

**Together But Alone: Belongingness and Troublesome Socio-Academic
Identities of Distance Doctoral Students**



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This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma.

Signature  _____

Abstract

Doctoral studies can be daunting and arguably even more daunting when studied from a distance away from the university. In this context, the relevancy of questions surrounding how a sense of belonging is built via interacting from a distance becomes more salient as well as how the student is viewed by members of the doctoral community (peers and staff members).

This study aims at exploring how distance doctoral students interact towards building their belongingness and identity within their doctoral community.

Through the lenses of Hodgins's (2018) Psychological Construct of Belonging, the study explored the data collected from semi-structured interviews using a narrative inquiry approach.

The interviews involved 25 distance doctoral students across six higher education institutions in the United Kingdom (UK). The students were studying in various doctoral programmes and at various stages of their programmes.

The results contribute significantly to the existing body of knowledge, but also highlight some relevant issues that can enable or constrain the development of a sense of belonging and identity from a distance. Key recommendations are offered that oscillate between those that are within the control of the institutions and those that are not.

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Publications derived from work on the Doctoral Programme

Ukpabio, A. G. (2019). After All, Who Lectures the Lecturer? Exploring the Possible Barriers Impacting the Development of a Reflective Practitioner – A Review of Literature. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 10(12), 248-255. DOI: 10.7176/JEP/10-12-01.

Ukpabio, A. G. (2019). Digital Exclusion or Digital Choice: Exploring the Gaps, Conflicting Views and Actions About E-Inclusivity – A Case of FE Lecturers. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 10(10), 248-255. DOI: 10.7176/JEP/10-10-01.

Ukpabio, A. G. (2019). e-Learners or e-Actors: Exploring the Possible Cultural Barriers Impacting Learner's Participation Originality in Online Collaborative Learning – A Review of Literature. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 10(11), 248-255. DOI: 10.7176/JEP/10-11-01.

Ukpabio, A. G. (2019). Mobile Devices to Enhance Teaching and Learning in the Classroom: Some More Second Thoughts, Using Activity Theory. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 10(9), 248-255. DOI: 10.7176/JEP/10-9-15.

Ukpabio, A. G. (2019). Alone But Together: Exploring the Possible Barriers Impacting Learner's Belongingness in Networked Learning. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 10(9), 248-255. DOI: 10.7176/JEP/10-9-16.

List of abbreviations

ALT	Association of Learning Technologists
BECTA	British Educational Communications and Technology Agency
COP	Community of Practice
ETF	Education and Training Foundation
EU	European Union
FLCoP	Flexible Learning Community of Practice
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HoD	Head of Department
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LMS	Learning Management System
NFTL	National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning
NI	Narrative Inquiry
NL	Networked Learning
PCB	Psychological Construct of Belonging
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
Q&A	Quality and Assurance
SET	Society for Education and Training
T&L	Teaching and Learning
TEL	Technology Enhanced Learning
USA	United States of America
UK	United Kingdom
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Study Background

1.1 Introduction

This study is aimed at understanding how distance doctoral students interact in their doctoral community towards building their belongingness and identity. The chapter begins with the rationale for the study, and an overview of the meaning of distance doctoral degrees and community that are adopted for this study; it is followed by a consideration of the underlying concepts of the study, which are belongingness and identity. The chapter then provides brief insights about the methodological approach deployed. A structure of the thesis is offered from a chapter viewpoint and the chapter ends with a summary.

In summary, the contributions of this thesis are the introduction of new knowledge regarding the belongingness and identity of distance doctoral students, bringing together the dimensions of belonging within the realms of identity in the context of distance doctoral students, ways which distance doctoral students interact towards building their belongingness and identity in their community and understanding the possible enablers and constraints in building belongingness within a distance doctoral community.

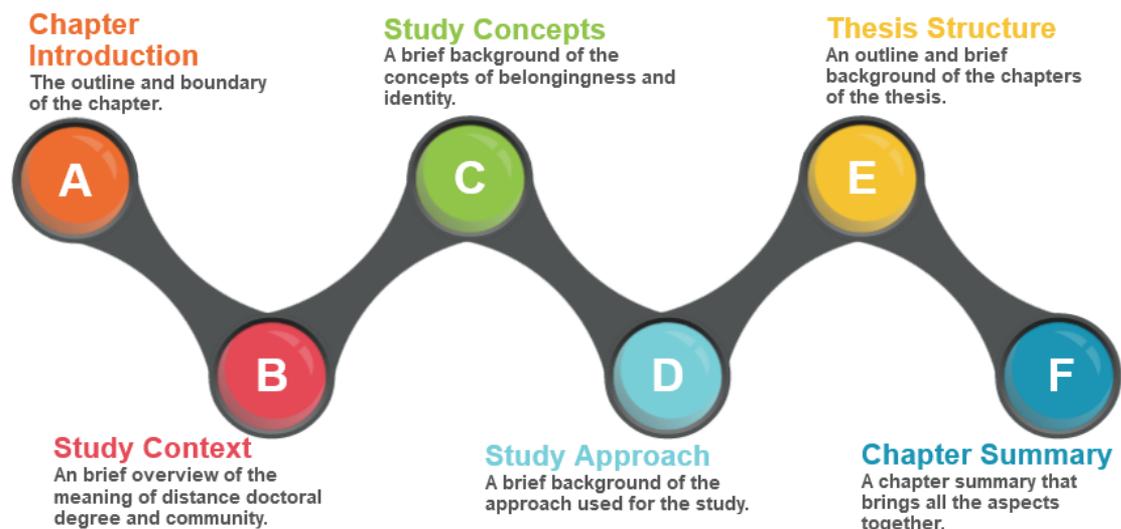


Figure 1.1 The roadmap of the introduction chapter

1.2 Motivation for the study and an overview of the context

1.2.1 Motivation for this study

The motivation for this study stems from a number of trends and experiences associated with distance doctoral education. Firstly, before starting my doctoral degree, I had only just finished a postgraduate programme which was predominantly studied from a distance. Whilst it was a relatively-lengthy two year programme, as a distance student, I had always wondered what a sense of belonging felt like and the context of belonging. Subsequently, as I got closer to the end of the programme, my curiosity grew towards how I viewed myself and how my colleagues in the programme viewed me. This curiosity lingered into my doctoral programme which was officially structured to last for at least four years. Becoming cognisant through the literature (such as Chou, Yang, & Ching, 2016; Delamont, Atkinson, & Parry, 2000; Groenvynck, Vandeveld, & Van Rossem, 2013; Golde, 2000; Pyhalto, Toom, Stubb, & Lonka, 2012; Metcalfe & Gray, 2005) that I was exposed to during the modules of the programme that in a distance education programme students' interaction is a tangential aspect that could be explored, understanding how it may help build their identity and a sense of belonging, my interest in this study increased.

Secondly, I had questioned if some of the issues discussed in the literature that I was initially exposed to might be better understood and linked to how distance doctoral students build their belongingness and identity within their distance doctoral community. These issues included but were not limited to university endeavours to establish research cultures that are deemed high in quality, the development of multiple skills by doctoral students from a distance, and the rate at which students fail to complete their doctoral studies. With these motivations as an underpinning for carrying out this study, the outcome of this study was conceived as one building block upon which future studies would be carried out in order to yield insights regarding the issues such as those stated in this paragraph.

1.2.2 An overview of distance doctoral degrees and community

Consistently, there has been a surge in doctoral students that carry out their studies either part-time or full-time (both formally and informally) from a distance. This growth is concurrent with the approach and opportunities that it affords to students that study from a distance (Exter et al., 2009; White and Nonnamaker, 2008; Liu et al., 2007). This includes the ability for students to make parallel progress with their career, family and doctoral degree, and attend a desired/reputable higher education institution (HEI) without changing their geographical presence.

As a mode of study, the structure and expectations are similar to traditional face-to-face settings except that technology is hugely utilised towards liaising with peers and staff members in networked learning modes towards producing a piece of PhD-worthy independent and unique research. However, students may be required to visit the campus of the HEI for residential events or events considered to be a requirement of the curriculum.

Furthermore, as a mode of study, a distance doctoral degree is associated with a number of issues that stem from the inconsistency of structure. Primarily, unpicking what studying a doctorate degree from a distance involves can be daunting. For example, distance learning students in United Kingdom (UK) universities may have the need to be periodically present on the campus, yet are still categorised as distance learning students (Hallinger, 2011; Lee, 2008) by their department. This means that they experience some aspects of what being a full-time student means and more of what it means to be a distance learning student. It is also inherently difficult to classify doctoral students as distance students merely by using their study commitment, expectations, socialisation, contribution, participation, authenticity, distance and duration because numerous studies, including Erichsen et al. (2014) and Golde and Dore (2001), have highlighted that these features are sometimes similar across other modes of study beyond distance learning. This study was not designed to address the issues related to the lack of unanimity about the notion of distance doctoral degrees, but to use existing notions to arrive at an understanding from which this study could build. This study defines a distance

doctoral degree as a doctoral degree which the student carries out and undertakes their doctoral research away from the university, regardless of the periodic requirement to physically attend a session at the university.

From a doctoral community standpoint, certain definitions may not fit with the focus and intentions of this study, so it is imperative to settle for a definition that resonates with appropriate existing literature. For this study, a distance doctoral community is conceptualised as a group of geographically dispersed yet interacting students and academic staff members that share a space with certain attitudes and interests in common (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

This latter definition is often associated with the educational foundations of belongingness and being valued as they relate to forming and sustaining significant relationships with others from a distance, towards becoming a valued member of the community (White and Nonnamaker, 2008; Wenger, 1998). Because the development of a sense of belonging necessitates regular interaction with peers and members of staff in a department in isolation, community is often concerned with and defined as developing social and professional networks through relationships.

1.3 An overview of the key concepts of the study

Two major concepts underpin this research. They are the concepts of belongingness and identity. In the following subsections, the concepts are discussed in isolation to provide frames for how the concepts shape this study.

1.3.1 Considering identity

The definitions of identity in the context of doctoral studies are plagued by a considerable scarcity of research in the domain (Van Lankveld et al., 2017). The existing definitions often explore the concept in terms of the domain of professional identity in general instead of doctoral students' identity. As a definition, professional identity implies a collection of externally-qualifying attributes used to distinguish one group from another (Tajfel, 2010). According

to Shoemaker and Tobia (2018), a number of themes that interchangeably appear within the discourse of doctoral student identity and professional identity tends to tilt the narrative more towards professional identity. These themes include: professional socialisation, professional development, professional formation, professional education and professional learning.

However, focusing on doctoral students' identity, the emergence of a number of fundamental associated concepts have developed such as academic freedom, collegiality, autonomy, values, professional self-regulation and behavioural patterns (Phelps, 2016; Sweitzer, 2009). Nevertheless, there is a belief that some of these fundamental concepts are developing, shifting and sometimes being eroded from doctoral student identity discourses as a result of the increased scrutiny of the role academics play in higher education (Strauss, 2017; Spears and Postmes, 2015).

To progressively steer this study towards its intended outcome, it was worth arriving at a definition of identity that resonated with the study objectives. In that context, identity should be considered as: a systematic construct; as a doctoral student's identity develops from a social, personal, academic and ethnic context, but it is also constructed socially over a period of time. To further shore up the academic context, a doctoral student is considered to develop their perception of 'academic self' via their conceptions of what constitutes an 'emblematic academic', how they view their current circumstances, their past experiences and how they think others in their community view them (Strauss, 2017).

1.3.2 Considering belongingness

The human desire of wanting to be a member of a group, or of a collective group, is called belongingness. To have a sense of belongingness, humans need to be accepted as a member of a group. A group membership can be associated with family, friends, work peers, academic peers, or a religious organisation, for example. Belongingness is considered a paramount motivational factor for humans. Not to belong can have devastating impact on

us. If it were not so important, then not to belong would not have wrathful consequences on humans (Baumeister and Leary, 1995).

Belonging is a strong and unavoidable feeling existing within the nature of every human. To belong or not to belong is brought about by the choice of the individual him/herself or of other individuals. Different people have different lives, different faiths, different socio-economic backgrounds, different hobbies, different occupations, etc.; therefore, it is wise not to assume that everyone has the same perception of belonging. More often than not, a person without belonging would struggle with self-identification and will have poor interpersonal communication. They will also be unable to relate to their environment.

Bringing together the concepts of belongingness and identity, this study considers the correlation between belongingness and identity, in that they are intertwined, and this implies that belongingness is experienced within the realm of identity. Along this line of thought, the consideration of this relationship is further described by the conceptual framework adopted for this study (see Chapter 3).

1.4 Research aim, questions, theory, and methodological approach

1.4.1 Research aim and questions

This study is aimed at understanding how distance doctoral students interact in their doctoral community towards building their belongingness and identity. This study does not include how belongingness impacts on identity and the converse. Along this line of thought, the research questions in Figure 1.2 are central in exploring this phenomenon (of building belongingness and identity) which is the focal point of this study.

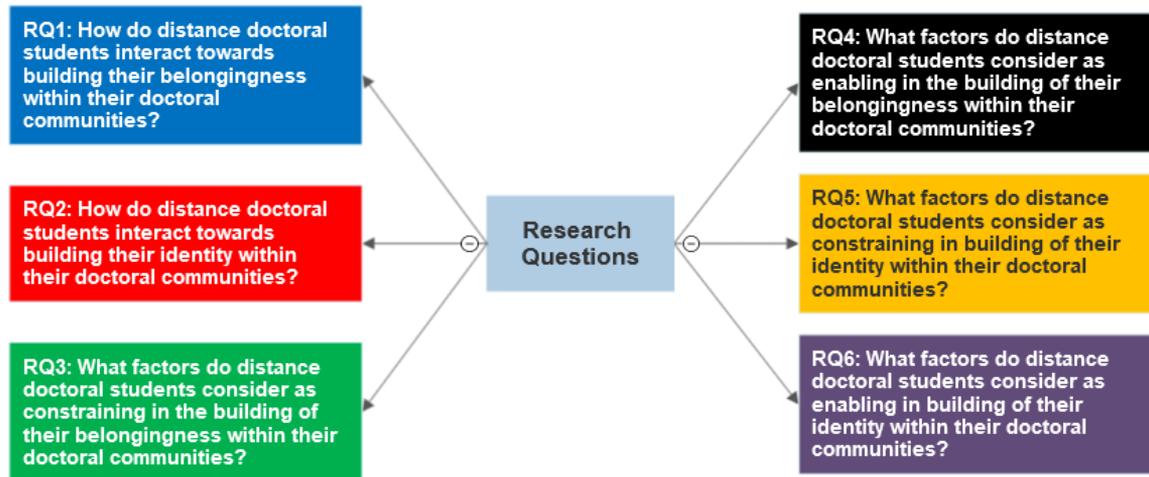


Figure 1.2. The research questions of the study

1.4.2 Theoretical model used

The notions of belongingness and identity are entangled if the components and subcomponents of the theoretical framework of Hodgins (2018) are considered.

In summary, Hodgins (2018) implies that three realms of identity (self, social and space) must exist to give rise to belongingness. In Chapter 3 (the theoretical model chapter), a contextualisation of Hodgins's (2018) Psychological Construct of Belonging (PCB) is offered with an exploration of understanding of the interplay between belongingness and identity related to interactions in the distance doctoral community. There, the key concepts that underpin the theory of belongingness and identity are discussed and this includes the willingness to identify and belong, the liminality of belonging to and identifying with a group, the practices to maintain identity and belongingness, the settings of the community and the individual experiences of belonging (see Figure 1.3, which shows the features as presented by Hodgins).

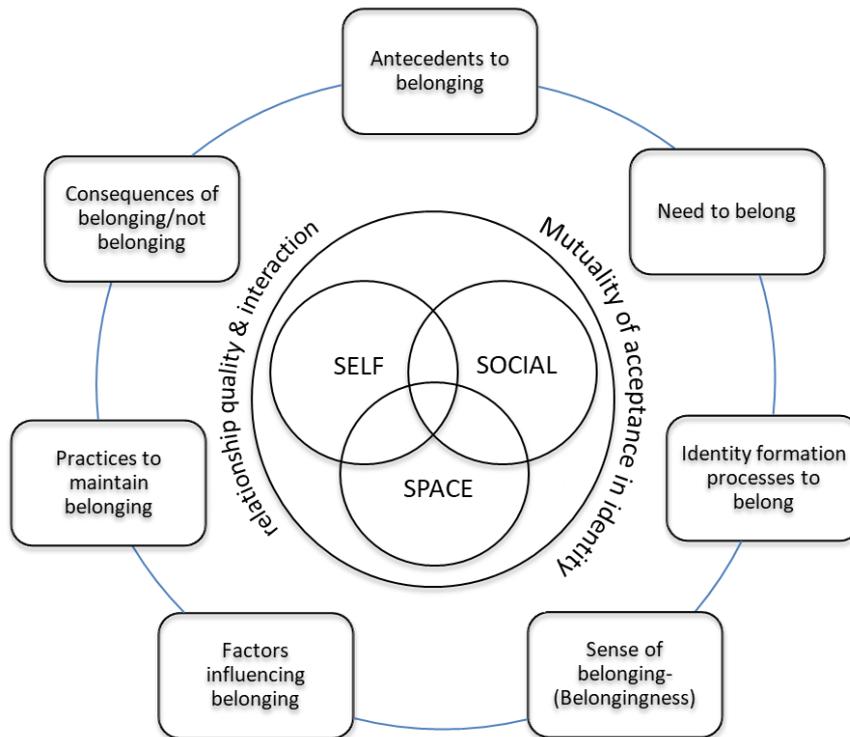


Figure 1.3. The psychological construct of belonging (Hodgins, 2018)

Hodgins’s work on belongingness and identity, and more particularly the PCB, is used in this study to aid a deeper investigation of how distance doctoral students build their belongingness and identity within a distance doctoral community.

1.4.3 Methodological approach adopted

A qualitative research approach is used for this study for the purposes of exploring and understanding the narrative responses from distance doctoral students’ experiences in terms of how they interact towards building their sense of belonging identity within their distance doctoral community. Using a narrative inquiry approach, this study investigated lived experiences of 25 distance doctoral students, across six universities in the UK, in the fields of criminology, history, media, and museum studies, in various stages of their doctoral programmes.

Using a semi-structured interview technique, participants were asked to share their experiences via narratives as distance doctoral students within their community. These were recorded, transcribed and analysed. During repeated evaluation and analysis, several themes began to emerge that aided the coding process, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4 (see methodological approach chapter). To understand the meaning and structure of specific words and statements contained in the transcripts, participants were contacted to elaborate or help provide clarity and meaning about their previous narrative. As themes came up, they were assessed for patterns and co-occurrences. The details of these procedures are explained in Chapter 4. In summary, the adopted methodology made it possible for the research participants' voices to emerge fully as themselves, rather than a part of a larger group or community.

1.5 The scope and participants of this study

1.5.1 The scope of this study

This study is focused on understanding how distance doctoral students interact in their doctoral communities in building their belongingness and identity. It is acknowledged that the context of a distance doctoral degree may include numerous factors beyond the community factor, but factors beyond this scope are not the focus of this study.

This study is not focused on how the existence of other elements of distance doctoral degrees (such as the use or limitations of technologies, how students and staff members use technological tools and the formulation of policies) can influence the distance doctoral community. This study does not consider or develop concepts of how belongingness impacts on identity or the converse. These are what might be regarded as limitations of this study, but also provide a basis for opportunity for further research.

It is worth noting that where belongingness or sense of belonging is discussed, the emphasis is about group membership within a distance doctoral community. Other forms of membership beyond a distance doctoral community are introduced only to re-emphasise the discourse about group

membership in the distance doctoral community. Similarly, where identity is discussed, the emphasis is on how identity is built and its dynamics within a distance doctoral community. Other interpretations of identity may be discussed, but only to re-emphasise the discourse of social identity within the distance doctoral community.

1.5.2 Study participants

The participants of this study are 25 distance doctoral students that enrolled in doctoral programmes within 1 university in the northeast of England, 3 universities in the East Midlands region of England, and 2 universities in London. Most of the participants were engaged in either full-time or part-time employment in various sectors (like computer science, education, art, media, management and criminal science) as they studied from a distance for their doctoral degree. Their jobs were not necessarily linked to their academic area of interest.

Alongside studying, the participants came from a diverse background, and most of the participants had a family life to balance as well as financial obligations to meet. The interplay between career, academic and family life, coupled with the financial challenge that some students were faced with made it a particularly interesting study.

1.6 The structure of this thesis

This thesis contains seven more chapters in addition to this introductory chapter. They are described in Figure 1.4.

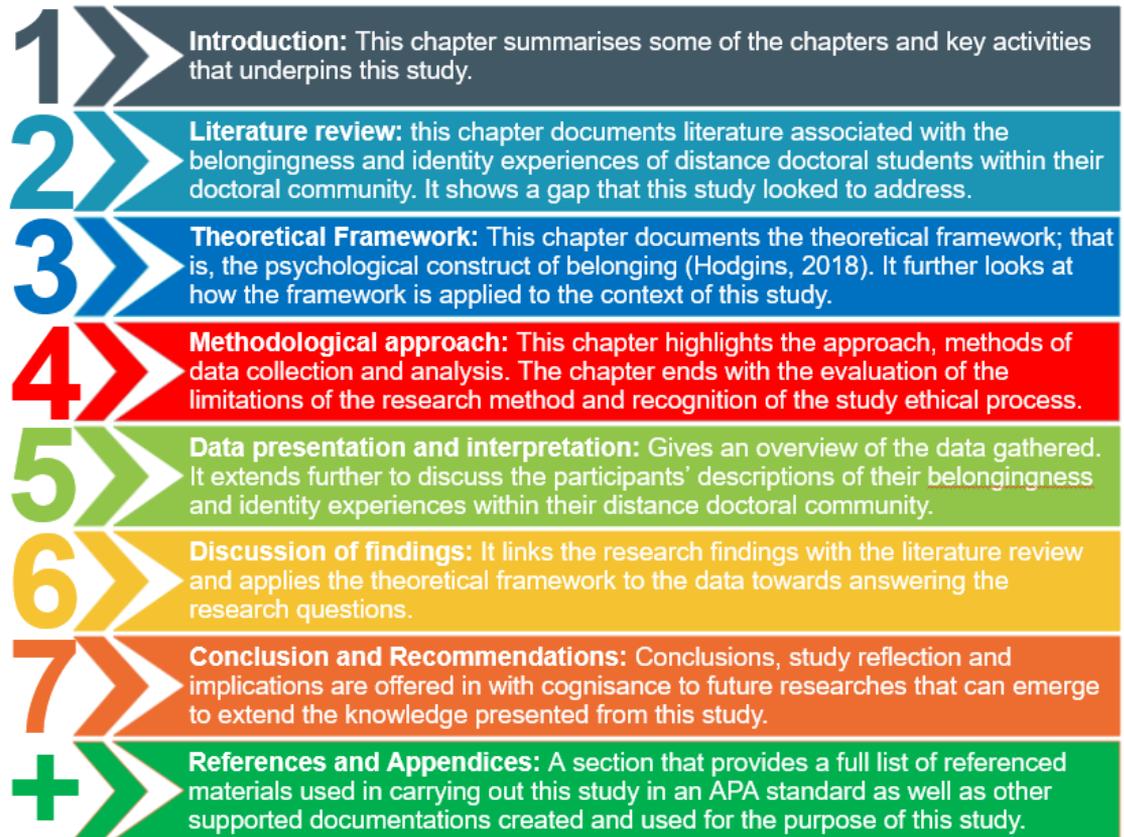


Figure 1.4. The Structure of the Thesis

1.7 Chapter summary

This chapter provides an overview of the key chapters and sections of this thesis. It began with an overview of the rationale for undertaking the thesis, and the chosen meanings of a distance doctoral degree and community adopted for this study and was followed by adopted meanings of the underlying concepts of belongingness and identity. The chapter went on to provide brief outlines about the aim, research questions, theoretical model, scope of the study, participants and methodological approach deployed. A structure of the thesis was offered at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review chapter is thematically arranged in sections and subsections in order to consider visible connections with and understandings of the study elements. The sections and subsections present the key elements of the area of study in order to facilitate the narrative thread. The section begins by setting the boundaries of what is within and out of scope in the review, considering the relational nature of identity and belongingness in distance doctoral communities. The review is invoked by the belongingness and identity problem within a doctoral community, and also offers an overview of identity and belongingness in a wider context, including a definition of what belongingness and identity implies in the context of this study. This is followed by a brief review of the relational nature of belongingness and identity in distance doctoral communities. Accompanying this relational view is a set of community dimensional elements of belongingness and identity that relate to distance doctoral communities; these include interaction, communication, socialisation, peers, supervisors, and contribution. The practical dimensions connect to the issues of obstacles of handling multiple roles by students in online doctoral communities, conformance and influence, doctoral practices and the transitional period of the doctoral journey.

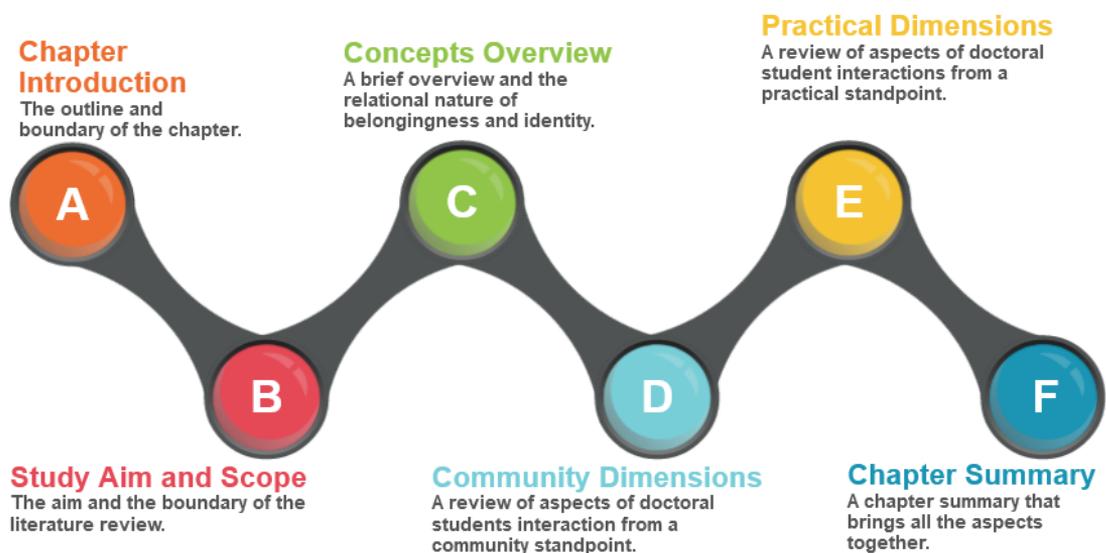


Figure 2.1. The roadmap of the literature review chapter

This chapter ends with a summary that brings together what is reviewed, towards an interconnected understanding of the phenomena studied. The resulting overview of this section steers this study towards the use of a theoretical model to aid understanding about its aim, within the relational nature of belongingness and identity of distance doctoral students.

2.2 Aims and scope of the literature review

This literature review is concerned with exploring aspects of how distance doctoral students interact within their doctoral community towards the development of their belongingness and identity. This study does not consider how belongingness impacts on identity and the converse.

It is acknowledged that the existence of other elements of distance doctoral degrees can influence the distance doctoral community. However, this acknowledgment is recognised as a limitation of this study, and that its pursuit could be a worthwhile extension after this study has been fully completed and examined. Such limitations are described in greater detail in the later chapter (see Conclusion and Recommendations chapter) of this thesis.

Where belongingness or sense of belonging is reviewed, the emphasis is about group membership within distance doctoral communities. Other forms of membership beyond distance doctoral communities may be introduced only to give weight to the discourse about group membership in a distance doctoral community. Where identity is reviewed, the emphasis is on social identity and its dynamics within a distance doctoral community. Other notions of identity are discussed only to give weight to the discourse of social identity within a distance doctoral community.

The literature reviewed focuses on a number of areas that are specifically concerned with the study aim: the relational nature of identity and belongingness; distance doctoral students' community and social networks; distance doctoral students' interaction in their doctoral community; distance doctoral students' identity development and 'fitting in'; distance doctoral students' interaction with the supervisor; distance doctoral students' interaction with their peers; managing role conflict by distance doctoral

students; distance doctoral students' transformation and transitional period; doctoral practices and scholarly stance; and conformance and influence.

These areas were chosen because they discussed and detailed major ideas that were highlighted as significant across the literature of belongingness and identity of doctoral students. These areas relate to the aim of this study because they underpin key aspects in exploring how distance doctoral students interact towards building their belongingness and identity.

The literature reviewed in this study was shaped by inclusion and exclusion criteria. The rationale underpinning the factors of the inclusion and exclusion criteria are described below.

The date of publication was predominantly between the year 2010 and 2020, to focus on relatively contemporary discourses and trends around the subject of belongingness and identity. The geographic location of the studies were predominantly the USA, the UK, Canada and Australia, as this range related closely to the scope of the place and context of the study. The language of the studies selected was English, as this negated the need for translation and the loss of meaning involved in translating the language of the studies. It was also vital that the studies used or focused on participants that were doctoral students. Studies selected were peer reviewed. Also, studies were selected where the reported outcomes confirmed, rejected or complemented the research problem underpinning this study, as this helped in viewing the concepts of the study from various perspectives. The selected studies were predominantly published books, monographs, theses, journal articles, book chapters, conference proceedings and technical reports. The rationale behind using this range of studies was concerned with the desire to retain a focus on relatively contemporary discourses and trends around the subject of belongingness and identity.

From a literature selection standpoint, it is worth stating that the inclusion and exclusion criteria used did not make the list of literature that are worth including in this study entirely exhaustive, but were focused on providing a substantive background and explored the key areas of concern of this study. Future studies that would build upon this study would seek to include wider

literature that will provide details about the future perspectives chosen, expanding an understanding about this phenomenon.

2.3 A brief overview of belongingness and identity

It should be clearly noted that from the perspective of the philosophy of mind, identity and belongingness often represent the school of thought that mental events experienced by individuals are concurrent to neurochemical activities in the human brain. That is absolutely dissimilar to how identity and belongingness is habitually understood in education; this study limits itself to the understanding of identity and belongingness as linked to social sciences and social practices.

To begin with, a number of authors from various disciplines have defined, explained, and interpreted the word 'belonging' or 'belongingness' in numerous contexts. In this study, a Western definition of the term is discussed to find a premise for this concept in a multicultural context. According to Webster (1979, p.39), 'to belong' implies "having a proper, suitable or appropriate place; to feel genuinely connected with something; to genuinely fit into a group". This study resonates with the Western dictionary's definition because the term belonging is linked to culture, event or place. Furthermore, this meaning shows an alignment and connection between people and these features in several ways. The use of the phrase 'genuinely' in the explanation above is also of note; its use shows the existence of a natural congruity between a person and the phenomenon. Furthermore, it shows that a harmonious feeling is felt between an individual's inner self and the community.

Based on its definition, the term belonging can be said to be a multifaceted psychological construct. The sense of belonging, as one face of the term, regularly appears in the literature as necessary in the overall concept of belongingness. Baumeister and Leary (1995) described the necessity to be part of a group (i.e. to belong) as an essential human driver for regular,

mutual contacts with existing ties and an urge to build and sustain at least the minimum amount of interpersonal engagements.

The need to belong is a compelling social motive that influences the way people think and can drive their emotions and behaviours in a given context, situation, and time. Whilst it is not the aim of this study to scope belongingness beyond distance doctoral communities, it is worth noting that there could be other qualifying reasons for individuals' belonging such as the events that take place in childhood and adolescence just before the occurrence of belonging in adulthood. Furthermore, belonging has another facet that is linked to the positive effects associated with belonging and negative effects that are connected to not belonging (Baumeister, 2012). This study is concerned with this facet, using the narratives of lived experiences of distance doctoral students in the United Kingdom (UK). To further exemplify the concept of belongingness, Figure 2.2 shows six members in a group: Sam, Peter, Sarah, Anna, Jess, and John. Almost every member has identified themselves with the group. The personal engagement they have brings to them a feeling of belongingness. On the other hand, John seems left out. His physical presence and participation are not enough to make him feel that he is part of the group. If John had an opportunity to leave the group and join another group with which he felt comfortable, he would not hesitate to do so. The other five members feel that they belong and would prefer to stay with the group. In this case, belongingness is used in a subjective sense. That is, everything is down to a member's sense of belonging regarding their group membership.

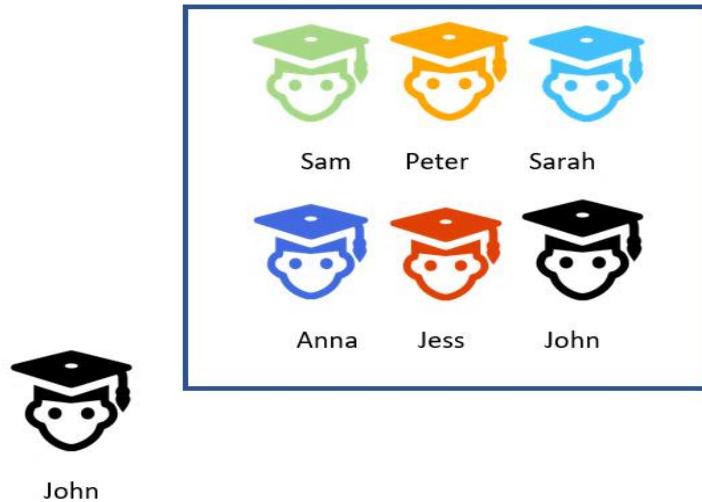


Figure 2.2 Belonging in a social group

From a social identity standpoint, the works of Tajfel (1981) considered social identity to be associated to a person's self-concept that is derived from their understanding about their relationship within a social group(s) and the advantages associated with being part of such group(s). Also, it is seen as shared collective identity within a group of other individuals who have or are considered to have specific mutual goals and qualities (Baker & Lattuca, 2010).

From a community perspective, it would appear that social identity has three main functions. It improves how people feel about themselves and improves their appreciation of themselves. Social identity makes it possible for individuals to recognise their unique place in a community via common values, behaviours and beliefs. From an intrapersonal standpoint, the functions of social identity mentioned above can be construed as belonging to self. From an interpersonal standpoint, these functions can be construed as socially belonging to a group with other individuals. In a community, it can be construed as belonging to a genuine social place (Deaux, 2001).

Based on the understanding of social identity that is driven by the works of Tajfel (1981), this study adopts an understanding of identity that is used as an underpinning, that is: a person's perception of who they are, which may also be determined through their association(s) in a group.

2.4 The landscape of technology-enhanced learning within distance doctoral degrees

Technology-enhanced learning (TEL) is one of the learning approaches that has been affected by the increased use of computers and communications networks in universities. Technology-enhanced learning comprises a large array of technical and pedagogical options. This thesis stresses the interpersonal aspect of technology enhanced learning within a distance doctoral community. To do this, I resonate with the observations of Cronin et al. (2016), which observe that learning and identity result from the interaction within networks of individuals and resources in networked learning (NL). Beyond individual technological enablers and limitations, the learning environment enhances and limits exposure to networks. To expand on this, by assisting and/or restricting some ways of expression, the media of a learning environment affects a learner's feeling of belongingness. Adding to this point is an aspect from the works of Evans (2015), who observed that members actively attempt to control the medium and available symbols with which to belong.

Furthermore, a literature review on professional identity development in higher education by Van Lankveld (2017) located relevant journal articles. Within it, there were no studies on the experience of learner belongingness via the construction of their identity in distance doctoral communities. At a general level, according to Phelps (2016), the absence of studies that directly investigate the belongingness and identity of doctoral students could be explained by the relative newness of the field.

In networked learning, the emotional process linked to learning and social development is affected by how a person experiences their relational belongingness. Kim (2016) theorised how a person could better evaluate difficult experiences using the awareness of the learning itself. Although Kim's work tended to treat the learning environment as a constant, the work of Hockey and James (2017) did not allude to Kim's perspective by arguing that a greater sense of emerging agency could be enabled by being capable of harnessing opportunities and choices caused by struggles a learner may face

from the learning community. In line with the works of Shoemaker and Tobia (2018), the development of the other identities of the learner such as academic, professional, and personal may be affected by a person's awareness of self-as-a-learner or self-as-a-professional or self-as-a-family-member and the capability for an increased security sense and agency in learning activities. Furthermore, this awareness may transfer across learning situations.

Epistemologically, this relational approach could be said to complement a social constructionist perspective in which a person's future social behaviour, goals, and self-conception are affected by interactional experience with others and resources. Identities are built through reflectivity, reciprocity, interaction, and communication; they are in continuous flux, interpreted from various relational contexts. To attempt to understand these contexts, it is imperative to briefly explore community and social networks of distance doctoral students.

To this end, a gap exists in the literature – within the area of further understanding about how distance doctoral students develop a sense of belongingness as well as build their identity through interactions in their doctoral community. In order to address this gap, an exploration of aspects typically associated to the community setup of distance doctoral students is studied through this thesis. These aspects are listed below and are also thematically addressed in the subsequent sections within chapter:

- The relational nature of identity and belongingness
- Distance doctoral students' community and social networks
- Distance doctoral students' interaction in their doctoral community
- Distance doctoral students' identity development and 'fitting in'
- Distance doctoral students' interaction with the supervisor
- Distance doctoral students' interaction with their kind (peers)
- Managing role conflict by distance doctoral students
- Distance doctoral students' transformation and transitional period
- Doctoral practices and scholarly stance
- Conformance and influence

Underpinning this literature review chapter and the greater part of this thesis was the selection and review of 147 related studies. Of the reviewed studies, 72 of them focused on explorations from the perspective of distance doctoral students whilst 45 of the studies focused on distance doctoral degrees from a more holistic perspective, which arguably included some individual or group perspectives of distance doctoral students. Thirty of the studies focused on doctoral studies in general and/or aspects of identity and belongingness that enhanced the coherence and narrative thread of the study.

The selection of studies was based on the theoretical model adopted for the study (discussed later in Chapter 3) and the need to understand the contexts surrounding the theme, and basic terms typically used in the discourses of belongingness and identity, especially from a distance doctoral student/degree perspective. This literature yielded substantial insights that highlighted some key points. However, an initial list of key phrases that were identified seemed to be broad, although linking keywords to those present in the research questions helped in producing a concise shortlist of relevant items. What followed was a generation of synonyms of terms, accompanied by the list of documents to be searched. The search for literature was initiated through the Lancaster University online library (also known as OneSearch). Through the University's partnerships and virtual private network authentication, further access was gained to other libraries and peer reviewed journal websites. Google Scholar helped fill in a gap that aided further access to resources where Lancaster University access could not.

Systematically, the search for studies focused on terms that met the inclusion criteria (see Appendix C) while some emphasis was placed on exclusion criteria, but only used as a reminder of studies that were not a priority of this study. Subsequently, as the search evolved, the use of wildcards or wild characters (such as "or", "and", "not" and "*") search techniques was deployed to help gain a more relevant search result set. More importantly, the literature was initially perused and sorted by recentness. Finally, the studies selected were organised, evaluated and linked in order to enhance the narrative thread of this chapter.

At the end of each subsequent section below, a highlight of the features and factors that point to the influences on belongingness and identity from a distance doctoral student perspective is provided. This is followed by the influences that will be focused on in subsequent chapters of this thesis and the rationale for this, as well as identifying those that will not be focused on and the reasons for not focusing on them.

2.5 The relational nature of identity and belongingness

In order to consider the relational nature of identity and belongingness, it is important to first construe a sense of belonging as a product of an individual's embracing of a social identity related to a given social group or sub-group. Various studies about how individuals belong in a group with their social identity in numerous settings and contexts have looked at the relational nature of belongingness and identity, and some of these contexts and situations included students in high school (Phelps, (2016), the elderly in aged care facilities (Curtin, 2013), and nurses in training colleges (Clements et al., 2016). Others included drug and substance abuse patients in rehabilitation (Clements et al., 2016), homosexuals in family events (Phelps, 2016), refugees in foreign countries (Hodgins, 2018), and university students in sporting teams (Bruner, 2015). Whilst the findings of the studies carried out by these authors have aspects of dissimilarities due to the contexts of their studies, the findings share a common similarity. The similarity in the findings is that there is no psychology-based model to help scope the issue of belongingness and identity together. Beyond that, the studies also found that belongingness was felt or not felt in various identity contexts like family, career and academia. It is worth noting that these are the aspects that this study sets to explore, and the similarities across the contexts implies that the factors and features may have a similar influence for distance doctoral students.

From an identity standpoint, identities linked to personal interest, academic concerns, vocation or values can be seen as flexible. Although Baumeister and Leary (1995) indicated that the need to belong could be key and persisting, the mere understanding of belonging is fluid, showing change and

relationship over time within an individual's place, action and context (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Admittedly, the changing aspect of social identity might affect the way a person experiences belongingness. The positional element can be viewed as the circumstances that result when a person experiences a new situation, such as after the commencement of a new course at a higher education institution, the commencement of a new job and moving to a new environment or home. Under such circumstances, the pre-existing social identity can be said to be retained and moved with them (Hockey & James, 2017).

Nevertheless, an individual must re-evaluate their social identity and its use in the new place when retaining an existing social identity in a new setting and context. When creating a persistent sense of belonging, a person may be forced to adapt, accommodate, or even remove the identity brought to the new situation.

Social identities that are involved in the build-up of a person's concept are said to contribute contrarily to a sense of belonging. For instance, Hockey and James (2017), while conducting a study in the UK, established that the top seven identities, when arguably ordered in the order of significance to a sense of belonging were family, friendship cycle, lifestyle choices in relation to affordability, nationality(ies), career or profession(s) identified with, solidarity, and a mutual interest. Although this study did not make any cultural distinctions (possibly because of the limitations of the predominantly 'white race' mono-culture sample), the researchers considered the rank of the various social identities on gender, only. Among men, team identities ranked higher than political, sub-ethnic, or faith-based affiliation identities. This differed greatly from the way that women's social identities were ranked in the study.

This relationship between identity and belongingness is what this study hinges on, to explore how distance doctoral students experience belongingness in their doctoral community via the construction of their identity.

To this end, based on the literature reviewed above, the key features that can influence the sense of belonging and identity of distance doctoral students are

family, friendship cycle, lifestyle choices in relation to affordability, nationality(ies), career or profession(s) identified with, solidarity, and a mutual interest. It is important to note that although highlighted as a key influence, this study will not focus on aspects of lifestyle choices, professional identity and nationality of distance doctoral students. However, family, friendships, team spirit, and a shared interest will be focused on in an intertwined manner in subsequent chapters of this thesis (particularly Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 7), because these can yield more specific insights towards understanding the interplay between belongingness and identity in the context of distance doctoral students.

