for identity and meaning was important, that search happened within a broader context of department, institution, and field expectations. Participants often discussed how they learned to “play the game” – to understand the expectations that others had for them, the “hidden curriculum” of academia, and the overall culture of the field of higher education.

One key area of learning for participants was around how they should be spending their time – specifically, their department or institution expectations around faculty work. Kathy struggled with conflicting messages about these expectations. At a research-intensive institution, she was expected to be highly productive in terms of her research, but she was also often called upon to engage in departmental service. Jess, on the other hand, noted that she was protected from too many service demands, and was able to focus heavily on her research in the first few years of her career. Regardless of the particular institutional culture and expectations, participants needed to figure out what those were and how to meet them. Participants generally picked this up through observation, or sometimes from direct feedback from other, senior faculty in their departments.

Another area in which participants needed to understand expectations was in the level and type of research productivity needed for tenure. For Eric, these expectations were made clear and explicit. For others such as Jess, there were no clear expectations for what it would take to achieve tenure at her institution; she only knew that she seemed to be producing enough because it was not “mentioned in my [annual] review.” Although most participants had some level of understanding of what it would take to achieve tenure at their institution, most also experienced a great deal of ambiguity in this area – so much so that many participants laughed out loud when asked what the tenure requirements were at their current institutions.

Outside of the confines of their individual institutions, participants also worked to understand the process of presenting and publishing research and how to navigate the culture of the wider field – what was and was not acceptable, particularly for early career scholars. Anne and Sylvia both expressed trepidation in pushing their research agendas too far, fearing that they might offend senior scholars who would be instrumental in writing external letters for their tenure files. Lucas commented on the overall culture of the field asserting,

We don't allow ourselves, as a field, to be vulnerable ... Because of that, in some respects, we serve as really crappy role models to the next generation of people coming up because we expect them to be almost these infallible beings when they're not.

Participants faced a number of challenges as they sought to understand their environments, often due to a lack of socialization into the field as doctoral students that left large gaps of their knowledge. For some, this was due to an overall lack of mentoring, but for others this was attributed to the fact that they did not plan to become faculty members going into their doctoral programs. While some of the participants knew they wanted to pursue a faculty position beginning with their graduate program, a few experienced a less direct route to a faculty role. Anne described her path to becoming a faculty member as "chaotic." As a result, she felt that she lacked direct mentoring and socialization to the field. Joe similarly was not on a "faculty track" during his doctoral program and somewhat fell into his faculty career. Because of this, he had to learn some of these expectations as he went along in his faculty position. For instance, he felt "totally blindsided" when his department chair mentioned external letters.

Many participants, however, were unsurprisingly trained in highly-competitive, research focused doctoral programs. In many of these programs, students were constantly being taught (directly and indirectly) the rules of the game. Jess recalled that she had made it known in her program early on that she wanted to become a faculty member, and "because of that they saw me as a quote-unquote researcher" and provided explicit mentoring that helped her achieve this goal. Although this was a positive in contrast to participants who had gaps in their socialization, some participants ended up on the opposite end of the spectrum, knowing so much about the way things work that they felt paralyzed. Emily had been involved in a large-scale quantitative project as a master's student. Instead of helping her build efficacy in quantitative research, though, after that experience she said it "seems kind of overwhelming to take on a fairly large quantitative project on my own." David similarly had strong research training and socialization in his doctoral program, so much so that he felt like he knew all of the "ins and outs" of the academic game. Rather than foster a stronger sense of efficacy, all of this knowledge made David feel less confident in his ability to navigate the publication process. Knowing the exact acceptance rates of major journals, for example, was something that heightened David's anxiety around submitting manuscripts. In contrast, other participants described the benefit of, as Jackie described, not "know[ing] enough about the research process to... be intimidated." This allowed these participants to take more risks, particularly as graduate students or early in their careers.

RECONCILING SELF AND ENVIRONMENT

In searching to understand themselves and their environments simultaneously, participants often ran into conflicts between the two. Participants struggled to reconcile how they would define the value of their work, reconcile their own values with the demands of the tenure system, and stay true to their own sense of purpose and values in the face of external pressures pushing them in different directions.

One major area of conflict that participants experienced was in how they would define the value of their research topics, methodology, publications, and institutions. Despite having a strong sense of purpose, Anne had received feedback multiple times that "the population you study is irrelevant." Anne found this "infuriating and wounding" and difficult to avoid internalizing because it was a matter of her identity as a member of this minoritized group. Kathy similarly experienced a conflict between her own passion and purpose and pressure to somehow "attach what I do to a STEM-focused research agenda" because research on STEM education could attract external funding. Mary discussed wanting to engage in more community-based research, but also found this time consuming and noted that the types of products that communities need are not always the types of peer-reviewed publications that are rewarded in academia. Even when participants had a strong sense of purpose in their work, like Anne's commitment to community activism, they often struggled to enact that purpose within the constraints of faculty life. Many participants questioned whether they could

really have the impact they wanted to have on the field. This was particularly true for participants who had strong personal ties to their research or who framed their research as part of a larger passion for affecting change. Others who were less personally connected to their research topics did not internalize this pressure or rejection as much. Robert, for example, discussed how continued rejection of papers on a particular topic of interest just led him to focus on different research topics.

Participants also struggled to balance internal and external metrics for defining the value of their work overall. Many relied on the peer review process to define this for them, often in problematic ways. David, for example, took a lot of pride in his work, but said, “if I can’t get [a paper] published in a top tier journal, it is not of a quality that I am comfortable [with] ... it usually means there’s something fundamentally wrong with the paper.” Although David’s connection between top tier publications and his own scholarly identity was particularly strong, many other participants connected the value of their work to their ability to publish it in top-tier journals.

The struggle to reconcile internal values and external pressures also extended to the types of people that participants wanted to be. Many struggled to resist the trap of hyper-competitiveness with others in the field. Mary, for example, admitted to succumbing to the temptation to compare herself with others. She has even found herself searching and comparing article citations against others—something she described as “ridiculous ways to waste my time.” David similarly suffered from this practice; he described, “I see the [big-name scholars in the field]. I look at them and say that’s the best of our field in my generation of scholars and I suck compared to them.” In fact, he fell so far short of these other scholars in his mind that positive feedback from colleagues at his institution seemed “incongruent” to him.

Many participants found that focusing too much on “playing the game” got in the way of pursuing their true purpose and passion in their work. David said that playing the game was “making [him] less of the scholar [that he] wants to be.” He reflected, “I feel like I’m selling out and becoming relevant doing what is best for me personally... but what is detrimental to my own sense of self.” Anne similarly described that after years in a highly competitive doctoral program, her sense of purpose faded away. Her experience then became “meaningless” and more of a question of what was next “in advancing a professional career.”

Despite these ongoing struggles, many participants *did* find ways to stay focused on their purpose and values, assert their perspectives in both big and small ways, and enact community-based and collaborative values. Much of how participants resolved tensions around their identities and values came from their ability to differentiate themselves and their perspectives from others in the field and advocating for less popular topics or approaches. Wendy and Dan questioned the value of their contribution to the field because of the narrow focus of their research. Both, however, found their topics to be personally meaningful. As Dan explained, “it’s important that I care about [this topic]. It’s important that it’s my contribution.” Other participants, like Kelly, Anne, and Mary, positioned themselves as advocates for their particular methodological approach.

Similarly, many participants focused on staying true to their own unique voice/self in their work. As a racially minoritized individual, Sylvia explained that

in order to survive in a place where you don’t have that privilege, you have to recognize your own cultural perspective, your home culture, but then also recognize how the power dynamics work and what you need to do to be able to navigate in a world where you don’t have that privilege.

Sylvia recognized that her perspective was unique and gave her an important perspective on her research area.

Participants who were able to focus on their own values and voice were also able to assert themselves in various ways. Joe recognized that he couldn’t completely build a career on critical scholarship as a quantitative researcher, but tried to insert small bits of critical perspectives into his articles. Robert,

Sylvia, and Anne all actively published scholarship that "pushed the envelope" in their respective areas of research, even though that scholarship might offend more senior scholars in the field. Importantly, in all cases where participants were able to assert their perspectives and subvert field norms, they also relied on prior success publishing research that conformed to those norms.