2.6 Community dimensions: Distance doctoral students' belongingness and identity

2.6.1 Distance doctoral students' community and social networks

Numerous literature offers various definitions of community at the graduate level within face-to-face communities. Although these definitions are slightly different from those used within distance and online learning communities, they have some aspects in common, such as collaboration, connectedness, shared goals and values, and trust among others (Bagaka's et al., 2015; Devos et al., 2017; Mazerolle et al., 2015;). Even though there are communities in online and distance courses, researchers have established that the weak social connections in these environments were related to lower rates of student persistence. The lack of connections, as a result, limited contact with student services, staff and peers (Sala-Bubaré & Castelló, 2017). The lack of technological knowhow and time also contributed to the lower rates of student persistence (Bawa, 2016).

In higher education institutions (HEI), the word community is used to cover the sub-populations of students, classrooms, institutions, and departments. In the educational context, community is also associated with the underpinnings of belonging and feeling valued as they are linked to significant relationships with other members of the community whilst evolving into a member of a group that is valued (Campbell, 2015). Interacting with other people in the departmental community regularly helps in nurturing a sense of belonging.

The notion of community is used and interpreted in the context of higher education in a number of ways (Russell, 2015). However, the conceptualisation of community mainly includes the idea of collective experiences and encouraging relationships among group members. In this thesis, the term 'community' is conceptualised as social networks developed via relationships, towards a shared academic goal.

Social networks can be personal relationships that an individual can rely on as resources during their doctoral education. Thus, making social relationships with staff and peers is a crucial resource that helps doctoral learners to overcome academic, emotional and social challenges which are common among those pursuing a doctorate degree in general as well as from a distance (Greene, 2015; Russell, 2015). Most graduate students tend to approach staff and peers in advanced stages of their programme when they experience any problems for assistance. It can be assumed that they may well value their advice since they have faced similar challenges in their doctoral study (Weidman et al., 2001).

Distance doctoral students and staff members in a department can create various forms of relationships with one another, either online and/or offline. Extended social circles with a higher membership are built upon these relationships. This spanning boundary of network enhances the ability of distance doctoral students to gain assistance from the resources, which increases as the number of connections and intersecting social circles rise (Greene, 2015; Russell, 2015). In some institutions in the UK, notably Lancaster University and Leicester University, distance doctoral students now have more constituents in the department who can provide necessary support. Community development during distance doctoral study is crucial as support sources can have a positive effect on distance doctoral students' perseverance, motivation, and adapting, which also affect completion of a degree (Bagaka's et al., 2015; Greene, 2015; Mazerolle et al., 2015). This also means that distance doctoral students wishing to create and develop strong and reliable support networks and relationships must have consistent opportunities to meet with peers and staff members as this would help in

nurturing a sense of belonging and feeling valued (Mazerolle et al., 2015). Belonging and feeling valued in relationships help in boosting the learner's feelings of being valuable, relevant, and recognised in their community (Russell, 2015). Whilst the points raised in this section appear entirely reasonable, the question of socialisation remains key within an online doctoral community.

Emerging from the studies reviewed in this section are key features that can influence the sense of belonging and identity of distance doctoral students. They are collaboration, connectedness and meaningful associations with peers and staff members, shared goals and values, trust, lack of technological knowhow, time, and evolving into a respected member of a group. While the lack of technological knowhow will not be focused on in the subsequent chapters of this thesis, the remaining above-mentioned features that can influence the sense of belonging and identity of distance doctoral students will be revisited, as they can yield a deeper understanding about the dynamics of the social network which distance doctoral students exist within.

2.6.2 Distance doctoral students' interaction in their doctoral community

Holistically, most researchers regard socialisation as the model that explains doctoral students' experiences and development during their study (Sala-Bubaré & Castelló 2017; Weidman et al., 2001). Doctoral student socialisation involves indoctrinating a newcomer in a community of an academic department (Castelló, 2017). To build upon this definition, socialisation can also be explained as a manner through which doctoral students acquire the values, skills, and knowledge essential in ensuring their academic and professional success (Portnoi et al., 2015). Regardless of the mode of socialisation, postgraduate students learn about important values and norms that can help them to succeed or fail through sustained interaction with peers and supervisors in the department.

Most of the literature on doctoral programmes combines socialisation into both academic and professional worlds as the programmes groom the learners to be experts (Castelló, 2017; Portnoi et al., 2015; Russell, 2015;

Weidman et al., 2001). Nevertheless, doctoral studies is both a steppingstone and a precise role itself. Learners are socialised into, take, and then exit the role of a doctoral student (Portnoi et al., 2015). The experience of an individual at the degree level influences his/her personal development as they take the doctoral student role. It is often the case that they discover how to develop integrity, balance numerous responsibilities, think independently and express ideas. As they progress from consumers to creators of knowledge, they view themselves differently (Castelló et al., 2017; Ramirez, 2017).

Researchers have established that the lack of enough literature on the socialisation of a person at the degree level has left a significant gap (Castelló et al., 2017; Ramirez, 2017). Furthermore, they have established the gap to be even wider for part-time and distance learning degree programmes as they are rarely included. Given that a significant number of distance and part-time learners may have been in full-time employment before beginning their doctoral study, they face difficulties when switching to being a student and may find it challenging to be integrated in the doctoral community (Castelló et al., 2017; Ramirez, 2017).

Additionally, since it is assumed that because doctoral students have accomplished their undergraduate and, in most cases, postgraduate studies (at Master's degree level) successfully, doctoral students are mainly viewed as capable navigators of higher education. Accordingly, Sala-Bubaré and Castelló (2017) observed that it is unknowingly presumed that doctoral students need none or only need little help in developing community and nurturing ways to belong and feel valued. Based on this inappropriate guess, some higher education institutions may fail to socialise doctoral students appropriately. An undergraduate degree exposes the learners to a highly structured and, to an extent, a collaborative learning environment; learners at doctoral degree level are expected to be independent and self-sufficient researchers at a speed that does not take into consideration the challenges of integrating into the community (Pifer & Baker, 2016). The lack of support compels doctoral students to learn to navigate these changes on their own,

without being socialised effectively or to quit the programme, thus leading to doctoral student attrition (Greene, 2015; Johnson, 2017; Portnoi et al., 2015).

One model of doctoral student socialisation is proposed by Weidman et al. (2001) and is made up of four stages. To elaborate more on the model of doctoral student socialisation, I begin by noting that whilst there exist several models or concepts of student socialisation, the model of Weidman et al. (2001) seems the most encompassing in helping to unpack the stages of socialisation in the doctoral community. The underpinning of this conceptual model is on the premise that doctoral students experience transformation during their study. These stages involve distress, self-doubt, and ambiguity. During the process where new information is obtained and doctoral students settle into their role, students often navigate through four unique yet related stages of socialisation. Within these stages (which are the anticipatory, the formal, the informal, and the personal), doctoral students as members of their doctoral community assume the role of socialising agents via watching, investigation, collaboration and/or mentoring.

Doctoral students usually experience the anticipatory stage when they begin their programme and are uncertain about the programme's expectations. Doctoral students learn about their academic role and become cognisant of what is expected from the role. Shortly after the anticipatory stage is the formal stage; this includes new doctoral students watching existing and experienced doctoral students to ascertain how they meet the expectations of the role. It also involves obtaining information from staff and peers to build a support mechanism and settle into their department. The watching and socialisation linger into the formal stage; however, a doctoral student may adopt the behaviours of the existing and experienced students and progress from acting as a student to acting like a professional. Lastly, the personal stage involves internal fusion of the doctoral student's social and individual roles, social structures and personalities (Weidman et al., 2001). This stage puts disparity between a doctoral student and the university's department as the identity of the student begins to develop.

Weidman et al. (2001) assert that graduate students tend to experience this socialisation procedure (of four stages) in a similar manner without the presence of peculiarities between diverse categories of students. Doctoral students that study from a distance or part-time basis were excluded from the sample of the research used in developing this theoretical model; therefore, this is an important gap in the existing literature.

A major feature of the doctoral students' socialisation model of Weidman et al. (2001) is its emphasis on the doctoral community, specifically in the aspects of building supportive relationships with peers and staff members and the programme culture. To progress through all the stages, doctoral students need to nurture and sustain solid relationships to provide social, academic and emotive support during their doctoral study. Beyond this, the doctoral students' socialisation model of Weidman et al. (2001) also accentuates the significance of building identity in the course of their doctoral study. During the anticipatory, formal and informal stages, doctoral students seek to mimic the established identity in the academic department as they remain a doctoral student. Subsequently, in the last stage (fourth stage), doctoral students may isolate from the academic department and start building an individual identity.

Bringing together the key factors that can influence belongingness and identity as reviewed in this section, these are doctoral student's social and individual roles, social structures and personalities, important values and norms that can help them to succeed or fail through sustained interaction with peers and supervisors in the department, the transitioning process, independent and self-sufficient research abilities, ability to nurture and sustain solid networks to provide social, academic and emotive support. These factors are pertinent and some of them will be discussed in an intertwined manner in the subsequent chapters of this thesis (particularly Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 7). The doctoral student socialisation model of Weidman et al. (2001), although earlier referenced for review purposes, will not be focused on, as this study will build upon the theoretical model of Hodgins (2018), which is discussed in the next chapter.

2.6.3 Distance doctoral students' identity development and 'fitting in'

In a distance doctoral programme, the implicit and explicit beliefs and values and experiences acquired within the programme's community can determine identity development of doctoral students (Campbell, 2015; Devos et al., 2017; Sala-Bubaré & Castelló, 2017; Weidman et al., 2001). Admittedly, a learner's identity development mainly happens before joining a doctoral study. It is sometimes the case that while studying for a doctoral degree, some students encounter some developmental challenges that force them to refer to some elements of their social and academic identities. These challenges cause constant constructing, co-constructing, and reconstructing of doctorate students' identities over time (Campbell, 2015; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Sala-Bubaré & Castelló, 2017; Weidman et al., 2001).

There is a difference between integrated identity (connections across multiple roles) and fragmented identity (focussed only on one role). Doctoral students may keep one identity in various roles or have multiple roles and take separate identities for each role (Sweitzer, 2008). It is worth noting that a learner may experience role conflict if two identities with distinct meanings and/or expectations occur concurrently (Colbeck, 2008; Pifer & Baker, 2016). Sometimes, a student might exit a role entirely or search for others to assist them in redefining themselves when role conflicts escalate (Pifer & Baker, 2016). Sadly, it is almost often the case that the role sacrificed is the role of a doctoral student.

The formation of doctoral student identities is determined by how the learners view themselves, how the community (i.e. both academic and professional) views them, and how those close to the student define them (Pifer & Baker, 2016). Almost always, students are seen as successful and their identities endorsed when they "fit in" with the academic community and incorporate the esteemed features of the academic department (Bawa, 2016; Campbell, 2015). Those who fail to fit in are isolated.

Given that the majority of doctoral students' interactions occur within their programme's community, the interaction could be said to take place where their community begins (Johnson et al., 2017; Pifer & Baker, 2016). As the

interactions and common attributes between learners and staff increases, it leads to a programme culture, which is characterised by shared attitudes, values, and norms. Studies have established that persistence and the experience of the doctoral student determine the degree of a learner's assimilation into both academic and social culture in a given academic department (Campbell, 2015; Devos et al., 2017; Sala-Bubaré & Castelló, 2017; Williams et al., 2018).

Studies have also established that the feelings of marginalisation, disconnection, and seclusion may be because of the student's incompatibility with the programme's or department's social and academic culture (Anderson, 2017; Gopaul, 2015; Greene, 2015; Rhoads et al., 2017). This viewpoint is slightly different from the work of Ramirez (2015) who contended that given that distance learning students only spend less time in the programmes and experience difficulties accessing peers and academic culture, marginalisation is more pronounced among them. Learners may leave a programme if they fail to become assimilated into the predominant and esteemed models of the academic department (Greene, 2015; Portnoi et al., 2015).

However, the learner's level of fit increases as their characteristics agree with the esteemed norms of the department. Consequently, they successfully integrate into their doctoral community (Russell, 2015). Similarly, the degree of integration increases as the student engages more in supportive interactions with peers with similar challenges, attributes, and interests in the departmental community (Greene, 2015). Along that line, learners become eager to join and integrate even into a large supportive community as they identify these commonalities and interact with staff and peers. Although, the extent of interaction required to integrate is yet to be known.

Emerging from the studies reviewed in this section are key features that can influence the sense of belonging and identity of distance doctoral students. They are how the learners view themselves, how the community views them, how those close to the student define them, the persistence and the experience of the doctoral student, marginalisation, disconnection, seclusion, and similar challenges, attributes and interests in the departmental

community. In subsequent chapters of this thesis (particularly Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 7), the departmental community will not be focused on in isolation, but rather it will be intertwined with the discourses that focus on the other influences stated within this paragraph. This approach seeks to yield understandings about the dynamics of distance doctoral students' identity development and the notion of 'fitting in'.

2.6.4 Distance doctoral students' interaction with their supervisor

Studies have consistently established that constant interaction between doctoral students and a department's supervisor and mentors is a strong predictor of the former's gratification, perseverance, and productiveness (Anderson, 2017; Greene, 2015; Rhoads et al., 2017). The relationship between a student and a doctoral supervisor is significant in determining the journey of the doctoral student beyond a good research output. Although assigning a supervisor is important for distance doctoral students, it is the relationship quality that a doctoral student is able to establish with a supervisor that affects how the learners interact with their programme's community that matters even more (Greene, 2015). A doctoral student's success and gratification are subject to the sense of care from a doctoral supervisor, trust, regularity of the interactions, and the time spent (Johnson et al., 2017; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Portnoi et al., 2015). A student may decide to quit the programme when they fail to fit within the doctoral community due to personal differences or supervisor mismatch (Portnoi et al., 2015).

Recently, most studies on the doctoral student experience treat programme supervisors and programme mentors differently since they have two separate roles (Kobayashi, 2017; Portnoi et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2018). The academic department allocates supervisors and their main role is to support, review and approve their doctoral students' research. Mentors, on the other hand, are mainly selected depending on research interests or personality match and are usually a staff member which doctoral students depend on for advice or for encouragement and general support (Russell, 2015). In the UK, a doctoral supervisor tends to do both the job of a supervisor and a mentor. This does not negate the knowledge that some universities in the UK may use

from within the wellbeing team and programme support staff to help the supervisor guide the student to completion. In most cases, programme completion can depend on whether a learner has a department supervisor who is more than just a supervisor. This is because the student's sense of personal commitment and accountability to the supervisor enables the supervisor to impact the student and this can enhance the relationship with the doctoral community (Williams et al., 2018). When doctoral learners develop self-doubt during their programme, research supervisors encourage them by assisting them to recognise their ability, knowledge, and skills (Anderson, 2017; Bawa, 2016).

In some cases, the research supervisor or mentor may be the only contact that a student has in the programme's community. However, such cases are more common among students in later stages of their study when they are mainly involved in writing, correcting, and defending their thesis (Pifer & Baker, 2016). Also, distance learning doctoral students, given that they spend isolated time in their geographical location, see their programme's supervisor as the only departmental connection (Rhoads et al., 2017). Clearly, interaction with a programme's supervisor is crucial but not enough to form a holistic sense of belonging in the community for doctoral learners.

Based on the literature reviewed in this section, the key features that can influence the sense of belonging and identity of distance doctoral students are constant interaction between doctoral students and a department's supervisor and mentors, a sense of care from a doctoral supervisor, trust, regularity of interactions, the time spent, sense of personal commitment and accountability to the supervisor. This study will focus on the influences highlighted within this paragraph. However, it is important to note that although highlighted as a key influence, in the subsequent chapters of this thesis (particularly Chapters 5, 6 and 7), this study will not focus on the aspects of supervision from the supervisor's perspective, rather it will be approached from the student's perspective. This is because this study focuses on using narratives of distance doctoral students to understand how they interact towards building their identity and sense of belonging within their doctoral community.

2.6.5 Distance doctoral students' interaction with their kind (peers)

Just like interaction with a programme supervisor, interactions with peers are equally essential in enhancing a doctoral student's sense of belonging (Campbell, 2015; Devos et al., 2017; Sala-Bubaré & Castelló, 2017; Williams et al., 2018). Connection with peers provides assistance, challenge, and responsibility, thereby intertwiningly creating a sense of belonging during the doctoral study (Pifer & Baker, 2016; Williams et al., 2018). Since doctoral candidates mostly find themselves at the lowest level in the community status hierarchy, they may find it challenging approaching staff members on a higher professional level and hierarchy in the community (Greene, 2015). Therefore, students turn to their peers for academic advice instead of asking staff members (Pifer & Baker, 2016; Williams et al., 2018). Arguably, faculty interactions are mainly only academic in nature; peer interactions often encompass both social and academic components. This helps to improve and widen the social atmosphere for learners, minimise anxieties, and produce a social channel for graduate students (Portnoi et al., 2015). In a traditional full-time (non-distance learning) doctoral programme, universities create informal gathering centres, whereas in online communities, distance doctoral learners may not have an informal space, and what is considered informal in meeting and interaction may become very subjective.

The regularity and quality of interaction with peers in the community can improve the doctoral student's experience or inhibit commitment (Pifer & Baker, 2016). This is because doctoral students can sometimes consider exiting their programme when they are not linked to their department's social peer community, as they sense that they are lacking an important aspect of the overall graduate student experience (Anderson, 2017; Greene, 2015; Portnoi et al., 2015).

Peer interactions are arguably habitually missing or very limited for distance doctoral students. Most of the doctoral students find it challenging to create and maintain peer relationships as they make progress in their programme because of the high academic demands and the need to balance other responsibilities in their lives.

The key factors that can influence belongingness and identity as reviewed in this section are how connection with peers can provide assistance, challenge, and a sense of responsibility, regularity and quality of interaction with their peers and community. These factors will be discussed in the subsequent chapters of this thesis (particularly Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 7), as they can yield more detailed understandings about the practicalities of distance doctoral students' interactions with their peers in their doctoral community.

2.7 Practical dimensions: Distance doctoral student belongingness and identity

In this section, a review of the practicalities of balancing multiple roles by distance doctoral students is offered (Devos et al., 2017).

2.7.1 Managing role conflict by distance doctoral students

Doctoral students experience role conflict due to the many roles they assume as students, career professionals, researchers, and peers among others (Pifer & Baker, 2016). Moreover, apart from their responsibilities within academia, distance doctoral students are also involved in important, if not more important, non-academic roles. It is almost always the case that many distance doctoral students have other responsibilities as friends, experts, couples, and parents (Rhoads, 2017). Distance doctoral students consider these non-academic roles as an essential source of support while undertaking their doctoral programme from a distance. Most distance doctoral students consider the support received from family members and friends as one of the most significant sources of motivation for their success when studying (Anderson, 2017; Bawa, 2016).

The challenges faced by doctoral students due to multiple life roles are especially consequential for distance learning students (Berry, 2017). Researchers have noted the difficulties that students face in managing their professional and familial roles during their programmes as they manage various commitments and identities. A doctoral programme is likely to be a distance learner's second or third main concern as they may have more responsibilities to attend to than full-time doctoral students do. Thus, in their

attempt to fit into the academic and social community, distance doctoral students face significant barriers (Mazerolle et al., 2015). Unlike distance doctoral students who only spend limited time on campus, doctoral students that study on a full-time basis on campus may work as tutors, make regular contact with staff members and peers, enabling them to easily integrate and connect with the programme's community (Kobayashi et al., 2017).

Gradually, distance learners have become defined by professional responsibilities and the commitment that they may have beyond their academic endeavour and not by the progress of their course or the expected outcomes (Williams et al., 2018).

Emerging from the literature reviewed within this section are key factors that can influence belongingness and identity. They are role conflict due to the many roles distance doctoral students assume as students, career professionals, researchers, and peers among others, responsibilities as friends, professionals, couples, and parents, and the support received from family and friends. These factors will be discussed in subsequent chapters of this thesis (particularly Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 7), as they can yield a deeper understanding about how distance doctoral students' manage their role conflicts.

2.7.2 Distance doctoral students' transformation and transitional period

For learners studying for their first doctoral degree, the feelings of uncertainty, ability, purpose and understanding and comprehending the ramifications of a higher degree desire can be a territory of thought that they live in for some period of their journey. The loss of a doctoral student's identity could come with emotional reactions or even a profound sense of crisis (Baker & Lattuca, 2010). For distance doctoral students, the period of transition into graduate status can be even more daunting due to vague and ill-defined expectations, standards and behaviours. In most cases, the first year of study is often perilous because that is when most students primarily come across and experience the interplay of academic and social processes at their extreme, also being challenging to initially comprehend (Dang & Tran, 2017).

Generally, gaining admission into a doctoral programme can be concurrent to privileges that signify acceptance into a community. The boundaries between the staff members, especially the supervisor may become hazy, thus allowing for informal methods of addressing individuals during some kinds of interactions in the community. This may trigger a thought that may lead some learners to see this as a change in social and professional communities as well (Dang & Tran, 2017). Additionally, during interaction in online communities, novel ways of thinking may lead a learner to also reassess their position in comparison to learners who may not be thinking at that level of novelty yet (Foot, Crowe, Tollafield et al., 2014). Distress consequential to this novelty may inspire self-consciousness and creativity, solving problems in a scholarly manner, or may inspire the feelings of self-doubts and insecurity. Creativity in this context may be associated with the field of study in the doctoral programme or may also include relationship with others (Gardner, 2008). However, doctoral students often resolve their problems using a combination of dialogue, analysis and logic (internally), and arguments (externally) (Wisker, Morris, Cheng et al., 2010).

As distance doctoral students interact socially with their peers in an online community, they may come to a realisation that their peers share similar struggles emotionally, financially and intellectually. Further interactions may also help to get rid of preconceptions of academia that learners have assimilated through interaction with non-academic subgroups (Glass, Kociolek, Wongtrirat et al., 2015). Self-doubts regarding intellectual ability may dissolve upon understanding that their peers are also struggling.

A study of postgraduate learners' interactions in their community by Pifer & Baker (2016) led to the observation that learners who were deemed to be at the stages of independent inquiry and/or contextual inquiry were still seeking guidance in resolving their challenges, especially externally. This led the author to conclude as a finding that intellectual advancement or growth cannot be subjected to only a cognitive cause but was also affected by the learners' relationships with others and their sense of identity. The study also found that learners who developed intricate ways of inquiry could not wholly associate

with those ways of inquiry until they had established intricate ways of seeing themselves and their relationship with others in their postgraduate community. Pifer & Baker (2016) further noted learners with a compelling sense of their identity or identities exhibited little worry about how other learners and staff viewed them. They were more explorative in their ways of learning and exhibited greater capability to select and assimilate ideas.

It could be a case that as learners face misperception and worries, they transit into a stage of evaluating, transforming, interpreting, creating and rejecting new knowledge. In order to operate at such magnitude, a learner needs to unpack aspects of a given phenomenon regardless of varying points of view. Whilst the skills of a learner can be influenced by socialising in their community, their unique biographies may affect their capability to differentiate aspects and decisions. This could also be related to their lived experiences, the interlacing of academic, personal and professional lives as well as their mental, physiological and emotional features (Glass & Westmont, 2014). According to Glass, Kociolek, Wongtrirat et al. (2015), past events affect present events, through the academic, cultural, social and economic capital possessed and drawn upon through the identities developed and ascribed to individuals. Along that line, the intricacy of a learner's biography can influence the motivations to start and complete a doctoral programme from a distance. Although intrinsic and extrinsic motivations may be interlaced, a doctoral student's sense of self may also be influenced by how a learner sees his/herself in comparison to others and gradually become cognisant of the concept of self-conception (Glass & Westmont, 2014).

Bringing together the key factors that can influence belongingness and identity as reviewed in this section, are uncertainty, ability, purpose and understanding and comprehending the ramifications of a higher degree desire, emotional reactions or even a profound sense of crisis, vague and ill-defined expectations, standards and behaviours, self-consciousness and creativity, solving problems in a scholarly manner, or how they may inspire the feelings of self-doubts and insecurity, emotional, financial and intellectual struggles, the interlacing of academic, personal and professional lives as well

as their mental, physiological and emotional features, the academic, cultural, social and economic capital possessed and drawn upon and how a learner sees his/herself in comparison to others. This study will focus on the influences highlighted within this paragraph. However, it is important to note that although highlighted as a key influence, in the subsequent chapters of this thesis (particularly Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 7), this study will not focus on aspects of economic capital possessed by a doctoral student. Although it would be ideal to understand how economic capital possessed by distance doctoral students influences their transition in the programme, it may introduce other layers of complexities and undermine other aspects which this study does not aim at addressing.

2.7.3 Doctoral practices and scholarly stance

Publication in the context of doctoral studies can have numerous inferences and lead to representations of a learner's' identity such as a scholar, lecturer, peer, parent, family member, among others, and an expression of a learner's research, viewpoints, philosophies and suppositions in the form of academic journals, conference presentations and doctoral thesis. As well as interacting with peers in their community, distance doctoral students that are in the teaching profession use their lecture room as a place to practice their opinions and sharing the findings of their studies before doing the same in a community where such opinions may be scrutinised by their peers and staff members (Hopwood, 2018). For distance doctoral learners who are not in the teaching profession, they may need to settle for other kinds of rehearsal environments for rehearsing their arguments and studies such as presenting in academic conferences and publishing in academic journals.

Whilst written texts in conference papers and journal articles may be a form of temporary identities of time-honoured and altered knowledge, they could also yield understanding about the researcher's stance in the context of prevailing academic and social discourses and forms of behaviours. This also implies that a researcher may use written and published texts to contend or approve practices and beliefs (Greene, 2015). Writing is strongly interconnected with identity. Most infant doctoral students consider scholarly writing to be a

difficult task, because identities and texts may be developed together during and via scholarly writing (Hunter & Devine, 2016). Most doctoral students use writing to adopt their scholarly stance and finding ways of supporting knowledge. The choice adopted during the expression of ideas in the form of a written text can align a learner with particular identities. The de-construction and re-construction of the researcher and the content of publication may take place during the production of the texts (Hall, 2018).

A researcher may also make his/her voice heard by expressing it in writing; thus, reflecting their discoursal-self, authorial-self and auto-biographical self. Therefore, a written text may enact more than one voice (written or spoken or communicated otherwise) to the extent that the voice heard or read may mirror other voices in the socio-cultural context (Litalien, Guay & Morin, 2015). Following along the identities available in the field or the context of study, the author builds their identity and history of their identities. Thus, the discoursal-self implies that multiple and contradictory identities may appear in a written text. This implies a state of struggle, progress and tenacity. However, the perspective of self as an author is associated with the voice and authority of the author. These interconnected views of self can have an influence on the identity and performance of the doctoral student (Johnson, Ward & Gardner, 2017).

Doctoral students that are more cognisant of their voice tend to move the emphasis of the contents from formal requirements to the enaction of the epistemic and social functions of textual representations. This also implies that doctoral students at this level of cognisance are more likely to identify themselves in academic contexts in relation to the audience and content of their publications (Greene, 2015).

The key factors that can influence belongingness and identity as reviewed in this section are written and published texts to contend or approve practices and beliefs, reflecting their discoursal-self, authorial-self and auto-biographical self, and audience and content of their publications. These factors will be discussed in subsequent chapters of this thesis (particularly Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 7), as they can yield more nuanced understandings about the

practicalities of scholarly practices of distance doctoral students' within their community.

2.7.4 Conformance and influence

Acceptance into the doctoral community can depict increased confidence in the doctoral student's knowledge of the field as well as the ability to assimilate into it and defend their stance within it (Wisker et al., 2010). This can spiral into a feeling of a learner seeing acceptance into a doctoral community as becoming part of a conversation among intellectual peers (Morris, Cheng, Wisker et al., 2009). In having acceptance into the doctoral community, peer-review could be one form of achieving acknowledgement and a framework of academic performance (Mazerolle, Bowman & Klossner, 2015).

Along this line, the acceptance of articles for publication in a reputable academic journal may yield feelings of acceptance into the doctoral community. In some cases, this also implies the originality of a doctoral student's work and depicts a record of identity as a scholar in a given field of study. Thus, successfully publishing represents a symbol of authority, authorship and authenticity (Hall, 2018).

Regardless of the stage of their doctoral programme, doctoral students may sometimes consider themselves as borderline contributors in research communities. This could increase their sense of belongingness as they may begin to feel more independent, feel less power of inequalities among peers in their community and take more ownership and responsibilities for their work (Wisker, Price, Moriarty et al., 2010). The source of increase in confidence may be beyond the attainment of knowledge in the field of study towards the ability to evidently articulate and support academic stances (Wisker et al., 2010).

Amidst the increase in confidence, acquisition of knowledge and reputation among peers in the doctoral community, a doctoral student may also begin to sense the existence of tension between their professional, academic and personal identities. There is a possibility that this is triggered by the transfer of skills by doctoral students across their social environments. There is empirical

evidence that doctoral students that are also in employment tend to apply their academic skills in their professional context or other similar situations where the application of such skills are eminent (Wellington & Sikes, 2006). Thus, acceptance, conformation and influence can alter the stance of a doctoral student among their peers in the academic, personal and professional environments.

Summing up the key factors that can influence belongingness and identity as reviewed within this section, these are concerned with how successfully publishing represents a symbol of authority, authorship and authenticity, distance doctoral students consider themselves as borderline contributors in research communities, and the tension between students' professional, academic and personal identities. These factors will be discussed in the subsequent chapters of this thesis (particularly Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 7), as they can yield understandings about how distance doctoral students' negotiate conformance and influence within their community.

2.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has focused on addressing various inferences from the literature that apply to the focus of this study. This review has established three important gaps in the literature. Primarily, most studies on the doctoral student's sense of belonging have not included distance doctoral learners. To have a better understanding about this significant group of students, their needs and experiences, it is important to focus on distance doctoral students (Johnson et al., 2017; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Portnoi et al., 2015), as I do in this thesis.

Furthermore, the existing literature tends to focus on the importance of community development for doctorate students as it affects their overall programme satisfaction and persistence. Nevertheless, the existing studies fail to discuss how learners develop community within their academic departments or how they build their identity towards belonging to the existing community. Clearly, an investigation that would aim at exploring how distance

doctoral students interact towards building their belongingness and identity is needed. This I do in this thesis.

Most studies on doctoral student experiences mainly discuss the negative aspects and the lack of elements from the experience. In other words, the focus is more negative than balanced. However, a few researches have focused on success factors and the interventions that can be carried out within programmes and universities. It is important, therefore, for more studies to be conducted with some emphasis on programme effects and how they shape distance doctoral student community and learner (Portnoi et al., 2015). In an attempt to cover this gap in literature, my study focuses on distance doctoral students with some emphasis on programme effects and how they shape a distance doctoral student community.

In summary, the review undertaken in this chapter (through each of the subsections) has enabled the identification of many factors and features that could influence belongingness and identity of distance doctoral students. These factors cover: family, friendships, professional identity, team spirit, and a shared interest, collaboration, connectedness and meaningful associations with peers and staff members, shared goals and values, trust, time, and becoming a respected member of a collective group, doctoral student's social and individual roles, social structures and personalities, important values and norms that can help them to succeed or fail through sustained interaction with peers and supervisors in the department, transitioning process, independent and self-sufficient research abilities, constant interaction between doctoral students and a department's supervisor and mentors, a sense of care from a doctoral supervisor, trust, regularity of the interactions, and the time spent, sense of personal commitment and accountability to the supervisor, how connection with peers can provide assistance, challenge, and a sense of responsibility, quality and regularity of interaction with peers in their community, role conflict due to the many roles distance doctoral students assume as students, career professionals, written and published texts to contend or approve practices and beliefs, reflecting their discoursal-self, authorial-self and auto-biographical self, audience and content of their

publications, how successfully publishing represents a symbol of authority, authorship and authenticity, how distance doctoral students consider themselves as borderline contributors in research communities, the tension between students' professional, academic and personal identities. These factors will remain prevalent in the subsequent chapters of this thesis (particularly chapters 5, 6 and 7), as they can yield more specific understanding about how distance doctoral students interact towards building their belongingness and identity within their community.

Progressively, some of the influencers discussed within subsections of this literature review chapter will be revisited in the next chapter (theoretical model chapter) to illustrate how the theoretical framework is exemplified by those features relating to distance doctoral students.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

3.1 Introduction

The approach used in this conceptual framework chapter is to discuss and contextualise a conceptual model that is central to understanding the relational nature of belongingness and identity in the context of distance doctoral students. This section is arranged in a manner to enhance visible connections and understandings of the conceptual elements as well as presenting aspects of the construct in an incremental manner. In the section that follows (section 3.2.1), notions of belongingness and identity are entwined when unpicking the components and subcomponents of the conceptual framework. In section 3.2.2, a contextualisation of Hodgins's (2018) conceptual model is offered, with cognisance of the interplay between belongingness and identity in distance doctoral students. The key concepts that underpin the theory of belongingness and identity are discussed and this includes willingness to identify and belong, liminality of identifying and belonging, practices to maintain identity and belongingness, settings of the community and individual experiences of belonging.

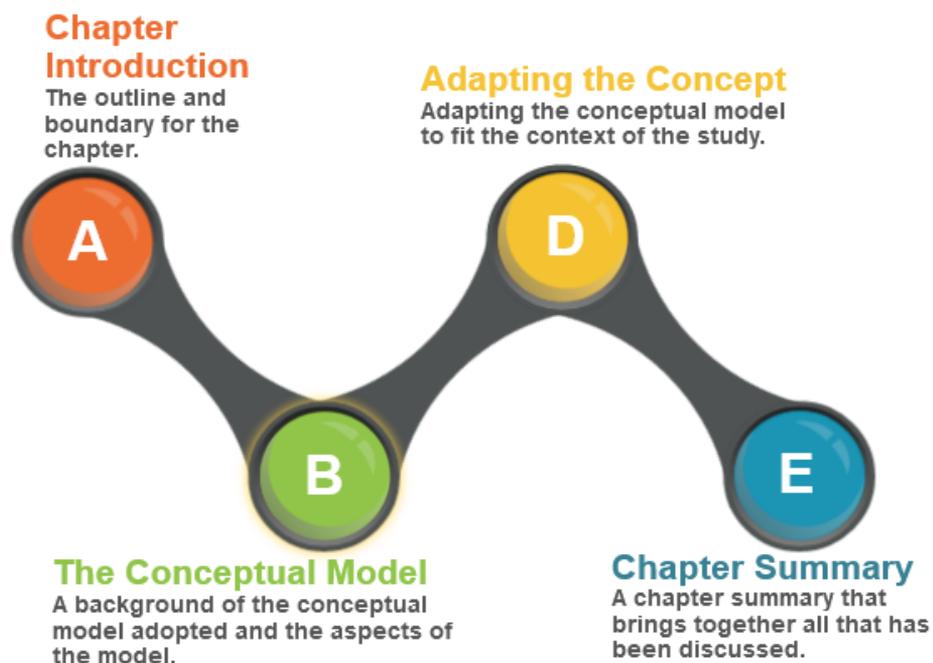


Figure 3.1. The roadmap of the conceptual framework section

This chapter ends with a summary that ties aspects of the conceptual model towards an interconnected understanding of the phenomena studied. The result of this section steers this study towards the application of the conceptual model to the findings chapter, to help answer the research questions of the study.

The use of Hodgins's (2018) theoretical framework in this study helped in yielding understanding about how the key concepts of this study would be best explored, the paths that can be used and the possible boundaries of exploration.

From a literature review standpoint, the theoretical framework is intrinsically linked to the literature. It was utilised as a model for sensibly cultivating and understanding the different, yet interrelated, aspects of the literature review. Furthermore, the link between the research questions and the theoretical framework is complementary, as they both embody recognisable aspects in a way through which the topic can be further explored, connecting to an existing body of knowledge and highlighting the gap in knowledge which the research questions seek to address.

From a data analysis and sense-making standpoint, the theoretical framework was useful as it helped in scoping the data and findings by mapping it to various sections of the framework towards understanding the phenomenon that was studied. This further strengthened the narrative thread and chapter coherence of this study (see sections 5.2 and 6.2).

3.2 Belongingness, identity, and the psychological construct of belonging

Within this chapter, I draw on the work of Hodgins (2018) to frame the key concepts of this study. Hodgins's emphasis on the distinct yet intertwined realms of identity is especially useful to my analysis as it allows me to think through how these realms influence various dimensions of belonging.

To this end, Hodgins's conceptualisation of belongingness and identity is generative for grasping the interplay between the notion of belongingness and

identity towards understanding how distance doctoral students interact in building their belongingness and identity. It is here also that Hodgins's attention to the conflicting nature of positionality of membership and identity is of value for informing the exploration of the key concepts of this study.

It is important to note that as a theoretical framework, Hodgins's Psychological Construct of Belonging is underpinned by a systematic review that tilted towards the quantitative axis of methodological approach, and has only been utilised in the context of national identity. However, the outcome of Hodgins's (2018) study is qualitative, and in this form was deemed applicable in this qualitative study.

3.2.1 Hodgins's psychological construct of belonging as a conceptual model

Hodgins's work on belongingness and identity, more particularly the conceptual model for the psychological construct of belonging, can aid a deeper investigation of how distance doctoral students differ in tacit awareness of themselves and their stance among other students and their experiences. The co-construction, de-construction and re-construction of an individual may be a manifestation of their transformed and/or retrenched perspective. It is important to note that whilst Hodgins's (2018) model was applied in a national identity and belongingness context, it is worth applying it in the context of this study, to help understand how distance doctoral students interact towards building their belongingness and identity within their doctoral community.

Reviewing identity-belongingness literature suggests that the conceptual elements which constitute the realms of identity that individuals belong to are related to self, space and social concerns. The use of realm as an identity manifestation arena implies that an individual may have sovereignty over other identities that they may habitually possess within them (Hodgins, 2018). Adopting identities can enhance the chances of satisfying the need to belong in those different contexts (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

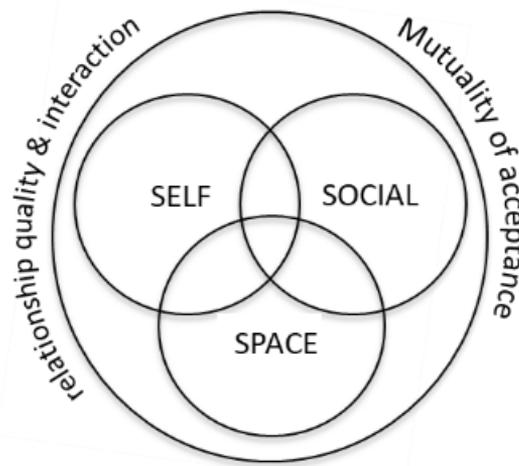


Figure 3.2. The realms of identity (Hodgins, 2018)

In Figure 3.2, social identities as a source of belonging implies social group memberships that are linked to external elements such as cultures, objects, shared beliefs, geographical locations and behaviours. It is worth mentioning that these identities can be formed using a self-categorisation process. Thus, enhancing the accessibility of the social system and levels of priorities of belonging is also discussed in an intertwined manner in this study, as it has also focused on the importance of social identities (Turner et al., 1987). The study found that family identities (i.e. those that involved family members) was the most important of all identities before friends and lifestyle identities. In relation to the influencers discussed in the Literature Review Chapter (see Chapter 2), family responsibilities and support were deemed tangential in making family identities a priority. The literature was inconclusive in indicating whether the dynamics of the family can influence the degree of support and responsibilities.

Space identity implies the oneness of an individual's physical, mental and environmental concerns. Within this significant space, it is arguable that belongingness can be built via relationships and reoccurring activities (Johnson et al., 2017). It can be said that where a person's place in the social system creates a sense of belonging, it could be due to the meaningful and positive sense of harmony from the social, environmental and historical features of the place, thus enhancing the feeling that an individual is an

integral part of the system. This resonates with the key influencers discussed in the Literature Review Chapter (see Chapter 2), that influencers such as collaboration, connectedness with peers and staff members, shared goals and values, trust, time, and evolving into a respected member of a group and frequent interaction between peers and staff members may help improve the identity associated with the 'Space' (doctoral community).

Personal identity stems from the idiosyncratic characteristics that an individual possesses that are made up of their attitudes, behaviours, memories and emotions. These characteristics can distinguish one individual from another (Blockett et al., 2016). This type of identity can be concurrent with an identity that is perceived as self-reflection. Regardless of the idiosyncrasies of the self, personal identities need to be in a congruent state for an individual to feel the ease and oneness in belonging (Russell, 2016). Looking at the self from an idiosyncratic standpoint back towards the influencers discussed in the Literature Review Chapter (see Chapter 2), it can be implied that a doctoral student's social and individual roles, personalities, independent and self-sufficient research abilities, how the learners view themselves, how the community views them, how those close to the student define them, the persistence and the experience of the doctoral student, may be vital embodiments of the 'self'.

Based on the insights of the realms of identity, Hodgins (2018) proposed that belongingness was psychologically linked to the realms of social, space and personal, engulfed within the mutuality of acceptance in concerns for space, personal and social. Also engulfing the space, personal and social concerns can define the quality of interaction within the relationship individuals form, along with the setup of physical and cultural environments.

Taking all factors into account, belongingness was found by Hodgins to be embodied by seven distinct, yet related dimensions. Starting with the antecedents to belonging, this dimension is followed by a sense of belongingness, factors that influence belongingness, the need to belong, consequences of belonging or not belonging, identity processes to belongingness and practices to maintain belongingness. A shared

understanding of the notion of belongingness was evidenced across various cultures (both non-Western and Western), reinforcing the notion that belongingness is a significant desire of individuals and exists in isolation to cultural beliefs and practices.

Arguably, Hodgins's (2018) seven dimensions of belongingness (see Figure 3.3), proposed as an embodiment of the psychological construct, conforms to and broadens several belongingness models previously proposed by other studies. To exemplify this further, Hagerty et al. (1996) proposed a model that is made up of three dimensions: consequences, antecedents and a sense of belongingness. Hagerty et al.'s (1996) model was built on Maslow's (1943) work towards building the need to belong dimension. These four historical dimensions put together, with three new dimensions derived from other belongingness studies, led to the proposal of the seven dimensions of belonging by Hodgins (2018), which is an embodiment of the psychological construct of belonging as well as explaining and supporting the concept as a whole. Immediately following Figure 3.3, an explanation is offered about the multidimensional nature of the top-level concept.