Participants also resolved some of the tensions between their values and external pressures by making conscious decisions to enact their values. Mary made a decision to work at a less prestigious institution so that she could achieve "wholeness" for her family. Jason discussed avoiding the temptation to be caught up in the competitive culture of the field, noting, "I intentionally sort of distract myself from [comparisons to others] and not get caught up in it ... If I get too much into that, it stresses me out." Many participants reframed the competitive culture to focus more on community building and collaboration. Anne and Kelly focused on connections with larger activist communities to fuel their passion and commitment to their social justice-focused research. Similarly, Jackie and Robert overcame the constraints of their methodological training by collaborating with others who had different skill sets.

Participants also sought to reconcile these tensions through giving themselves an occasional break. Dan had clear ideas of what defined high-quality research, but sometimes he needed to send things out that did not necessarily meet his own standards in order to keep up with tenure expectations. Although he did not like the idea of submitting papers that were not up to his own standards, he decided to accept this as a necessary part of his job. Wendy recognized that certain times of the year would be particularly busy, so she decided to allow herself that time not to work on her research. Kathy noted that she was "becoming more and more clear on what my job actually is and how I have to actually spend my time and being ... unapologetic about that."

Generally, this decision to not put too much pressure on themselves was positive, although it sometimes led participants to stay within a very narrow area of specialization, and in some cases, avoiding situations that were outside of their comfort zone. Jason described sticking with one particular quantitative method, because it was where he felt comfortable working and was an area that was generally rewarded in the field. Emily went so far as to avoid specific conferences where she felt that her research did not quite measure up, and Joe stuck with an area of research he considered boring because it was where he knew he could establish himself as a scholar and publish enough to earn tenure.

Related to giving themselves permission to be less than perfect, a number of participants commented that they would "play the game" for now, but that later (presumably after tenure) they would be able to do more meaningful work. As Joe explained, "after you get tenure or after you've established yourself then start to change directions ... There's no sense in me trying to do different types of research now if what I'm doing now gets rewarded."

Finally, another way that participants worked to prioritize their personal lives and navigate who they wanted to be as people was by focusing on the relative importance of their work or current position. As Kelly described, "If this starts to interfere with my happiness ... then I'll go do something else ... I'm not defined by my career or meeting other people's expectations." For Kelly and others, having a "plan B" if their current position or academia in general did not work out allowed them to focus more on the importance of their personal lives. Others particularly those who had partners and/or children depending on them, did not have the luxury of assuming that something else would work out if this did not. As David described, "the repercussions of failing [now] ... are far more daunting when they involve [family] ... having money, having a stable job, having the right insurance."

DISCUSSION

Consistent with prior studies on faculty in higher education administration (e.g., Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008), we found that despite being in a field that focuses specifically on the ins and outs of higher education institutions, participants in this study still struggled with many of the same challenges as other early career faculty (Austin et al., 2007; Rice et al., 2000). Yet, as O'Meara et al. (2008)

argued, there was much more to participants' stories than a simple "narrative of constraint" (p. 2). Our findings point to the complicated role of socialization throughout the doctoral program and early career periods, the process of scholarly and personal identity development, and the tension between agency and constraint that all influenced early career experiences.

SOCIALIZATION

Our findings on the role of doctoral socialization in participants' early career experiences reflects Austin et al.'s (2007) assertion that there is a major disconnect between graduate school socialization and the realities of faculty life. A number of participants saw major gaps in their socialization, including a lack of role models and gaps in their knowledge about the publication and tenure processes. Some participants also discussed socialization that was actually negatively influencing their abilities to be productive scholars; participants discussed poor writing habits developed in graduate school, unhealthy competitive environments, a lack of willingness to be vulnerable and discuss failure, and unreasonably high expectations resulting from their graduate school experiences, all of which had detrimental effects on their lives and professional work.

Although some of these challenges reflect limitations of graduate school socialization that likely cut across fields of study, some of these challenges may also be due to the diversity of academic preparation of faculty members in the field of higher education (Dressel & Mayhew, 1974; Hyle & Goodchild, 2014) and the disconnect between the programs in which faculty were trained and the ones in which they work (Wolf-Wendel, 2014). Participants who had been socialized as scholar practitioners in administratively focused programs (Hyle & Goodchild, 2014) and/or who decided later in their programs that they wanted to become faculty members often reflected gaps in their knowledge about faculty life. Conversely, participants who were socialized in a more prestigious program that produced the majority of faculty in the field (Wolf-Wendel, 2014) often felt constrained by the norms and expectations of the field and struggled to separate their own identities from those imposed upon them by their socialization experiences.

IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Consistent with Pfifer and Baker's (2013) assertion, we found that identity was central to our participants' experiences – both their developing professional identities and the ways those identities intersected with their personal and social identities. Participants were working to identify who they were as scholars and whole people, to find their purpose, and to solidify their personal and professional values. Many also struggled with dynamics of privilege. Participants with more privileged identities (generally race, gender, and social class) often struggled to reconcile their privilege with a more critical worldview or epistemology. Participants with minoritized identities struggled to reconcile those identities with the demands of an academic career.

This view of the early career period as one of personal and professional identity development, a continuation of participants' development during graduate school, is in direct contrast to the traditional view of socialization that requires people to "abandon previous roles and values" in exchange for those that may not align "with one's preexisting character" (Weidman et al., 2001, p. 33). For our participants, it was through continuing to develop their *own* attitudes, beliefs, and identity that they were able to find meaning and purpose in their work.

This process of identity development was particularly important for minoritized faculty. Prior early career literature has given a great deal of attention to the additional challenges facing minoritized faculty members, which has typically focused on additional service burdens (Alexander-Snow & Johnson, 1999), lack of respect (Rice et al., 2000), and lack of community (Rice et al., 2000). Although these issues did come up for some, the larger challenges were with establishing their identities as scholars despite negative, racist feedback and inconsistencies between the demands of an academic career and the cultural norms and expectations of participants' families. It was through their ability to draw on their minoritized identities and to see how those identities gave them a unique perspective

and sense of purpose that minoritized participants were able to navigate these challenges. This is consistent with prior research, which has identified the important role of internal sense of purpose for early career faculty in general (Austin et al., 2007; Rice et al., 2000), but in particular for minoritized faculty who often see their work as intrinsically connected to serving their communities (Austin et al., 2007).

AGENCY AND CONSTRAINT

In many ways our participants' stories could be viewed through a lens of constraint, reflecting much of the prior research on early career faculty. They struggled, had gaps in their socialization and research training, faced unclear tenure expectations, experienced sometimes overwhelming demands on their time, encountered work environments that were at odds with their own values, and even at times received toxic and racist feedback on their work. Although all of these experiences were important in shaping participants' experiences, as O'Meara et al. (2008) argued, focusing only on these constraints can obscure the larger narrative of growth, development, and agency despite (or perhaps because of) these constraints.

One of the ways that participants enacted agency in their early career periods was through developing a sense of their own identity, separate from field norms and expectations, and finding ways to stay true to that. For participants who valued public scholarship, this often took the form of finding alternate outlets for their work (e.g., blog posts). Participants who valued alternative metrics for success actively avoided comparisons to others and reframed the publication process to fit their values. Participants who valued family and personal balance found ways to prioritize this, sometimes taking positions at lower-prestige institutions that would allow them to achieve more "wholeness" in their lives or developing alternative career plans if they found that their academic positions did not allow for the kind of lives they wanted to live. Participants who saw gaps in their training collaborated with others to fill in those gaps. This does not mean that participants were not aware of the rules of "the game," but rather that they were reflecting Antony's (2002) view of socialization as one where they were recognizing and learning the rules and norms of the field, but yet were not conforming; rather, they were choosing how to navigate those norms in their own way.

Although many participants did exhibit agency in negotiating their own values and identities with the norms and expectations of the field, it is important to note that their ability to do so was often based on the privilege of prior success, strong professional networks, or economic security. Participants who did not have a strong publication record, who had not developed a network of peers or mentors with whom they could collaborate, or whose background and/or current family situation put them in a more precarious financial position often struggled to act in agentic ways when faced with barriers or challenges.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The goal of this work was to examine how early career faculty develop both their professional and personal identities beyond their doctoral socialization. Early career higher education faculty often struggled to define themselves and to overcome unhealthy work behaviors they developed during their doctoral programs—some of which were fostered directly by their mentors and systemic to their program environments. Struggles with identity were particularly challenging for early career faculty to navigate, but some of these struggles were positive in that they allowed faculty to reflect on their work and further develop and refine who they were both as people and as professionals. This process of identity development is not complete once the doctoral program is finished. Rather, this process plays out throughout the early stages of faculty life and helps new faculty members to develop a strong internal foundation that will hopefully sustain them throughout the rest of their academic career.