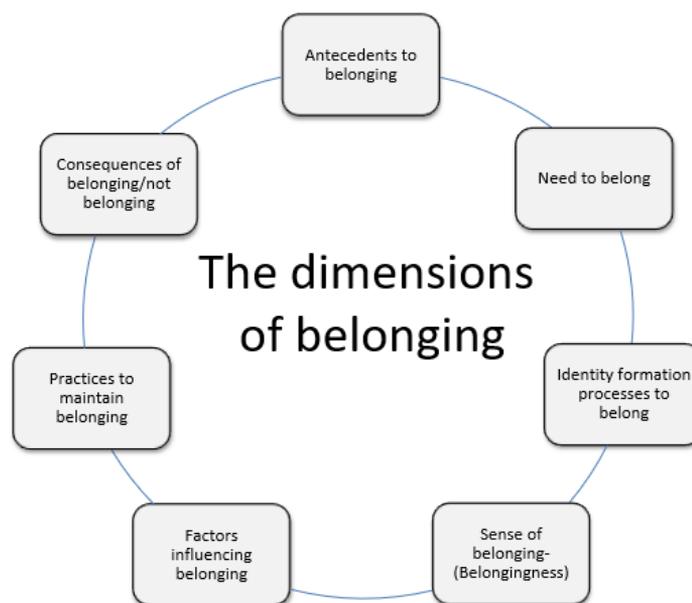


Figure 3.3. The dimensions of belonging (Hodgins, 2018)

To further support the argument for the seven dimensions of belongingness, the foundations of the antecedents of belonging are underpinned by the intricacies of the social backgrounds of individuals. The influence of culture and family can significantly impact an individual's psychology of behaviour, personality, values and beliefs. Numerous studies (like Gopaul, 2016; Hagerty et al., 2002; Hagerty et al., 1992a; Adler, 1930) have shown the importance that interactions can have on personality and behavioural traits on individuals. For example, in a family context, the young or inexperienced members can emulate the elder or experienced ones towards becoming independent and experienced (Delamont et al., 2018). Other factors such as biological and social factors can also impact an individual's personality in a community. The culture of an individual can influence their personality, sense of morality, happiness, behaviour and mortality (Pifer & Baker, 2016).

The need to belong as a dimension focuses on the fundamental factors that drive an individual to aspire to belonging in a group. As an essential element that socially stimulates individuals, this dimension manifests mostly after the fulfilment of safety and psychological desires (Maslow, 1943). The interpersonal nature of an individual to desire to belong to a group(s) makes their behaviour and emotion the stimulus of social action and an avenue for interaction (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). However, a mere need or desire to belong may not substantiate as a reason to belong to a group but may become a catalyst that disambiguates the reason to belong; such as to achieve other goals, for personal growth, or to minimise personal differences within members of a group (Richards et al., 2018).

Belonging and identity are conceptually connected. Along that line, from an identity formation perspective, Hodgins's (2018) psychological construct of belonging presents a dimension that individuals habitually evaluate their membership in a social group through the formation of their identity(ies). Alternatively, individuals in a social group may also be ascribed and accept an identity that is similar to one that is dominant in a group to which they belong to or aspire to belong to (Portnoi et al., 2015). Identity formation towards belonging also has another facet to it; one that is anthropologically associated

to performativity. This implies the ability for individuals to communicate, act or idealise actions or to conceptualise and put into practice an identity. This further validates the notion that social identities can manifest and develop in a context by mingling and interacting with social group members (Yuval-Davis, 2006). It is worth reiterating that mingling and interaction would be almost meaningless without speech and communication supporting them in building identity in a social group. However, one notable inference from how identity is entwined to belonging is that belonging in a vocational context may be achieved through emphasis on the primacy of a person's professional and/or academic identity over their ethnic, national or cultural identity. The work of Lederer et al. (2015) reinforces this viewpoint.

Belongingness has another dimension that is concerned with factors that influence it. Social, physical and environmental factors are either enabling or hindering a sense of belongingness. The impact of the influence may be momentary, such as a non-terminal ailment, a divorce or permanent influences such as refugees that survive war (Mahar et al., 2013), although in some contexts other factors like age and socioeconomic status may be an influence to belongingness. Such contexts are evidenced in the works of Rhoads et al. (2017). However, increased communication and interaction with members of a social group may undermine the impact of some negative factors (Jaeger et al., 2017). Also, it is worth noting that gender plays a vital role in influencing belongingness in positive and negative ways. Several studies have shown how gender influences belongingness in numerous ways (Jaeger et al., 2017; Rhoads et al., 2017; Mahar et al., 2013).

Invariably, individuals perceive their sense of belonging from varying perspectives. Hodgins (2018) implied that for a complete sense of belonging to be perceived, an individual should feel self-accepted and receive acceptance (or welcome) from other group members to the extent that they do not only fully socially identify with the social group, but begin to see their membership is significant to the existence of the social group. It would appear that the notion of self-accepting an identity is a huge commitment and sacrifice required by an aspiring or new social group member so as to feel

accepted by others in return. This presents a troublesome question or perhaps an issue of the degree of self-accepting and an indicator of received acceptance in return by other group members (Ramirez, 2017). Additionally, the studies of Mahar et al. (2013) support this stance by conceptualising belonging in a manner of mutuality and oneness with others. This manner of mutuality resonates with the idea of duality of acceptance where a new or aspiring group member co-chooses and co-accepts an identity of a social group as well as implicitly receiving permission/acceptance by other group members.

Progressively, gaining a sense of belonging is not a process to be completed, but rather to be sustained and continued via practices. Social group members need to exhibit cognitive and affective devotion of skills, time, and other resources as well as behaviours to maintain an acquired sense of belonging within a group. Typical among practices individuals adopt to maintain belongingness, is forming ties and remaining in close contact with group members that share a common cultural and national background with them (Castelló et al., 2017). This type of behavioural practice can significantly aid communication and interaction (Pifer & Baker, 2016; Williams, 2018). It is worth noting that other practices may exist that are very context-dependent, as discussed in section 3.2.2.

Consequentially, there are consequences of belonging and not belonging in a group. When a sense of belongingness is felt, the consequences can span within the psychological, physical, mental, social and/or spiritual. As belongingness is a mental/psychological affair, its relationship to a good mental and physical health cannot be underestimated (Jaeger et al., 2017). On the other hand, not belonging can affect the mental and physical health of a social group member. An example of this involves the feeling of an awkward sense of belongingness in a group or situations where an individual does not fit in (Bagaka's, 2015). In other studies, the negative impacts of not belonging are far more severe (Jaeger et al., 2017).

3.2.2 Adapting the psychological construct of belonging in the context of this study

Adapting Hodgins's (2018) conceptual model of the psychological construct of belongingness in my study first requires an understanding and the deconstruction of various elements of the object of this study. To begin with, I acknowledge that this model scopes the notion of belongingness and identity in an intertwined manner yet primarily starting from how identity influences belongingness and how belongingness in turn influences identity. Although it remains contestable, the manifestation of the concept of identity and belongingness of distance doctoral students within their online doctoral community is embedded only or mostly in the tacit awareness of themselves and their stance among other students and their experiences (Hodgins, 2018). However, such arguments would invoke discourse beyond the process and driving forces behind the co-construction, de-construction and re-construction of a distance doctoral student. Therefore, the application of this conceptual model constrains the scope of application to the boundaries of the experiences of distance doctoral students' tacit awareness of themselves and their stance among other students and their experiences.

Relating back to the literature and the conceptual model in view, the realms of identity for distance doctoral students emerge. Beginning from the 'self' (identity related to the uniqueness of the distance doctoral student), 'space' (identity related to the oneness of the doctoral student within the distance doctoral community) and 'social' (identity related to the social system that a distance doctoral student belongs to). According to Hodgins (2018), the use of realm as an identity manifestation platform indicates that a distance doctoral student may have sovereignty over other identities that they may usually possess within them. Along this line, the adoption of an identity(ies) can be fruitful in yielding essentiality of belonging (Johnson et al., 2017).

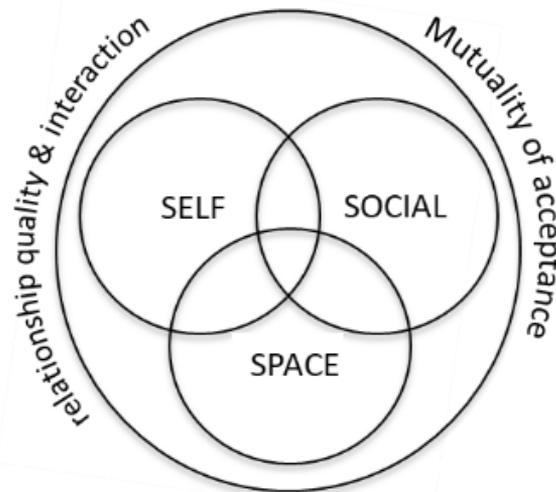


Figure 3.4. The (contextualised) realms of identity (Hodgins, 2018)

As depicted in Figure 3.4, it can be inferred from the insights offered by the identity realms of Hodgins (2018) that distance doctoral students belongingness can be associated to the identity realms of space (occupying own place in the distance doctoral community), social (finding own place in the distance doctoral community) and self (finding own voice or finding their own academic self within the distance doctoral community), with cognisance that they are wrapped within the quality of relationship among student and staff members as well as a shared feeling of acceptance among distance doctoral students and staff members. The physical and cultural setup of the distance doctoral community is tangential to how belongingness can be associated with the realms of identity.

Furthermore, the conceptual model in focus considers belongingness to be underpinned by several, yet unique and related dimensional elements. I begin with the seven dimensions of belongingness as proposed by Hodgins (2018) by looking at antecedents of belonging. The family and culture of a distance doctoral student can influence their behaviour, personality, beliefs and values. For example, in a doctoral community, a new or inexperienced student is likely to emulate the experienced students and even staff members towards becoming independent and experienced (Delamont et al., 2018). Also, the culture of a doctoral student can have an impact on the personality, happiness, behaviour and sense of morality (Pifer & Baker, 2016).

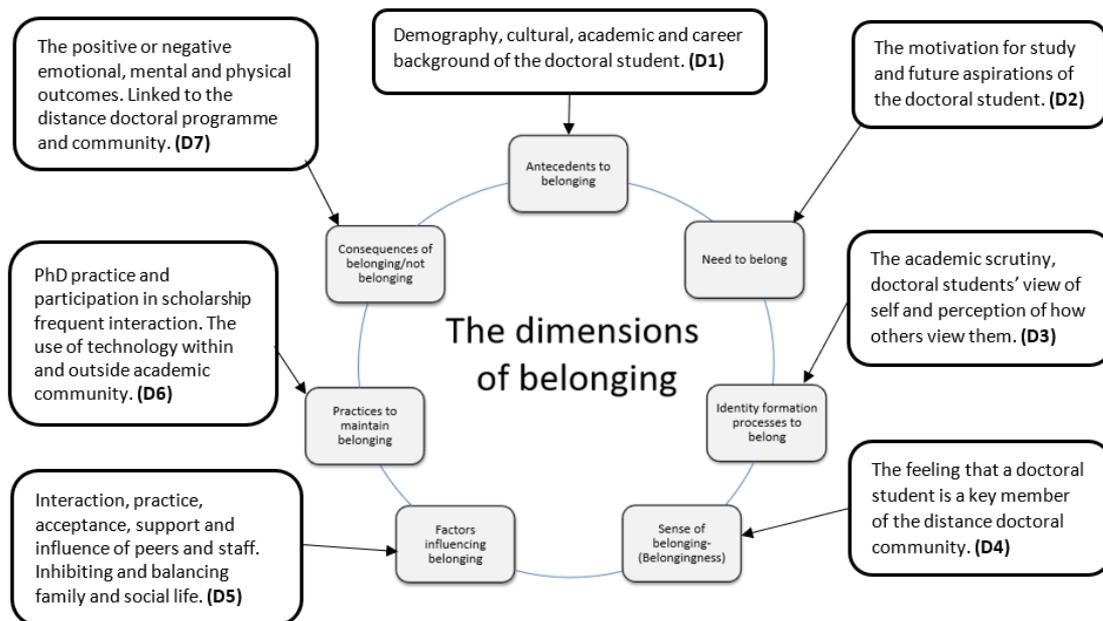


Figure 3.5. The (contextualised) dimensions of belonging (Hodgins, 2018)

In using Figure 3.5 to scope the influencers discussed in the Literature Review Chapter (see Chapter 2), an exemplification of the relationship between the dimensions of belonging and the influencers begins to emerge.

To further shore up this relationship, the antecedents to belonging (D1) can be influenced by the demography of the distance doctoral student, their academic background and ability, their professional identity and their goals and values as linked to their doctoral community.

Next, the need to belong (D2) as a dimension can be influenced by the academic and career aspirations of the doctoral student, goals, the aspiration to have their own voice and place in the scholarly community and to experience the rite of passage towards being viewed as a researcher.

Equally important is the identity formation processes to belong (D3) dimension which can be influenced by the written and published texts to contend or approve practices and beliefs, reflecting their discoursal-self, authorial-self and auto-biographical self, audience and content of their publications and how publishing represents a symbol of authority, authorship and authenticity.

Consequently, the sense of belonging (D4) as a dimension can be influenced by collaboration, connectedness with peers and staff members, shared goals and values, trust, time, and becoming a respected member of a collective group and frequent interaction between peers and staff members.

Relatedly, factors influencing belonging (D5) as a dimension can be influenced by role conflict due to the many roles distance doctoral students assume as students, career professionals, researchers, and peers among others, and the support received from peers and staff members, uncertainty, inability, lack of purpose and misunderstanding the ramifications of a PhD desire, emotional reactions or even a profound sense of crisis, vague and ill-defined expectations, standards and behaviours, self-consciousness and creativity, feelings of self-doubts and insecurity, emotional, financial and intellectual struggles.

Therefore, as a dimension, the practices to maintain belongingness (D6) can be influenced by managing the role conflict that distance doctoral students assume as students, career professionals, researchers, and peers among others, gaining the support peers and staff members, purpose and understanding the ramifications of a doctoral study, clearly defined expectations, standards and behaviours, self-consciousness and creativity, solving problems in a scholarly manner, using written and published texts to contend or approve practices and beliefs, reflecting their discoursesal-self, authorial-self and auto-biographical self, and audience and content of their publications.

Finally, the consequences of belonging or not belonging as a dimension (D7) can be impacted by the negative and positive influencers associated with the need to belong (D1), sense of belongingness (D3), factors influencing belonging (D5) and practices to maintain belonging (D6) dimensions.

As a dimension, the need to belong emphasises the central issues that influence a distance doctoral student towards belonging or aspiring to belong to their distance doctoral community. Being a primary dimension that inspires students to enrol on a distance doctoral programme, this often precedes the feeling of wellbeing and other psychological desires (Hunter & Devine, 2016).

For example, the motivation for study and future aspirations of a doctoral student may vary, yet it is part of what creates their need to belong to their doctoral community. Also, given that an individual desire to belong can be interpersonal, their behaviour and emotion can become the driver of social action and an opportunity for interaction. Nevertheless, a mere need to belong is not sufficient as a reason to belong to a distance doctoral community but could enhance the clarity of the rationale for the desire to belong. For example, this could be for personal growth, development of academic voice, or career growth (Richards et al., 2018).

From a distance doctoral student identity formation standpoint, membership in the distance doctoral community can be influenced via the formation of student identity(ies), although doctoral students in the community may also be recognised and even accept an identity that is akin to that fully or partially dominant in the doctoral community. From an academic standpoint, forming an identity in the community also has another extension that is associated with doctoral and scholarship practices. This implies the ability to adopt, demonstrate and maintain scholarship practices like contributing to publications or peer reviewed academic journals, attending and speaking at relevant academic conferences, or discharging various academic mandates. All together, this can help build the identity of a distance doctoral student in the community. Thus, interaction alone may not be sufficient for the development of social identities without the use of the appropriate or accepted speech and communication that matches the type and context of interaction (Lederer et al., 2015).

On the subject of factors that influence the belongingness of distance doctoral students, they are either enabling or hindering it. The factors may impact in a short-lived manner such as a minor ailment or even a minor socially-related impact like separating from a partner in an intimate relationship. Long-term impacts may affect students that have experienced severe traumatic situations like war crisis. However, contextually, there exist other factors that may influence belongingness both positively and negatively, such as socioeconomic status, gender and age of a doctoral student (Mahar et al.,

2013). The evidence of such factors exists in previous studies (see Rhoads et al., 2017), for example, increased interaction with peers and staff members and communication can reduce the negative impact that the age and socioeconomic status of a distance doctoral student may have on their belongingness. However, it is not certain if increased interaction and communication can undermine the impact that gender may have on belongingness in the doctoral community.

Perpetually, doctoral students feel their sense of belonging in the community via various stances. Dominant within one stance is the feeling of self-acceptance and received acceptance. This feeling extends to a doctoral student feeling that they socially identify with their community and are considered an important member of the community. However, self-acceptance can be challenging, and requires oneness and mutual acceptance with other group members.

Furthermore, for a distance doctoral student, achieving a sense of belonging is a continuous process that requires the constant commitment of time, skills and behaviours to sustain a sense of belonging within the community. Common within a doctoral community is the act of bonding with peers from related professional, cultural and national backgrounds and maintaining the bond via formal and informal communication and interaction (Castelló et al., 2017). Whilst this type of practice can enhance interaction and communication among students and staff members in the doctoral community, other context-dependent practices may exist that could enhance the sense of belonging of a distance doctoral student with their doctoral community.

Inevitably, for a doctoral student, there exist consequences of not belonging or belonging to a distance doctoral community. One such consequence of belonging can be induced by the sense of belonging to a community, thus, spanning across physical, mental and social consequences. Habitually, because belongingness is mentally and/or psychologically experienced by a doctoral student, its association to a sound physical and mental wellbeing remains imperative (Rhoads et al., 2017). Conversely, when a doctoral student does not belong to a doctoral community, the physical and or mental

health of the student may be affected in a way that does not support their programme of study (Bagaka's, 2015).

3.3 Chapter summary

This chapter evaluated the conceptual model that frames the psychological construct of belonging of Hodgins (2018) in detail and is contextualised to the content of this study. Beyond the contextualisation of the conceptual model is the integration and consideration of the influencers identified in the Literature Review Chapter (see Chapter 2) alongside the dimensions of belonging (discussed following Figure 3.5). Importantly, as I explored this concept for this study, a captivating feeling was felt about how a mini-research assignment I had previously carried out about belongingness resonated with several aspects of this conceptual model. Personally, as a distance doctoral student, I sometimes experienced the inhibition of multiple roles straddling my progress in the doctoral programme. Juggling between family responsibilities, career, events and interacting socially can be challenging. Therefore, Hodgins's conceptual model for the psychological construct of belonging resonated fully as a suitable lens, which could be used to explore unique and varying experiences that could be central in provoking further research or help learners in navigating belongingness and identity in their doctoral programmes. Knowing these experiences, distance doctoral learners could study in the programme with cognisance of techniques that can be adopted towards forming their identity and belonging to their distance doctoral community.

As distance doctoral students adopt personal, academic and professional identities, their interaction varies and possesses varying agency and self-esteem feelings in relation to their competence and participation in their family, academic and professional communities. As they interact with academic peers, academic staff members, family members, work peers and friends, they improve their belongingness via the formation of their identities.

With the use of this conceptual model, it is now possible to proceed with other explorations about how distance doctoral students interact towards building their belongingness and identity within their doctoral community via the construction of their identity as well as how their belongingness helps them build their identity. Thus, hindrances and enablers that might impede or support the learning experiences of distance doctoral students can be better understood. In the next chapter (Chapter 4), a discussion about the adopted methodological approaches for this study are put forward, detailing data collection tools, techniques, processes, data analysis tools and techniques used to ethically conduct this study.

Chapter 4: Methodological Approach

4.1 Introduction

The methodological approach used for this study is outlined in this chapter, as well as the selection of the sample, collection of data and the interpretation of the data. This chapter initially presents the research approach, which includes the aims, objectives and research questions, the research process and a discussion about the use of narrative inquiry and analysis. Following this, there is a section about the demographics of the study participants, how they were recruited and how the participants were protected. Details of the data collection and analysis techniques, starting with the pilot interviews for the study, how a semi-structured interview was deployed, the development of themes and the analysis of data follow. The chapter also considers methodological limitations, particularly regarding aspects of interview procedures and practice limitations, limitations of the technology used during the interview, transcription procedures and practice limitations and limitations in the analysis. The chapter ends with a summary that reviews all previous sections.

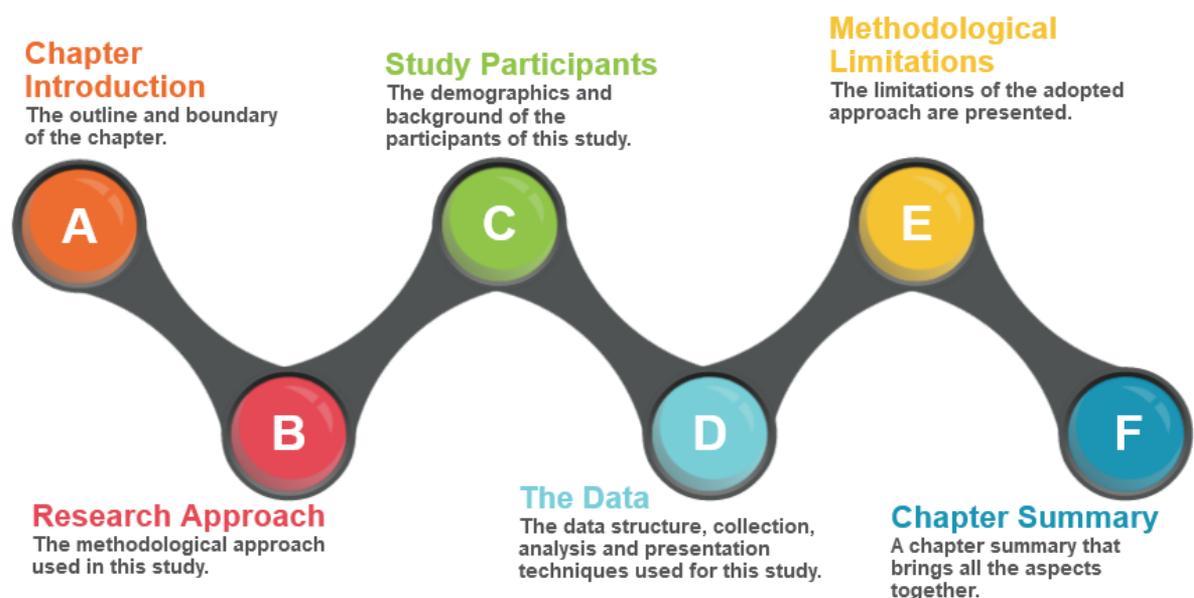


Figure 4.1. The roadmap of the Methodological Approach Chapter

4.2 The research methodology

From a fundamental methodological standpoint, this study adopts an epistemological paradigm of social constructionism, which construes reality as one that is socially constructed, and is based on experience and collaboration with others (Creswell, 2013). In implementing this paradigm, this study recognises the positionality of individuals within distinct socio-cultural settings, which can influence the construction of identities, realities and meanings (Creswell, 2013). In adopting a social constructionist approach to the study of how distance doctoral students interact towards building their belongingness and identity within their doctoral community, the study recognises both the social processes and idiosyncratic nature of doctoral studies, which coalesce to result in an experience of multiple realities. Thus, there is a shift in focus towards the subtleties linked with the manner a distance doctoral student interprets and forms their experience using the presence and influence of others in various contexts, and the settings in which they are positioned. On this basis, the study here takes an exploratory approach. While using Hodgins's framework as a means to identify the presence and importance of existing factors, the analysis used an approach to additionally identify newly-arising features and factors.

4.2.1 Research objectives, aims and questions

This study sought to understand how distance doctoral students build their identity and belongingness within their doctoral community. The wide scope of this aim introduced multiple layers of complexity that raised concerns about whether it would be more beneficial to extend the aim to look at how the development of a sense of belonging impacts identity and how identity development, in turn, impacts belongingness. In view of the potential scope and focus, a decision was made to narrow the aim towards a single focus, using doctoral students' interactions to understand how a sense of belongingness and identity is developed within their community. This single focus on 'interaction' gives more clarity to the intention of this study, that is, to explore how distance doctoral students interact in their doctoral community

towards building their belongingness and identity. This study does not, therefore, cover how belongingness impacts on identity and the converse. In order to address the focal aim, the objectives presented in Table 4.1 are considered central to this study.

S/N	Research Objectives
Objective 1	To understand how distance doctoral students interact towards building their belongingness within their doctoral community.
Objective 2	To understand how distance doctoral students interact towards building their identity within their doctoral community.
Objective 3	To explore the factors that distance doctoral students consider as constraining in the building of their belongingness within their doctoral community.
Objective 4	To explore the factors that distance doctoral students consider as enabling in the building of their belongingness within their doctoral community.
Objective 5	To explore the factors that distance doctoral students consider as constraining in the building of their identity within their doctoral community.
Objective 6	To explore the factors that distance doctoral students consider as enabling in the building of their identity within their doctoral community.

Table 4.1. The objectives of this study

In order to meet the objectives listed in Table 4.1, this study focused on answering the following research questions in Table 4.2.

S/N	Research Questions
RQ1	How do distance doctoral students interact towards building their belongingness within their doctoral community?
RQ2	How do distance doctoral students interact towards building their identity within their doctoral community?
RQ3	What factors do distance doctoral students consider as constraining in the building of their belongingness within their doctoral community?
RQ4	What factors do distance doctoral students consider as enabling in the building of their belongingness within their doctoral community?
RQ5	What factors do distance doctoral students consider as constraining in the building of their identity within their doctoral community?
RQ6	What factors do distance doctoral students consider as enabling in the building of their identity within their doctoral community?

Table 4.2. The research questions

4.2.2 Researcher's perspective

In an effort to enhance openness and trustworthiness, it is imperative to declare that at the time of conducting this study, I was a distance doctoral student that can bring its own set of biases that are based on my personal experiences. To exemplify further, there existed moments during my study when I felt a poor sense or no sense of belonging with peers and staff members or I could not identify as a doctoral student. Although Creswell (1998) suggested that personal experiences can be bracketed or set aside, in a manner that would not influence the outcome of a study, I found that such separations can sometimes be inherently difficult and impractical to implement. Therefore, the approach used in this study is to openly declare my position both as a distance doctoral student and as a researcher to the readers.

Reflexivity (i.e. the process of reflecting critically) was recommended by Ortlipp (2008) for use by researchers in order to ensure that a participant's perspectives and meanings are not misrepresented, based on the perspectives or worldviews of the researcher. This was one of the techniques

deployed during the course of this study to maintain the integrity of the data. At the time of conducting this study, the researcher was studying a doctoral programme at a distance in the UK, so it might have been possible for the researcher to harbour bias from personal experiences. For example, there are narratives from the study participants that might be commonplace to the personal experiences of the researcher in completing a doctoral degree from a distance, which might be to do with aspects of peer interaction, interaction with staff members, motivation for studying a doctoral degree, inhibiting multiple roles and role conflict issues, etc. In order to not misrepresent the data through interpretations influenced by the experiences and assumptions of the researcher, it was vital to put aside or separate the researcher's personal perspectives on this phenomenon. The practice of reflective journaling throughout this study was deployed in order to track and manage the personal reactions of the researcher and to protect the data.

4.2.3 The research approach

A qualitative approach was adopted for this study. It was not the aim of this study to attempt to quantify the results and findings that this study might produce, but rather to build a rich picture of the lived experience of the study participants, produced through a narrative analysis of their perspectives. Following this line of thought, the research design was underpinned by a qualitative methodology which permitted iterative collection of data. Semi-structured interviews were the only tool used in the collection of data for this study. Study participants, through their own voices, were able to tell their unique stories from their perspectives.

The use of semi-structured questioning technique allowed the interviewer the flexibility to improve and focus the interview questions towards a thorough exploration and discovery of the phenomenon (Newcomer, Hatry & Wholey, 2015). The interview guide consisted of questions around experiences, feelings, values, behaviours and opinions (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The questions that explored study participants' experiences and behaviours helped to provide insights about the participants' activities, actions and practices. As an example, the interview schedule included questions along the

line of, “Can you narrate what a usual day in your doctoral study looks like. What do you usually start with?” The study participants’ beliefs and thoughts were explored using questions around opinions and values. As an example, the interview schedule included questions along the line of, “What is the most important trait of a staff member in your doctoral programme?” The specific feelings of the study participants were explored using questions around their feelings. As an example, the interview schedule included questions along the line of, “how do/did you feel about [situation x] or [person x]? or what was it like to experience [situation x]?” The combination of these types of questions helped to provide understandings about the participants, their experiences and interactions during their doctoral study from a distance. The participants of this study were also asked some questions in order to provide demographic data and background information. See Appendix D for an illustration of the process used for this study.

Research notes became a valuable practice deployed to help improve the trustworthiness of the data. This was practised in the following ways:

- General observations and conclusions from the interviews were recorded and used to compare the interview transcripts (during data analysis) with the notes.
- An audit trail was created using detailed notes in order to record decisions related to the collection, coding and analysis of data. Newcomer et al. (2015) implied that to promote the reliability and validity of a study, notes collected should be referred to in the entirety of the research process.
- Notes about personal reflections from the researcher’s perspectives and reactions to the research process were also recorded. This type of research journal is encouraged as an avenue to critically self-reflect and manage assumptions and personal bias that may impact the study (Newcomer et al., 2015).

Trustworthiness: Qualitative researchers should find an equilibrium between narrating the stories of individual participants in a non-misrepresented manner and narrating the broader complete story towards the creation of coherent meaning (Jones, 2002). Numerous strategies exist which can be applied to

enhance the trustworthiness of the results such as participant validation, data/method triangulation and peer briefing. This study utilised participant validation as a strategy.

Participant Validation: Because this study used semi-structured interviews to capture data, participant validation was an ideal strategy to manage internal validity. Participant validation helped in guiding the researcher towards capturing the responses of the participants accurately and allowed for consideration and identification of possible biases in data interpretation (Thomas, 2017; Newcomer et al., 2015). Participants were contacted with the sole purpose of reviewing the responses and summaries produced during their interview to ascertain that the interpretation of the interview data by the researcher represented their story. If necessary, participants made adjustments, and they received an updated copy of the responses and summaries produced during their interview for their record.

4.2.4 The approach of narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a research approach for deriving meaning out of social experience, whereby the perspective of the narrator is influenced by the narrative (Kim, 2015). The research participants of this study acted as the first interpreter of the social experience being recounted (Bochner & Riggs, 2014). Specific situations, practices and ways that individuals were involved were the main focus of the narrative inquiry approach (Wang & Geale, 2015). Through this approach, it is possible for the narrator (study participants) to provide a conduit to their voices alongside reconstructing their experiences within their distance doctoral community in a way that is reflective and dialogical (Haydon, Browne & van der Riet, 2018).

More importantly, what matters is how the participants interpret their own lived experience and their consent to use their life story in a study (Clandinin, Caine & Lessard, 2018). The reality of the participants is explored by the narrative inquiry as a phenomenon that is socially constructed. Aspects that sought to find out more about the participants' experiences and attitudes in the "first

person” within the cultural group or the social environment where the narrative occurs were the main focus of this narrative inquiry approach (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016).

Rather than aiming to merely look at the unfolding of events, narrative inquiry accesses the meaning that the participants attribute to it (Clandinin, Caine & Lessard, 2018). Meaning is context-bound since it is never fixed, and it is also dynamic and alive. This approach was chosen because narrative inquiry aims to understand individual approaches within a given social group and situation as opposed to an understanding of group activity, as achieved by other research methodologies. Voices of individuals are, therefore, the main evidence and outcome voice of the research.

In using narrative inquiry, there are different broad stages that the narrative analysis went through. Some stages involved some sub-data analysis stages, which are discussed in the subsequent section within this chapter (see section 4.4.3).

First stage: The first interpretation of the stories told was completed when these were written. Audio files that were recorded during interviews were used alongside the notes taken to gather a picture of what transpired during the interviews. For attempting to recreate the narrative from the stories told during the interviews, personal interpretation was significant in the analysis. In an effort to uncover the richness of perceptions, feelings and practices of research participants, a combination of verbatim quotations from the interviews (Bruce, Beuthin, Sheilds, Molzahn & Schick-Makaroff, 2016) were used. Participants were contacted to help validate the responses and summaries produced during their interview. Where necessary, participants made modifications.

Second stage: Interviews and transcripts were used to aid the second phase of analysis. Through the use of transcripts, it was possible to achieve a different perception of the same narratives because of the ability to visualise the discourse produced by those that participated in the research. Themes that were present across or in each of the narratives was also created during this stage. A number of strategies were then adopted:

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- Further familiarisation with the narrative's content through the reading of interview transcripts;
 - Linking to themes identified in the literature review and aspects of the theoretical model through re-reading of interview transcripts;
 - Identifying emergent themes through re-reading of interview transcripts;
 - Coding relevant citations into an MS Word document table to allow for the dismantling of interview transcripts; and
 - Analysing the research narratives to explore contradictions and tensions of practice.

Third stage: Matching the data that had been analysed to key aspects of Hodgins's (2018) conceptual model was the third stage in refining the interpretation of the data. The need to refine data interpretation emerges from the narratives of research. Issues of scholarship opportunities, family dynamics, role balance conflicts and financial responsibilities that emerged as some of the significant elements of the narratives of the study participants were not highlighted in the same ways through the literature that was reviewed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Hence, an opportunity to contribute new knowledge arose, but it was important to think about how Hodgins's (2018) conceptual model would also be incorporated in this stage. The discussion of findings that are later presented in Chapter 6 contributed to this third stage of the narrative analysis.

4.3 Study Participants

4.3.1 Protection of the participants of this study

According to Adinoff, Conley, Taylor, and Chezem (2013) the accuracy of the data collected for research purposes may depend on the study participants believing that they can provide truthful and honest information to the researcher without fear of it harming them. Along this line of thought, all the participants of this study received detailed information regarding voluntary participation, guaranteed anonymity and privacy, and any risks linked to taking part in this study. The work of Fleming (2015) implied that reassuring

participants about the secrecy of the data that they provide should be ongoing and done at all stages of interaction. This was put into practice; during the interview, the researcher re-introduced these details, gave the title of the study and explained why they were selected and reassured the participants of their anonymity by participating in this study.

Participants were informed about the freedom to ask questions related to the study at any time they felt the need to.

In ensuring that participants feel in charge of their data even after providing consent and the data, the study obtained formal consents from the study participants using forms as well as them being given an option to opt-out of the study (Lynch, Largent, Joffe, & DeMichele, 2018). In line with the participants' narrative verification suggestions offered by Fiske and Hauser (2014), the transcripts were shared with the participants for review and to ensure that no information contained within them could help identify the participant (either directly or indirectly). Pseudonyms were used for the names of the participants, and their institutions were vaguely referred to using national regional names in the UK such as universities in London, the East Midlands and the northeast of England.

At all phases of the study, confidentiality was emphasised in order to ensure that no recognisable information was contained in the data presentation and interpretation as well as the discussion of findings. All files, forms, interview notes and recordings were encrypted and stored securely on a standalone storage device with no access to any kind of networks.

4.3.2 Study participants' recruitment

Almost similar to the approach suggested by Thornton et al. (2016), some of the participants were already identified by the researcher in the process of attending academic events organised by various higher education institutions and learned societies (such as the Society for Education and Training, and the Association of Learning Technologists), whilst some of the participants were recruited via online academic discussion groups and forums (such as Academia.Edu, Research Gate, and the Flexible Learning Community of

Practice that is managed by the Higher Education Academy). Also, because Lancaster University participates in the shared library membership scheme colloquially known as 'SCONUL', it was easy to meet some distance doctoral students in other institutions and talk to them about participating in the study.

In line with the participant recruitment procedure discussed by Killawi et al. (2014), this study's participant recruitment process was predominantly aided through a snowballing technique. This was implemented by using the contact details of the participants; the snowballing technique involved telling a few potential participants to help reach out to a few more within their institutions by passing the details of this study to them. Potential participants were told within the study details that if they were interested in taking part, they should make direct contact with the researcher and not through an intermediary or gatekeeper. In line with the suggestions of Fiske and Hauser (2014), as an effort to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants of this study, it is important to note that potential participants that reached out to the researcher through an intermediary or gatekeeper were excluded from the study, and they were politely notified about the decision and reason for the exclusion.

Most of the correspondences regarding the recruitment of the study participants took place via email messages. An email was often about the details of the study, next steps, obtaining consents and sharing more details about the study, scheduling interviews, thanking participants for their participation, asking for more clarification on a transcript, asking for a review of the transcript, and reminding participants about their right to opt-out of the study. See Appendices E, F, G, H and I for more details about the documentations and process used to recruit the participants of this study.

4.3.3 Study participants' demographics

The participants of this study were made up of 25 distance doctoral students that were enrolled in distance doctoral programmes in one university in the northeast of England, three universities in the East Midlands region of England and two universities in London. Most of the participants were

engaged in either full-time or part-time employment in various sectors (like computer science, education, art, media, management and criminal science) as they studied from a distance for their doctoral degree. Their jobs were not necessarily linked to their academic area of interest (see Table 4.3 for more details and an overview of these).

Name	Program Area	Duration	Stage	Age Range	Occupation	Funding
Mark	Criminology (Hate Crimes)	6 Years	Final Year	51 – 60	Retired (Public Transport)	Self-funded
Sarah	History and Political Science	6 Years	Final Year	41 – 50	Unemployed	ERC
Peter	International Development	6 Years	5 th Year	31 – 40	Intl Development Practitioner	Bursary / Self-funded
Bob	Media and Communication	6 Years	3 rd Year	21 – 30	Teacher	Self-funded
Jack	Museum Studies	5 Years	3 rd Year	41 – 40	Archivist	Self-funded
Jane	Museum Studies	5 Years	3 rd Year	31 – 40	Exhibit Designer	Self-funded
Clark	Museum Studies	5 Years	4 th Year	21 – 30	Teacher	Self-funded
Vicky	Archaeology	6 Years	4 th Year	41 – 50	Teacher	ESRC
Chloe	Media and Communication	6 Years	4 th Year	21 – 30	Self-Employed	Self-funded
Stuart	History of Art	5 Years	4 th Year	41 – 50	Assistant Head Teacher	Bursary / Self-funded
Ngo'lo	Conservation Studies	6 Years	5 th Year	51 – 60	Exhibition Officer	Self-funded
Kwesi	Museum Studies	5 Years	Final Year	31 – 40	Self-Employed	Self-funded
Nick	Computer Science	4 Years	Final Year	31 – 40	Software Engineer	Self-funded
Jen	History of Art	5 Years	2 nd Year	41 – 50	Head Teacher	Bursary / Self-funded
Jess	Education	6 Years	4 th Year	41 – 50	Teacher	Employer
Beth	Conservation Studies	6 Years	2 nd Year	51 – 60	Historian	Leverhulme Trust
Ana	Contemporary History	6 Years	4 th Year	31 – 40	Teacher	Bursary / Self-funded
Mike	Museum Studies	5 Years	3 rd Year	41 – 50	Lecturer	Self-funded
Graham	Criminology	6 Years	5 th Year	41 – 50	Writer	Self-funded
Corey	Museum Studies	5 Years	4 th Year	21 – 30	Lecturer	Self-funded
Marta	Management	4 Years	Final Year	51 – 60	Unemployed (Taking a break)	Self-funded
Isabella	Archaeology	6 Years	1 st Year	21 – 30	Lecturer	Bursary / Self-funded
Emma	History and Political Science	5 Years	Final Year	31 – 40	Teacher	Self-funded
Olivia	Museum Studies	5 Years	Final Year	51 – 60	Retired (Defence)	Self-funded
Mia	Management	4 Years	Final Year	31 – 40	Sales Representative	Self-funded

Table 4.3. The pseudonymised participants of the study

Alongside studying, the participants were from a diverse background, and most of the participants had a family life to balance as well as financial obligations to meet. The interplay between career, academic and family life, coupled with the financial challenge that some students faced, made it a very interesting study. Of the 25 participants interviewed in this study, 4 participants were living in the United States of America (USA), 2 participants were living in Canada, 2 participants were living in Ghana, 1 participant was living in South Africa, whilst 16 participants were living within Europe and the United Kingdom.

Program Area	Pseudo Name	Official Duration	Stage
Archaeology (n = 2)	Vicky	6 Years	4 th Year
	Isabella	6 Years	1st Year
Contemporary History (n = 1)	Ana	6 Years	4 th Year
Criminology (n = 2)	Mark	6 Years	Final Year
	Graham	6 Years	5 th Year
Conservation Studies (n = 2)	Ngo'lo	6 Years	5 th Year
	Beth	6 Years	2nd Year
Computer Science (n = 1)	Nick	4 Years	Final Year
Education (n = 1)	Jess	6 Years	4th Year
Media and Communication (n = 2)	Bob	6 Years	3 rd Year
	Chloe	6 Years	4th Year
History of Art (n = 3)	Stuart	5 Years	4 th Year
	Jen	5 Years	2nd Year
	Emma	5 Years	Final Year
International Development (n = 1)	Peter	6 Years	5 th Year
Management (n = 2)	Marta	4 Years	Final Year
	Mia	4 Years	Final Year
Museum Studies (n = 7)	Clark	5 Years	4th Year
	Jane	5 Years	3 rd Year
	Jack	5 Years	3 rd Year
	Kwesi	5 Years	Final Year
	Mike	5 Years	3 rd Year
	Olivia	5 Years	Final Year
	Corey	5 Years	4 th Year
History and Political Science (n = 1)	Sarah	6 Years	Final Year

Table 4.4 The participants' programme, duration and stage of the programme

Among the participants that were interviewed, 28% were enrolled in museum studies, 8% were enrolled in history and political science and media and communication whilst international development, contemporary history, computer science and education accounted for 4%, and criminology, archaeology, history of arts, conservation studies and management accounted for 8% (see Table 4.4).

Within the occupation that the participants were engaged in, 45% were teachers or lecturers, 13% were self-employed or retired whilst 42% of the participants were involved in various occupations in the art and museum, software development and business fields (see Table 4.5).

Industry	Occupation	Number of Participants
Education	Lecturer	3
	Teacher	8
Art	Historian	1
	Archivist	1
	Exhibit Designer	1
	Exhibition Officer	1
	Writer	1
Information Technology	Software Engineer	1
Business and Management	International Development Practitioner	1
	Sales Representative	1
Public Transport	Retired	2
Self-employed	Self-employed	2
Not Applicable	Unemployed	2

Table 4.5. Occupation of the Participants

The age range among the participants varied, with 39% of the participants being within the age of 41 to 50 years, followed by 29% of the participants being within the age range of 31 to 40 years, whilst the age range of 21 to 30 years and 51 to 60 years made up 16% of the total (see Table 4.6).