Our findings point to a number of implications for practice, both for graduate students/early career faculty members and for the more senior faculty members and administrators who mentor them.

First, our findings support the assertions of Anthony (2002) and O'Meara et al. (2008) that mentors should re-imagine the doctoral student and early career faculty socialization processes to focus on a more inclusive and agentic approach to mentoring. As we described in this study, focusing on socialization as a process of identity development is one way to do this. To help mentees develop their own professional and personal identities, mentors should focus on helping mentees learn the important values and norms of the profession, but should also help mentees develop agency in navigating those values and norms without necessarily adopting them as their own (Anthony, 2002).

One way that mentors can help mentees develop this sense of agency is by being open and transparent in discussing how they, themselves, navigated tensions between their own values and the norms of the field. Most of our participants had experienced and navigated these tensions in some way, so it is likely that more senior faculty members have also had similar experiences. Some participants discussed role models and mentors who helped them envision different ways of approaching academic life, but all participants could have benefitted greatly from additional mentoring and role models in this area. It is particularly important for mentors to focus on agency and identity development for those mentees who do not enjoy the privilege of race, gender, economic security, and/or early research success that enabled the most agentic of our participants to prioritize their own values over field norms and expectations.

Another way in which mentors can re-imagine the socialization process as one of identity development is to recognize and embrace mentees' multiple personal and social identities and how these identities intersect with mentees' work and professional identities. Mentors should recognize that mentees with minoritized identities face unique challenges (e.g., additional service demands), but should also recognize that for some mentees, those very same minoritized identities are a source of strength and motivation. Although graduate students and new faculty should be aware of the potential pitfalls of studying highly controversial and personal topics, as some of our participants did, mentors should seek to provide this information in a way that does not discourage mentees from pursuing these topics, but rather helps them find ways to navigate those pitfalls while staying true to their values and motivation.

Finally, our participants' stories point to a number of specific ways that graduate programs and mentors can better prepare graduate students for faculty life, including:

1. Shift the focus of writing assignments to align more with the habits and skills needed for successful academic writing. Avoid assignments that promote "binge writing" and instead require students to work through multiple drafts and solicit feedback from different sources over longer periods of time. Encourage faculty members to be open and transparent with students about their own writing processes.
2. Focus on collaboration and community rather than individual achievement. Encourage group projects, peer feedback, and collaborative research and writing. As Rice et al. (2000) found, graduate students are often drawn to academia in part because of a desire for community, so graduate programs should help students learn how to achieve this sense of community both during and after graduate school.
3. Encourage mentors working with graduate students to be open about their own struggles and failures to give students a more accurate picture of faculty work, normalize rejection, and show models of how to productively take feedback.
4. Intentionally expose students to different types of faculty, administrative, and non-academic positions at different types of institutions, both within and outside of higher education. Participants in our study often struggled to reconcile differences between their own graduate training and the institutions where they eventually ended up working, and participants who had a "plan B" outside of a faculty career were more agentic and grounded in their own identity and values than those who did not have these alternatives.

It is important to recognize that the participants in this study were exemplars of research productivity for early career scholars in the field of higher education, yet all still faced their own struggles adjusting to a faculty role. Their experiences underscore important implications for mentoring and socialization that takes into consideration the unique motivation and identity development of aspiring and new faculty members.