Participants' Age	Percentage
21 – 30 Years Old	20%
31 – 40 Years Old	28%
41 – 50 Years Old	32%
51 – 60 Years Old	20%
61 – 70 Years Old	0%

Table 4.6. Age of the participants

Self-funded students accounted for 74% of the participants, whilst 26% of the participants were sponsored by a trust fund, bursary, and employers (see Table 4.7).

Programme Funding Source	Percentage
Self-funded & Bursary	84%
Trusts	4%
Research Council	8%
Employer	4%

Table 4.7. The programme funding source of the participants

From a participant standpoint, female participants outnumbered males, with a 52% to 48% relative split (see Figure 4.2).

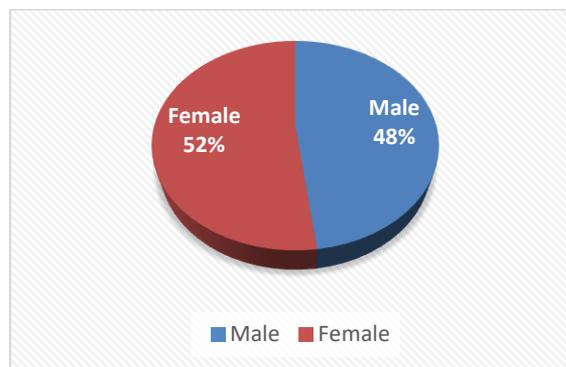


Figure 4.2. Gender distribution of the participants

Participants were asked about their marital status only to give more background information about the support structure that might be available from the family. Sixty-four percent of the participants indicated that they were married, 16% of the participants indicated that they were single, 12% were cohabiting, while 8% indicated that they were divorced (see Figure 4.3).

However, no questions were asked that would allow their relationship status timeline to be viewed as being concurrent to the length of their doctoral degree or if they envisaged the status to change before the completion of their doctoral degree. There existed other aspects of the participants' demographics, like ethnicity, programme duration and current stage, that could be revisited to help understand the context within which the narrative of participants was embedded. See Appendices J, K and L for more details about the demographics of the participants of this study.

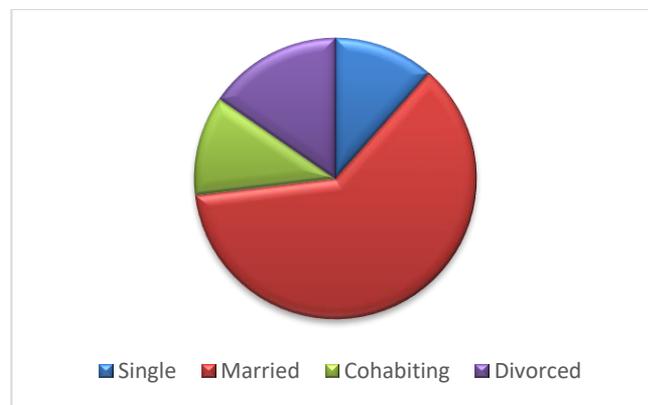


Figure 4.3. The relationship status distribution of the study participants

4.4 The study data

4.4.1 Starting out with pilot interviews

A number of pilot interviews (more specifically, six pilot interviews) were used to practice some dialogic techniques with some participants from the study population. Details of these participants are shown in Table 4.8. The goal was to be able to ask questions that explored the experiences of belongingness and identity via interaction. In this context, it was expected that the study participants would provide information that they found to be of great interest. Nonetheless, the unstructured and unguided nature of the discussion, whilst hoping for the participants to tell their experiences in the form of their narratives, developed into unencumbered narrations of their experiences about their own career and family dimensions that predominantly focused on interaction, belongingness and identity from a very vague (societal)

perspective rather than it being focused within the scope of their distance doctoral community.

Despite rephrasing of the responses and taking forward the conversation to tackle the subject matter, it was evident that there was no clear understanding of the topic by the informants or they were affected by other more pressing issues. Consequently, there was little or no useable information that was yielded about how distance doctoral students interacted towards building their belongingness and identity within their distance doctoral community. The predominant dispositions and practices related to belongingness and identity were not easy to glean any notion from. There was, therefore, the need to rethink the data collection strategy because of the direction taken by the interviews regarding the research questions. It was also necessary to conclude that a more realistic and context-related approach to the interviewing process was to be taken in the study.

To understand and improve the ideas about beliefs, values and ideologies of the distance doctoral students and how their sense of belonging and identity was impacted, there was a modification to the aims of the study. Based on the three specified underlying concepts (belongingness, identity and distance doctoral community) that underpin the study research questions, it was possible to construct a loosely structured interview schedule (see Appendix M). An approach using a semi-structured interview that was lightly directed yet still able to adhere to the direction of the planned inquiry was the final strategy that was put to use.

Name	Program Area	Duration	Stage	Age Range	Occupation	Funding
James	Contemporary History	6 Years	1 st Year	41 – 50	Administrator	Bursary / Employer
Stan	Education	6 Years	2 nd Year	41 – 50	Lecturer	Employer
Phil	International Development	6 Years	2nd Year	31 – 40	Tutor	AHRC
Tony	Media and Communication	6 Years	1st Year	31 – 40	Lecturer	Self-funded
Tom	Computer Science	4 Years	Final Year	41 – 50	Solutions Architect	The Wellcome Trust
Sophie	History and Political Science	5 Years	1st Year	41 – 50	Librarian	Self-funded

Table 4.8. The pseudonymised participants of the pilot study

4.4.2 The semi-structured interviews

Progressing from the lessons learnt from the pilot interviews, adjustments were made to the interview schedule, and the main interview kicked off with 25 voluntary participants. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of each participant. The interviews took place either face-to-face in the same physical space with the participants or virtually using Skype or WebEx video conferencing tools. When it was a virtual interview, the video conferencing tools had audio recording and note-taking capabilities. However, when it was face-to-face, a Sound note application on an iPad was used for the recording of the narratives. Through the use of the application, it was possible to take notes during an interview, carry out recording and write simultaneously. The application was then able to playback the recordings that related to the notes, should there be a need. Using all the available equipment, there was then an opportunity for adding memos to the notes after the interview, as appropriate. The face-to-face interviews provided an interesting contrast and possibilities for co-constructions of meaning.

At the beginning of the interview of the distant doctoral students, the study was re-explained, and the participants were reassured of their anonymity, including identifiable statements, identifiable names, location and time. Various interviews were carried out with each distant doctoral student; the initial interviews were verbal interviews, whereas the majority of the follow-up interviews took a written form via email. For virtual interviews, after welcoming the study participants, they were asked where they were located and what they were doing prior to the interview. The semi-structured format of the interview afforded flexibility in exploring various aspects of the narratives during the interview, with the answer to one question naturally and coherently flowing into another question. Notes were written that allowed key phrases and ideas, which could help prompt further questions as the interview progressed.

After each interview, the study participants were thanked for volunteering to take part in the study, and they were then eased into a lighter conversation about the nature of what they would be doing for the rest of the day.

Participants were asked if they could be contacted again to provide more clarification or to fill in the blanks (if any) once the interviews had been transcribed and looked at. What followed was the transcription process which was quite challenging because more interviews were scheduled and taking place alongside a busy career and social life. The interviews were transcribed, and participants were contacted to help provide clarifications and fill in the blanks. In the next section (section 4.4.3), details of how the data were analysed is provided.

4.4.3 Data analysis

The data collection and analysis exercises of qualitative research can be simultaneous (Newcomer et al., 2015; Mayer, 2015). During the data collection phase, researchers continually evaluate developing understandings and results to make adjustments to the interview schedule in order for the trustworthiness of the results to be improved. Qualitative studies with a descriptive element may adopt an inductive data analysis approach to belongingness and identity related themes or patterns that emerge from the data (Newcomer et al., 2015; Mayer, 2015). The inductive approach is used by researchers to develop concepts, themes and conclusions while the data collection is still very much ongoing.

For this study, the interviews were completed before the data analysis began. Interviews were continuously reviewed and improved in terms of the quality of data collected. For coding, the study allowed the data, theoretical model and insights gained from the literature to guide the way meaning was inductively inferred from the data. The reason for this was to avoid any prescriptive approach to coding that would impede, allowing the voices of the participants' narratives to emerge in the manner that would tell their story (See Appendix N). The data analysis was an iterative process that involved repeated reads of transcripts, coding, reviewing and re-coding as summarised here:

- 1) The transcripts were each read for at least a minimum of three rounds to understand the flow of the narratives. Notes were made for each read as

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- well as referring back to the notes written during the interview to support aspects of the narratives.
- 2) The coding exercise began with cognisance and considerations about the insights gained from the data, conceptual model and the review of relevant literature.
 - 3) The transcripts were read again and where necessary indications were added by appending notes to indicate the changes made and the reason for the changes.
 - 4) The transcripts were read again, and the creation of codes began in order to highlight the experiences shared by the participants through their narratives.
 - 5) The coded transcripts were re-read, and adjustments were made. Where necessary, codes were expanded or collapsed. Notes were written to explain the changes, questions and uncertainty. Sometimes, the audio transcripts were replayed only to get a reminder of the participant's voice tone. This step happened numerous times. The backups of each coding session were retained in order to ease access to navigating to a previous coding hierarchy.
 - 6) As a personal preference, for ease of tracking, the transcripts with all the codes were printed, read, and sticky-notes were used to thematically label and categorise them on a table. As co-occurrences were detected, the move of sticky-notes across different groups began, and logical patterns began to materialise.
 - 7) The transcripts were reviewed again in order to locate possible quotes that may have gone unnoticed during previous reviews.
 - 8) The patterns that emerged are presented in Chapter 5 (Data Presentation and Interpretation) and the results in Chapter 6 (Discussion of Findings).

4.5 Methodological limitations

Qualitative interviews, procedures of transcription, and analysis associated with face-to-face interviews are affected by many potential issues such as bracketing, the constantly changing nature of experience, versus collective emergence of categories, effects of the interviewer, limits of linguistics to

expression, individual, de-contextualisation/re-contextualisation and the reconstitution of utterance into abstract categories.

4.5.1 Interview procedures and practice limitations

As an approach to collecting data, interviews in the research can be viewed from a constructionist perspective as a process of co-constructing meaning between the people involved, the context, and communication medium. There are people, such as Hanna (2012), Bampton and Cowton (2002), and Longhurst (2003), who contend that the quality of data collected through technological mediation might be affected in the research. However, it can be argued that the research cited consistency between the methodology and the context of the research itself.

The participants in this study were studying primarily at a distance. While the participants' asynchronous and synchronous course discussions, assignment submissions and other course-related activities occurred at a distance, the participants had a chance to interact with their fellow students at conferences or other events. The semi-structured interviews that were conducted at a distance via using Skype and WebEx video conferencing tools permitted real-time conversations and were the primary source of data used in the study. It can be contended that the participants' use of technologies for online interviews was congruent with how they were interacting with staff members and peers on their doctoral courses. As implied by Oates (2015), the methodology has to be consistent with the integrity of the research topic and context whether research is conducted in-sight or on-site. The participants used Skype and WebEx, the same systems that they used in their online interactions for their courses. The use of technologies, therefore, seemed to be a natural medium for use in the study. With the exception of the face-to-face interviews, the live scribe pen was, arguably, unnoticeable and unobtrusive.

Furthermore, interview methods are sometimes used by qualitative researchers who make attempts to bracket their own opinions and knowledge of experiences to elicit descriptions of the participants' experiences that are

directly recorded and transcribed, and in an accurate manner without interpretation (Peters & Halcomb, 2015). It can be very difficult to bracket the preconceptions of the researcher and prevent the participant from pre-reflective work (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Sipes, Roberts, & Mullan, 2019). As per the tendencies of constructionism, the interaction between the individual and surrounding phenomena, the individuals and their prior-experience, the individuals and their socio-cultural origins, and the individual and the language used in expressing their descriptions can affect the viewpoints of a researcher or participant on a given topic at a given time.

A further issue is the participants' contribution to the co-construction of the interview (Johnson et al., 2019). Since participants strive to provide accounts that are appropriate to the research/interview context or that meet the desires of the interviewer, the description of their experiences may be a product of narration within the interview (AlKhateeb, 2018; Johnson, Scheitle & Ecklund, 2019). It can be challenging to untangle the relationship between narrative practices and the phenomenon being narrated in the interview because of the understanding of the constitutive nature of the research interview.

In view of that, there are two levels on which interviews can take place: the interaction between the researcher and the study participant and, at a metacognitive level, that involves the participant recounting their awareness of an experience (AlKhateeb, 2018; Lamerichs, 2016). Sharing experiences of the researcher might be helpful in some cases within the context of co-construction interaction. The responses of participants can, however, be influenced by too much lead in the research (Shapka et al., 2016). Recording the content that is shared by both the researcher and the participants is, therefore, important as it ensures no information passes unnoticed. Whilst covering all the questions that were scheduled ahead of the interviews, there was an attempt to ensure that the conversation was balanced. During the interviews, participants were also allowed to digress.

It was not intentional to set out to elicit utterances specifically coinciding with any specific dimension in Hodgins's (2018) dimensions of belonging, though the participants were asked explicitly about their troublesome experiences

during the interviews. Listening to the stories of the participants about their doctoral interaction experiences pertaining to various aspects of their belongingness and identities, both inside and outside their academic contexts, was rather the intention at the interview stage. It was, therefore, appropriate to guide the participants into recalling their experiences and the challenges they faced. Although the students were quite candid, it was important not to push them into having sensitive discussions. By withholding names and identifiable information, the participants were assured that the final report would entail the use of pseudonyms and remove any details that might reveal their identity, and attempt to obscure details that might allow them to be identified.

It is arguable, therefore, that the interviews may have been affected by the researcher's role/involvement as a distance doctoral student in the UK. However, such an argument would need to consider the steps taken by the researcher to ensure misinterpretation and analysis of data.

Also, it may have been easy to lose focus in the interviews as there are incidents when the recording process would stop and not enable engagement with the participants' narratives. The engagement involved issues such as asking the participants about their activities of the day. Some participants would openly express their appreciation for discussing their doctoral programmes during conversations (that could go on for around thirty minutes).

4.5.2 Limitations of using technology for interviews

With regard to using similar technologies to those that the participants were using in their doctoral programme, it is worth reiterating that the interviews for the study were conducted both face-to-face in the same physical space and remotely using video conferencing tools. There were no notable differences/changes in the aspects of mode and speech when results from these media were compared. Regardless of the interview medium, some participants were lively and animated. It was, therefore, difficult to determine whether it was the personality of the participant that contributed to the liveliness of the interview or if it was an effect of face-to-face or the video conferencing medium.

Also, from a remote interview standpoint, although the interviewee arguably may not have been able to study the researcher's body language as the facilitator of the interview, it was possible to understand the researcher's actions during the interview. For example, encouraging the participant to proceed or showing the participant that their narrative was understood was accompanied by the use of facial expressions and nodding. There are phrases that were also used to encourage the participants to stay put or to continue with their narration. Poor network strength/connectivity and background noises were major challenges experienced during remote interviews. For example, on one occasion, an automatic system update had forced the computer into a mandatory restart just when the interview had gained momentum, and the participant had to be notified about the disruption. Fortunately, it was agreed that the researcher could call the participant back after the system restart. On another occasion, during the remote interview via WebEx, a minor (who later got introduced as the child of the participant) ran into the section where the participant was sat and speaking and attempted to touch the screen of the laptop. The situation was jocularly de-escalated, the minor was taken away to another room and the interview proceeded and concluded without any issues.

Overall, there were no obvious characteristics that would make the face-to-face transcripts stand out as different from the others, as the resulting data did not appear substantially different. During the remote interviews (via video conferencing), there were ellipses and parenthetical notes that were used to substitute interview sections that were difficult to hear. Regardless of the medium, the participants participated in a "live" conversation with hesitations, moments of reflection, and correction on aspects of grammar and word choice.

4.5.3 Transcription procedures and practice limitations

There are a series of fraught questions that concern the analysis of interview transcripts. Inevitably resulting in the loss of meaning, the act of transcription is viewed by some as an act of translation and de-contextualisation (Stuckey, 2014; Hepburn & Bolden, 2017). There are potentially different interpretations

that come with the process of re-contextualisation, as argued by Stuckey (2014). With regard to the transcription process, the concepts of transduction and remediation may arguably be raised (Kowal & O'Connell, 2014). Changing from one type of interaction mode to another is an aspect to consider; changing from one medium to another (also known as remediation) should equally be considered too. For example, since the medium changes from live to electronic, but the mode (speech) remains the same in recorded interviews, remediation is identified in the change of channels. An example of transduction is the transcription of the recording because of the shift of the mode from auditory to print. There is a suggestion by Kowal and O'Connell (2014) that recognising the processes is important in affecting individuals' interpretation of the content of the interaction. There is a possibility of individuals in associating different prior experiences and knowledge with different modes and media, resulting in different contexts for the interviews and subsequent outcomes. Commenting on the impact of remediation (via the use of technology) on the interpretation of the interviews is, however, not a necessary debate that this study was set to focus on; hence, the reason why it is stated as one of the possible limitations of the methodological approach used for this study.

4.5.4 Limitations in data interpretation/analysis

The structure that emerged from the data is highly contingent upon the interaction of the researcher with the data because of the design of the study and the co-constructed nature of the interview (Thomas, 2017; Kim, 2015). There is, therefore, mediation through interactions to represent the faithfulness in the researcher's experiences. The researcher's ability to linguistically give a description or otherwise a depiction of the stories of participants is, however, limited to the faithfulness in representing the participant's experiences.

To create a snapshot of the experiences of participants at a single point in time, there was a focus on exploring the variation of experience that participants narrated (McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Bochner & Riggs, 2014).

Some critics, therefore, argue that de-contextualisation and reductionism can

lead to the problematic nature of faithfulness of representation as a reductionist process (Haydon et al., 2018). By not offering more descriptions about the participants in the context of the interview as well as reducing expressions that are complex, unique to abstract, this generalisation of categories can alter the meanings of presentations during the analysis process (Stuckey, 2014; Haydon et al., 2018; Mayer, 2015). Working iteratively between the categories and the original transcripts was a possible way to mitigate this limitation (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016).

The analysis may also be affected by an additional limitation. This is because parts of narratives from various individuals make up the resulting snapshot(s) of experience, which is a partial representation and is used in abstract constructs by the researcher (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016; Bruce et al., 2016). The relationships between the variations in the ways in which conceptions are experienced can be represented in a variety of ways. Therefore, the manner in which the relationships were discovered, described, and depicted could be questionable. The ability of the researcher to bracket their own preconceptions during the phase of analysis is also further questionable (Haydon et al., 2018).

4.6 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed the methodological approaches used in the selection of the sample, collection of data and the analysis of data. The chapter began with the methodological approach adopted for this study. It presented the research approach, which included the aims, objectives and research questions, the rationale for the research design, the research process and the use of narrative inquiry and analysis. It then presented the demographics of the study participants, how they were recruited, and the actions that were taken to protect the participants. It also presented the data collection and analysis techniques, starting with the pilot interviews of the study, how the semi-structured interview was deployed, the development of themes and the analysis of data. The chapter also covers some methodological limitations, particularly concerning aspects of interview procedures and practice

limitations, limitations of the technology used during the interview, transcription procedures and practice limitations and limitations in the analysis. In the next chapter (Chapter 5: Data Presentation and Interpretation), the data are presented and interpreted.

Chapter 5: Data Presentation and Interpretation

5.1 Introduction

Within this chapter, the data collected for this study are presented; more specifically, it explores how distance doctoral students interact in their doctoral community towards building their belongingness and identity.

To exemplify the distinct perspectives of distance doctoral students, sections from the interviews that were conducted as part of this research are shared in various sections of this chapter where appropriate. In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, participants' names have been replaced by pseudonyms.

The participants of this study were made up of 25 distance doctoral students that were enrolled in doctoral programmes in 1 university in the northeast of England, 3 universities in the East Midlands region of England and 2 universities in London. Most of the participants were engaged in either full-time or part-time employment in various sectors (including computer science, education, art, media, management and criminal science) as they studied from a distance for their doctoral degree. Their jobs were not necessarily linked to their academic area of interest.

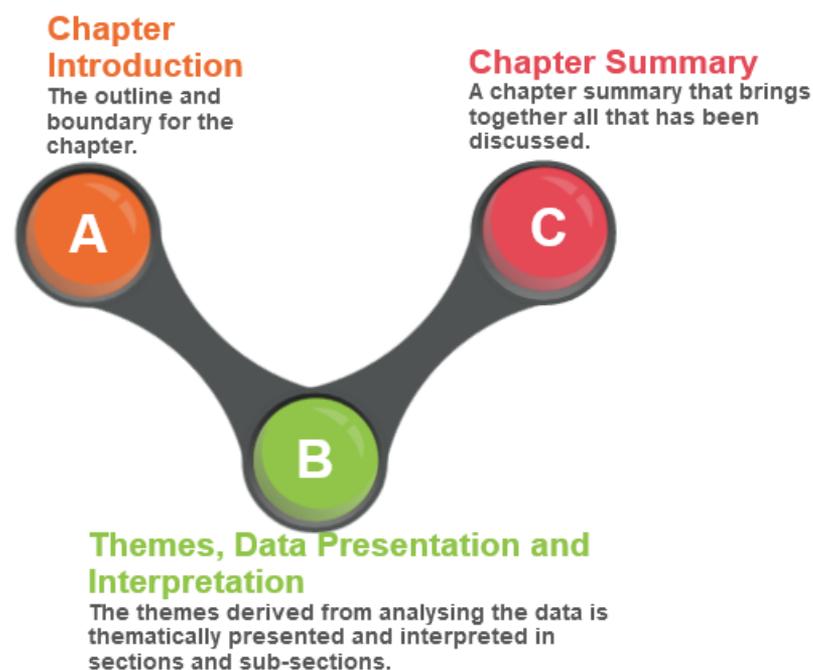


Figure 5.1. The roadmap of the Data Presentation and Interpretation chapter

5.2 Themes and interpretations from the study data

Within this chapter, the theoretical model is linked with the data arising from the study in order to frame and help shape the outcome. Firstly, the utilisation of Hodgins's (2018) Psychological Construct of Belongingness in this chapter serves as a mental map that facilitates the presentation and interpretation of the data in a related, yet logical and coherent manner. To begin with, a tabulation of the themes and sub-themes from this chapter that are an embodiment of the theoretical framework are highlighted and alphanumerically labelled for ease of further referencing (see Table 5.2). It should be emphasised that the themes and sub-themes are not presented in any order that would indicate hierarchy or priority.

Data Analysis Theme Code	Themes/sub-themes From Data Presentation and Analysis
DA1	Sense of belonging in the distance doctoral community
DA2	A shared meaning of academic community of practice
DA3	Building a relationship with peers
DA4	Gaining the support and understanding of peers
DA5	What happens when there is no peer support
DA6	Challenges involved in building a relationship with peers
DA7	The time, <u>place</u> and frequency challenge – Proximity
DA8	Building relationships with staff members
DA9	Staff members' support via mentoring and advising
DA10	The difficulties of developing connections with staff members
DA11	The impact of proximity on interacting with staff members
DA12	The lack of or limited research opportunities
DA13	It is about time (balance)
DA14	Maintaining personal and family relationships
DA15	Managing career and financial responsibilities
DA16	The motivation for studying a doctoral degree

Table 5.1. Themes and sub-themes from the study data

Following the labelling and tabulation of the themes and sub-themes from this chapter, is the alphanumerically-labelled Hodgins's (2018) Psychological Construct of Belongingness model (see Figure 5.2). This centrally focuses on the realms of identity (such as space, self and social) that oscillate between the mutuality of acceptance in identity and the quality of relationship and interaction; outside this are the seven dimensions of belonging that permeate these realms of identity. It is important to note that the labelling of the realms of identity (shown with 'R' numbers) and dimensions of belongingness (shown with 'D' numbers) do not indicate any order of precedence or priority. The labelling of data analysis themes (in Table 5.1) and the conceptual framework (in Figure 5.2) facilitated the linking of the themes to aspects of the framework.

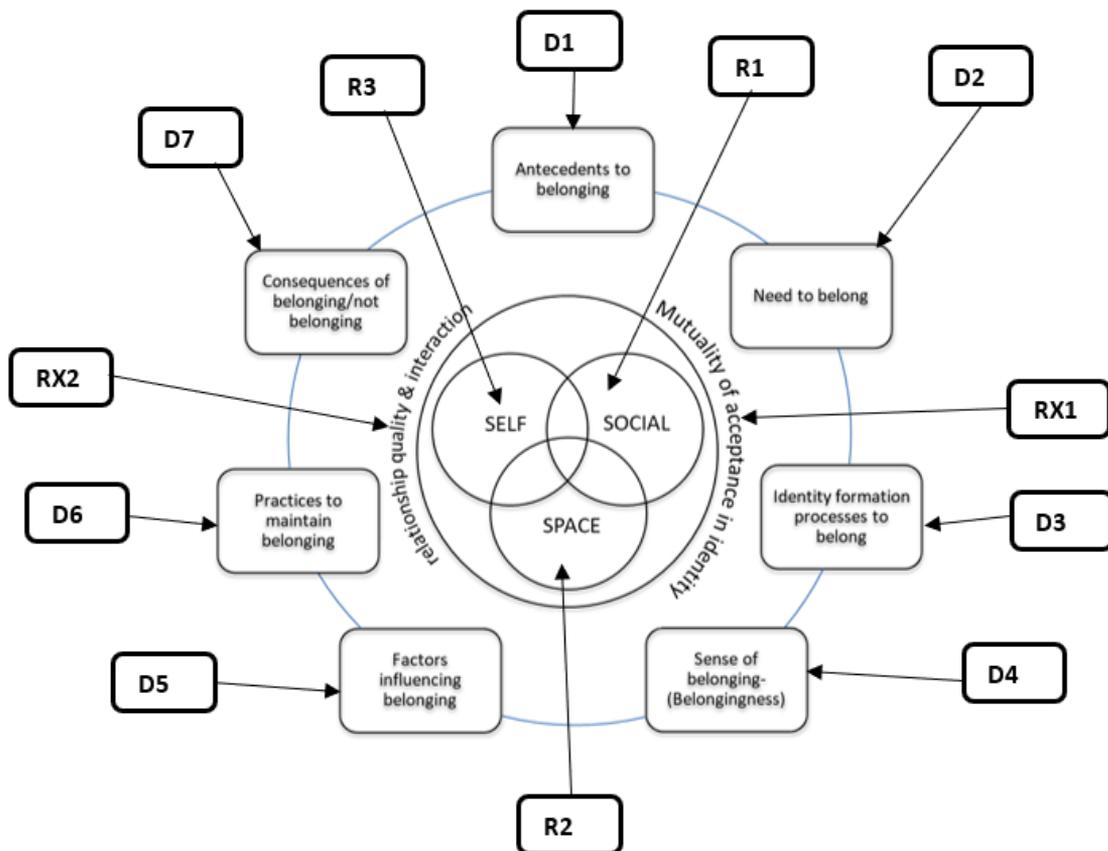


Figure 5.2. The (labelled) Psychological Construct of Belonging (Hodgins, 2018)

In Chapter 6, the alphanumerically-labelled aspects of the themes and sub-themes of the data (Table 5.1) and the alphanumerically-labelled theoretical model (Figure 5.2) are fully coupled to help to fully delineate the findings of this study.

The data analysis of the participants' interviews involved several rounds, with the initial round leading to the emergence of 12 themes. After five rounds of analysis and refinement, ten main themes were identified, some with sub-themes. The main themes from the data were: Sense of belonging in the distance doctoral community, A shared meaning of academic community of practice, Building a relationship with peers, Gaining the support and understanding of peers, What happens when there is no peer support, Challenges involved in building a relationship with peers, The time, place and frequency challenge, Building relationships with staff members, Challenges involved in building a relationship with staff members, Research opportunities and realities, It is about time balance, Maintaining family and personal relationships, and Managing financial and career responsibilities and the motivation for studying a doctoral degree. Each theme will be discussed in order and illustrated with evidence from the participants.'

5.2.1 Sense of belonging in the distance doctoral community

Most participants indicated that a sense of belonging in the academic community is very significant. A sense of belonging has been described as how a community member feels valued and respected by other members. This involves mutual confidence and support and understanding that someone else really matters to you. Ngo'lo narrated a sense of belonging in this way:

It feels like you have a community of people who empathise with you. Others understand the challenges to finish your doctoral degree which involves some, you know, self-doubt, exhaustion, and many other struggles. They can motivate you; motivate each other.
[Ngo'lo, Male, Conservation Studies, 5th Year]

Some of the participants implied that belongingness may be derived from having a shared goal or partnership. Stuart narrated that gaining a sense of belonging stems from reciprocated respect and having common interests and beliefs that can help one another:

I believe that a sense of belonging will lead to some form of camaraderie, like members feeling like we're all in this together. [Stuart, Male, History of Art, 4th Year]

Similarly, Jen explained a sense of belonging as an indication of general “happiness” in a community, feeling of oneness with the doctoral student at the centre of it. It was almost as if doctoral students only needed someone in the scholarly community to remember them and accept their thoughts, suggestions or reviews.

5.2.2 A shared meaning of academic community of practice

More than 15 participants identified the definition of community as a scholarly culture of practice in the academic department. Wenger’s concept of a scholarly practising group involves working together, depending on one another and having common values and objectives (Wenger, 1998). Distance doctoral students conceptualised this as a transparent atmosphere in which individuals with common beliefs and values come together to collaborate with other researchers and to exchange ideas about a study and practice in a particular field or topic. Several students responded to input from faculty and peers as a part of the scholarly culture. Isabella narrated that a community is an environment or a space where individuals with the same minds come

together to exchange ideas, noting that even after you complete your programme, this form of influence from a group continues to exist:

In my view, group sentiment is a bunch of people who learn and develop ideas across their lives, go forward to see if they can be actualised into reality. [Isabella, Female, Archaeology, 1st Year]

The manner in which Isabella conceptualises a community of practice embodies discourses about the application of theory and the theory itself in her line of work:

[When I started the programme] I thought that in my courses there were definitely moments when I needed more theoretical discussion than what could happen, and so we developed a platform to do that. I believe that we (staff and students) developed a space for those who wanted this kind of dialogue to make this happen. [Isabella, Female, Archaeology, 1st Year]

Jack narrated how his desire for conversations about theories within the academic community occasionally posed a challenge as a result of the uniqueness of his research interest in the community.

The difficult thing is that for me, because I'm not necessarily an expert in [x field of study], there are situations when I feel I can't communicate as well as I would have loved to. I just don't have the literature base to do so, because I just don't. I have this experience in [another area] and that's where I mainly draw academic interactions from. And so I, you know, if I think they will be worthwhile I like to share those connections. I feel like I've a group of scholars in that way. [Jack, Male, Museum Studies, 3rd Year]

This theme is one of the main themes as a few of the participants narrated that they considered themselves to be members of a community of practice; other participants indicated that this form of group was not present from their academic department or was only encountered during certain stages of their study. Some of the participants who narrated this, asserted that it was a rare

occurrence that could be attributed to their distance doctoral student status; they explained that this was an aspect of a doctoral study that may only be experienced by full-time students/programme. The participants of this study narrated that they had at some point been part of an academic group but were disappointed by the absence of continuity of scholarly discourse prospects. For example, Bob narrated it in this manner:

Staff and students just sort of concentrate on their own work and sometimes you may have moments of, you know, cooperation, you know, something like a dream where everybody is just popping up with some ideas and throwing ideas off each other. I think it's happening but I think it's definitely happening in small doses. [Bob, Male, Media and Communication, 3rd Year]

When questioned what a desirable scholarly community of practice should resemble, Clark replied that,

[it] would be a space where you could openly exchange ideas and develop on the ideas of each other, encourage each other to find out certain things and refine certain things. However, although ...I think it's easier for the full-time doctoral students to create the community of scholars among themselves. They are together in a physical space as well as a virtual space if they want to, which is crucial I think they have more chances to be around one another. And when they do this, they are willing to pour all their resources into their academics. And I think they will make the most of the whole experience of transforming into a scholar. I think they will get to the level where they feel more confident bouncing out the ideas and hypotheses and everything else. Where this is as critical as that, and where I have a good understanding of certain concepts, this is not my lingo on a given day. It really isn't. Because if it is not used, it will start declining. [Clark, Male, Museum Studies, 4th Year]

Others acknowledged that there are institutional obstacles that hinder intellectual participation for distance doctoral students, but the academic community of practice worked as a tool that helps them resolve those obstacles. Peter alluded to this as he narrated that,

a few of our programme's requirements are potentially separating us, however I still believe that the opportunity for us to collaborate on vital issues in [field of study] or relevant issues keeps us together. It is a group of colleagues who come together, or a network of scholars or learners who come together to develop the domain and the practice. I think that I want to do the work that I have bolstered further by being here and in the presence of my peers. [Peter, Male, International Development, 5th Year]

Both Clark's and Peter's accounts indicate that the variations between their experiences are as a result of the differences in the participants and how a culture of practice in the scholarly community was considered by the participants. The participants that concentrated on academic interactions with the staff members identified a culture of practice that was conflicting or lacking. Alternatively, those who concentrated on scholarly discussions with other doctoral students (rather than staff members) identified themselves during their study programme as belonging to a community of practice.

5.2.3 Building a relationship with peers

The study participants mentioned the substantial role of the academic community's relations with peers and staff members. In some contexts, students conceptualised staff members and peer relationships as a single broad supportive network of academics (similar to those discussed in section 5.2.2). Participants, however, expressed strong distinctions between peers and staff members when discussing one-to-one or group experiences. In addition, when describing the ways they felt that were linked to their study programme, participants discussed relationships with peers more regularly (421 times versus 293 times) than staff member relationships. It would appear inappropriate to assume that a form of relationship has precedence over another form of relationship; however, it is essential to note that the study participants narrated that they had more social and academic experiences with their peers compared to those which they had with staff members.

For all participants, peer relationships were an important component of their doctoral education experience. Relationships with other students appeared to play a part in several different educational contexts (through educational,

individual conversations and group work), outside their community in informal learning spaces like ResearchGate, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, in other social networks or settings (meetings held to address issues that were not related to academic process), in addition to professional settings (workshops and conferences). Specifically, some of the participants engaged with their academic peers in their work environments, so in addition to their position in the academic programme, they knew their peers as professional colleagues. Before joining the programme, some of the participants narrated that they had been familiar with their doctoral peers as work colleagues before starting their doctoral programme (and some noted that they enrolled on the programme due to the recommendation from their peers). The participants interpreted this phenomenon both positively and negatively, as it was often difficult to perform both of these positions in the same setting concurrently.

The participants referred to some instances of peer relationships within the academic department. The sub-themes emerging from within the theme of building relationships with peers are: peers serving as a basis for encouragement and appreciation, the challenge of establishing and sustaining relationship with peers, and how distance affected peer relationship. Most of the participants considered peer relationships as a basis for support and motivation, especially in the aspects of mutual understanding about the difficulties faced by distance doctoral students.

5.2.3.1 Gaining the support and understanding of peers

Each participant expressed the significance of peer relationships and expressed the peers in their programmes as one of the rationales for their persistence. The participants also expressed that a stronger sense of belongingness and how they view themselves with other distance doctoral students were experienced as a result of the uniqueness and interactions as students. Peers functioned as personal and academic support and encouraged and embraced the difficulties they faced during their distance doctoral studies. Most of the participants' narratives implied that if they had not depended on their peers as a source of knowledge "their

progress would have been in doubt” in some courses or at different points in the programme. Mia had to resubmit a paper for one of her modules and was disheartened by the disappointment that this would bring. She noticed, however, after talking to some of her peers, that many students were also struggling with that module. Such discussions with her peers who were in the same circumstance inspired Mia and reassured her not to feel alone:

If you had those relationships and had that time together, I don't see why you would not want to get to that end goal. And I could see that I would definitely not have been able to get through some of the more stressful times without that. I also talked to other doctoral students from a past cohorts who had encountered similar issues, and this was really helpful. That made me feel like you're always going to get through this and move on, and that was really good. [Mia, Female, Management, Final Year]

Most participants in the museum studies were reported to have explicitly discussed this module and noted that it was particularly discouraging and challenging. The participants mentioned peer encouragement and support as the motivation that aided them to complete the module successfully and they gained a positive sense of belongingness and an improvement of how they view themselves because of how they collaborated during this challenge. Like most of the museum studies students, building a community with peers impacted positively on perseverance, particularly during difficult modules like the one Mia mentioned. Community with peers often promoted continuity of engagement with most of the media studies students, but when this happened, the media students did not discuss particular modules; they narrated that their peers offered a consistent basis for encouragement at several points of their programme.

Eight of the participants highlighted the importance of the early establishment of peer relationships in the programme. Their narratives implied that they were more likely to perform and progress together with their ‘study or programme buddy’ due to forming a relationship at an early stage of the programme with their peers. Isabella narrated,

it was very important for me to find confidants in the programme in terms of consistency and being successful. Specifically establishing a friendship with ... those people who were in my [professional symposium] group, so I knew there were those who faced similar struggles. And sometimes it was really beneficial to tell someone, 'It's so disappointing that I have to do all this and not much time to do it. [Isabella, Female, Archaeology, 1st Year]

Some participants expressed the support of peers who were at a later stage of the programme than them. Due to the reason that some peers had experienced some stages of the programme before them, it was easy for the more experienced peers to share their knowledge of the modules and staff members with their new or inexperienced peers.

Such experienced peers functioned as mentors and were able to offer the students a different form of encouragement and guidance. Ngo'lo narrated a personal, considerate act from an advanced student who made an extra effort in order to make Ngo'lo feel supported:

I felt that I knew who I was and I felt a real sense of belonging from a peer of mine who knew that I was nearing the critical stage of my programme and he gave me some tips on how to organise my stuff, you know, sent me some very cool articles to think about adding them to my files in advance. And it was just, he just felt compelled to do it. And I just thought that to do that was really big of him. [Ngo'lo, Male, Conservation Studies, 5th Year]

From an identity standpoint, Ngo'lo was not probed through the interview towards establishing the link between his identity and the considerate act from a student in an advanced stage of the programme; however, Ngo'lo's narrative would imply that his identity as a student was aligned with the depth and relevance of support he received from his peers.

Graham noted that his peers were the critical resource "helping me through the doctoral programme." He mentioned that relationship with peers was a continuous resource for encouragement during the programme and evolved to

be more relevant during the advanced stages of his doctoral programme even as he was getting towards the end of the programme as well as looking forward to the viva voce oral examination. Some of the doctoral students who studied in a programme with some structured set of modules noticed that they had completed the modules without communicating with their peers as much as they would have if they were not studying from a distance.

Consequently, they felt more isolated at a period when essential encouragement and support was required. Graham narrated that this lack of contact contributed to a feeling of being left out of touch and support:

I would like to think that we're all getting to a point where we need something else to pick us up. [Graham, Male, Criminology, 5th Year]

This could be interpreted to mean, as Chloe indicated, that generally a weaker sense of belonging was felt and it was likely to be difficult with contact with peers, keeping abreast with the developments of the community and having a connection with their peers. Nevertheless, as some peers tried to extend their support to struggling peers during difficult times (for example, in the case of Clark), the efforts yielded a positive effect on one's sense of belonging. This implies that the supportive behaviour of only one peer during times of depression or alienation can build a sense of belonging beyond the student and cascade towards the wider academic community.

5.2.3.2 What happens when there is no peer support

Some of the participants (Chloe and Jane) identified different points during their doctoral programme when they sensed an absence of support from peers and a lack of community. Even though they had already developed peer relationship situations, these relationships were threatened by unique circumstances. Their experiences are poignant because they instantiate the difficulties of peer separation for distance doctoral students. Jane also narrated that she suffered from changing relationships with her peers as some

of them dropped out of the programme. Jane started her doctoral programme in a cohort of twelve distance doctoral students but became a cohort of only five distance doctoral students.

When each student dropped out of the programme, Jane remembered how it impacted her relationship and her ability to progress in the programme. Jane narrated a certain instance that she experienced after thirteen months on the programme, when a peer on her programme informed her she was dropping out:

after thirteen months, I can't stop remembering the first student that left and even the few that followed, if you will...when we received an email to inform us that our colleague was dropping out of the programme, I just recalled thinking 'wow, I am not sure if I can continue with the programme.' This was not because I was so fond of my peers, but it made me scared because I could end up making such decision someday. And when another student left, I felt like, you know, wow? And any time I think about this, it affects me, because my support structure is getting definitely reducing. [Jane, Female, Museum Studies, 3rd Year]

From an identity standpoint, Jane was not asked to discuss more deeply if her identity as a distance doctoral student was challenged by the numerous colleagues that dropped out of the doctoral programme; however, Jane's narrative would imply that there were times when her identity as a student was in doubt.

According to Chloe, she recalls a particular time where she experienced separation from her peers because her participation and commitment in a particular module was less and late. The module was a mandatory element of the doctoral training programme and there was one month left before the end of it, and she was considering the option of attempting the module or reattempting it (possibly with a different cohort) in six months' time. According to her, this made her feel isolated and left behind from the peers that she had spent time developing a relationship with on the programme:

I just felt that I was no longer part of the group. Most of my peers attempted and completed the module with familiar faces and being that it had sections and criteria in it that I would have benefited from if I had done it with my colleagues. It was difficult to attempt that module with a new cohort and begin to build relationships from the beginning like a teenager. We are adults and little things can begin to get difficult with age... haha... Not saying that I am too old. [Chloe, Female, Media and Communication, 4th Year]

Chloe considered the module as a reflective opportunity to think about the whole programme and reflect with her peers about growth and development so far. Since she missed the initial attempt of the module with her peers, she had to complete it with another cohort of students in the same programme as her. Chloe noted that she was unfamiliar to the new cohort of students, thus making it challenging for them to understand her unique experiences as a doctoral student studying from a distance.

These two narratives (from Chloe and Jane) show the detrimental effects of feeling isolated from peers as a member of an academic group, despite forming deep ties with other members. Chloe and Jane felt the peer network they had spent time building and being part of quickly diminished. According to Jane's narrative, each time a peer dropped out of the programme, she started to have self-doubt about her ability to complete the programme. This could be considered to mean that she depended on her peer group more than she realised; she underestimated her own ability to succeed in the programme when she lost the ties to her peers. This indicates that the loss of group members in a community may have a negative effect on other members of the community.

Although most participants narrated that they identified with and felt a sense of belonging as a result of building relationships with their peers, even though establishing or sustaining such ties did not come naturally. Most of the participants expressed the challenge of building their sense of belongingness and how they viewed themselves within their community with their peers.

5.2.3.3 Challenges involved in building a relationship with peers

The process of forming or sustaining peer relationships was narrated as very difficult by fifteen out of the twenty-five participants. Although there are a few factors that were common among the participants, there were some variations as well. The narratives were concerned with the varying levels of commitment and experiences of peers and the effects of falling behind or changing cohorts.

Peer commitment and experience level vary: As previously stated, that in gaining a sense of belonging and changing how they view themselves, some participants found it challenging to engage with their peers in academic conversations. For example, a few of the participants (like Peter, Stuart, Clark, Isabella, Jane) likened this challenge to variations in the level of engagement between the peers they tried to engage with and themselves. The participants indicated that they were attracted to other peers in the programme because they had common reasons to undertake the doctoral degree and dedicated themselves to sustaining a common standard of quality in interactions and module tasks. These participants associated quality interaction and dedication to task completion to their status as distance doctoral students. They narrated that this might have been because distance doctoral students had to compromise some dimension of their livelihood (such as having a career, being part of a family, having financial responsibilities and volunteering) in order to study their doctoral degree; thus, they were highly interested in the doctoral degree journey rather than the end result. Shockingly, Stuart recalled that when he connected with peers that were classed as full-time students in his department, he perceived a lower level of engagement. He mentioned how that also changed his envious perception about students who studied a doctoral degree on a full-time basis. He narrated:

Among the students that were doing full-time Ph.D, some of them did not seem to be as dedicated as I had expected, or might have preferred to have been, if I was financially capable so I could go full-time, you know? And it was interesting, because even with the chance to be sponsored or to go full time as I would have liked to have done, they just didn't all seem quite dedicated as I was, which was kind of a huge surprise. [Stuart, Male, History of Art, 4th Year]

Three of the participants (specifically, Jack, Peter, Isabella) linked a higher degree of dedication to differences with regards to their age and years of work experience for distance doctoral students. Specifically, gaining some years of professional experience after finishing a masters degree programme and before commencing his doctoral degree, Jack narrated,

Occasionally I think there's a disagreement because there are different views about it, you should have a few years of practical job experience before studying for a doctorate degree and advise others how to do something you are yet to try? [Jack, Male, Museum Studies, 3rd Year]

From an identity standpoint, Jack was not asked to explore if he deemed lack of professional experience to be an impediment to his identity; however, Jack's narrative would imply that there existed a link between identifying as a doctoral student with a professional experience and particularly one without any professional experience. Such views were prevalent among 3 study participants and may be a more specific affecting factor as it was not a common narrative across all the participants of this study.

Isabella linked her programme's success to meeting and interacting with her peers who possessed a similar attitude to academic concerns as she did because they were likely to be trustworthy and demonstrate a high degree of rigour in their academic tasks. She noted that the difference in the degree of engagement due to age and work experience occasionally caused friction between the doctoral students:

I think it sometimes causes tension between the students, okay? Like, my world's not good enough. And sometimes I wonder, if it is about age as well. That some of the Program's young students who happen to be enrolled as full-time students may not be as thorough in their academic pursuit. [Isabella, Female, Archaeology, 1st Year]

Although those participants regarded their peers who enrolled as on-campus full-time students to be less prepared to work towards meeting the programme's requirements and "maybe not as thorough in their research", the participants did not generally interpret this contrast as a disappointing aspect of their programme experience. The variations, however, influenced how they viewed their peers and who they considered as part of their departmental culture. Based on their narratives, it would appear that, with their peers, they built a sense of belonging and changed how they viewed themselves that was comparable to them in work experience, age and academic task approach. To exemplify further, Peter narrated that he preferred to work with peers that believed in hard work, diligence as well as share a similar professional background with him:

I am a strong advocate on study breaks or professional experience in between the completion of undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes. This can be a part-time or full-time job. Full-time, preferably. On that note, I have to say that I have nothing against the full-time students on campus, it may just be their own desire and what they want to get out of a Ph.D programme. Different routes, same destination. [Peter, Male, International Development, 5th Year]

Apart from the difference between distance learning and on-campus full-time students, Isabella linked a few of the variations associated to the students' commitment level to the motivation for studying for a doctoral degree. According to Isabella, her peers could fit into two distinct categories: those who tended to focus on applying aspects of the theories and concepts towards meeting the programme's requirements, and those who were more theoretical and preferred the learning journey in an abstract form. She mentioned that during group works, the concept of theory compared to what

was practically possible often caused conflicts as peers took a stance in favour of only theory or only practice and not a mixture of both. Such differences had important consequences for the growth of a group of peers. Based on Isabella's interview, it would appear that she tended to collaborate with the peers that preferred theory more and often avoided or engaged less with peers that preferred practice. Therefore, she had a much stronger relationship and a sense of belonging with peers that preferred more theory than practical focus. This narrative poses a significant conflict over the absence of unity on the distance doctoral students' positions. Although it may be regarded as the only qualification that serves as a gateway to lecturing in higher education, some participants in this study (especially those that were enrolled in a science and technology doctoral programme) considered it as their gateway to career progression. Some other way of approaching the conflict of theory versus practice is via the prism of research and practice (application). In this way, assumptions within this group can influence their sense of belonging and how they view themselves within their doctoral community.

For Clark, the inherent differences between distance learning and on-campus full-time doctoral students in the level of commitment were particularly pronounced. He highlighted a particular example that is presented below; the narrative of the differences was mainly adverse and impacted how he interacted as well as his relationships with the full-time peers he met online through a departmental webinar. Clark narrated that he had little or no levels of community with his full-time peers as he observed that a few of his full-time peers struggled to understand the implications of practice or see beyond the theory because they had no work experience:

...Optimistic and young in their own ways. Don't get me wrong, I was also optimistic about scholarly journey, I think. However, my optimism was not related to how theory can easily link into existing practices. I knew that there were existential limitations but I had never looked at it in very great details with data. It was after completing my undergraduate degree that I realised how much is left to learn and gained the momentum to keep on learning. I expected surprises about the kind of knowledge that I will encounter. [Clark, Male, Museum Studies, 4th Year]

Clark also mentioned that it was challenging for him to relate to his peers studying for a doctoral degree on a full-time basis because they were unable to connect with the complexities of a distance learning student's experience, particularly the issues faced by distance doctoral students when attempting to manage role conflict:

They live in their own bubble and have no idea what it means to be tired and what it means to be multitasking. Because in all honesty, even though they call us distance learners, we still take the same modules and write and submit the same thesis, same review of literature and work. I am not going on about anything, just saying. [Clark, Male, Museum Studies, 4th Year]

From an identity standpoint, Clark was not asked to discuss more deeply if re-emphasising his identity as a doctoral student was deemed as an identity challenge; however, Clark's narrative would imply that re-emphasising his identity as a doctoral student was due to how he thought that his peers (on the full-time programme) viewed him.

Throughout Clark's interview, a general sense of lack of belonging within his academic community with his peers on the full-time doctoral programme could be sensed. He narrated how relationship with his peers served as a basis for encouragement, as well as discussed how dissatisfied he was with the depth and relevance of the relationship. This was interpreted as Clark's academic department having a weak sense of belongingness; it was not as deep to him as the community that some of his distance learning peers narrated.

Falling behind, unfamiliar faces and changing cohorts: Some of the participants (Clark, Chloe, Beth and Jess) narrated that they considered it was challenging to relate to their peers and build community because they fell behind their cohort during the programme, because of the pace at which they completed tasks in order to meet the programme's requirements and progress. They each noted that they commenced their doctoral studies with

one cohort of students and finished their tasks and milestones with a different group of students. Beth narrated that during her second year of the programme, she fell behind her peers. Almost all of the students were completing tasks and milestones at different paces and finally ended up with only a peer from the cohort that she commenced her programme with. Chloe narrated that although the cohort that she started her programme with was a mixture of students that studied on a full-time and distance learning basis, the peers that studied on a full-time basis had “progressed quickly” to the extent of making her lose contact with most peers in her cohort. Chloe fell behind with a module as a result of that, and she was unable to progress in the programme with her original cohort. In Jane’s case, she progressed in the programme with a new group of students because she lost study motivation from having peers drop out of the programme in their initial cohort. Clark noted that after completing his tasks and reaching programme milestones with different groups of students, he did experience an absence of relationship with his peers in that group. He also mentioned that he took study breaks due to the medical emergencies of his wife. He noticed that when he resumed after the breaks, he was progressing in the programme with a wholly different group of students:

I began with a group and we had so much in common, getting along was easy. And there were a few tasks and modules that I was absent in ... but they just kept going as they were full-timers. Since I've been here, I've had like 3 to 4 separate cohorts, the original and maybe the ones that started about a year later, maybe a year later and then there's another one that started a bit further. Currently most of them have ended the first cohort. I mean we're still good but I know that when I first met them and spoke to them, I don't have the same relationship that I always had. [Clark, Male, Museum Studies, 4th Year]

Also, the varying interpretation of the meaning of ‘cohort of students’ is worth noting. Although Chloe, Clark, Beth and Jane conceptualised ‘cohort of students’ as a group of students enrolled on a programme during the same enrolment period, some of the participants tended to characterise a ‘cohort of students’ as all the students enrolled on the same programme as them,

regardless of the period or year of enrolment. It may be possible that the culture of the academic departments played a part in how a 'cohort of students' is viewed by each participant. For example, Jess enrolled on the education doctoral programme, using this phrase to characterise a group of incoming students enrolled during the same period of time and programme:

Each year in the month of September, there is a window for a fresh cohort of PhD students to enrol and it is expected that they will progress throughout the programme as a group, but life happens, and it does not always work out as we planned. [Jess, Female, Education, 4th Year].

It is also inconclusive if each participant's conceptualisation of 'cohort of students' is a limitation in building and sustaining cross-cohort and department-wide relationships with peers or if this is not relevant and does not compound the challenges of building and sustaining peer relationships.

5.2.4 The time, place and frequency challenge – Proximity

Various participants, depending on their institution, structure and outcome of their doctoral programme narrated the challenges that they encountered trying to interact with their peers as being linked to their limited proximity (place, time, or occurrence). However, the challenge with proximity appeared to have two strands of manifestations. The first strand of manifestation included participants that were mostly able to interact with their peers during their institutions' departmental events (including conferences and residentials). The second strand of manifestation included participants that were mostly not able to interact with their peers regularly. These distinctions are discussed in separate sections below. Also, it is important to note that in the context of proximity, this study did not investigate if participants that lived in the same city as their institution were able to interact better than those that did not.

Interaction during close proximity: Participants identified frequent interactions during the institution's events with their peers but encountered some challenges in establishing relationships and growing those interactions

in other contexts. The institutional event's atmosphere was designed to include peer participation through a group activity, giving and receiving opinions and reviews, and discussions were coordinated. Beyond those interactions, it was seldom for the participants to communicate with their peers. Mike narrated,

I guess it is during conferences, I think we're far closer. I mean mostly because of purpose ... we like to express our thoughts and all that stuff so it has never been a problem. However, except it was someone that I met personally during the event, once we left the event that was pretty much as far as the communication and our commitment. [Mike, Male, Museum Studies, 3rd Year]

Marta narrated that minimal proximity was commonplace in the distance learning students' doctoral experience. She mentioned that full-time students were more likely to take part in events and scholarly activities in their departments and in a shared physical space to facilitate interaction:

Perhaps the [peer interaction] opportunities didn't present themselves. And so I think that would be a factor of distance learning playing out in certain ways, right? Like I think of the student community, particularly the students who study full-time on this programme and can participate in many events organised by the department. I believe that their case is different, because there are plenty of explanations why their activities provide more socialising opportunities than in my case. [Marta, Female, Management, Final Year]

One of the participants, even during the events, had an especially difficult time establishing a sense of belonging through his peers. Nick narrated the feeling of being left out of many of the interactions and narrated that he often found peers failing to recognise or accept his contributions during the discussions. He linked this to his peers being dissimilar; Nick narrated that his peers sometimes felt awkward with him because they would rather interact with people who shared a lot in common with them:

For example, there are occasions when there are 15 people in the lecture room, and don't ask me how I came to this conclusion because I just felt that most people aren't comfortable approaching and sitting next to me and interacting with me. Normally people will interact in the room usually with the others. Because of my race, or my age, or my attitudes towards various things, I am willing to accept. I don't know whether other students in the programme who are in my cohort, who are my age and race and gender experienced the same difficulty, and I think this is associated to it, the idea that people are probably more comfortable with others. [Nick, Male, Computer Science, Final Year]

The experiences Nick had with some peers in the events appeared to have spanned beyond the events. Some of these challenges were due to the distance that he had to travel for most of the events; he narrated that he felt more connection to his peers after attending numerous events together. He stated that after several interactions he managed to build a bond with some peers and struggled with others as a result of the lack of common ground and the opportunity to establish one. While some of the participants had minimal group contact, Nick's lack of peer interactions persisted during his programme up until the time of his interview. Nick's narrative shows students who feel they cannot connect with their peers also felt ostracised. His narrative is an example of students feeling extreme alienation and loneliness during their doctoral studies from a distance.

A sense of belonging or being related to peers may not be experienced by distance doctoral students in their situation. Because of that, they may also have a very poor sense of belonging or are entirely absent.

No interaction, regardless of opportunity for interaction: During the on-campus events (like residential events), the participants expressed a sense of belonging but narrated the absence of interaction with their peers during other activities in their doctoral studies. Because the programmes are predominantly studied from a distance (or online), the participants faced challenges sustaining the relationships they created during the on-campus events. During the events, the format of the sessions facilitated several different types of physical interactions, but students generally lost contact afterwards. Beth narrated,

...in the beginning, especially during the events we got on really well together during those times only because we spent seven to nine hours daily for five days, you know, in sessions together. As soon as everybody went home you sort of lost it a little bit. And the online thing they'd do is, you know, put their photo up there but then they pause it, so it's not like you really saw them. [Beth, Female, Conservation Studies, 2nd Year]

Olivia discussed a similar experience of feeling very connected to her peers and staff members during on-campus events, then not interacting during virtual sessions. She narrated that she acknowledged the challenges of virtual communication, and cited a range of methods in which participants in the programme could utilise technology to improve interaction and promote a sense of belonging:

in a more modern environment, I think it would be fantastic if we could have a regular chat where, at least, you know, we could call each other once a month while we progress through the programme. Chats like: So, What stage of your thesis are you at? What are you currently working on by the side? How do you feel about that? What would you suggest I do? A mere email message to check how we are doing or talk about the weather would be nice. [Olivia, Female, Museum Studies, Final Year]

Likewise, Mia narrated how she attempted to connect with her peers using emails and Facebook; however, the interaction tended to be patchy and quickly diminished. She added that despite making promises about keeping in touch beyond the on-campus events, other commitments in their livelihood took precedence and made it challenging to keep their promise.

5.2.5 Building relationships with staff members

Most of the participants narrated how relationships with staff members in the academic department influenced their sense of belonging and how they viewed themselves. The participants cited significant comparisons between the experiences of interacting with staff members online and interacting with staff members during on-campus events. An interaction in one setting, in most cases, had a different sense from an interaction in another setting.

Furthermore, the doctoral experience and relationship to the academic department were greatly influenced by attending departmental events on campus.

The relationships and interactions with staff members had a different narrative to that of peers interacting with peers, predominantly because peers were perceived as colleagues or similar in ranks, regardless of age, experience and career, whilst staff members were perceived as experienced scholars that doctoral students saw as mentors as a result of accomplishments. Most of the participants described staff members as experienced and knowledgeable members of their doctoral community. Beyond serving as a basis for support, some of the participants encountered challenges in trying to interact and build a relationship with staff members as a result of various limitations. Some narratives about how interaction and relationship with staff members influenced their sense of belonging and how they viewed themselves were shared by participants, and they are categorised within the following sub-themes: staff members' support via mentoring and advising, the difficulties of developing connections with staff members, the impact of proximity on interacting with staff members, and the lack of or limited research opportunities.

5.2.5.1 Staff members' support via mentoring and advising

Most of the participants narrated a helpful relationship with staff members during their programme or during a particular circumstance that would have been difficult without the support of staff members. Although variation existed within the consistency and level of support received, each participant narrated instances when a staff member supported them in a way that improved their sense of belonging and how they thought that they were viewed within their doctoral community. Participants narrated staff members as understanding, dedicated and encouraging with regard to domain expertise as well as supporting the success of their students. For example, Mark narrated that he could not stop pondering how the supervisors maintained a balance between

giving him and his peers full support, lectured, researched and published papers and their personal lives:

I'm astonished at our staff members. I feel humbled, proud and deeply impressed with our school's faculty. To me it's just incredible, their commitment to our learning, all the academic. I do not even know how they can handle as many of us as they have done.

[Mark, Male, Criminology, Final Year]

Mark further noted how the supportive works of a particular staff member was well known and acknowledged by his peers:

I recall that a member of staff told me she was on 20 different committees in her department — 20, this is nuts. And I suppose she was a leader in almost all of them. This shows me a desire and a commitment for what they are doing, and I truly appreciate that. [Mark, Male, Criminology, Final Year]

Some participants narrated the high respect that was exhibited to staff members for their unequalled contributions in the field and how uncomfortable it was to address staff members by their first name because of this respect. Participants indicated that they connected well with staff members that were comfortable with the idea of addressing them by their first name without their academic titles. Sarah narrated,

I think that I am guilty of trying to be too respectful to my supervisor and some academic staff members of my department. And I still am, I am not a big fan of 'call me by my first name' wagon. I always add their academic titles and my supervisor got fed up of reminding me to just address him by his first name. I tried to do that but could not do it for long because I simply could not forget their amazing contributions in the field and department. They have touched my life in many ways. [Sarah, Female, History and Political Science, Final Year]

Most of the participants narrated that their supervisor was a relatively consistent source of support and encouragement. Some participants went

further to highlight the kind of support received from other staff members beyond their supervisors that was equally helpful to them. The supervisor was described to have a wealth of knowledge about the topic and students, especially their professional and personal aspirations. The degree of vision that a supervisor possessed was useful in seeing the possible impact that the doctoral student might have on an area of research, even if the student was unable to see it. Mark narrated one such situation:

My supervisor is supportive. I believe she is, she's got visions of what she sees me doing. I am not sure whether, at the end of the day, I 'm going to do what she needs me to do but she certainly really tries to encourage me and is always encouraging and tells me she always believes in my skill sets and strengths and potentials, which is great. [Mark, Male, Criminology, Final Year]

Participants often appreciated their supervisors' knowledge and experience and also used it as a pillar of strength or a professional who could put their minds at ease about a given theory or concept. Sarah narrated that her supervisor regularly contacted her to monitor her progress, which negated the need for writing and sending emails, making telephone calls and anxiety during the programme. To certain participants, their strongest supporters were a particular member of staff who was not the designated supervisor. Sarah narrated that the encouragement of a certain member of staff that was not her supervisor made her feel comfortable and respected as a distance learning student:

I think this is a very good example of how staff members are really happy to support you in the programme, wherever you are, irrespective of your family circumstances or even just taking it into perspective: taking your family situation into consideration, taking your particular desires as a student into account. And I think that it is one of the things that makes the programme as successful as it is for distance learning students in particular. [Sarah, Female, History and Political Science, Final Year]

Emma also narrated that a staff member actively assisted distance learning students and acted as a trustworthy mentor because she recognised distance learning students' special needs and circumstances:

Some of the aspects which really influenced my experience was finding a group that was working for distance learning students. I believe there was a handful who knew what it meant to be a full-time student and consciously found ways to campaign for those students. That was tremendous and I think it made me recognise the effort and support that a non-supervisory staff member can give to me. [Emma, Female, History and Political Science, Final Year]

A certain participant (Jess) mentioned that she had been extremely busy with her supervisor, so she called another member of staff to seek advice. After describing her circumstance with this staff member, she considered her support to be equivalent to that of her supervisor, relying on her for supportive advice. Though she had not formally changed her supervisor (using appropriate process and forms), she considered this member of staff to be one of her main sources of support. Jess narrated that this new arrangement was highly helpful to her, as the new staff member was equally very committed to her success:

One of the tasks assigned to me by my supervisor was to read some thesis that may be related to my research interest and so I read a staff member's thesis. I didn't know that she was in [my university] until I found it out. She had a common area of interest and so I related to her. In an ideal world, she should be my main supervisor. I feel very grateful and fortunate because she's not as stressed as my supervisor and you know she because wants me to succeed as well. Okay they all want us to succeed, but she still has something in common to rely on. [Jess, Female, Education, 4th Year]

All these narratives implied that participants desired a reliable member of staff who understood the overall curriculum, basic tasks, research concepts, or other personal interests of their personal and professional objectives. This member of staff was not typically the appointed student's supervisor. In practice, a greater sense of belongingness was felt by students because,

apart from their designated supervisor, they were able to get support from additional staff members of their choice. Some of the participants had two staff members (including their designated supervisor) on whom they could rely for help. Furthermore, it would appear that the participants desired a deeper connection with staff members as a mentor; it was almost as though they had been given more control and ownership and persevered in trying to engage with staff members and building relationship with them.

5.2.5.2 The difficulties of developing connections with staff members

Most of the respondents referred to the difficulties they encountered in building and sustaining relationships with members of staff. Participants cited numerous reasons for lack of interaction with the staff members; however, the most prevalent ones were: the limited availability of staff members and the anxiety some doctoral students felt towards interacting with staff members.

The inaccessibility of staff members: Respondents narrated that it was difficult to build relationships and community with staff members because staff members seemed inundated with tasks and were hence unavailable, struggled with meeting schedules and responses to emails and having sufficient support. The participants perceived this as a major disappointment of their doctoral programme as it varied from the expectations they had before enrolling on the doctoral programme. Marta narrated that she was shocked by the scarcity of student-to-staff member interactions beyond those customarily required for the completion of a task or module because she expected a more convivial community:

Before starting the programme, I had imagined it would be very cordial and convivial. I had always imagined that my supervisors would be busy discussing their research interests and works with me passionately. Or even frequently facilitate me to share my ideas and grow quicker than I have. I expected that there would a lot of events and opportunities to collaborate on various projects with my supervisors. In reality, the supervisors are busy and interact in a structured way with me. I don't feel connected when it goes on like this. [Marta, Female, Management, Final Year]

The participants noted that staff members were exceedingly occupied, had projects to manage and other relevant tasks to complete. Nonetheless, the participants perceived this as a source of disappointment. By contrast, the participants had admiration and respect for their staff members because of their commitment to scholarship activities and duties; however, it would appear that the commitment of staff members to scholarship activities was tangential to the feeling of disappointment expressed by the participants. For example, Vicky narrated that she would have been more connected to her supervisor if her supervisors were not as busy as they were.

My supervisors have a lot of commitment to fulfil. I sometimes feel bad when they cancel or postpone my meetings but then again I have to remember that they are only humans with the same 24 hours in a day. I felt like there was no humour in our meetings and we went straight to business as usual. [Vicky, Female, Archaeology, 4th Year]

5.2.5.3 The impact of proximity on interacting with staff members

Staff members focus on on-campus full-time students: Three of the participants (Ngo'lo, Graham, Jack) narrated that based on their perception, staff members were more accessible to full-time students that had a campus presence and were therefore not very accessible to distance doctoral students. There was a perception that supervisors would rather work with students that studied on a full-time basis because of the assumption that they were more likely to complete their programme within the official programme duration, were more committed and interacted regularly with staff members. Furthermore, the participants felt that the staff members were catering for full-time students because of proximity reasons and the ability to easily meet in a physical space, attend events or socially intermingle with members of staff. The participants' narratives implied that their sense of belonging and how they viewed themselves may have been impeded by this, and their overall doctoral experience was negatively impacting. Ngo'lo narrated,

To be honest, I don't expect supervisors to give me more attention than full-timers, because I'm a distance learner. You know, in terms of doctoral students I am not the primary or the most preferred choice. So, you know, I understand that distance learning is not just half the effort or partial commitment. How can one justify that? [Ngo'lo, Male, Conservation Studies, 5th Year]

From an identity standpoint, Ngo'lo was not asked to specifically discuss why he felt comfortable in identifying as a distance learner and not a doctoral student; however, Ngo'lo's narrative would imply that there was a link between identifying as a distance doctoral student and expecting more commitment from staff members.

Graham noted that his experience was negatively affected by this notion because his interactions and connections with staff members were limited. Graham narrated that he had no opportunity to talk to many staff members (potential supervisors) about his research, he was allocated a staff member that agreed to work with him from a distance and was available:

The value of the experience is far less as there are fewer choices in my case. Therefore, you have to feel contented and say, 'Alright, even though he or she may not be the appropriate person for this particular subject, because he or she is available, and I urgently need someone to work with.' However, if I had a choice, I'd approach a lot of staff members and say that's what I want to do, you know? I've studied your published works; it is related to my work and I think that my work can help to extend your work. I am yet to ask these questions. [Graham, Male, Criminology, 5th Year]

Jack indicated that staff members tended to focus on doctoral students that studied on a full-time basis because most of them were likely to start an academic career after completing the programme. Jack narrated that the staff members of his academic department preferred to supervise students who shared similar objectives and aspirations to theirs:

There tends to be an assumption that distance learning students are less likely to desire an academic career and may be busy with work commitments. This is not a deliberate act; however, they subconsciously focus on their future replacements. Thus, students with potential to excel academically gets more attention and a unique programme experience than I have had. So, although I study the same programme as full-time students, they may get more out of it than me. [Jack, Male, Museum Studies, 3rd Year]

The impression that staff members are inaccessible or prefer working with full-time students slightly affected their sense of belonging and how students viewed themselves because the students feel that full-time students had a higher priority than the distance learning students. This notion also hindered their sense of belonging within their doctoral community as they felt a lack of acknowledgement by the staff members that was concurrent to peers that studied on a full-time basis. None of the participants was able to give an example of an event that may have triggered this perception. Additionally, none of the participants indicated any inequalities of full-time students' higher level of priority.

Feeling anxious about approaching staff members: Four participants (Ana, Kwesi, Peter and Jen) identified levels of anxiety about academically and socially approaching staff members. Although some of these feelings of anxiety were narrated in a way that related to the lack of community between students and staff members, some participants narrated the feeling of being overwhelmed and intimidated towards having academically-challenging dialogues with staff members. As a result, some participants narrated that they joined other non-institutional communities where they felt very free to express themselves without anxiety. Ana narrated how she felt very anxious about approaching a certain high-profile professor in her department who was well respected in his field. She narrated,

For some strange reason, my meeting with my supervisor is often one-directional. I sit there and listen to him speak passionately and endlessly. Sometimes I want to challenge his nature of truth but my respect and anxiety towards him shuts me up and I often had to take my points of view to some external forum where we are kinda equal. [Ana, Female, Contemporary History, 4th Year]

Similarly, Kwesi noted that when he changed from being classified as a 'PhD student' to 'PhD candidate', he had hoped to get more input and support from his secondary supervisor who is even more prominent and respected in his field than his primary supervisor. However, he felt very anxious about approaching his secondary supervisor for support because it could indirectly undermine the value and relationship of his primary supervisor. He narrated,

I am getting very close to the end of my programme, my chances of working with one of the best in my field is diminishing. This is purely my fault because I could have made an effort, but I am a bit anxious about how it may affect my relationship with both supervisors because they have different contradicting preferences and ideas about my research direction. He is a very busy man so it would be difficult for him to work very closely with me. [Kwesi, Male, Museum Studies, Final Year]

The participants also narrated anxiety with regards to socially interacting with staff members, requesting to collaborate on academic projects or journal articles with them. Jen noted that she rarely communicated with most of the staff members in her department until she made significant progress in her study. Some participants also narrated about their preference for sending email to staff members rather than meeting virtually or physically. Peter attributed his anxiety to his poor knowledge of the field of expertise of the staff member and a lack of comprehension of how he could collaborate better with staff members on his thesis. He narrated,

I feel like it is hard for anyone, irrespective of their status, to hold a conversation with a staff member to tell them, 'I want to work with you on this.' [Peter, Male, International Development, 5th Year]

Because participants did not feel confident about approaching staff members, it may have impeded their sense of belonging within their department. Furthermore, this anxiety resulted in delays to formal procedures or to the completion of the appropriate steps towards completing their thesis because the students were mostly anxious about approaching staff members. Therefore, it is possible that it may have influenced the progress rate for some participants.

5.2.6 The lack of or limited research opportunities

Opportunities to engage in research (both informally and formally) is tangential in doctoral studies, especially during the 'student-to-scholar' transitioning process. According to the participants, the opportunities to engage in research had been very minimal. All participants attributed those weaknesses to their distance learning status as students.

Three participants, beyond being doctoral students, held academic roles as tutors for undergraduate modules. This is important because numerous studies (Austin et al., 2009; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Nettles & Millett, 2006) imply that doctoral students tend to experience a greater sense of belonging and have access to competitive and rare departmental research opportunities when they participate in research or teaching within their department. Nevertheless, two of the three participants outlined a range of opportunities that were available to engage in research within the department.

During her doctoral programme, Jane held no academic position. She applied for the role of a tutor in her department, but after all the necessary documents were reviewed and the panel decided, she was told that she was not successful and to apply again for other suitable roles. Jane clarified that her distance learning status created major research opportunity limitations:

I think that I personally struggle as a distance learning student. I always had to be persistent searching for some similar opportunities that full-time students have. Some full-time students possess opportunities to teach in the department, write grants, write publications, and, as you know, do presentations, and get research grants and lots of money, and be really deeply involved in their research or the research of their supervisor.
[Jane, Female, Museum Studies, 3rd Year]

Mike acknowledged he was jealous of the opportunities available for full-time students to collaborate and conduct research studies. He narrated,

I sometimes wish that I was a full-time student because I would have taken advantage of so much more than what I currently can. [Mike, Male, Museum Studies, 3rd Year]

Nonetheless, Jane tried to be creative by striving to engage in a similar manner and with activities concurrent to that of her full-time peers. She did this by enrolling onto a short course that would enable her to gain intensive mentoring to help improve her academic writing skills and towards publishing a journal article. This could imply that the opportunities to engage in research with staff members were more available to full-time doctoral students, whilst distance learning students almost always had to build the opportunities themselves. Her narratives also indicate that community within the department appears to occur quite naturally for full-time students, as regular study opportunities are offered to them. By comparison, distance learning students must be more diligent in looking for these opportunities and in engaging with the department.

Early in her programme (more specifically shortly after she enrolled on the programme), Chloe recounted specific discussions with the members of staff of her department when she was trying to apply for a tutor role within her department. Her narrative is quite poignant because as a result of this unique experience, she had chosen to enrol on her doctoral programme as a distance learning student.

During the interview, one of the directors in the department told Chloe that students who were able to find a balance between holding an academic position at a higher education institution (HEI) and study for their doctoral degree are researchers ‘with an uppercase R – Researcher’; however, the director said that he still considered Chloe to be a researcher with a ‘lowercase r - researcher.’ This is because Chloe’s prior experience was far from competitive and would require some years of commitment to attain the status of a ‘researcher with an uppercase R.’

Although Chloe was not successful in her job application, her enthusiasm helped her secure a role in another institution. Chloe realised that the university placed much emphasis on research when she started the programme, but she narrated that the ‘uppercase R, lowercase r’ differentiation developed apparent divides among the students. Chloe narrated,

...Within our cohort there is a distinction as far as the kind of relationships that were established. The media school is very research-oriented, and the lighter aspect of things is not so highly recognised. [Chloe, Female, Media and Communication, 4th Year]

Chloe categorised her peers that preferred to concentrate on media education (to become lecturers/teachers) instead of media research as the “lighter aspect”, whereas the media research-focused students were the ones who made their primary career goal to become a researcher:

Research will be the major aspect of their careers and lecturing could be secondary. It may be a part of it, depending on where they are, but they don't focus on their teaching skills; they focus on their research skills. [Chloe, Female, Media and Communication, 4th Year]

Chloe mentioned that she was disappointed not to have secured the role, but she understood that she was probably more of a ‘lowercase r’ researcher based on the description of the departmental director:

I guess that a researcher with an uppercase R, is not my level yet because of my age and aspirations, I was fine with being described as a lowercase r researcher. [Chloe, Female, Media and Communication, 4th Year]

She indicated that she was not given advanced training and mentoring as were the full-time students, as she progressed through her doctoral programme, she gained recognition and eventually gained opportunities to work with staff members on four research projects, and subsequently helped obtain some funding for some of the projects. Chloe's narrative is an exemplar of the consequences arising because of an adverse interaction with staff members in the doctoral community. Chloe's experience may have adversely affected her sense of belonging and how she viewed herself within the community throughout her doctoral programme (up till the time of her interview) and the way she categorised her academic abilities. Although at the beginning of her programme Chloe did not specifically link these two encounters to her unpleasant conversation with a departmental director, it would appear that she regarded herself as a researcher with a 'lowercase r,' and this may have had a negative impact on her confidence as a researcher. Furthermore, her narrative indicates that the lens of the 'uppercase R and lowercase r researcher' discussion she had at the beginning of her programme became a source of motivation towards her progression.

Some of the other participants narrated that opportunities to engage in research were limited or non-existent. Clark narrated that he was aware that collaborating with academic staff in the research group is a "huge thing from a scholarly point of view", but because of his full-time career commitment, it was never a choice. He also narrated that writing opportunities were very challenging to get for the reason that staff members habitually preferred to work with doctoral students that studied on a full-time basis before considering distance doctoral students:

We just aren't on their map. If, for obvious reasons, and I am not sure if this really is the case, my gut tells me that if there is a member of staff that needed students to work on a research project, I doubt they'd first try to identify students from the distance learning pool of students. I find it hard to believe that they'd try to identify from that pool of students except they have a particular relationship with a distance learner, and they know a particular skill set that this person has. [Clark, Male, Museum Studies, 4th Year]

Clark implied that his academic department developed formalised study frameworks for distance learning students by actively integrating them periodically into some academic projects.

From an identity standpoint, Clark was not further asked about why he felt that identifying as a distance doctoral student was a major impediment in the availability of research opportunities; however, Clark's narrative would imply that there was a link between identifying as a distance doctoral student and having more access to research opportunities.

Stuart's interpretation of distance learning student research opportunities appears to be akin to the one above, although Stuart has attributed the limitations to a staff member "preference" for working with full-time doctoral students:

...certainly, you know, those kinds of students, full-timers are the preferred options, the preferred students since they see them often, or that they tend to go through them in a timelier way than distance learning students. [Stuart, Male, History of Art, 4th Year]

Stuart narrated that, because he was a distance learning student and had no ability to communicate deeply with staff members as much, he felt the members of staff regarded him as "kind of a by the dangling string on the side".

To this end, it is apparent that access to research opportunities or other academic positions in the department facilitated community development,

while limited or no access to engage in research with staff members impeded a sense of belongingness. The participants felt that their department offered full-time students more research opportunities than distance learning students.

5.2.7 It is about time (balance)

Although it is not a focus of this study, the data analysis suggests that the dimensions discussed in the subsections above are impacted by distance doctoral students attempting to manage role conflicts. The study participants occupied numerous roles concurrently whilst studying for their doctoral degree: professional responsibilities (usually more than one position); student roles; family roles; and numerous financial responsibilities. Participants narrated time management and an overall limited time availability while discussing nearly every facet of this research. The participants thus stressed the significance of time management aspects more often than they discussed relationships with their peers and staff members. For the participants in this research, life/work balance concerns and regular transitioning roles encompassed all the aspects of their doctoral experience. Although the participants assumed roles that were associated with relationships beyond their doctoral community, these roles impacted their status as a doctoral student, time spent with their peers and staff members and the ways they interacted with staff members and peers. Consequently, to comprehend the scale of managing role conflict as it applies to building relationship, sense of belongingness in the academic community, and how they view themselves, this is explored using the sub-themes that developed from this section: time management with regards to family and personal relationships, and financial and professional commitments.

Overall time management: Most of the study participants cited challenges encountered whilst trying to manage their time as distance doctoral students; they cited the continuous need to compromise, prioritise, re-prioritise and transitioning between roles as a major technique. The participants also narrated compromising some aspects of their lives to undertake the doctoral

degree; it was quite a struggle to continually navigate through family commitments, professional duties, personal interests and programme tasks.

For most of the participants, several facets of their livelihood had to be a good fit for their distance doctoral programme because they considered it to be of high importance. This regularly implied that the time spent socialising with friends and family members was minimised or wholly non-existent during most times. Jane narrated becoming unsocial because of her desire to study for her doctoral degree:

For me, this has been everything that I can do to keep things going, the programme and the family. [Jane, Female, Museum Studies, 3rd Year]

Jane noted that the role of a distance doctoral student “does not have a statute of limitation” and the student must shuffle and reshuffle tasks to fit into the programme. She referred to the analogy of going out for dinner:

Whenever my friends or family invite me for a dinner, I always have to first evaluate my Ph.D workload, my pace, ability and progress. I often ask myself if this is something that I am willing to commit to? Because I don't want to promise them that I will come and then disappoint them or stand them up at the end. [Jane, Female, Museum Studies, 3rd Year]

Additionally, the participants indicated that they had abandoned domestic tasks or only did them during long study breaks or public holidays, commonly desired interests, and academic activities (seminars and conferences) because they genuinely could not fit them into their busy routine.

Most of the participants noted they would not consider spending their time taking a lunch break; instead they would use the time for academic activities. Corey narrated staying up late to write his academic papers almost every night (including weekends), but came to the realisation that he still needed to allocate additional reading time to enhance his writing activities:

Then I got the impression I was not going to spend my lunch time eating lunch. And I used my lunch break writing or editing or reading journal articles, or doing other academic tasks and such stuff. I was having lunch for 5 to 10 minutes and at the same time I was doing some work on my thesis in some way for the remainder of the time and that was successful. [Corey, Male, Museum Studies, 4th Year]

Weekend champions: As stated earlier, being a doctoral student was just one of several roles embodied by the participants of this study. Sometimes being a doctoral student occupied a lower priority level than other roles. The participants narrated how they utilised their weekends and nights to read and write; Chloe stated that she fell asleep on her reading table whilst reading relevant researches and literature. Similarly, after their family members had gone to sleep, Clark, Nick, and Stuart narrated that they allocated time to focus on their doctoral studies' tasks. Clark implied that, because he was tired of balancing various responsibilities in his life, he sometimes fell asleep whilst reading or writing.

Additionally, some of the participants of this study indicated that they devoted their weekends to doing most of their doctoral tasks. Some participants used the term "weekend champion" to characterise their strategies to balancing doctoral studies with other priorities in their life. Peter noted that doctoral-related tasks were almost impossible to accomplish during weekdays, due to working long hours and family "fatherhood" responsibilities:

I practically always made my Saturdays of the weekend a day to read and get Ph.D work done. During the week, I considered it too hard to even read anything that is not work and family, you know. I may read a few pages but it just didn't happen to put my attention on it. [Peter, Male, International Development, 5th Year]

Allocating time for late-night or weekend doctoral activities impacted connection with some of the staff members and peers as a result of having different availabilities and schedules. During these times, subgroups like writing groups or most social activities did not take place. Even when

participants encountered their peers online, they did not feel obliged to socialise. Hence, the majority of the participants individually worked on their programme tasks. The participants also discussed the negative effects of using their weekends for doctoral studies as it impacted their relationships with family and friends.

5.2.8 Maintaining personal and family relationships

Each participant in this study narrated how relationships with their family and friends (both close and distant) affected their doctoral programme. Most of the participants were married or in some form of committed relationships, as well as having children. As previously stated, the participants often waived certain aspects of their lives for the study of their doctoral degree. The majority of the participants cited a change in their relationship with family and friends because of devoting time and commitment to making progress in their doctoral studies; they noted that family and friends considered them to be too unsocial to interact with. Also, the participants narrated how self-centred they had become by reducing family activities or turning down invitations to attend low priority events.

More notably, participants that were also mothers narrated a severe sense of guilt because their family members could not get much of their time. While the other participants who also inhabited the role of a mother did not mark their experiences as guilt, they expressed remorse or a significant psychological and emotional cost of knowing that their family members could not always have access to them. Chloe cited the conflict that she experienced between being a mother and being a student:

Sometimes when I say goodnight to them or lock myself away from them, I feel terrible. I just thought what it would be like if I were not studying a PhD programme and what I could have been doing with them, you know, dealing with the various relationships in my life, rather than being a PhD student. [Chloe, Female, Media and Communication, 4th Year]

Chloe's narrative implied that because she was also a doctoral student, it was inherently challenging for her to sustain her relationships outside academia. Some participants narrated attempting to make friends, and members of their family realised how difficult it was to spend time with them and to make reasonable progress in their programme. However, they failed to bring about such realisation to most family and friends.

Jane narrated that she tried spending time with family and friends, but noticed that she was still thinking about doctoral tasks and while she tried to engage in entertainment with her family or friends, she was not mentally present until she had achieved a milestone in her doctoral tasks. Jane's cohabiting partner regularly travelled for work. The time she spent with her cohabiting partner during particularly busy weeks consisted of grocery shopping on Friday nights whilst talking and planning their weekly meals. She settled for deriving solace from the benefits that her doctoral study might yield (especially when completed and awarded) to an attempt to manage her guilt; particularly, she wanted her children to consider her as their typical and familial example in aspiring to achieve:

I think it's really important for my children to see and understand that it is possible to make sacrifices, such as you can have a job, progress through education and maintain a family balance. I want them to really appreciate the powers of education and the opportunities, the boundaries that clear as a result of widening your education. [Jane, Female, Museum Studies, 3rd Year]

Most of the participants narrated that they had discussed and agreed time arrangements with their partner and other members of their family (especially their children) in order to gain their unwavering support for studying their doctoral degree. However, they began to realise that their spouses/partners or other family members were getting tired of the additional household responsibilities that they had to handle. The majority of the participants mentioned that their partners or other members of their family became dissatisfied with the agreement they had and wished that the programme

could be hastily completed (if possible). The participants made use of phrases like, “he’s sick of taking care of the additional workload”, “she can’t wait for me to complete this journey and leave it all behind us” and “she’s over it”. Jen narrated that her husband is no longer questioning her about how much is left in her doctoral programme because according to her, “it’s just going to lead to a struggle and overwhelm me much more”. Bob narrated, feeling rushed to finish his programme quickly because of the fact that his doctoral programme was almost costing him his family. He also noted feeling guilty about not attending some of the school activities of his sons:

I feel the pressure to complete this and it is mostly because I have invested so much energy, money and time in it. Not to mention the things that I previously wouldn't miss for the world if I was not studying for a PhD. I haven't missed my son's birthdays, yet, but I have missed their football games and parents' evenings which I used to love attending. But my wife is very understanding and helps me a lot. [Bob, Male, Media and Communication, 3rd Year]

Additionally, Nick narrated that he had done his best to manage progress in his doctoral programme and family life; however, sometimes, it was inherently challenging. He narrated,

My wife would definitely tell you I probably just didn't have a very well-balanced family life. It has been difficult. The challenge is that you will never be able to put anything above family. You ought not. [Nick, Male, Computer Science, Final Year]

According to the participants’ narratives, it was clear that a challenging balance existed between the support of the family and family members’ pressure to finish the programme as soon as possible. Whilst most of the participants narrated support from members of their family in the early stages of their programme, their support started to decline over time and subsequently led to discontent and pressure to complete the programme in some cases. For example, Jen noted that it became so frustrating to discuss progress in her doctoral programme with her husband that they subsequently

agreed that it is better not to talk about it at all. Most of the participants narrated a time when they doubted their decision to study for a doctoral degree as they realised what it truly costs and how their relationships with members of their family had been affected.