REFERENCES

- Alexander-Snow, M., & Johnson, B. J. (1999). Perspectives from faculty of color. In R. J. Menges & Associates (Eds.), *Faculty in new jobs: A guide to settling in, becoming established, and building support* (pp. 88-116). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Antony, J. S. (2002). Reexamining doctoral student socialization and professional development: Moving beyond the congruence and assimilation orientation. In J. C. Smart & W. G. Tierney (Eds.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 349-380). New York, NY: Agathon Press.
- Austin, A. E., Sorcinelli, M. D., & McDaniels, M. (2007). Understanding new faculty: Background, aspirations, challenges, and growth. In R. P. Perry & J. C. Smart (Eds.), *The scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education: An evidence-based perspective* (pp. 39-89). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.
- Dressel, P. L., & Mayhew, L. B. (1974). *Higher education as a field of study*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Eddy, P. L., & Gaston-Gayles, J. L. (2008). New faculty on the block: Issues of stress and support. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 17(1/2), 89-106.
- Freeman, Jr., S. (2014). Introduction and overview. In S. Freeman Jr., L. S. Hagedorn, L. F. Goodchild, & D. A. Wright (Eds.), *Advancing higher education as a field of study: In quest of doctoral degree guidelines – Commemorating 120 years of excellence* (pp. 1-10). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Haley, K., & Jaeger, A. (2012). “I didn’t do it the right way”: Women’s careers as faculty in higher education administration. *The Journal of the Professoriate*, 6(2), 1-26.
- Hyle, A. E., & Goodchild, L. F. (2014). Contemporary condition of higher education programs in the United States and Canada. In S. Freeman Jr., L. S. Hagedorn, L. F. Goodchild, & D. A. Wright (Eds.), *Advancing higher education as a field of study: In quest of doctoral degree guidelines – Commemorating 120 years of excellence* (pp. 51-74). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Jones, S. R., Torres, V., & Arminio, J. (2014). *Negotiating the complexities of qualitative research in higher education: Fundamental elements and issues* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Laudel, G., & Gläser, J. (2007). From apprentice to colleague: The metamorphosis of early career researchers. *Higher Education*, 55, 387-406.
- O’Meara, K., Terosky, A. L., & Neumann, A. (2008). Faculty careers and work lives: A professional growth perspective. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 34(3), 1-221.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 8(1), 5-23.
- Pfifer, M., & Baker, V. (2013). Identity as a theoretical construct in research about academic careers. In J. Huisman & M. Tight (Eds.), *Theory and method in higher education research* (International Perspectives on Higher Education Research, Volume 9; pp. 115-132). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing.
- Rice, R. E., Sorcinelli, M. D., & Austin, A. E. (2000). *Heeding new voices: Academic careers for a new generation*. Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Sorcinelli, M. D. (2007). Faculty development: The challenge going forward. *Peer Review*, 9(4), 4-8.
- Stake, R. E. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis*. New York, NY: Guildford Press.

- Tierney, W. G., & Rhoads, R. A. (1994). *Faculty socialization as a cultural process: A mirror of institutional commitment*. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, 93-6. Washington, DC: The George Washington University School of Education and Human Development.
- Weidman, J. C., Twale, D. J., & Stein, E. L. (2001). *Socialization of graduate and professional students in higher education: A perilous passage?* ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, 28-3. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Wolf-Wendel, L. (2014). Foreword. In S. Freeman Jr., L. S. Hagedorn, L. F. Goodchild, & D. A. Wright (Eds.), *Advancing higher education as a field of study: In quest of doctoral degree guidelines – Commemorating 120 years of excellence* (pp. xi-xvi). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Wright, D. (2007). Progress in the development of higher education as a specialized field of study. In D. Wright & M. T. Miller (Eds.), *Training higher education policy makers and leaders: A graduate program perspective* (pp. 19-34). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc.
- Yin, R. (2011). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

BIOGRAPHIES



Elizabeth received her Ph.D. in Counseling and Personnel Services from the University of Maryland, College Park.

Elizabeth Niehaus, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her research focuses on the dynamic interactions of individuals and their environments within institutions of higher education, with a particular emphasis on the international dimensions of higher education. She studies how individuals' learning and development are influenced by their environments and experiences and, correspondingly, how individuals shape higher education environments.



Jillian Reading is a doctoral candidate at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her research interests focus broadly on issues surrounding faculty members within higher education. She also serves as the Director of Undergraduate Student Services and Recruitment within the School of Public Health and Health Professions at the University at Buffalo. She holds a master's degree in higher education administration and a bachelor's degree in psychology, both from the University at Buffalo.



Crystal E. Garcia is a PhD candidate and graduate assistant in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her research focuses on the interplay between the experiences of racially minoritized college students and institutional environments while bringing in a critical focus on social justice and equity in postsecondary institutions.