Based on the narratives above, it would appear that the participants experienced moments of doubt about continuing in their doctoral programme when they began to feel guilt or pressure from members of their family. By contrast, they were motivated to continue to engage and advance through the programme when they felt the support of family members. These viewpoints seemed to vary based on the stage of their programme, the depth of focus required and whether support from their family was repeatedly being negotiated by the participants.

Jen narrated the personal challenges that she experienced during some period of her doctoral journey whilst trying to be a mother to two children and a supportive wife to her husband. She narrated,

I am not aware if any of my colleagues are in a similar situation that I am. I mean being married, having more than one child, working and doing this programme. I reckon that they will be very few. Most women are not as insane as I am, you know. I am not being funny, but these things are harder than rocket science. [Jen, Female, History of Art, 2nd Year]

She narrated a particular time when she was working with one of her peers on two research papers that had been accepted with major corrections. She took a few days break from work in order to focus on the papers only to be faced with a situation that involved her daughter being critically ill for one week. She narrated that it was a challenging time for her despite having her parents momentarily help her so that she could make progress with the papers. Stuart narrated a similar circumstance where he managed doctoral tasks with a critically ill child:

You know, when your son is constantly crying, you wish that you could just say to him please be quiet because daddy wants to do uni work. Well, welcome to reality, I just have to sit, help him and hope that he eventually stops crying. [Stuart, Male, History of Art, 4th Year]

Clark's narrative of his life/role balance is predominantly despondent. He narrated that his partner was bed-bound due to a deteriorating medical condition which required him to frequently take time out to provide her with daily special and personal care alongside his day job. Thus, this made it inherently difficult to switch between the roles of a husband, carer, student and a professional:

Clearly, due to the complexities of managing her ailment and conditions coupled with providing personal care, plus whenever her pains or needs increases, this usually becomes difficult for me to add to my study and writing. I always have to find a way to do all of these things, you know. And don't forget that she loves a good chitchat to keep her going during the day. It is just hard to explain but when you have a critically ill family member then your life changes dramatically in a way that may affect your psychological, physical and emotional wellbeing. Ph.D becomes the least but very desirable thing on your list. [Clark, Male, Museum Studies, 4th year]

Clark narrated that as a couple, they gradually developed a regimen and did well to adapt their lives to the circumstances of his wife so that he could fit in other tasks during the day without feeling guilty or resentful about it. Clark's narrative is an example of how role balance and transitions can affect how students view themselves, sense of belonging and perseverance during doctoral studies. During Clark's programme, there were times when he had contemplated putting his study on indefinite hold because the health of his wife was in a critical state that required intensive care. After thinking about it, he successfully transitioned back into his work, doctoral studies, and home life management schedule. He narrated, however, that although providing personal care for his spouse may have impacted on his doctoral commitment and experience (like attending conferences, seminars, social events, and the

like), it most likely may have impeded his sense of belonging and how they viewed themselves, that the personal care of his wife remained his priority and most desirable achievement.

Most of the participants indicated that the absence of support from family and friends could be linked to a vague knowledge about likely demands of the doctoral journey and the commitment involved in completing it. They narrated that despite having several conversations with family and friends, their family and friends made statements like, “why does a PhD take so long to complete?” or “why are you so slow about finishing this quickly?” Isabella narrated that there had been times when she did not believe that she had the support of family members. Like Isabella, Beth narrated that she frequently experienced a similar situation. She narrated that her father frequently asked her and that it was difficult for her father to understand the level of commitment and work required, as well as her rationale for doctoral studies. She narrated,

They often wonder and say, I don't know why you think that you need to get another degree. When I was at your age, I never wanted to do any more studying. You must be insane. [Beth, Female, Conservation Studies, 2nd Year]

Similarly, Jen narrated that after completing her postgraduate programme, her partner struggled to comprehend her motivations for studying a doctoral degree or her career aspirations after completion. She narrated,

Firstly, it took me a long while to help him understand that when I do finish with my Ph.D, that I might start earning six figures sum as a take home. [Jen, Female, History of Art, 2nd Year]

The participants narrated that they understand why their family and friends struggled to comprehend the doctoral process because they had not experienced it themselves. Although this lack of common understanding

momentarily introduced tension in their relationships, they derived solace from understanding the uniqueness of the viewpoints of others and the nature of their relationship. Also, the participants persisted in their programme because they were supported by their family and friends. However, as they continuously had to explain the nature of the doctoral process to their family and friends, this dissatisfaction contributed to concerns regarding the continuity of the programme.

Gaining motivation from family members: Although it was difficult to balance family interests and responsibilities with doctoral studies, most of the participants narrated that members of their family frequently served as a basis for support. During their doctoral programme, members of the family frequently encouraged and motivated the participants during specifically challenging times. Participants narrated that depending on their intellectual capabilities, children, spouses, siblings and grandparents provided psychological and emotional support, and practical help with domestic tasks, serving as a proof-reader to their drafts, critiquing and helping with organising their calendar. This tends to present an interesting tension between the participants and their family members. It would appear that family members often fulfilled dual roles: sometimes, they posed a considerable difficulty to the participants, and sometimes served as their basis for encouragement, support and motivation.

The participants also narrated how the sacrifices made by family members in order to allow them to study served as a source of inspiration. Emma narrated that during difficult and intense times, she would be worried about her family. She narrated,

When I begin to feel like I don't want to continue on anymore, I just think that you know that so many people have put something in me to do this and I can't disappoint them. They too should have a say about me wanting to quit and not just me. [Emma, Female, History and Political Science, Final Year]

Clark narrated the unwavering support that he received from his wife motivated him and added that his family members always advocated for continuous education right from his childhood days. He added that his wife empowered him to achieve his doctorate degree qualification because she had aspired to study further up to a doctorate degree before becoming ill. Stuart regarded his grandparents to be his biggest supporter as they constantly encouraged him to seek higher education and assured him that education and what you learn in the process was something that cannot be unlearned. He had hoped to finish his doctoral degree before his grandfather died but remained grateful for his support. He narrated his death as a very challenging time, but it also rekindled his determination for him to complete his doctoral degree.

5.2.9 Managing career and financial responsibilities

Most participants in this study were employed on a full-time or part-time basis whilst studying for their doctoral degree from a distance; most of the participants worked between 15 to 40 hours weekly, and in some cases worked extra hours in order to increase their income and fulfil their financial obligations. Most of the participants narrated that they had to sustain a routine that they had set up before starting their doctoral degree; raising and supporting their children and partners, keeping up with a monthly mortgage payment, paying their bills, keeping at least one vehicle roadworthy for the household and shopping for food, etc.

Some of the participants stated that they struggled to study for their doctoral degree on a full-time basis because it was not financially feasible or because caring for their family was a full-time responsibility and studying for their doctoral degree was a part-time responsibility. Although most of the participants indicated that studying for a doctoral degree did introduce a direct or indirect financial burden, they also indicated that having their doctoral degree fully-funded would have been helpful, but not to the extent of resolving all their existing financial burdens. This was a sensitive subject for the participants because anecdotally, they believed that only full-time doctoral

students were offered opportunities for fellowships and scholarships. Three participants that worked at the higher education institutions where they were also students received a 20% tuition fee discount that reduced their overall fees to be paid; however, it was not sufficient to alleviate the financial burden they had. Some of the participants also indicated that they received tuition fee discounts that ranged from between 10% to 20% due to being an alumnus of their institution or being a national of a certain country. Generally, based on the narratives of the participants, it would appear that the tuition fees of participants who were classed as international students was higher than those classed as home students by at least 50%.

All the participants narrated the challenges posed by their career during their doctoral studies, particularly when working towards a milestone or goal. Most of the participants indicated that their employers were considerate in being flexible about their hours of working in order to enable them to commit to urgent doctoral tasks. Furthermore, because of this issue, most of the participants had to make some changes in their jobs; they understood that they had to be in a more versatile role with an employer who is in support of their commitment to study for their doctoral degree.

More specifically, two participants (Isabella and Clark) started new job roles shortly after applying for their doctoral programme (but before the programme actually began) and three participants (Chloe, Peter, Beth) changed job roles as soon as they started their programme. Isabella narrated she decided to find a “job that fits around her existing life” before her programme intensified because her former employer was not flexible with her family-work-study schedule. Beth’s previous job role required her to work four consecutive days of 12-hour shifts that she characterised as “too hard” because it did not give her sufficient time to do doctoral programme tasks. This led Beth to start a new role with another employer that required her to work 24 hours (that were spread across a few days) per week. She noticed that her working days in the new role were sometimes long but rewarding and accommodating of her programme because she had more uninterrupted days available to commit to her doctoral education.

The participants indicated that their job sometimes required them working on certain weekends and evenings that were in conflict with their personal and doctoral schedule. This implied that some students did not commit sufficient time to their doctoral tasks, and it impeded their progress. Peter indicated that he was dissatisfied that his career did not correlate as much with his doctoral studies as he had initially envisioned. He was unable to commit sufficient time to his doctoral programme during demanding times at his workplace:

To be honest, the quality of work I produced was way below doctoral level sometimes. I figured it was sacrificing some stuff. I also realised that there are projects and papers that I submitted that might have been better if I had given them more attention and time. [Peter, Male, International Development, 5th Year]

Similarly, while trying to balance the deadlines of her programme, Mia indicated feeling frequently overwhelmed by her financial responsibilities at home and work. Mia narrated that the opportunity to socialise was limited due to trying to balance her commitment between her family, career and academics. As a result, her identity and sense of belonging within her doctoral community may have been affected.

In summary, it would appear that the issues of life/role balance and transitioning through roles has the ability to impede the development of a sense of belonging and identity within their doctoral community. Focusing on professional and familial responsibilities contributed to participants committing less time to their doctoral studies and community, thereby impacting their relations with the staff members and peers. Although some of the participants narrated to address or be addressing role conflict management challenges, they appeared to have transitioned between their academic, social and professional role more seamlessly than others. For the participants that transitioned between roles more seamlessly than others, it would appear that their sense of belonging and how they viewed themselves was not affected by their multiple role commitments.

5.2.10 The motivation for studying a doctoral degree

One of the themes that emerged was strongly linked to the motivation for studying for a doctoral degree. Although the participants' narratives differed in their motivation for studying for a doctoral degree, for common ground purposes, they were mostly along the lines of the following: (i) a doctoral degree as a means to career advancement (within or outside academia), (ii) a distance doctoral degree provides the flexibility to make progress in career and academia, (iii) a doctoral degree as a rite of passage into full acceptance to the scholarship community, (iv) a doctoral degree as a means to self-fulfilment/life purpose (for example, "it has always been my desire to complete my doctorate degree" or "I want to serve my community by gaining a qualification and helping them in return"), and (v) life circumstances changed and made a doctoral degree a new goal (that was career-oriented or not).

Participants' interest in the programme: All participants narrated how well motivated they felt towards completing their doctoral programme. According to the participants, feeling motivated had been a major driving force in their doctoral experience, especially during difficult times. This attitude was sometimes perceived as the ability to persevere through to a very important life goal by the participants. Mike narrated that he was determined to complete his programme regardless of the challenges encountered during the process:

Having started this programme, it is going to be very difficult to stop me. I will be...I think it is encoded in me to always see my decision in life through regardless of how difficult it may seem. Nobody can make me change this decision. But they can support me get to the end of it... [Mike, Male, Museum Studies, 3rd Year]

Similarly, Bob considered the completion of his doctoral programme as a personal goal whose attainability became more feasible by the achievement of each milestone or doctoral task:

I don't know about others, but I can say that doing this programme means a lot to me. I started with the mindset of finishing and as I complete a task or a paper or chapter with my supervisor I feel as if I am getting closer to the light at the end of the tunnel. This feeling is making me get more committed because I have surprised myself about how powerful my mind can be. This level of persistence and resilience is just on another level to me. [Bob, Male, Media and Communication, 3rd Year]

The participants also indicated that some of their motivation for completing their doctoral programme could be due to taking into account the adverse effects that they might experience for not completing their doctoral programme. Because of the considerable amount of time, money and personal investment, several participants narrated that quitting their doctoral programmes would be a massive setback both in terms of future opportunities as well as the monetary value that could have been available to them after completing the programme. Jess also considered it “very unwise not to complete” her doctoral programme and narrated that while in the programme she had encountered obstacles and some difficulties,

I don't quit and I am a massive believer in completing whatever you start. I am very driven and ambitious, and I've wanted to do it for a very long time before I eventually started. [Jess, Female, Education, 4th Year]

Furthermore, some participants narrated that they were inspired by the principles that were ingrained in them as a result of their upbringing; to overcome obstacles and achieve their doctoral qualification. Beth narrated that finishing the programme is a “responsibility” because it is only sensible that “I finish what I started”. She indicated that her childhood upbringing was the source of these values:

I was raised with the 'you are in control of your own life and destiny' mentality, if others can do it with less resources and in a less favourable circumstance, then you have no excuse than to face it and deal with it, you know. [Beth, Female, Conservation Studies, 2nd Year]

The participants that were nearer to the end of their programme narrated that they were inspired by their determination and drive to progress through the challenges of lacking motivation towards the end of their programme; and the feelings of declining relevance and tiredness as they were about to finish their programme. Colloquially known as ‘senioritis’ in some part of the world, Graham, as he nears the end of his programme narrated that imagining himself with a doctoral degree awarded was helpful in fighting the feeling of senioritis:

I think that I am at that stage where I am this close to finishing the programme and I am beginning to think that it is too easy and that I can finish the programme in my sleep. So, I have got some end-of-lap syndrome coming up but I can't stop seeing myself with a PhD and even getting addressed as Dr... My family has always considered education as a significant part of their history and I believe that PhD is the peak. Personally, I've given a lot of my money and to this for it not to work because of my own demons. [Graham, Male, Criminology, 5th Year]

The participants of this study expressed that their desires to study for their doctoral degree whilst making progress in their career and the inherent objective of finishing their doctoral programme were paramount to progress as they relied on these sentiments throughout the entirety of their doctoral journey, especially during challenging moments. Although the factors that motivated the participants shared many aspects of similarities, their motivations were primarily shaped by their unique circumstances and events of their lives. It is essential to consider this theme because it contributes to a student persistence to identify with and belong to their doctoral community.

5.3 Chapter summary

This chapter began with an introduction that sets out the outline for the chapter and provided insights about the demographics of the study participants that provided the data through their narratives. It went further, to analyse the narratives in a thematic fashion with featured excerpts of the narratives to reinforce the analysis thread.

In the next chapter (Chapter 6), the study explores the findings using the lenses of Hodgins's (2018) psychological construct of belonging and discussing findings in a thematic manner, whilst aligning some aspects of the findings with relevant literature. It also looks at research questions of the study, establishing how the data presented and analysed answered these questions.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter takes forward the data presented in the previous chapter, and discusses those findings related to ways that distance doctoral students interact towards building their belongingness and identity within their doctoral community. The discussion of the results is presented thematically within this chapter. It links the findings to the conceptual model adopted for the study, and indicates how the research questions have been answered both from the perspective of the data and literature reviewed. The significant contributions of the study are discussed, and the chapter ends with a summary.

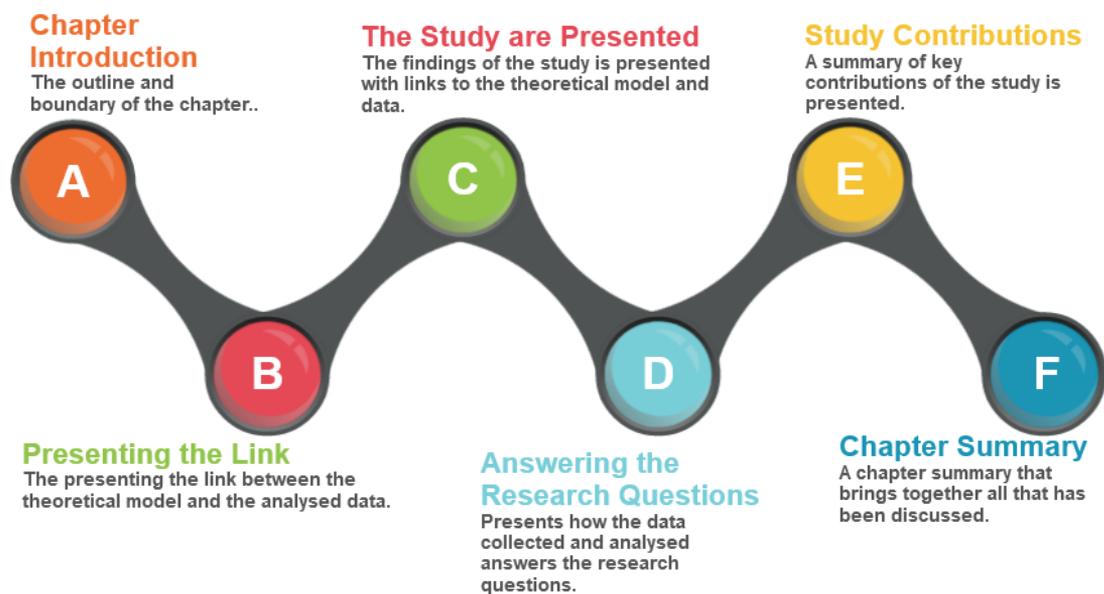


Figure 6.1. The roadmap of the Discussion of Findings chapter

6.2 Linking the conceptual framework with study elements

Progressing from the data and findings that were presented and interpreted in the previous chapter, some aspects and findings emerged from the narratives of the participants that can be more fully discussed and understood using the conceptual framework. The application of Hodgins's (2018) Psychological Construct of Belongingness in the context of this study serves as a mental map that facilitates the presentation of the findings in a related, yet logical and coherent manner. To begin with, a tabulation of the themes and sub-themes from the data analysis that are related to sections of the findings are

highlighted and alphanumerically labelled for ease of further referencing (see Table 6.1). It is vital to emphasise that the themes and sub-themes are not presented in any order that would indicate hierarchy or priority.

Data Analysis Theme Code	Themes/sub-themes From Data Presentation and Analysis
DA1	Sense of belonging in the distance doctoral community
DA2	A shared meaning of academic community of practice
DA3	Building a relationship with peers
DA4	Gaining the support and understanding of peers
DA5	What happens when there is no peer support
DA6	Challenges involved in building a relationship with peers
DA7	The time, place and frequency challenge – Proximity
DA8	Building relationships with staff members
DA9	Staff members' support via mentoring and advising
DA10	The difficulties of developing connections with staff members
DA11	The impact of proximity on interacting with staff members
DA12	The lack of or limited research opportunities
DA13	It is about time (balance)
DA14	Maintaining personal and family relationships
DA15	Managing career and financial responsibilities
DA16	The motivation for studying a doctoral degree

Table 6.1. Themes and sub-themes from the study data

Following the labelling and tabulation of the themes and sub-themes from the data analysis section, it is possible to see how these relate to the alphanumerically-labelled Hodgins's (2018) Psychological Construct of Belongingness model (see Figure 6.2). This centrally focuses on the realms of identity (such as space, self and social) that oscillate between the mutuality of acceptance in identity and the quality of relationship and interaction; outside this are the seven dimensions of belonging that permeate these realms of identity. It is important to note that the labelling of the realms of identity (shown with 'R' numbers) and dimensions of belongingness (shown with 'D' numbers) does not indicate any order of precedence or priority. The labelling

of data analysis themes (in Table 6.1) and the conceptual framework (in Figure 6.2) facilitated the linking, of the themes to aspects of the framework.

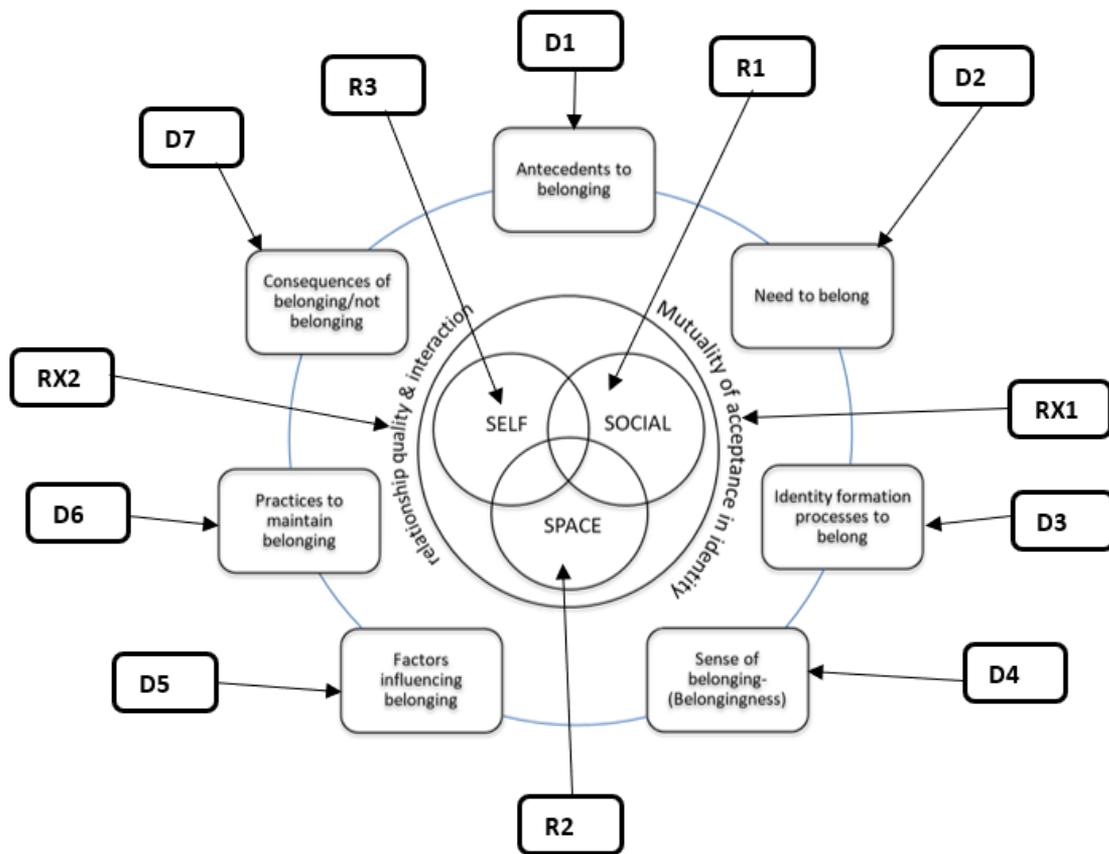


Figure 6.2. The (labelled) Psychological Construct of Belonging (Hodgins, 2018)

6.3 Study findings

Although the previous chapter delineated the data presentation and analysis in a thematic manner, this chapter extends the categorising of findings in the same manner. An exploration and application of Hodgins's (2018) Psychological Construct of Belonging was used as a conceptual lens. As this section unfolds, the entwined realms of identity and the dimensions of belonging are mapped to the findings revealed by the data. Parts of Hodgins's (2018) Psychological Construct of Belonging are used throughout the discussions in this section as they relates to the wider literature, and data gathered. Given the different possible interpretative (what some would regard as subjective) nature of viewpoints and a potential for controversy, it is without

doubt that interpretations offered in this section may inevitably challenge some dominant opinions and beliefs.

6.3.1 Distance doctoral community and oneness

The participants described a sense of belonging as feeling of oneness with the academic community, trustworthiness, developing relationship with staff members and peers, and being part of the community of practice. These perspectives align with relevant literature about the development of a sense of belonging in an academic community during doctoral study (irrespective of the mode of study). There is evidence from existing research, which asserts that the experience of students is shaped by departmental communities through various groups of people in the subject area (Sala-Bubaré & Castelló 2017; Weidman et al., 2001). By contrast, professionals in the field were not specifically mentioned in the study to be part of the community in their academic departments. Whereas most of the participants of this study held professional positions, the focus of existing literature (such as Sala-Bubaré & Castelló 2017; Weidman et al., 2001) tended to aim at the impact that external professionals might have as members of the doctoral community. Because previous studies excluded distance doctoral students as the sample for the studies, the finding of this study highlights differences. Distance doctoral students gain exposure to their career by practising within it and in most cases researching from a distance; this negates the need to collaborate with external professionals through their doctoral tasks in order to gain exposure into practise. This context may not be accurate for distance doctoral programmes where the students are required to attend periodic events (like conferences, residentials, lectures or research training) held on the university campus. This finding does not exist in isolation, but serves as one of the contributions to the existing body of knowledge within this domain.

Also, the feeling of oneness with the academic department was noted by Ngo'lo and Stuart as one of the foundational requirements for building a sense of belonging that may further help in building the identity of the students, such as how they view themselves and how their peers view them. Relationships

with peers and staff members were used to form connections. However, the positive atmosphere that existed, arising from how supportive the community members were, was used to describe oneness and connectedness. Previous studies (such as Devos et al., 2017; Mazerolle et al., 2015; Bagaka's et al., 2015) focused specifically on the relationship as a key influencer for developing connection in the academic community; the finding of this study builds on that by adding to the literature about the doctoral student community. For strong connections to be felt within the community, distance doctoral students need to develop relationships with other individuals beyond their research supervisors (Castelló et al., 2017; Ramirez, 2017). Interestingly, brief interactions with non-supervisory staff members that did not evolve into any form of relationship were used by the participants in the current study to describe connections. For some participants, being within an inclusive department without much interaction with people led to experiencing the feelings of oneness and connectedness.

Using Hodgins's (2018) Psychological Construct of Belonging, it can be arguably inferred that these findings posit within the 'social', 'space' and 'self' identity realms; they oscillate between the 'mutuality of acceptance' and 'relationship quality and interaction' spectrums; and are related to 'antecedents to belonging', 'sense of belonging', 'factors influencing belonging' and 'consequences of belonging or not belonging' dimensional elements of belongingness (see Table 6.2).

Realms of Identity:	R1, R2, R3, RX1, RX2
Dimensions of Belongingness:	D1, D2, D4, D5, D7
Related Data Analysis Theme Codes:	DA1, DA2

Table 6.2. Distance doctoral community and oneness using Hodgins (2018)

6.3.2 Sense of belonging in the community

A sense of belonging was one of the essential features of distance doctoral communities that emerged. According to the narratives of the participants, a sense of belonging can be said to entail mutual trust, encouragement, appreciation, and feeling of being valued by others. Since the notion of

belongingness and feeling connected to the development of relationships with peers and staff members and transitioning into a respected member of a group, the findings are therefore consistent with those offered by the literature reviewed (see Bagaka's et al., 2015; Greene, 2015; Mazerolle et al., 2015; Wenger, 1998). Additionally, the participants such as Isabella, Jack, Bok, Clark, and Peter alluded that a shared goal, which reinforced the commitment they had in the academic department, was cultivated through their sense of belonging with staff members and peers (Wenger, 1998).

In some previous studies, particularly those (such as Zahl, 2013; Portnoi et al., 2015; Johnson, 2017; Greene, 2015) that utilised the theoretical model of Tinto (1993), the manner in which graduate students assimilate and persevere towards finishing their doctoral programme is also determined by the depth and relevance of the interactions within the academic systems. Drawing from the assumption of Tinto's approach of "painting graduate students with the same brush" approach to belonging and socialisation that the model fits all graduate student in a similar manner, this study argues that the unique experiences of distance doctoral students as part of the population that belongs and fits in the academic and social systems are not included in Tinto's model. The premise for Tinto's (1993) model has often relied on the notion that a graduate student migrates to a new location to start a doctoral programme and that they need to build a social life that works around their academic life. There was an indication from the findings of this study that distance doctoral students have their academic and social spheres overlapping. The development of social ties and relationships by distance doctoral students are primarily done outside the institution as they make progress in their doctoral programme. This is because of the limited availability to participate in social activities that exist within their academic department. It can be inferred, therefore, that a correlation exists between persistence and integrating academic and social life. The basis for this inference aligns with the narratives of the participants of this study.

From a scholarly community standpoint, Wenger's (1998) conceptualisation of a community of practice was a match with what the narratives of the

participants implied. Wenger’s (1998) research on scholarly communities of practice focused on collaboratively learning and interpreting of experiences as a community and posits, on the contrary, to being specific to academic settings. Some of the participants in this study noted that the ‘ideal’ type of community described by Wenger (1998) was frequently absent in their doctoral community. The participants of this study linked the absence of community that they felt to their unavailability on campus as distance doctoral students. They further implied that it was an attribute of a doctoral journey that can be commonly associated to full-time students’ experiences. Some of the participants wanted more avenues for engaging in scholarly practices (such as discussions) with their peers and staff members; the possibility of such an engagement was attributed to the structure of their doctoral programmes. For some participants, they continuously experienced an inconsistent form of scholarly community of practice throughout their distance doctoral experience.

From the perspective of Hodgins’s (2018) Psychological Construct of Belonging, it can be arguably inferred that these findings posit within the ‘social’, ‘space’ and arguably ‘self’ identity realms; they oscillate between the ‘mutuality of acceptance’ and ‘relationship quality and interaction’ spectrums; and are related to the ‘antecedents to belonging’, ‘factors influencing belonging’, ‘practices to maintain belonging’ and ‘consequences of belonging or not belonging’ dimensional elements of belongingness (see Table 6.3).

Realms of Identity:	R1, R2, R3, RX1, RX2
Dimensions of Belongingness:	D1, D2, D5, D6, D7
Related Data Analysis Theme Codes:	DA1, DA2

Table 6.3. Sense of belonging and community using Hodgins (2018)

6.3.3 Building relationships with peers

One of the most significant aspects within building belongingness and identity within the academic community was the interaction with peers. From the narrative of the participants, it would imply that participants’ interaction was less frequent with staff members than it was with their peers. Previous studies (such as Pifer & Baker, 2016; Williams et al., 2018) noted the importance of peers in facilitating the sense of belonging of doctoral students in general and

building an academic community through mentoring, encouragement and responsibility, and these are further alluded to by the findings of this study.

Gaining the support and understanding of peers: According to the narratives of the participants, their peers were an invaluable resource and helped them build their belongingness in their doctoral community. Studies (such as Pifer & Baker, 2016; Williams et al., 2018) indicate that peers who are supportive influence students positively beyond just building a sense of belonging but support adaptability, motivation, and perseverance, and ultimately the completion of their doctoral programme. There was also evidence that participants sometimes relied on their peers to get through difficult moments, especially those associated with their doctoral programme. Evidence such as the narratives of Mia, Isabella, Ngo'lo and Graham demonstrated that the social, emotional, and academic problems that doctoral students encounter are minimised through their relationships with peers; this has previously been alluded to by previous studies (see Golde, 2005; Hawley, 2010).

Challenges involved in building a relationship with peers: Managing academic and personal commitments in the lives of many distance doctoral students increased the challenges that they experienced while forming and maintaining relationship with peers (Pifer & Baker, 2016; Williams et al., 2018). The participants such as Stuart, Jack, Isabella, Peter and Clark asserted that they experienced some difficulties trying to connect with their peers because of their distance learning status. The participants also highlighted the differences between their relationships with peers that study from a distance and with peers that study on campus and on a full-time basis. The variations in professional experience (in the aspects of depth and duration) and the intensity of commitment were one of the leading causes of participants' difficulties in trying to build and sustain relationships with their peers (both distance learning and full-time students). There is evidence from previous research that loneliness and isolation in the academic community can be caused by lack of interaction with peers (Devos et al., 2017; Sala-Bubaré & Castelló, 2017; Campbell, 2015; Williams et al., 2018). Some of the

participants in this study narrated complete isolation from their on-campus full-time peers but considered it relatively easy to connect with their distance learning peers. With regards to falling behind and changing cohorts, participants such as Clark and Jess began completing programme tasks with different groups of students after losing track of their original cohort. As a result of constant transitioning across different cohorts of doctoral students, it was inherently challenging to connect and build a relationship with their peers.

The time, place and frequency challenge – Proximity: Research indicates that difficulties faced by distance doctoral students in accessing peers within the academic culture are as a result of the limited time or time spent from a distance in the academic department (Pifer & Baker, 2016; Williams et al., 2018). Participants such as Mike, Marta and Nick considered it challenging to build relationships and maintain the interactions progressively. The participants blamed the limited contact that they had with peers on the structure of the doctoral programme. However, they narrated experiencing a sense of belonging during the events that enabled them to meet and interact physically with their peers.

Learning from a distance: The distance between distance doctoral students, their peers and the university could contribute to the reasons for the participants experiencing isolation and/or separation from the academic community (Anderson, 2017; Portnoi et al., 2015; Greene, 2015). Mike, Marta and Nick cited living far away from their university and peers as the likely reasons why they experienced difficulties trying to connect with their peers through online classes. There was support for a sense of community through very structured on-campus events and activities that involved working in groups and pairs. However, the study participants considered it a challenge to sustain the same connections outside of these activities because the time zones of the participants impaired real-time collaboration online.

In considering Hodgins's (2018) Psychological Construct of Belonging, it can be inferred that these findings posit within the 'social', 'space' and 'self' identity realms; they oscillate between the 'mutuality of acceptance' and

'relationship quality and interaction' spectrums; and are related to 'antecedents to belonging', 'sense of belonging', 'factors influencing belonging', 'practices to maintain belonging' and 'consequences of belonging or not belonging' dimensional elements of belongingness (see Table 6.4).

Realms of Identity:	R1, R2, R3, RX1, RX2
Dimensions of Belongingness:	D1, D2, D4, D5, D6, D7
Related Data Analysis Theme Codes:	DA3, DA4, DA5, DA6, DA7

Table 6.4. Building relationships with peers using Hodgins (2018)

6.3.4 Building relationships with staff members

All the participants cited at least one member of staff that they were able to build an encouraging relationship with during their doctoral programme. A sense of belonging with specific staff members was inspired by the positive relationships that the participants had with their supervisor and/or mentor. However, there was a variation in the level and consistency of support, and the various issues related to the distance learning status of most of the participants; these were blamed on limited support and availability of staff members.

The impact of supervision: The persistence of distance doctoral students has been heavily linked to regular interaction with supervisors and other staff members by researchers (such as Anderson, 2017; Rhoads et al., 2017; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Greene, 2015). One of the crucial factors in deciding the progress of the doctoral student is the relationship of the students with their supervisor (Johnson et al., 2017). Most participants such as Mark, Sarah, Emma and Jess cited at least a member of staff that was not their assigned supervisor, who supported and guided them during their doctoral programme. The finding is in line with Johnson et al.'s (2017) conclusion, which implied that building an encouraging relationship with a staff member is essential. Still, the staff member could be someone else, apart from the supervisor that has been assigned. Literature (such as Portnoi et al., 2015; Kobayashi, 2017; Williams et al., 2018) that differentiates between research supervisors and research mentors is, therefore, supported by the results of the current study.

In the study, the mentor that some of the participants mentioned was not the supervisor that was assigned. Nonetheless, an assigned supervisor has the capability to serve both roles.

The difficulties of developing connections with staff members:

Challenges of building and sustaining relationships with staff members were pointed out by most of the participants. Furthermore, limited staff availability and general anxiety about approaching staff members were the reasons attributed to the difficulties faced by the students. Relating to belongingness, the challenges experienced, and the reasons attributed to them are particularly significant to the development of a sense of belonging. Distance doctoral students felt a sense of belonging in the academic community, as previously discussed (Johnson et al., 2017; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Portnoi et al., 2015). There was an expression by the participants (such as Marta and Vicky) that the staff member did not avail themselves to students because they were too busy. Some participants, such as Marta and Vicky, implied that the staff members did not value their time with students as much as they valued spending time in researching, reading, and writing. Developing and sustaining a sense of belonging with staff members was difficult.

Are distance doctoral students less likely to get the attention of staff members? This question is highly controversial and lacks the literature or any kind of empirical evidence to give weight to address it. Some of the participants such as Ngo'lo, Graham and Jack implied that staff members were not accessible to distance learning students as they were more available to full-time students present on campus. Commitment to the programme and the urge to acquire more opportunities to interact with staff members were the reasons for the perception that staff members had a preference for collaborating with students that studied on a full-time basis because they had more presence on the campus.

Feelings of anxiety about approaching staff members: Doctoral students are in some cases noted to be of a low priority and may feel anxious about collaborating or interacting with staff members because they are likely to be

more professionally advanced and academically experienced, as insinuated by literature on doctoral student socialisation (Johnson et al., 2017). Consequently, academic advice from peers rather than from staff members may be equally helpful to the students (Kobayashi, 2017; Williams et al., 2018). For the participants in the study (such as Peter, Kwesi and Ana), it was overwhelming and intimidating to ask a staff member for help. As a result, some students experienced delays in some of the formal processes. For example, this was the case with Stuart, who had an option of several proposals on his thesis before deciding on one topic.

Fitting in and a sense of belonging: in the case of Nick, he described several semesters of difficult interactions with staff members. Consequently, there was a consideration by Nick of giving up on the programme. Staff members and peers who wanted to associate with others “who were like themselves” resulted in the lack of connection with Nick; thus, he felt marginalised. There are assertions from many studies - that lack of integration of a doctoral student into the department’s academic and arguably social culture can result in seclusion, marginalisation and withdrawal, and it is strongly connected to building a sense of belonging and identity (Kobayashi, 2017; Williams et al., 2018; Anderson, 2017; Rhoads et al., 2017; Gopaul, 2015; Greene, 2015; Bawa, 2016). For distance doctoral students that do not spend sufficient time in the department and experience more challenge in fitting into the social and academic cultures, the marginalisation can be particularly pronounced (Pifer & Baker, 2016). Nick’s intense feeling of an absence of community resonates with the literature even though it provides only one perspective. When a staff member bestowed moral and academic support, this was eventually identified by Nick. He narrated that he experienced a sense of belonging with the staff member who made a significant difference to his work.

The impact of proximity on interacting with staff members: Building relationships and a sense of belonging with staff members was in cases difficult due to the lack of proximity with staff members. Some of the distance doctoral students seldom interacted with staff members beyond the structured

programme activities like facilitating online discussions, forums and supervision, although there were regular interactions with staff members during online activities and collaboration. Interactions with staff members beyond those mandated by the structure of the programme are the focus of most literature that sought to address the experiences of doctoral students; but connections with staff members have not been sufficiently explored by researchers. Professional and family commitments contributed to the limited time that distance doctoral students in the study spent in connecting with members of their academic community; the finding is a significant aspect, as students often left/signed out immediately after the completion of the programme task or activity remotely. Interactions with staff members, therefore, took place primarily within the structured programme activities like facilitating online discussions and forums (with the exception of the supervision relationship discussed above). Furthermore, building (or the inability to build) a sense of belonging and the perseverance of the doctoral student was influenced by interactions with staff members.

In scoping these findings using Hodgins’s (2018) Psychological Construct of Belonging, it can be inferred that these findings posit within the ‘social’, ‘space’ and ‘self’ identity realms; they oscillate between the ‘mutuality of acceptance’ and ‘relationship quality and interaction’ spectrums; and are related to ‘antecedents to belonging’, ‘sense of belonging’, ‘factors influencing belonging’, ‘practices to maintain belonging’ and ‘consequences of belonging or not belonging’ dimensional elements of belongingness (see Table 6.5).

Realms of Identity:	R1, R2, R3, RX1, RX2
Dimensions of Belongingness:	D1, D2, D4, D5, D6, D7
Related Data Analysis Theme Codes:	DA8, DA9, DA10, DA11

Table 6.5. Building relationships with staff members using Hodgins (2018)

6.3.5 Lack of research opportunities

Studies such as Greene (2015) implied that research opportunities is a significant aspect that can help develop distance doctoral students’ belongingness. Due to the distance learning status of the participants, access

to research opportunities for the participants (such as Jane, Mike, Chloe, Clark, and Stuart) in the study was very limited.

Furthermore, there is an indication from studies (such as Hopwood, 2018; Hunter & Devine, 2016; Hall, 2018; Litalien, Guay & Morin, 2015; Johnson, Ward & Gardner, 2017) that there can be a strong connection to the academic community by doctoral students through teaching assistantships as well as through access to opportunities of research within the department.

However, there were difficulties that were experienced by some of the participants as there was no feeling of connection to the department or access to research opportunities for the distance doctoral students whose mode of study may give the perception of absence. Discussing Chloe's "lowercase r, uppercase R" research discussion with a staff member is also an aspect of great significance. Going by the information that Chloe obtained, students who are able to find a balance between holding a position at a higher education institution (HEI) such as lecturing or tutoring and study for their doctoral degree were "researchers with an uppercase R" whereas doctoral students like Chloe were categorised in "lowercase r" researchers' category. Chloe's socialisation and perception of who she would become as a researcher was greatly affected by the discussion. The "little r" concept became particularly pronounced when the perception of not being a valued member of the community was combined with the unavailable or limited research opportunities because of the students' distance learning status.

Similarly, a marked dearth of research opportunities within the department was described by some of the participants due to their distance learning status and their lack of interest or inability to secure an academic role that could align with their distance doctoral programme. Some academic roles (such as research assistantships) were considered by distance doctoral students as one of the mechanisms of spending valuable and uninterrupted time engaging in academic research with staff members in their institutions.

Limited access to research opportunities for distance doctoral students:

The difference in the ability of students to articulate the “uppercase R, lowercase r” concept was evident during interviews as Chloe was the only participant who was more aware of the concept. There was discussion about the impact on students’ access to research opportunities based on their distance learning status; indeed, Chloe viewed distance learning students (like themselves) as researchers “with a lowercase r” while full-time peers with responsibilities alongside doctoral studies were perceived to be researchers “with an uppercase R.” Notably, some of the participants in the study had the perception that distance doctoral students did not have access to opportunities compared to the full-time students. Furthermore, distance doctoral students were mentioned by most of the participants as those that staff members did not prefer to work with, but rather worked with full-time students on research projects. Full-time doctoral students’ access to research opportunities and staff members’ preference of collaborating with full-time doctoral students on research projects cannot be assumed to be mutually exclusive. It is, therefore, essential to draw a distinction between the two ideas. The two concepts are, however, related to most of the participants in the study. Nevertheless, from the results of this study, it is evident that developing belongingness and identity with the doctoral community was hindered by a lack of access to research opportunities.

In scoping these findings using Hodgins’s (2018) Psychological Construct of Belonging, it can be inferred that these findings posit within the ‘social’, ‘space’ and ‘self’ identity realms; they oscillate between the ‘mutuality of acceptance’ and ‘relationship quality and interaction’ spectrums; and are related to ‘consequences of belonging or not belonging’, ‘sense of belonging’, ‘practices to maintain belonging’, ‘factors influencing belonging’, and ‘identity formation processes to belong’ dimensional elements of belongingness (see Table 6.6).

Realms of Identity:	R1, R2, R3, RX1, RX2
Dimensions of Belongingness:	D3, D4, D5, D6, D7
Related Data Analysis Theme Codes:	DA12

Table 6.6. Lack of research opportunities using Hodgins (2018)

6.3.6 Managing role conflict

Some of the aspects of the belongingness and identity experience for the participants (such as those narrated by Jane, Corey, Peter) were permeated by issues associated with managing multiple roles and switching roles regularly. It would appear that priority was given to family and professional responsibilities rather than doctoral studies and relationships with staff members and peers; this may have impacted on doctoral students' belongingness in the doctoral community. To date, there is a rarity in the number of studies (such as Kobayashi et al., 2017; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Rhoads, 2017; Bawa, 2016) that have investigated managing multiple roles and role conflict during doctoral studies. Within the rarity of studies that have addressed the issue of role conflicts for doctoral students, they have tended to focus on internal academic role conflicts (such as being a doctoral student, scholar, researcher, and peer all at the same time) instead of doctoral students' academic lives that could be influenced by the external environments (such as professional and family life). Relating to transitioning between academic roles, role conflicts were not even stated by the study participants. Balancing student role with non-student roles (professional and family) was, on the other hand, the centre of focus. More prevalent in the category was the concept of "time theft" or forgoing an event in an aspect of the participant's life in order to make space for another event. For example, not socialising with friends in order to work on doctoral tasks during weekends. An increase in stress, a toll on the participant's relationships, and an impact on their belongingness within their academic community was created by the constant "balancing" of multiple life roles.

Is doctoral study a lesser significance? The notion that doctoral students (including those studying from a distance) take on roles that are non-academic that are equally significant, or arguably more significant, than their academic roles, aligns with the findings of relevant literature such as Anderson (2017), Berry (2017), Mazerolle et al. (2015), Williams et al. (2018) and Dang and Tran (2017). Family and/or professional obligations impacted

commitment to academic obligations and led to the doctoral study having a low priority for some of the participants. The narrative of some of the participants that a doctoral task is the least priority in their schedule is an indication that family and professional obligations often emerged as high priority. Most students narrated how they worked on their thesis upon completion of their household chores that took much of their academic time. There are indications that the doctoral programme schedule of the participants had to fit around everything else, including all aspects of their lives rather than other schedules fitting around their doctoral programme and schedule.

Obligations of Family and in the Professional Field: Some of the participants (such as Chloe, Jane, Bob, Nick, Jen, Stuart, Clark and Beth) had children, and all were married or in committed relationships. Discussing things that they had forgone in order to pursue their doctoral programmes, the participants cited not attending leisure or events with family members or spending less time with members of their family as the ultimate sacrifice they made. A feeling of neglect to their children and other family responsibilities was one of the key concerns for participants who were parents as it led to “emotional and psychological toll.” An interesting dichotomy was, however, presented by the participants: the participants (such as Jen, Stuart, Clark and Beth) narrated that members of their family served as a significant source of encouragement and motivation, although their social life had been limited by their doctoral commitments.

Whilst they studied for their doctoral degree, most of the participants were employed, with the majority of them committing to over 50 hours of weekly working time. Some of them held part-time employment positions. One of the reasons why participants chose to attend a distance learning doctoral programme was their professional positions. Whilst studying for their doctoral degree, some of the participants decided to change their professional roles as well as commitments because their fixed schedule at work did not align with some aspects of their distance doctoral programme. Peer support was offered

to some participants that experienced challenges trying to balance their work commitment with academic programme commitment.

In aligning these findings with the lens of Hodgins’s (2018) Psychological Construct of Belonging, it can be inferred that these findings posit within the ‘social’, ‘space’ and ‘self’ identity realms; they oscillate between the ‘mutuality of acceptance’ and ‘relationship quality and interaction’ spectrums; and are related to ‘consequences of belonging or not belonging’, ‘sense of belonging’, ‘practices to maintain belonging’, ‘factors influencing belonging’ and ‘identity formation processes to belong’ dimensional elements of belongingness (see Table 6.7).

Realms of Identity:	R1, R2, R3, RX1, RX2
Dimensions of Belongingness:	D3, D2, D4, D5, D6, D7
Related Data Analysis Theme Codes:	DA13, DA14

Table 6.7 Managing role balance using Hodgins (2018)

6.3.7 Financial constraints

Some of the participants (such as Peter) implied that starting their doctoral programme introduced a financial burden to their families. While university funding in the forms of scholarships and grants were mostly accessible to students that studied on a full-time basis only (corroborated on the programme official website), a “tuition-fee discount” that was received by a few of the study participants that were employed by a higher education institution or were citizens of certain nationalities was not enough. Some participants of this study narrated to be struggling with the payment of their academic expenses. To live an ideal quality of life with their professional salaries, the participants chose to engage in part-time or full-time employment as they began their doctoral programme from a distance. This aligns with literature such as Baker and Lattuca (2010), Foot et al. (2014), Wisker et al. (2010) and Glass et al. (2015). Alongside the other expenses that they incurred prior to starting their doctoral programme, the participants incurred additional tuition fees for each academic year. To attend conferences, many of the participants’ full-time peers with sponsorship and research opportunities received monthly allowances, full tuition refund, and funds purposed for their

professional development. The mentioned types of opportunities were, however, not available or limited in availability to distance doctoral students.

In scoping these findings with the lens of Hodgins’s (2018) Psychological Construct of Belonging, it can be inferred that these findings posit within the ‘social’, ‘space’ and ‘self’ identity realms; they oscillate between the ‘mutuality of acceptance’ and ‘relationship quality and interaction’ spectrums; and are related to ‘factors influencing belonging’, ‘antecedents to belonging’ and ‘practices to maintain belonging’ dimensional elements of belongingness (see Table 6.8).

Realms of Identity:	R1, R2, R3, RX1, RX2
Dimensions of Belongingness:	D1, D5, D6
Related Data Analysis Theme Codes:	DA15

Table 6.8 Financial burden using Hodgins (2018)

6.3.8 Distinct realities in the use of technology

Although availability and knowhow of technological tools were not explicitly mentioned, several narratives of the participants raised a dichotomy in the way that technology played a role in the interaction of distance doctoral students with their peers and staff members. One of the aspects of focus is how Clark, via online interaction (during a webinar) was able to form an opinion about his peers (on the full-time programme) being inexperienced. Although this aspect was not probed further with Clark during the interview so that he might give further details about his opinion, it would appear that the use of technology for interaction could have contributed to how Clark viewed some of the members of his doctoral community.

Another reality concerned Olivia, Mia and Beth who, based on their narratives, did not struggle to build a physical connection with peers during on-campus events but struggled to build or maintain one online. Although this was not probed further with Olivia, Mia and Beth so that they might narrate if their struggle was associated with the use or availability of technology by them and their peers, it would appear that they experienced the reality associated with the use of technology for interaction with peers uniquely and equally

challenging. Peter implied that the obligation for interacting with peers online was quite low, compared to meeting peers physically during conferences and events. He added that such behaviour would be deemed ‘too snobby’ if done in a face-to-face setting.

With regards to interacting with staff members online, some of the participants experienced a difference in the way that online interaction unfolded when compared to how it habitually happens in a face-to-face setting. Participants felt that online interactions with staff members were too formal, with less room for jokes and display of a sense of humour. Although this was not probed further with the participants so that they might narrate the circumstances surrounding their narrative, it would appear that their experience of using technology to interact with staff members was also unique.

In summary, these findings align with relevant literature (such as Devos et al., 2017; Sala-Bubaré & Castelló, 2017; Campbell, 2015; Williams et al., 2018). Beyond the alignment, there is the need to emphasise that distance doctoral students experienced distinct realities in using technology to interact with peers and staff members. In scoping these findings with the lens of Hodgins’s (2018) Psychological Construct of Belonging, it can be inferred that these findings posit within the ‘social’, ‘space’ and ‘self’ identity realms; they oscillate between the ‘mutuality of acceptance’ and ‘relationship quality and interaction’ spectrums; and are related to ‘identity formation processes to belong’, ‘factors influencing belonging’ and ‘practices to maintain belonging’ dimensional elements of belongingness (see Table 6.9).

Realms of Identity:	R1, R2, R3, RX1, RX2
Dimensions of Belongingness:	D3, D5, D6
Related Data Analysis Theme Codes:	DA3, DA6, DA8

Table 6.9 Distinct realities in the use of technology using Hodgins (2018)

6.3.9 Against all odds: Persisting from a distance

Although most of the participants were studying unique doctoral programmes at distinct higher education institutions, their interest to steer through challenges and persevere through their programme had aspects of

similarities. The participants' (such as Mike, Bob, Jess, Beth and Graham) expressions of their desires to study for their doctoral degree and objectives of completing their doctoral programmes were linked to progress as they depended on these beliefs at various stages of their doctoral journey, especially during difficult times. Even though there were similarities between the factors that motivated the participants, the unique circumstances and events of their lives were what shaped their motivations. This cascaded towards helping the participants gain resilience in building a sense of belongingness and identity within their doctoral community from a distance.

In summary, these findings align with relevant literature such as Greene (2015), Hopwood (2018), Hall (2018), Litalien, Guay and Morin (2015), and Johnson, Ward and Gardner (2017). In scoping these findings with the lens of Hodgins's (2018) Psychological Construct of Belonging, it can be inferred that these findings posit within the 'social', 'space' and 'self' identity realms; they oscillate between the 'mutuality of acceptance' and 'relationship quality and interaction' spectrums; and are related to 'identity formation processes to belong', 'sense of belonging', 'factors influencing belonging' and 'practices to maintain belonging' dimensional elements of belongingness (see Table 6.10).

Realms of Identity:	R1, R2, R3, RX1, RX2
Dimensions of Belongingness:	D3, D4, D5, D6
Related Data Analysis Theme Codes:	DA16

Table 6.10 Persisting from a distance using Hodgins (2018)

To this end, based on these findings, it would appear that interaction or the lack of it can impact a sense of belonging which manifests in three distinct yet intertwined realms of identity. Whilst the findings do not offer insights about the realms of identity with more dominance as they relate to a dimension of belonging, it does indicate that the associated realms of identity are tilted towards relationship quality or the mutuality of acceptance. The summary of these findings aligns with Hodgins (2018) and relevant literature such as White and Nonnamaker (2008) and Yuval-Davis (2006) that situate the manifestation of belongingness within realms of identity (see Table 6.11). Also, summarising the dimensions of belonging within the realms of identity

(in Table 6.11) helps in provide insights about how the dimensions of belonging posit within the realms of identity as well as offer a contribution that adds to Hodgins's (2018) PCB. This addition to the framework is further discussed alongside other contributions of this study in Chapter 7 of this thesis (more particularly, see section 7.2).

Findings	Dimensions of Belonging							Realms of Identity				
	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	R1	R2	R3	RX1	RX2
Distance doctoral community and oneness (DA1, DA2)	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Sense of belonging and scholarly community of practice (DA1, DA2)	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Building relationships with peers (DA3, DA4, DA5, DA6, DA7)	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Building relationships with staff members (DA8, DA9, DA10, DA11)	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lack of research opportunities (DA12)	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Managing role conflict (DA13, DA14)		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Financial constraints (DA15)	X				X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Distinct realities in the use of technology (DA3, DA6, DA8)			X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Against all odds: Persisting from a distance (DA16)			X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X

Table 6.11 An overview of the findings using Hodgins (2018)

6.4 Answering the research questions

In presenting and analysing the data, it was imperative to ensure that the research questions that drove this study were answered. The study was driven by six research questions. However, having explored the relational nature of belongingness and identity, the focus of the questions relate to a merged conception that demonstrates that belongingness is experienced within realms of identity as seen in the application of Hodgins's (2018) Psychological Construct of Belonging model. Following, a brief summary is provided about how each research question was answered.

How distance doctoral students interact towards building their belongingness and identity within their doctoral community: Holistically, it would appear that distance doctoral students generally used techniques associated with the relationship with peers and staff members, support from peers and staff members, time management, participation in scholarship practices and motivation to continue studying for their doctoral degree as avenues for building their belongingness and identity within their distance doctoral community. However, the data analysis indicates that these realities are unique for some students, either by serving as an enabler or a barrier to building their sense of belongingness and identity.

More specifically, distance doctoral students generally leveraged events that took place in various academic spaces (both formal and informal) to develop their relationship with staff members and peers. For some students, face-to-face conferences, workshops and campus residential events were the best opportunities whilst some students were not able to use these opportunities to interact in a manner that helped them build a relationship with peers. The data also indicated that whilst scholarly discussions may not have been prevalent in informal spaces like online forums, WhatsApp messenger group chats, Facebook and Twitter chat, it served as an avenue for some students who had aspects of commonalities like career, children and hobbies to talk about them and also manage their anxieties about interacting with peers. However, this experience was different for doctoral students who changed cohort when

they fell behind in their programme progression. The data indicated that this category of students struggled to sustain a relationship with their peers, both in their current cohort and the cohort ahead.

For staff members' interactions, it would appear that most students did not leverage informal learning spaces as much as they used the formal spaces and periodic interactions that served as a checkpoint/progress report of their doctoral research project with their supervisor. Students generally classed their staff members (especially supervisors) as their mentors; and for some students, this introduced anxieties about approaching staff members and asking for support more frequently. The data indicated that as students progressed through stages of their programmes and participated in scholarship activities more often, they were able to manage this anxiety and interacted better than they previously did with their supervisors.

The data also indicated that some doctoral students tended to establish a relationship with peers very early on in their programme before the formation of 'cliques' began, whilst for some students, establishing a quality relationship with peers was only possible as the programme progressed. Students also built their belongingness and identity by establishing a relationship with peers who were in advanced stages of the programme. The performances of peers in advanced stages of the programme conceptually served as a benchmark for students that were in the early stages of the programme. This helped to manage their expectations and increased the commitment level of some students as they began to comprehend the effort and quality of work expected at a doctoral level of study.

Also, because supervisors were assigned to the students by their departments/institutions using criteria that the departments deemed as fit to the students' research interest and direction, most students indicated that they had to go through a period of transition, which included learning about the works and interests of their supervisors, their routines and their preferred ways of working and implicitly reaching a compromise towards a consensus. For some students, this period of transition served as an enabler to build

relationships with staff members and enhance their sense of belongingness and identity within their doctoral community whilst some students struggled during this period of transition.

From a geographical standpoint, the data analysis showed the enablers and barriers posed by proximity in building a sense of belongingness and identity within a distance doctoral community. In answering this research question, the emphasis will be mainly on the enablers. For interactions with peers, students whose routines seemed to fit into the time, frequency and occurrence of the programme and events in academic spaces were able to leverage this advantage to build their belongingness and identity as they participated more frequently in community activities. Some students had to settle for using weekends, part-time career commitments, study breaks and lunch breaks to catch up with missed events, interactions and engage in doctoral tasks. However, for interaction with staff members (especially research supervisors), the data indicated that most students had limited levels of flexibility in interaction that spanned beyond geographical limitations towards the unavailability of staff members because of their intensive academic commitments in their department. The data indicated that staff members held numerous roles which allowed insufficient flexibility and modes of interaction with students. However, the data showed that staff members and students were open to using various forms of interaction to manage their proximity challenges in unique ways. This involved video conferencing, sharing calendars, instant messaging, emails and forums.

From a professional standpoint, doctoral students held various career positions either on a part-time or full-time basis. The data showed that students that shared a similar career found avenues of further interaction with peers as opposed to students that were retired or self-employed who generally could not leverage this advantage. Also, the data showed that their career and levels of career commitments did span into varying levels of experience and commitments within their doctoral community. This implied that some students did not engage with their community as well as produce works with quality deemed at a doctoral level of study. This position appeared

to be fluid and, in most cases, evolved as students engaged with peers in advanced stages of the programme, progressed through their programme and expanded their knowledge about the phenomena under study via scholarly practices.

Although seldom accessible to distance doctoral students, the data implied that students saw departmental/institutional research opportunities as another avenue to engage in scholarly practices towards building their belongingness and identity within their distance doctoral community. Doctoral students narrated that access to research opportunities would help 'put them back on the academic map' as well as increase the frequency of interaction with staff members and scholarly practices. Also, in a unique instance with one of the research participants, Chloe, the data showed that a staff member in her department perceived doctoral students that were able to find a balance between holding an academic position at a higher education institution and study for their doctoral degree as researchers 'with an uppercase R – Researcher'. At that point in time, because Chloe did not hold any academic position alongside her doctoral degree, she was a researcher with a 'lowercase r – researcher'. This implies the presence of invisible divides that may be present in some doctoral communities which students may only negotiate using access to research opportunities.

In using the support of family and friends and the motivation to study for a doctoral degree to build their sense of belongingness and identity, the data indicated that participants relied on supporting family members and friends who may not fully comprehend the ramifications of studying for a doctoral degree but still offered sufficient support and encouragement to help them progress through the programme. The data showed that participants often referred to their motivation for studying for a doctoral degree as a driving force as well as imagine themselves (in career and non-career contexts) with a completed doctoral degree. The data implied that the use of post-doctoral degree imaginations were common among participants that struggled with feelings of declining relevance and tiredness as they were about to finish their doctoral programme (colloquially known as 'senioritis').

Factors that online doctoral community distance doctoral students considered as enabling in the building of their belongingness and identity within their doctoral community:

In summary, distance doctoral students implied that factors such as support from peers, support from staff members beyond their research supervisors, frequent interaction between peers and staff members, a sense of care from a doctoral supervisor, the time spent, sense of personal commitment and accountability to the supervisor, the flexibility of the programme, understanding of the requirements for a doctoral level of study, clear and well-defined expectations, standards and behaviours, access to research opportunities within their department to be enabling in building their belongingness and identity within their distance doctoral community were all important.

From a practice standpoint, distance doctoral students also consider factors such as written and published texts to contend or approve practices and beliefs, reflecting on their discursal-self, authorial-self and autobiographical self, audience and content of their publications, how publishing represents a symbol of authority, authorship and authenticity to be enabling in building their belongingness and identity within their distance doctoral community.

Whilst the participants experienced these enabling factors uniquely, these factors are highlighted across the data analysis chapter of this thesis (see Chapter 5).

Factors that online doctoral distance doctoral students considered as constraining in the building of their belongingness and identity within their doctoral community:

Contrary to the enablers, distance doctoral students considered factors such as programme inflexibility, staff members (especially research supervisors) unavailability, the mismatch between the project of the student and the research interest or expertise of the supervisor, lack of research opportunities within the department, infrequent interaction with peers and staff members due to the structure of the programme, lack of financial support, lack of scholarly practices and contributions as very constraining in trying to build their belongingness and identity within their

distance doctoral community. Participants also considered factors such as the commitment and level of experience of their peers, falling behind and joining another cohort of students as equally hindering in trying to build their belongingness and identity within their distance doctoral community. Whilst factors such as managing role conflicts, time and feeling anxious about approaching staff members can be debatable, as being either external and not within the control of the programme or institution, the narratives of participants implied that the structure of the doctoral programme could either exacerbate or help manage these factors.

6.5 Chapter summary

This chapter began with an introduction that set out the outline for the chapter and presented the link between the data, conceptual model, and relevant literature. It presented the findings in a thematic manner, predominantly informed by the data, but linked the data to the conceptual model to reinforce the narrative thread as well as the chain of evidence. The chapter also presented how the research questions have been answered both from the perspective of the data and literature reviewed.

In the next chapter (Chapter 7), this thesis presents the conclusion, contributions of this study, recommendations, limitations of the study, future studies that can build on the results of this study and a reflective account of engaging in this study.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the concluding aspects of this study. It starts with an introduction, offers concluding remarks arising from this study, followed by key recommendations based on the review of relevant literature, data analysis and findings of the study. Limitations of this study are offered in terms of time, scope and sample. The chapter considers future studies that can build upon the contributions of this study, ranging from those that combine the notion of belongingness and identity to those that consider them in isolation. Finally, the chapter ends with a reflection of the researcher about engaging in the study as a whole.

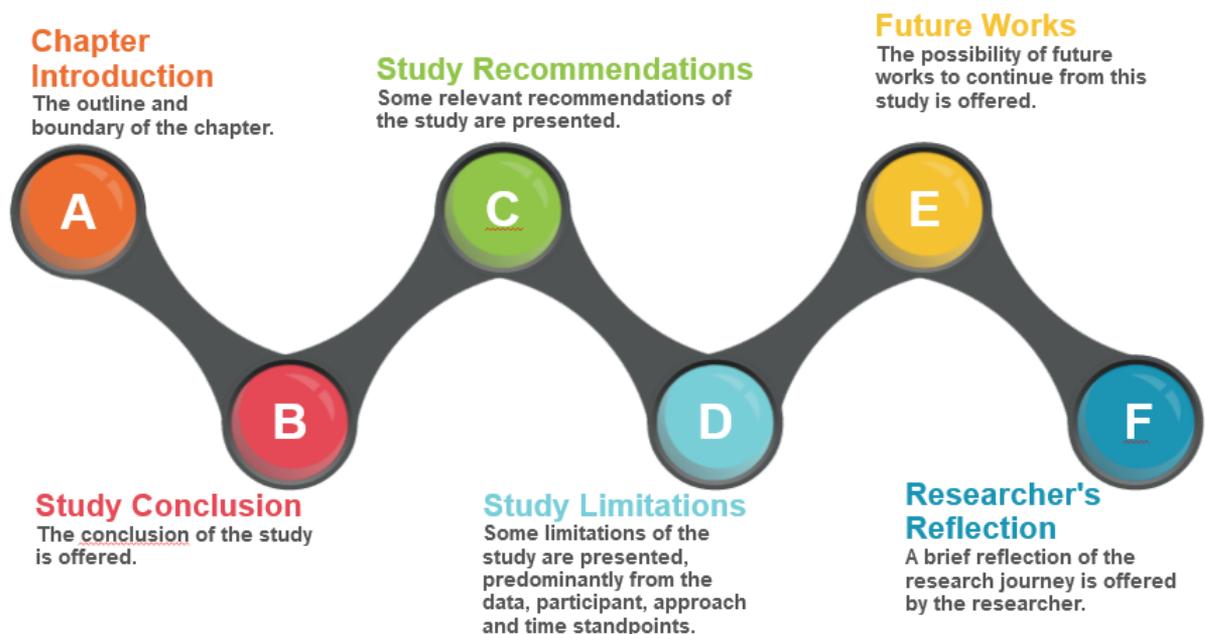


Figure 7.1. The roadmap of the Conclusion and Recommendations chapter

7.2 Concluding remarks

This thesis addressed fundamental questions related to how distance doctoral students interact towards building their belongingness and identity within their doctoral community. Beyond answering the research questions, this thesis led to a number of outcomes that are briefly re-stated here:

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- Contributing to the existing literature on distance doctoral students' belongingness and identity.
 - The identification of enablers and hindrances in building a sense of belonging and identity from distance interaction.
 - Using a narrative inquiry approach and Hodgins's (2018) Psychological Construct of Belonging model to study distance doctoral students' belongingness and identity.
 - The suggestion of enhancements to the conceptual model that was used for this study.

To begin with, as a contribution to the literature about factors and features that can influence the belongingness and identity of distance doctoral students, this study has reinforced and expanded understanding by re-contextualising the influencers in context and through the narratives of the study participants.

Influencers	Existence (New or Existing)	Contribution (Expansion or Reinforcement)	Supporting literature
Multiple roles of doctoral students	Existing	Reinforced using a unique context and conceptual model	Baker & Pifer, 2011; Golde, 2005; Portnoi et al., 2015; Zahl, 2013
Independent and self-sufficient research abilities	Existing	Reinforced using a unique context and conceptual model	Baker & Pifer, 2011; Overall et al., 2011; Roulston et al., 2013; Bieschke et al., 1996
Managing senioritis (a feeling of a lack of interest towards the end of a goal)	New	Expansion (with regards to the novelty of context studied – distance doctoral students in the UK)	Blanchard, 2012; Puente, 2012; Hoover, 2003; Manning, 2013. Also, see section 5.10
Research opportunities availability for distance doctoral students that is equal to their full-time peers	New	Expansion (with regards to the novelty of context studied – distance doctoral students in the UK)	Nettles & Millett, 2006; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000. Also, see sections 5.2.6 and 6.3.5
Frequent collaboration on scholarly projects with staff members from a distance that is equal to their full-time peers	New	Expansion (with regards to the novelty of context studied – distance doctoral students in the UK)	Zahl, 2015; Cejda & Hoover, 2010. Also, see sections 5.2.6 and 6.3.5
Staff members' categorisation of doctoral students (lowercase r and uppercase R researchers)	New	Expansion (with regards to the novelty of context studied – distance doctoral students in the UK)	Zahl, 2015; Zahl, 2013. Also, see sections 5.2.6 and 6.3.5
Anxiety about approaching or interacting with staff members	Existing	Expansion (with regards to the novelty of context studied – distance doctoral students in the UK)	Johnson et al., 2017; Pifer and Baker, 2016; Portnoi et al., 2015. Also, see sections 5.2.5.3 and 6.3.4
Students falling behind and changing cohort of students	New	Expansion (with regards to the novelty of context studied – distance doctoral students in the UK)	Devos et al., 2017; Sala-Bubaré and Castelló, 2017; Campbell, 2015; Williams et al., 2018. Also, see sections 5.2.3.3 and 6.3.3

Influencers	Existence (New or Existing)	Contribution (Expansion or Reinforcement)	Supporting literature
Coping with time balance (Weekend champions)	Existing	Expansion (with regards to the novelty of context studied – distance doctoral students)	Baker & Pifer, 2011; Golde, 2005; Portnoi et al., 2015; Zahl, 2013
How the learners view themselves and how the community views them	Existing	Expansion (with regards to the novelty of context studied – distance doctoral students)	Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Dang & Tran, 2017; Foot et al., 2014; Hall, 2018
The persistence and the experience of the doctoral student	Existing	Reinforced using a unique context and conceptual model	Greene, 2015; Hopwood, 2018; Hall, 2018; Litalienet al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2017
Frequent interaction between peers and staff members	Existing	Expansion (with regards to the novelty of context studied – distance doctoral students)	Pifer & Baker, 2016; Williams et al., 2018; Anderson, 2017; Portnoi et al., 2015; Greene, 2015
Financial responsibilities of distance doctoral students	Existing	Expansion (with regards to the novelty of context studied – distance doctoral students)	Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Foot et al., 2014; Wisker et al., 2010; Glass et al., 2015. Also, see sections 5.2.9 and 6.3.7
Support received from family and friends	Existing	Reinforced using a unique context and conceptual model	Kobayashi et al., 2017; Gopaul, 2015; Rhoads, 2017; Bawa, 2016
Understanding the ramifications of a doctoral study	Existing	Reinforced using a unique context and conceptual model	Greene, 2015; Hopwood, 2018; Hall, 2018; Litalienet al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2017
Using written and published texts to contend or approve practices and beliefs	Existing	Reinforced using a unique context and conceptual model	Pifer & Baker, 2016; Hopwood, 2018

Table 7.1 The influencers impacted by this study

The influencers presented in Table 7.1 have all been enhanced via this study. This reinforcement and expansion of the literature on possible influencers can aid future studies to build on it further and potentially help to address aspects related to the extent to which they can be impactful.

Similarly, within the literature about possible enablers and hindrances in building a sense of belonging and identity of distance doctoral students, some of the influencers have been uniquely expanded by this study through the combination of context, approach and the conceptual framework. More specifically, enablers such as support from staff members beyond their research supervisors, sense of personal commitment and accountability to the supervisor, the student understanding of the requirements for a doctoral level of study, access to research opportunities within their department, staff members treating distance learners and full-time students equally with regards to opportunities and commitment have been expanded (with regards to the novelty of context – distance doctoral students in the UK) by using the experiences of the participants to co-construct the influencers in a unique manner. Furthermore, the influencers associated with possible constraints have been uniquely expanded by this study (with regards to the novelty of context – distance doctoral students in the UK) through the combination of context, approach and use of the conceptual framework. More specifically, influencers such as the mismatch between the project of the student and the research interest or expertise of the supervisor, lack of research opportunities within the department, the commitment and level of experience of their peers, falling behind and joining another cohort of students have been expanded by using the experiences of the participants to co-construct the influencers in a novel context using distance doctoral students in the UK. Also, influencers such as feeling anxious about approaching staff members have been arguably expanded by this study because the narratives of the participants imply that whilst it may be deemed as external and not within the control of the programme or institution, the structure of the doctoral programme could either exacerbate or help manage these factors.

From a methodological standpoint, several qualitative and quantitative approaches (such as participant observation, surveys, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, experiments, secondary data analysis/archival study and a mixture of one or more methods) have been used by past studies (Acker & Haque, 2015; Anderson, 2017; Antony, 2002; Zahl, 2013; Austin, 2009; Bagaka's et al., 2015; Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Baker & Pifer, 2011; Berry, 2017; Blockett et al., 2016; Castelló et al., 2017) to investigate the socialisation, belongingness and identity of doctoral students. These studies have uniquely contributed to the literature of doctoral students' belongingness and identity. Although my study used semi-structured interviews, its uniqueness adds to the existing literature via the combination of context (25 distance doctoral students across six higher education institutions), approach (narrative inquiry) and conceptual framework (Hodgins's (2018) Psychological Construct of Belonging).

From a conceptual standpoint, Hodgins's (2018) Psychological Construct of Belonging offers a particularly relevant lens in understanding the intertwined realms of identity and the dimensions of belonging that are posited within them. Progressively, in attempting to enhance the conceptual model used in this study, some of the dimensions of belonging are critically highlighted. To begin with, a conceptual gap exists between the dimensions of 'antecedent to belonging' and 'need to belong.' The state of the current conceptual model assumes that all distance doctoral students habitually possess the antecedents to belonging; thus, it does not address how the absence of an 'antecedents to belonging' can be managed at a dimensional level. Similarly, the state of the current conceptual model implies that the dimension of 'the factors influencing belonging' would sufficiently inform the dimension of 'practices to maintain belonging' and assumes that distance doctoral students do not experience these factors and practices uniquely; thus, it does not address how it can be managed at a dimensional level.

Based on the context of my study and the improvements to the conceptual model offered in the previous paragraph, Hodgins's (2018) Psychological Construct of Belonging conceptual model can be re-illustrated with two

additional dimensions introduced as a way to add important detail (see Figure 7.2).

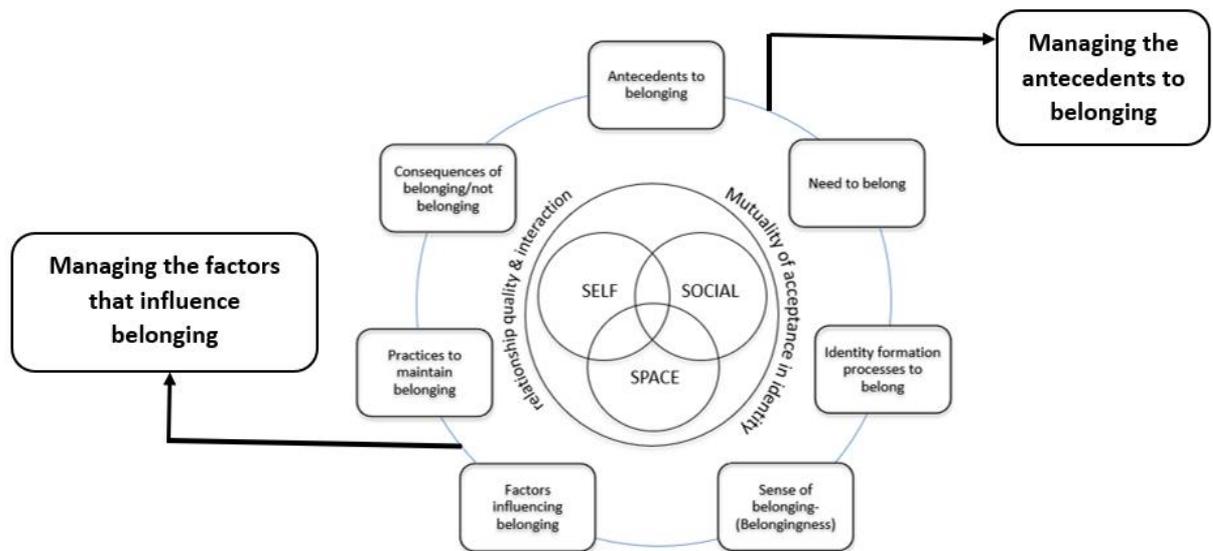


Figure 7.2 A re-illustration of Hodgins’s PCB with suggested improvements

The significance of the suggested elements added to Hodgins’s (2018) psychological construct of belonging is that it further strengthens the model to address issues related to how the absence of ‘antecedents to belonging’ can be managed at a dimensional level before proceeding to the need to be part of a group. This is relevant because the need to belong may lack clarity without understanding what antecedents are required in a particular desire to be part of a group. Similarly, a clear understanding of the factors that can influence belonging may help build a set of practices that can sustain belonging in a group. Along this line, these elements could offer a significant improvement to Hodgins’s (2018) psychological construct of belonging to address more practical contexts in a robust manner.

From a study findings standpoint, it is important to acknowledge that most of the findings of this study can be easily applied to “traditional” face-to-face doctoral programmes. However, the extent to which the findings of this study are specific to online doctoral programmes are:

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- The aspect of little or non-availability of research opportunities for this population of students highlighted in various sections of this study may be arguably more prevalent in circumstances where the degree is studied online; thus, the quantification and classification of online commitment becomes troublesome and could be perceived as stigmatisation.
 - The feature of doctoral students falling behind and changing cohort discussed in various sections of this study may be arguably more prevalent in circumstances where the degree is studied online; thus, changing cohorts exacerbates the challenge of building and re-building relationships that are habitually difficult to build in online doctoral programmes.
 - The findings associated with little or non-availability of funding for this population of students highlighted in various sections of this study may be arguably more prevalent in circumstances where the degree is studied online; thus, the 'becoming ineligible for the funding' criterion can arise because of the difficulty in classifying their study commitment, geographical location, and nationality, among other funding decision criteria.

7.3 Study recommendations

Holistically, without attempting to generalise, but based on the results of this study that highlight the range of challenges that online doctoral students face, higher education institutions should be encouraged to review some aspects of their doctoral academic programmes and reinforce their commitments to support this category of students, as the findings detail the unique experiences of doctoral students across six universities. Based on the findings of this study, it can be inferred that the development of a sense of belonging and identity for distance doctoral students is influenced by a variety of issues. Programme administrators, supervisors and heads of departments in academic departments can support the distinctive requirements of the

population under study as well as encourage interactions and develop a sense of belonging with peers and staff members in numerous ways.

Important ways are:

Include interactions that are purposeful and supportive with faculty:

Having successfully completed their bachelor's and master's degrees, doctoral students are often seen to be experienced individuals that are familiar with academic processes and systems. Consequently, in connecting with peers and staff members, an anecdotal assumption exists that distance doctoral students may need little or no support (White & Nonnamaker, 2008). It must be said that being successful in navigating the academic processes and systems of a structured undergraduate and master's programme does not suffice as criteria that a student can survive independently studying for a terminal degree from a distance. This is because there are environments that are highly structured in most undergraduate programmes, whereas students are required to be self-sufficient, a self-starter, self-motivated and be able to make progress independently in graduate programmes (Gardner, 2008). Students may navigate the challenge independently and be unable to build and sustain a sense of belonging with staff members without proper support. The challenges associated with the availability and building relationships with staff members were narrated by a majority of the participants in this study. Distance doctoral programmes should utilise meaningful and essential meetings and activities with staff members in order to build a sense of belonging and identity because of the nature of the distance learning student experience and their quest to manage role conflict.

Provide impartial research opportunities for distance learning students:

Building distance doctoral students' sense of belonging may require research collaborations as a vital tool (Anderson, 2017). However, conducting research with staff members was shown to be aided by very limited opportunities. Based on the narratives of the study participants, there is an indication of a feeling that staff members had a preference for collaborating on research projects with students that studied on a full-time basis rather than with

distance doctoral students. This recommendation has an implication for distance doctorate programmes because of its potential to help the students build their sense of belonging and identity. Regardless of the fact that the perception may be just a perception or a reality, it was described as a hindrance of the development of a sense of belonging and identity because of discouragements and frustration. Both distance doctoral and full-time doctoral students should have equal access to participating in research projects with staff members in their academic department. The addition of some research projects to courses that are topical, or to seminars, may be one of the ways of achieving this.

Re-organise the setup of the programme to accommodate distance

doctoral students: The sense of belonging of participants was consistently pointed to procedural and structural impediments. This is very common with doctoral programmes with structural elements and modules where the student is required to complete certain modules before progressing to independent research. The schedule and structure of the modules should be focused to achieve more accommodation. This improvement could be in the aspects of precedence of activities, duration of tasks, the learning outcomes associated with the modules and using various methods of assessing, tracking and measuring learning that does not put pressure on the learners. The majority of the study participants were engaged in either a full-time or part-time employment; this conflicted with programme schedules that were not outside their professional hours of work. Their geographical differences further exacerbated this issue. Also, a “cohort” model for distance doctoral students is one of the avenues that can be used to build peer relationships. However, if students fall behind, for numerous reasons including the structure and schedule of the programmes, they are often moved to a new cohort of students which can imply that they need to start building new relationships and gaining the trust and support of their peers. For some students, constantly struggling and falling behind means constantly facing the challenge of change and new relationships.

Offer a variety of financial support to distance doctoral students: A significant financial burden was cited by most of the study participants, including those who worked full-time even as they studied for their doctoral degree from a distance. An assumption that distance doctoral students may be financially secure may have led to most financial supports being restricted in many academic programmes. This assumption is, however, refuted by the findings of this study, which asserts that financial support may be required by distance doctoral students in a proportion that may be greater or similar to full-time doctoral students. To offer additional support, alleviating the financial stress that can be caused by doctoral study, and encouraging perseverance in the programme, specific financial awards for distance doctoral students should be created in academic programmes where possible, without constraining criteria that do not attempt to marginalise a huge population of this category of students.

Re-emphasise the significance of peer interaction: Portraying them as an invaluable resource and an essential support structure, the importance of peers was narrated by distance doctoral students in the study. Developing a sense of belonging within the doctoral community was encouraged by positive peer relationships that also contributed to how the students viewed themselves and how they believed that their peers viewed them. The ability to be part of a community (ability to identify with a community) was deemed significant and generated feelings of a supportive space regardless of the unique struggles that some students faced in their programme. There was also a sense of tension felt by the participants in the study. This was because as much as the doctoral community contributed greatly to the overall experience of the participants, there were negative effects because the knowledge of an existence of a community that a student was not a part of resulted in the feeling of isolation or being ostracised. Re-emphasising the significance of peer interaction, especially with distance doctoral students, is vital in alleviating some of these tensions. The establishment of peer support/mentoring programmes should be considered by institutions as one of the ways of building and sustaining a sense of belonging for distance doctoral

students. Encouraging distance doctoral students to frequently partake in graduate student social groups from a distance is equally important.

Adapt programme structure to support the family and professional emergencies of distance doctoral students: Alongside professional and familial responsibilities, there is also evidence of several challenges related to managing role conflict in this study. Considering that the precedence of other life priorities may be prioritised before doctoral studies, it is vital that distance doctoral students gain some form of support in the structure of the programme that accounts for such uncontrollable life events. Interfering with the requirements of the programme, family members being ill, medical emergencies and professional emergencies were narrated by some of the participants of this study. Programme heads should be flexible and understand the circumstances that are considered emergencies. Furthermore, embracing family members such as spouses, civil partners and children into the academic community is equally significant in helping doctoral students feel settled, and supporting familial perceptions focused on the programme are important. Finally, distance doctoral students should be frequently encouraged and allowed to take a temporary academic break when they feel overburdened during intense times.

7.4 Study limitations

All studies have aspects of uncertainties that can be construed as its limitations. This study is no exception; hence, the following limitations are offered:

The duration of the study: Whilst the timeline of this study made it possible for a lengthy one-on-one interview with each participant, only a snapshot of their lived experiences within the phenomena under study may have been captured. Although the interviews provided perceptions about their context and experiences as each participant saw it at that specific point in time, the disadvantage of this was the inability of the researcher to continuously revisit the study's participants while they continued their distance doctoral journey. In turn, this would have helped with the assessment of the influence of the social

forces that may have impacted their first interview, perhaps permitting the determination of modifications and avail an opportunity for further research to establish the efficacy or otherwise of institutional initiatives to enable the belongingness and identity experience of distance doctoral students within the community.

The scope of the sample: The sample was only just sufficient for this research. Nonetheless, restricting the study to a few universities affected the sample in two ways. The universities' provision of distance doctoral programmes is not a complete representation of the sector, where there may be larger numbers of distance doctoral students than the average university offering similar programmes. Some of the participants were working in their field of study, but this does not yield a full mix with regards to how that makes their experiences different from distance doctoral students that are not working in their field of study. Although it was not possible, it would have been helpful to look to extend the research to several other universities beyond those involved.

The method of study: This research was conducted with participants that were enrolled in distance doctoral degree programmes in the UK. Those who participated did not come from programmes particularly tailored for delivery through or within virtual learning only. Some of the programmes were designed to have partial or periodic contact with the university staff and yet were still classified as distance learning programmes. This introduced a blurry classification of what distance learning is. Whilst this research offered some understanding of the phenomena under study, it raised further unanswered questions that could either not be sufficiently addressed or not addressed at all, due to the limited scope of this study. Such concerns identify opportunity for future research to branch out from this study.

7.5 The possibilities of extending this study into further studies

Providing a greater understanding of how distance doctoral students interact towards building their belongingness and identity was the main aim of conducting the research. Within the rare set of literature about the

belongingness and identity experience of distance doctoral students, a focus on the population is notably absent. The results of this study offer a foundational understanding of the ways in which distance doctoral students interact towards building their belongingness and identity within their doctoral community and how their persistence is supported by the community. More study is necessary to develop a further understanding of other aspects of distance doctoral students, such as:

Multiple institution study: It would be useful to attempt exploring this phenomenon from the perspective of a comparison study across multiple institutions. This can look to understand how the programme and community setup of various institutions can enable or hinder distance doctoral students in interacting towards building their belongingness and identity. The implications of such a study would seek to understand aspects associated with the peculiarity of some specific programmes and institutions.

Comparison study of persistent students versus students who are not persistent: Doctoral students' dropout that results from the absence of a sense of belonging within their doctoral community could be a significant focus. By focusing on the development of connections by the students and how their persistence through programme tasks can help build a sense of belonging may yield a wealth of understanding. However, to date, there is no comparison of any large-scale studies on distance doctoral students in the UK who are persistent in their programme and those who are not persistent in the same institution.

Comparison study of distance learning versus full-time doctoral students: Perceived differences between the experiences of distance doctoral students and those of their full-time peers are described in some parts of the current study. This study is, however, not a comparison study; thus, no specific conclusions can be drawn from the differences. A comparison of the experiences of distance doctoral students and full-time doctoral students through a large-scale study would allow such a comparison to be made. A focus on ways of creating more opportunities that distance

doctoral students can collaborate with staff members is, therefore, recommended and would build on the findings of this study.

Study of the role technology plays within a distance doctoral

community: Evidence of struggling distance doctoral students in the UK in developing connections and community with their peers and staff members using technology is brought forth by this study. Although it is not conclusive as to whether the technology is the problem (availability) or if the problem is technology (applicability), it would be significant to make a start in exploring the role technology plays in helping to build a sense of belonging and identity within their distance doctoral communities.

7.6 Study reflection (looking backwards and moving forward)

“It has been five years, and I begin to forget the things that I should remember, and I cannot stop remembering the things that I should forget.” However, as I look back and move forward, it is worth sharing some relevant aspects of this journey because these encounters are the underpinnings of my transition during this doctoral programme. Perhaps a good place to start would be to re-explain my motivation for studying this doctoral programme.

My motivation for this study stems from a number of sources associated with distance doctoral education. Firstly, before starting my doctoral degree, I had only just finished a postgraduate programme which was predominantly studied from a distance. Whilst it was a fairly long two-year programme, as a distance student I had always wondered what a sense of belonging felt like and the context of belonging. Subsequently, as I got closer to the end of the programme, my curiosity grew towards how I viewed myself and how my colleagues in the programme viewed me. This curiosity lingered into my doctoral programme, which was officially structured to last for at least four years. Secondly, I had questioned if some of the issues discussed in the literature that I was initially exposed to might be better understood and linked to how distance doctoral students build their belongingness and identity within their distance doctoral community. These issues included but were not limited to universities’ endeavours to establish research cultures that are deemed

high in quality, the development of multiple skills by doctoral students from a distance and the rate at which students fail to complete their doctoral studies.

As I progressed through to the stage of producing a research proposal, narrowing my research interest to the extent that it could be practical and feasible was very challenging. After numerous conversations with the tutor that facilitated the research proposal development module, I began to visualise how things connected, and I appreciated more fully the research direction that I had proposed to study. This led to the development of clear research aims, objectives, questions, methodological approach, sample and timeline. When this doctoral journey began, in total honesty, I was unrealistic and naïve during the early stages with the mindset that I could breeze through the stages in four years and finish the programme. I was not cognisant of the ramifications of studying at a doctoral level, and as I encountered various hurdles, it took me some time to understand what it was, why I was encountering it and how to manage the situation. Hurdles emerged, such as: managing role conflicts, time, switching roles regularly, learning about research methodologies and technologies, maintaining focus and creating time to write.

Working on a full-time basis and studying for this doctoral programme: attempting to balance challenging career demands and the requirements of this doctoral programme, especially during the first two years was daunting and resulted in having longer days and shorter nights regardless of the season. I often looked through my window and imagined myself running or walking just to derive solace in the idea that I am achieving a work-life balance by doing the things I used to enjoy doing when I had not started this doctoral programme. However, I later realised that I had to find a way to fit in some social activities around my career and doctoral studies, so I got better at managing my workload and time which helped in improving my work-life balance. This I did by using various project management techniques like scheduling, time management and tracking (see Appendices P, Q and R).

Learning new methodologies: coming from a technology background, I had very limited experience of quantitative and qualitative methodologies and how they could be applied in research. Initially, I did struggle with the layers of complexities associated with this school of thought. But as I learnt more about methodologies, I began to narrow down on a few of them that I considered useful in applying to my proposed research. Consequently, I became intrigued by the richness of semi-structured interviews and the approach of narrative inquiry. This led to its adoption and application in this study.

Learning new technologies: I initially struggled with the use and application of technological tools that can aid in capturing and analysing research data. However, during part one of this programme, this struggle was controlled by engaging in five small-scale modules of research, and training during the residential events exposed me to the use of technological tools that could aid in capturing and analysing research data.

Moving forward: regardless of the challenges and hurdles encountered, I persevered through it, and I am confident that I probably would not have been able to do it alone without the support of my tutors, work colleagues, family and friends who supported and encouraged me in numerous ways and various stages of the programme and challenges. As for my supervisor, Professor Don Passey, he was unquestionably remarkable and went the extra mile in supporting, guiding, and encouraging me during this journey. The significance of having an experienced and efficient supervisor became evident to me because it helped me maintain the thought momentum required to keep producing a doctoral quality of work in a timely manner. The feedback that I received from him helped me piece together various works that I had produced and considered waste, and ultimately gave me the frequent reassurance that I can do this programme.

Have I achieved what was set out in this doctoral study? Because I “stood on the shoulders of numerous giants”, the findings of this study offer some new insights into how distance doctoral students interact towards building their belongingness and identity. It also expands towards illuminating the

influencers that may enable or constrain distance doctoral student development of a sense of belonging and identity. More importantly, six recommendations were offered that can be adopted by institutions in helping to support distance doctoral students in their doctoral journey. Future studies that can build on this study were also looked at with a view of continuity beyond doctoral study.

So, as I look back and move forward, slowly, I realise that in many ways, studying for a doctoral degree can be a selfish endeavour and it would be very easy to lose the vision of why I embarked on this journey. I am focused on not letting this manifest and remain steadfast towards continuously contributing to education practices in a scholarly manner because this doctoral journey has taught me that learning is a process to be continued rather than to be completed.

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Appendix A: Permission to Use Figure

Dear Dr. Jeffery,

Subject: Permission To Use Copyright Materials In My Doctoral Thesis

My name is Anietie Ukpabio and I am a PhD candidate for the degree of PhD in E-Research and Technology Enhanced learning at Lancaster University, UK. I am currently working on my doctoral thesis entitled: Together But Alone: Belongingness And Troublesome Socio-Academic Identities of Distant Doctoral Students.

I came across your works in your thesis with a great interest as it matches my research theoretical direction as well as it demystified the notion of belongingness and identity which I have been struggling to grasp for some time. More specifically your theoretical model for the Psychological Construct of Belonging used in your doctoral thesis which was submitted to Southern Cross University in 2018. I believe that using your model can help me scope my research literature, questions and methodology in a manner that would yield an understanding about the phenomena under study.

I wish to seek from you a limited, non-exclusive license, for an indefinite period to include these materials for which you hold the copyright, in the electronic copy of my thesis to be made available on the database and Lancaster University's repository, the National Library and Archives, and to be stored on the thesis database.

In return for your anticipated generosity, I guarantee the following:

- The material to be quoted/produced was published without credit to another source. If another source is acknowledged, I will apply directly to that source for permission clearance.
- The requested permission is for non-exclusive, English language rights, and covers use in your thesis only. Any further use (including storage, transmission or reproduction by electronic means) shall be the subject of a separate application for permission.
- Full acknowledgement would be given to the original source, with full details of figure/page numbers, title, author(s), publisher and year of publication.
- Your works will be fully and correctly referenced.

I am happy to provide more details about myself and my study, if required.

Yours Sincerely,

Anietie Ukpabio
Doctoral Candidate of
PhD in E-Research and Technology Enhanced Learning
Lancaster University
Department of Educational Research
County South, Lancaster, LA1 4YD, UK

 a.ukpabio@lancaster.ac.uk

 +44(0)7778311531



Appendix B: Permission Granted to Use Figure (Email)

From: Jeff Hodgins <hodgins@live.com.au>
Sent: 21 March 2019 02:09
To: Ukpabio, Anietie
Subject: Re: Permission To Use Copyright Materials In My Doctoral Thesis

Hi Anietie

You have my permission to use the attached diagrams and table of definitions.

The reference needs to be:

Hodgins, J. (2018). Belonging and identity in Australia's multicultural society. (Doctoral dissertation). Southern Cross University. Lismore, Australia.

Good luck with your PhD, it is worth all the work!!

Warm regards, Jeff
Jeff Hodgins

Mobile: 0435992639

Appendix C: Literature Review Selection Criteria

Literature Review Selection Criteria

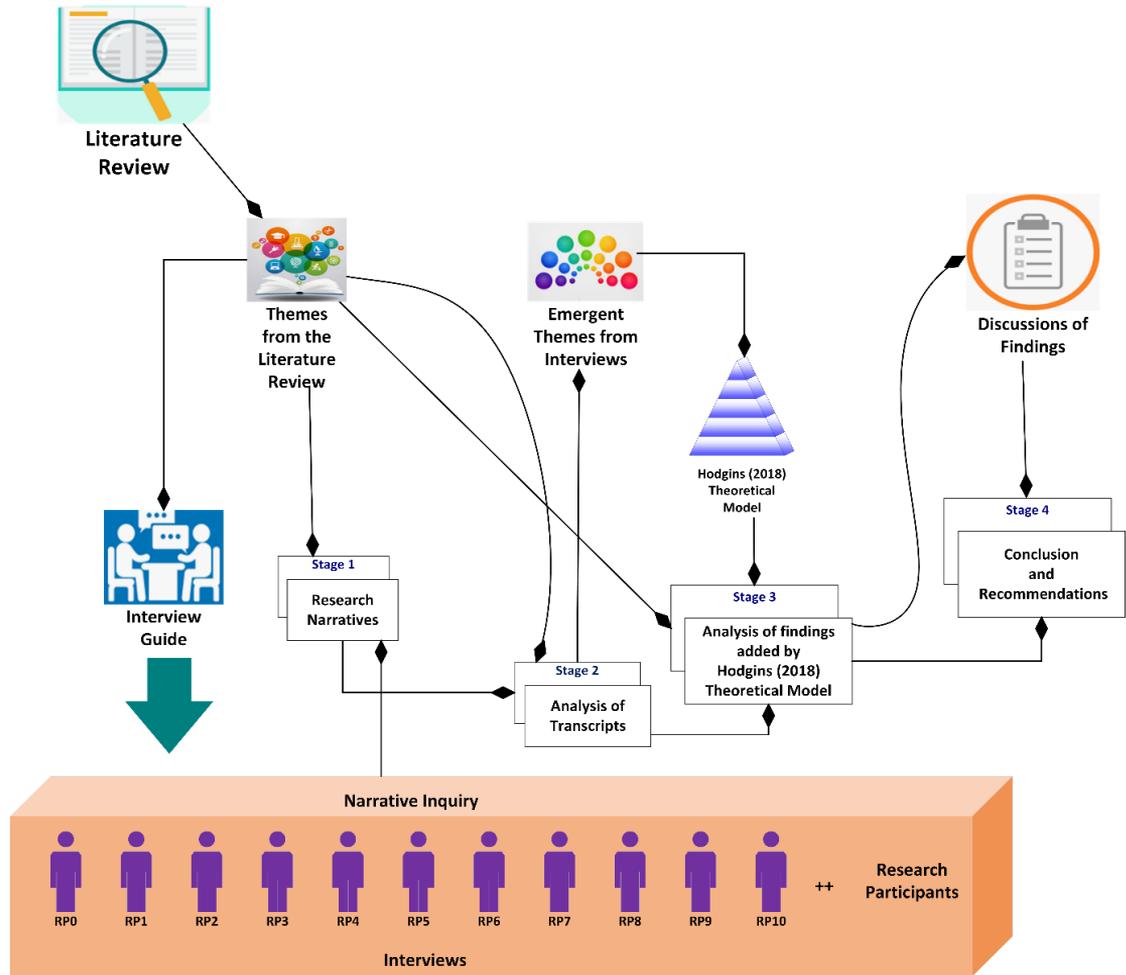
Inclusion Criteria:

- Recent studies that matched the research context and ranged between five to ten years old
- Studies that associated belongingness and identity to distance doctoral degree
- Studies that associated belongingness and identity to distance degree
- Studies that focused on belongingness and identity
- Studies that focused on distance doctoral degree
- Studies that focused on distance degree
- Studies that focused on the social aspects of distance doctoral degree
- Studies that focused on the social aspects of distance degree
- Studies that focused on the community aspects of distance doctoral degree
- Studies that focused on the community aspects of distance degree
- Studies that focused on student socialisation / interaction in distance doctoral degree
- Studies that focused on student socialisation / interaction in distance degree
- Studies that underpins the theoretical model of Hodgins (2018)
- Studies that focused on the TEL aspects of distance doctoral degree
- Studies that focused on the TEL aspects of distance degree
- Studies that focused common ground problem in online learning communities
- Studies that focused on the intricate meaning of culture in education
- Studies that focused on cross-cultural comparisons in distance education
- Studies that were conducted within the scope of key learning and cultural theories and frameworks
- Studies that criticised some major learning and cultural theories and frameworks

Exclusion Criteria:

- Recent studies that did not match the research context and ranged between five to ten years old
- Studies that did not associate belongingness and identity to distance doctoral degree
- Studies that did not associate belongingness and identity to distance degree
- Studies that did not focus on belongingness and identity
- Studies that did not focus on distance doctoral degree
- Studies that did not focus on distance degree
- Studies that did not focus on the social aspects of distance doctoral degree
- Studies that did not focus on the social aspects of distance degree
- Studies that did not focus on the community aspects of distance doctoral degree
- Studies that did not focus on the community aspects of distance degree
- Studies that did not focus on student socialisation / interaction in distance doctoral degree
- Studies that did not focus on student socialisation / interaction in distance degree
- Studies that does not underpin the theoretical model of Hodgins (2018)
- Studies that did not focus on the TEL aspects of distance doctoral degree
- Studies that did not focus on the TEL aspects of distance degree
- Studies that did not focus common ground problem in online learning communities
- Studies that did not focus on the intricate meaning of culture in education
- Studies that did not focus on cross-cultural comparisons in distance education
- Studies that were not conducted within the scope of key learning and cultural theories and frameworks
- Studies that did not criticise some major learning and cultural theories and frameworks

Appendix D: Research Process



Appendix E: Participant Consent Form

CONSENT FORM



Project Title: Together But Alone: Belongingness and Troublesome Socio-Academic Identities of Distance Doctoral Students

Name of Researcher: Anietie Ukpabio

Email: a.ukpabio@lancaster.ac.uk

Please tick each box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during my participation in this study and within 2 weeks after I took part in the study, without giving any reason. If I withdraw within 2 weeks of taking part in the study my data will be removed.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. If I am participating in the interview I understand that any information disclosed during the interview remains confidential to the researcher and me, and I will not discuss the interview with or in front of anyone who was not involved.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles, publications or presentations by the researcher/s, but my personal information will not be included and I will not be identifiable.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I understand that my name/my organisation's name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentation without my consent.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I understand that any interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I understand that data will be kept according to University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I agree to take part in the above study.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent:  Date _____ Day/month/year

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

Appendix F: Participant Optout Form



Dear [Participant],

In the case where you change your mind about participation, this opt out form can be used to expressly notify me about your desire to discontinue your involvement with the research and I would destroy all information that have been obtained from you and notify you of this action. Although, you can still do this without completing this form, however, this form can be used to formally inform me of you intention to exclude you from this study.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Anietie Ukpabio".

Anietie Ukpabio

✂
.....

Together But Alone: Belongingness and Troublesome Socio-Academic Networked Identities of Distance Doctoral Students

I understand that Anietie Ukpabio will be conducting the above study and I **do not** wish to be included in this study.

Signed _____ (Participant)

Please return this form to Anietie Godswill Ukpabio via a.ukpabio@lancaster.ac.uk as soon as possible if you do not wish to take part in the study.

Appendix G: Study Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet

Together But Alone: Belongingness and Troublesome Socio-Academic Identities of Distance Doctoral Students

My name is Anietie Ukpabio and I would like to invite you to participate in a study entitled: *Together But Alone: Belongingness and Troublesome Social-Academic Identities of Distance Doctoral Students*. This study is the basis for my doctoral thesis in E-Research and Technology-Enhanced Learning in the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University, UK.

What is the study about?

The purpose of this study is to explore towards understanding how the social-academic networked identity of distance doctoral learners impacts their belongingness to the doctoral community they inhabit. Within that, my interest lies in the social-academic networked identity experiences of doctoral students and the approaches they come up with to steer through diversities they come in contact with in their pursuit for distance scholarship. This involves how you conceptualise and maintain membership to your doctoral community.

Why have I been approached?

You have been approached because the study requires information from people who are enrolled in a distant doctoral degree programme. Your gender, age or nationality and other demographic traits are not the criteria for approaching you.

Do I have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part. There is no obligation or pressure to take part in this study. However, taking part in this study can help me create an understanding regarding further aspects of considerations that are important in distance doctoral degrees. It could possess the capacity to help me enhance the literature (through theory development) on distance doctoral students' sense of belonging and identity. It could also offer me a panacea of recommendations for changes in policy or practice to conquer current barriers and improve a sense of belonging/identity in distance students.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you decide you would like to take part, you would be asked to attend a semi-structured interview, during which I would ask you questions that would help me understand how you conceptualise identity within your doctoral community and how you perceive networked identity and belongingness within your doctoral community. Your narratives would be anonymised, analysed and reported as part of my thesis. After the interview, if there is any ambiguity with your responses, I may ask for further clarification via email. Your emails to me would be downloaded on to Lancaster University's server computer and deleted from the mail server. The downloaded emails would be further encrypted using a 256-bit encryption standard which happens to be one of the most secure standard available in the field of information security.

Will my data be identifiable?

The information you provide is confidential. The data collected for this study will be stored securely and only my supervisor and I will have access to this data:

- Audio recordings will be destroyed and/or deleted once the thesis has been submitted for publication and examined.
- The files on the computer will be encrypted (that is no-one other than the researcher will be able to access them) and the computer itself password protected.
- The typed version of your interview will be made anonymous by removing any identifying information including your name. Anonymised direct quotations from your interview may be used in the reports or publications from the study, so your name will not be attached to them.
- All your personal data will be confidential and will be kept separately from your interview responses.

There are some limits to confidentiality: if what is said in the interview makes me think that you, or someone else, is at significant risk of harm, I will have to break confidentiality and speak to a member of staff about this. If possible, I will tell you if I have to do this.

What will happen to the results?

The results will be summarised and reported in a thesis and may be submitted for publication in an academic or professional journal.

Are there any risks?

There are no risks anticipated with participating in this study. However, if you experience any distress following participation you are encouraged to inform the researcher and contact the resources provided at the end of this sheet.

Are there any benefits to taking part?

Although you may find participating interesting, there are no direct benefits in taking part.

Who has reviewed the project?

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Lancaster University.

Where can I obtain further information about the study if I need it?

If you have any questions about the study, please contact the main doctoral researcher:

Anietie Ukpabio

Email: a.ukpabio@lancaster.ac.uk

Tel: +44(0)3335670407

If necessary, my research supervisor can also be contacted on:

Professor Don Passey

Lancaster University

Department of Educational Research

County South, Lancaster, LA1 4YD, UK

Tel: +44(0)1524 592 874

d.passey@lancaster.ac.uk

My head of department can also be contacted via:

Professor Paul Ashwin
Lancaster University
Department of Educational Research
County South, Lancaster, LA1 4YD, UK
Tel: +44 (0)1524 594443
paul.ashwin@lancaster.ac.uk

Complaints

If you wish to make a complaint or raise concerns about any aspect of this study and do not want to speak to the researcher, you can contact the head of department or my supervisor.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix H: Invitation to Participate (Email)

Dear [Doctoral Student],

My name is Anietie Ukpabio and I would like to invite you to participate in a study entitled: *Together But Alone: Belongingness and Troublesome Socio-Academic Identities in the Lives of Distance Doctoral Students*. This study is the basis for my doctoral thesis in E-Research and Technology-Enhanced Learning in the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University, UK.

What is the study about?

The purpose of this study is to explore towards understanding how the social-academic networked identity of distance doctoral learners impacts their belongingness to the doctoral community they inhabit. Within that, my interest lies in the social-academic networked identity experiences of doctoral students and the approaches they come up with to steer through diversity they come in contact with in their pursuit for distance scholarship. This involves how you conceptualise and maintain membership to your doctoral community.

Why have I been approached?

You have been approached because the study requires narrative experiences from doctoral students who are enrolled in a distant doctoral degree programme. Your gender, age, nationality and other demographic traits are not the criteria for approaching you. If you are not enrolled in a distance learning programme, please ignore this email.

Do I have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part. There is no obligation or pressure to take part in this study.

Are there any benefits to taking part?

It is my hope that participation in this study will raise your awareness of the importance of identity and belongingness in online learning communities. In addition, for those of you who are considering conducting research in the future, I will openly discuss my procedures, data collection, methodology, and other aspects of the project once the interview phases are complete. Experience participating in research projects can help you design your own studies in the future.

What should I do if I decide to take part?

If after reading the documents attached with this email and you decide to take part, please notify me about your interest via the email or phone number provided in this email. If you decide not to take part, please ignore this email and I assure you that you will never be contacted again about this study.

Your help with this project is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Anietie Ukpabio
Doctoral Candidate of
PhD in E-Research and Technology Enhanced Learning
Lancaster University
Department of Educational Research
County South, Lancaster, LA1 4YD, UK



a.ukpabio@lancaster.ac.uk



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Appendix I: Invitation Gratitude and Next Step

Dear [Participant],

Thanks very much for accepting to participate in my studies.

Attached with this email is the participant information sheet which is the same with the content of the invitation to participate email that you received from me. I have also attached the consent form and an opt out form.

Please complete and return only the consent form at your earliest convenience.

I would be grateful if you can also suggest the most appropriate date, time and mode (face-to-face, Adobe Connect, Webex) of interview with yourself.

Also, please feel free to inform me about any additional issue that I should be mindful of or any adjustments that you may require.

I am happy to provide more details about myself and my study, if required.

Yours Sincerely,

Anietie Ukpabio
Doctoral Candidate of
PhD in E-Research and Technology Enhanced Learning
Lancaster University
Department of Educational Research
County South, Lancaster, LA1 4YD, UK

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Appendix J: Participants' Demographics Analysis

Program Area	Duration	Stage	Relationship	Gender	Ethnicity	Age range	Occupation	Funding
NOP=25	NOP=25	NOP=25	NOP=25	NOP=25	NOP=25	NOP=25	NOP=25	NOP=25
NOS=12	NOS=3	NOS=6	NOS=4	NOS=2	NOS=6	NOS=4	NOS=12	NOS=4
Museum studies (7) =28%	4years(3) =12%	1st(1) =4%	Single(4) =16%	Male(12) =48%	White British (8) =32%	21-30(5) =20%	Lecturer & teacher & tutor(11) =44%	Self-funded & Bursary (21) =84%
Media & communication (2) =8%	5 years(10) =40%	2nd(2) =8%	Married(16) =64%	Female(13) =52%	White[others & Irish & Gypsy](9) =36%	31-40(7) =28%	Self-employed(2) =8%	Trust fund(1) =4%
History & political science(2) =8%	6 years(12) =48%	3rd(4) =16%	Cohabiting(3) =12%		Asian(2) =8%	41-50(8) =32%	Unemployed (2) =8%	Organisation sponsored(2) =8%
International development (1) =4%		4th(7) =28%	Divorced(2) =8%		Black [British & African & Caribbean & others](3) =12%	51-60(5) =20%	Retired (2) =8%	Employer & Bursary(1) =4%
Criminology (2) =8%		5th(3) =12%			Arab(2) =8%		Exhibit Designer(1) =4%	
Contemporary History (1) =4%		Final(8) 32%			North Irish(1) =4%		Writer (1) =4%	
Education (1) =4%							Archivist (1) =4%	
Archeology(2) =8%								
History of Arts(2) =8%								

Conservation studies (2) =8%								
Computer science (1) =4%							Sales representative (1) =4%	
Management (2) =8%							Historian(1) =4%	
							Software engineer(1) =4%	
							Exhibition officer(1) =4%	
							International development practioner (1) =4%	

Appendix K: Participants' Demographics

Name	Program Area	Duration	Stage	Relationship	Gender	Ethnicity	Age Range	Occupation	Funding
Mark	Criminology (Hate Crimes)	6 Years	Final Year	Married	Male	White British	51 – 60	Retired (Public Transport)	Self-funded
Sarah	History and Political Science	6 Years	Final Year	Married	Female	Northern Irish	41 – 50	Unemployed	ERC
Peter	International Development	6 Years	5 th Year	Married	Male	White British	31 – 40	Intl Development Practitioner	Bursary / Self-funded
James	Contemporary History	6 Years	1 st Year	Single	Male	White British	41 – 50	Administrator	Bursary / Employer
Bob	Media and Communication	6 Years	3 rd Year	Married	Male	White British	21 – 30	Teacher	Self-funded
Jack	Museum Studies	5 Years	3 rd Year	Married	Male	White (Others)	41 – 40	Archivist	Self-funded
Jane	Museum Studies	5 Years	3 rd Year	Cohabiting	Female	White (Others)	31 – 40	Exhibit Designer	Self-funded
Stan	Education	6 Years	2 nd Year	Divorced	Male	Black British	41 – 50	Lecturer	Employer
Clark	Museum Studies	5 Years	4 th Year	Married	Male	White (Irish)	21 – 30	Teacher	Self-funded
Vicky	Archaeology	6 Years	4 th Year	Single	Female	White (British)	41 – 50	Teacher	ESRC
Chloe	Media and Communication	6 Years	4 th Year	Married	Female	Arab	21 – 30	Self-Employed	Self-funded
Stuart	History of Art	5 Years	4 th Year	Married	Male	Arab	41 – 50	Assistant Head Teacher	Bursary / Self-funded
Ngo'lo	Conservation Studies	6 Years	5 th Year	Divorced	Male	Black African	51 – 60	Exhibition Officer	Self-funded
Kwesi	Museum Studies	5 Years	Final Year	Single	Male	Black African	31 – 40	Self-Employed	Self-funded
Nick	Computer Science	4 Years	Final Year	Married	Male	White (British)	31 – 40	Software Engineer	Self-funded
Jen	History of Art	5 Years	2 nd Year	Married	Female	White (British)	41 – 50	Head Teacher	Bursary / Self-funded
Jess	Education	6 Years	4 th Year	Single	Female	Asian (Pakistani)	41 – 50	Teacher	Employer
Beth	Conservation Studies	6 Years	2 nd Year	Married	Female	White (Others)	51 – 60	Historian	Leverhulme Trust
Ana	Contemporary History	6 Years	4 th Year	Married	Female	White (British)	31 – 40	Teacher	Bursary / Self-funded
Phil	International Development	6 Years	2 nd Year	Cohabiting	Male	Asian (Indian)	31 – 40	Tutor	AHRC
Mike	Museum Studies	5 Years	3 rd Year	Single	Male	White (Others)	41 – 50	Lecturer	Self-funded
Graham	Criminology	6 Years	5 th Year	Cohabiting	Male	White (British)	41 – 50	Writer	Self-funded
Tony	Media and Communication	6 Years	1 st Year	Cohabiting	Male	Black (Others)	31 – 40	Lecturer	Self-funded
Corey	Museum Studies	5 Years	4 th Year	Married	Male	White (Others)	21 – 30	Lecturer	Self-funded
Tom	Computer Science	4 Years	Final Year	Single	Male	Asian (Indian)	41 – 50	Solutions Architect	The Wellcome Trust
Marta	Management	4 Years	Final Year	Married	Female	Asian (Chinese)	51 – 60	Unemployed (Taking a break)	Self-funded
Isabella	Archaeology	6 Years	1 st Year	Cohabiting	Female	White (Irish)	21 – 30	Lecturer	Bursary / Self-funded
Emma	History and Political Science	5 Years	Final Year	Married	Female	White (Others)	31 – 40	Teacher	Self-funded
Olivia	Museum Studies	5 Years	Final Year	Divorced	Female	White (Gypsy)	51 – 60	Retired (Defence)	Self-funded
Sophie	History and Political Science	5 Years	1 st Year	Single	Female	White (Others)	41 – 50	Librarian	Self-funded
Mia	Management	4 Years	Final Year	Married	Female	Black Caribbean	31 – 40	Sales Representative	Self-funded

Appendix L: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement Form



Confidentiality Agreement for the Transcription of Qualitative Data

Name of Study:	Together But Alone: Belongingness and Troublesome Socio-Academic Identities of Distance Doctoral Students.
Study Principal Investigator:	Anietie Godswill Ukpabio

In accordance with the Research Ethics Committee at Lancaster University (UREC), all participants in the above-named study are anonymised. Therefore, any personal information or any of the data generated or secured through transcription will not be disclosed to any third party.

By signing this document, you are agreeing:

- not to pass on, divulge or discuss the contents of the audio material provided to you for transcription to any third parties.
- to ensure that material provided for transcription is held securely and can only be accessed via password on your local PC.
- to return transcribed material to Anietie Ukpabio via recorded post or electronic form when completed and do so when agreed in password protected files. Method of return to be agreed upon, depending on the circumstance/size of files.
- to destroy any audio and electronic files held by you and relevant to the above study at the earliest time possible after transcripts have been provided to Anietie Ukpabio, or to return said audio files.

Your full name/organisation (block capitals) _____

Your signature _____

Date _____

Appendix M: Study Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule:

Introduction

[Welcome – meet and greet]

[Preparation, tension calming conversations like: Where are you located right now? How are you?]

Thank you for helping me by participating in my study.

The response you are about to provide during this interview would be anonymised. You will also have the opportunity check the transcript in future before the data is analysed. This would provide you with an ample opportunity to make modifications or additions (if any) to your comments and reflections.

Would you like to ask any question(s)?

About the interview process

As we are about to begin the interview, I would like to briefly explain what the interview process involves. To begin with, the title of my study is: Together But Alone: Belongingness and Troublesome Socio-Academic Networked Identities of Distant Doctoral Students, which is the independent research element (thesis) of my current study of PhD in E-Research and Technology-Enhanced Learning at Lancaster University, United Kingdom.

I will explore the notions of belongingness and identity and would be grateful if you can share your experiences with me. I appreciate that this processes and experiences can be lengthy and subtle, so please feel free to take your time in making me see the experiences from your perspective.

There are no right or wrong answers to the questions that you are about to be asked; however, I would be grateful to get your perception about some aspects of your doctoral study.

The duration of this interview should be approximately a minimum of 1 hour and a maximum of 2 hours. Should you wish to discontinue the interview at any time, please feel free to do so by letting me know.

The interview is of a semi-structured type. To be more précised, this means that there are a few pre-formulated questions that I have put together for you; however, I would like to offer you the flexibility to explore and share the experiences that you deem as noteworthy. There might be times where it would appear as if the same question is being repeated several times, please note that if this is the case, then I am simply trying to explore other aspects of your lived experiences as you would have done it. Also, there might be a pause momentarily only to enable me articulate your responses and formulate further instantaneous questions to enable me capture your narratives as much as possible.

Interview Questions:

1. Before commencing the journey for the doctoral degree, how would you describe yourself?
2. Before relocating to your current location, what life factors and/or experiences prompted the move? To inquire more:
 - a. Briefly discuss your family status, relationships, and past experiences.
 - b. What were your motivational factors towards moving to your current location?
3. Before enrolling for a doctoral program on a distance learning basis, what were the motivational factors that inspired your move?
4. Are there experiences that you had before enrolling for the doctoral programme, what were your expectations regarding the enrolment? Taking a closer look:
 - a. Was there any source of encouragement or discouragement that you encountered?
 - b. How did your expectations for the doctoral programs match or differ from your experiences? Kindly elaborate on your answer.
 - c. Since becoming a doctoral student, have you experienced any changes in your relationship with others? If so, explain.
5. What were your initial personal impressions about the academic department and culture when starting the programme? To elaborate further:
 - a. What were your impressions about the staff members?
 - b. What did you perceive the students to be?
6. Do you have any personal narration about the support system? Kindly elaborate on:
 - a. Family, close associates, others...
 - b. Within and outside the doctoral program, what role did family and close associates play?
7. What defines your typical day in the doctoral programme? What are the observations you have made while engaging in the program? For further review:
 - a. What were the observations you made on the staff members' interactions online and offline?
 - b. What observations did you make regarding the students' interactions online and offline?
 - c. What observations did you make regarding the university administrative staff interactions and the staff offering student services?
 - d. In the academic department, is there a sense of connection that you have witnessed among the staff members and peers? Explain the response. Furthermore:
 - Was there any acceptance from your peers and staff members including the supervisor?
 - Were the peers and staff members including the supervisor supportive?
 - What was your peers and staff members' frequency of interaction? (Supervisor included)
 - What was your peers and staff members' mode of interaction and communication? (Supervisor included)
8. Do you feel a sense of belonging in the doctoral community? To ask further:
 - a. Do you feel that it is challenging to develop relationships with peers and staff members?
 - b. To enhance the development of relationship with peers and staff members, what is your opinion on what should be done to make the process effective?
9. How is it possible to ensure a balance between your doctoral study, work, personal commitments, etc.?
For an extensive research:
 - a. What is the impact of other roles you play on your doctoral programme?

10. Talking from experience, which factor has been your motivation to pursue the doctoral program each year? Taking a closer look:

a. Was there ever a moment when you thought of quitting the programme?

b. To continue pursuing the doctoral program, what strategies did you adopt that worked?

11. From your experience, what is the difference between engaging in full-time and part-time doctoral program?

12. From your experience, in what way are the peers in the doctoral programme influenced? (Look further into the response)

13. Deriving from your experience, what are the learner's contributions to the goal of the doctoral community?

(Dig further into the answer)

14. Do you have an opportunity to share your views by posting them online? For further review:

a. How often do you post your academic views online?

b. What are the platforms that are available for sharing your academic views?

15. Do you find posts shared by others worth reading? Taking a closer look:

a. How often do you go through other people's posts?

b. What are the platforms that others share their posts for viewing?

16. Do you have any intention of publishing your academic work(s)? Possible further inquiries:

a. What is the relationship between your academic work(s) to the PhD research?

17. Are there any conference that you have attended? Possible further inquiries:

Was the submission of your paper(s) for the conference(s) done?

How did you feel by making the submission of the paper(s)?

What is the connection between the conference(s) to your PhD research?

18. How many times do you read? Possible further inquest:

a. What is the relationship between the material you read and your PhD?

19. What is your working preference, in a group or as an individual? To seek further:

a. Is your working preference applicable in both PhD and other aspects outside the PhD, such as within the community?

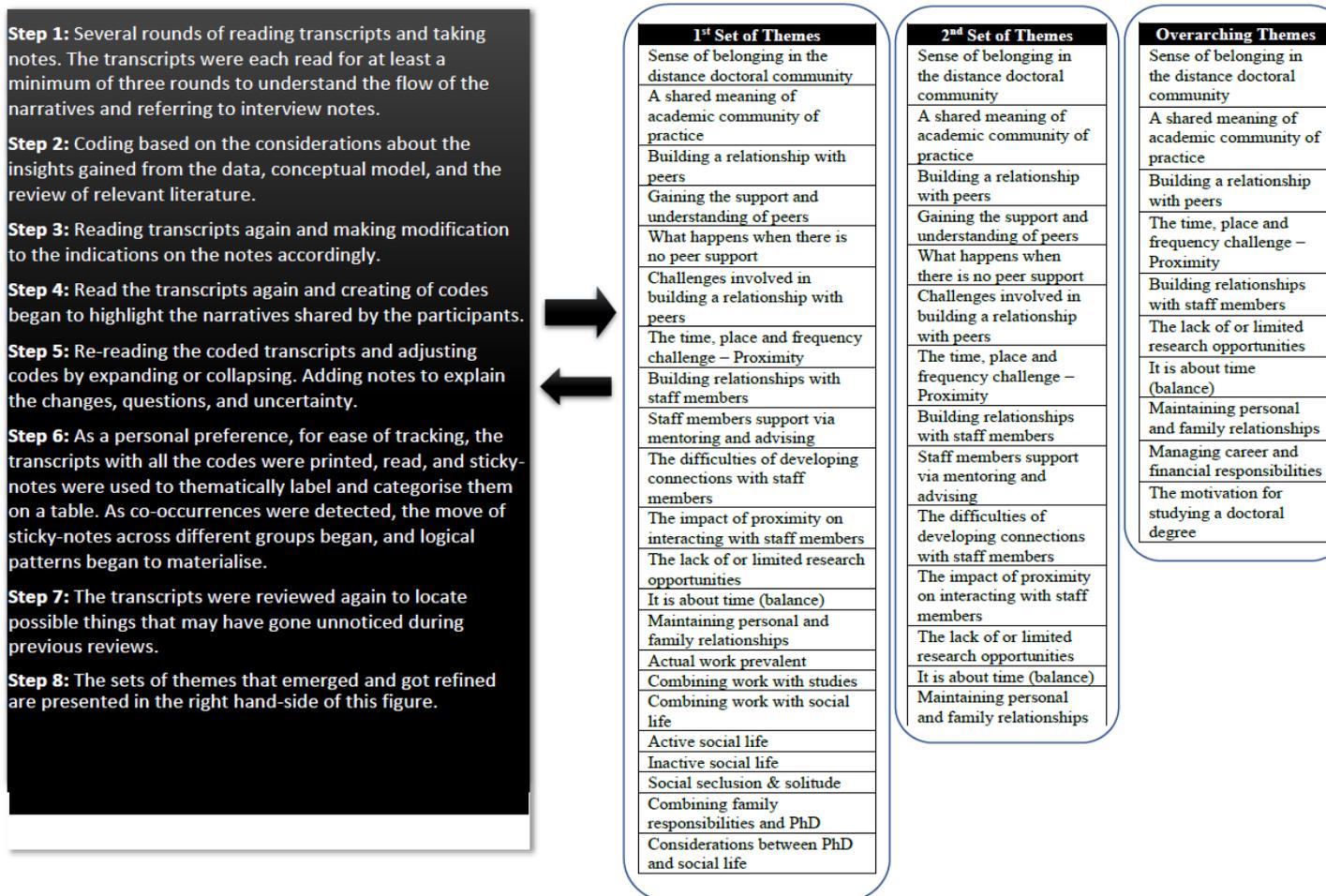
20. What gender do you prefer associating with?

21. What is your marital status?

22. What is your age range: 21 – 30, 31 – 40, 41 – 50, 51 – 60, 61 – 70, 71 – 80?

23. What is your ethnicity?

Appendix N: Coding Across Transcripts and Sample Coding Book



1. Sense of belonging in the distance doctoral community

It feels like you have a community of people who empathise with you. Others understand the challenges to finish your doctoral degree which involves some, you know, self-doubt, exhaustion, and many other struggles. They can motivate you; motivate each other. [Ngo'lo, Male, Conservation Studies, 5th Year]

2. A shared meaning of academic community of practice

In my view, group sentiment is a bunch of people who learn and develop ideas across their lives, go forward to see if they can be actualised into reality. [Isabella, Female, Archaeology, 1st Year]

3. Building a relationship with peers

If you had those relationships and had that time together, I don't see why you would not want to get to that end goal. And I could see that I would definitely not have been able to get through some of the more stressful times without that. I also talked to other doctoral students from a past cohorts who had encountered similar issues, and this was really helpful. That made me feel like you're always going to get through this and move on, and that was really good. [Mia, Female, Management, Final Year]

4. What happens when there is no peer support

I just felt that I was no longer part of the group. Most of my peers attempted and completed the module with familiar faces and being that it had sections and criteria in it that I would have benefited from if I had done it with my colleagues. It was difficult to attempt that module with a new cohort and begin to build relationships from the beginning like a teenager. We are adults and little things can begin to get difficult with age... haha... Not saying that I am too old. [Chloe, Female, Media and Communication, 4th Year]

5. Challenges involved in building a relationship with peers

Occasionally I think there's a disagreement because there are different views about it, you should have a few years of practical job experience before studying for a doctorate degree and advise others how to do something you are yet to try? [Jack, Male, Museum Studies, 3rd Year]

6. The time, place and frequency challenge – Proximity

I guess it is during conferences, I think we're far closer. I mean mostly because of purpose ... we like to express our thoughts and all that stuff so it has never been a problem. However, except it was someone that I met personally during the event, once we left the event that was pretty much as far as the communication and our commitment. [Mike, Male, Museum Studies, 3rd Year]

7. Building relationships with staff members

I'm astonished at our staff members. I feel humbled, proud and deeply impressed with our school's faculty. To me it's just incredible, their commitment to our learning, all the academic. I do not even know how they can handle as many of us as they have done. [Mark, Male, Criminology, Final Year]

8. The difficulties of developing connections with staff members

My supervisors have a lot of commitment to fulfil. I sometimes feel bad when they cancel or postpone my meetings but then again I have to remember that they are only humans with the same 24 hours in a day. I felt like there was no humour in our meetings and we went straight to business as usual. [Vicky, Female, Archaeology, 4th Year]

9. The impact of proximity on interacting with staff members

To be honest, I don't expect supervisors to give me more attention than full-timers, because I'm a distance learner. You know, in terms of doctoral students I am not the primary or the most preferred choice. So, you know, I understand that distance learning is not just half the effort or partial commitment. How can one justify that? [Ngo'lo, Male, Conservation Studies, 5th Year]

10. The lack of or limited research opportunities

I think that I personally struggle as a distance learning student. I always had to be persistent searching for some similar opportunities that full-time students have. Some full-time students possess opportunities to teach in the department, write grants, write publications, and, as you know, do presentations, and get research grants and lots of money, and be really deeply involved in their research or the research of their supervisor. [Jane, Female, Museum Studies, 3rd Year]

11. It is about time (balance)

Whenever my friends or family invite me for a dinner, I always have to first evaluate my Ph.D workload, my pace, ability and progress. I often ask myself if this is something that I am willing to commit to? Because I don't want to promise them that I will come and then disappoint them or stand them up at the end. [Jane, Female, Museum Studies, 3rd Year]

12. Maintaining personal and family relationships

My wife would definitely tell you I probably just didn't have a very well-balanced family life. It has been difficult. The challenge is that you will never be able to put anything above family. You ought not. [Nick, Male, Computer Science, Final Year]

13. Managing career and financial responsibilities

To be honest, the quality of work I produced was way below doctoral level sometimes. I figured it was sacrificing some stuff. I also realised that there are projects and papers that I submitted that might have been better if I had given them more attention and time. [Peter, Male, International Development, 5th Year]

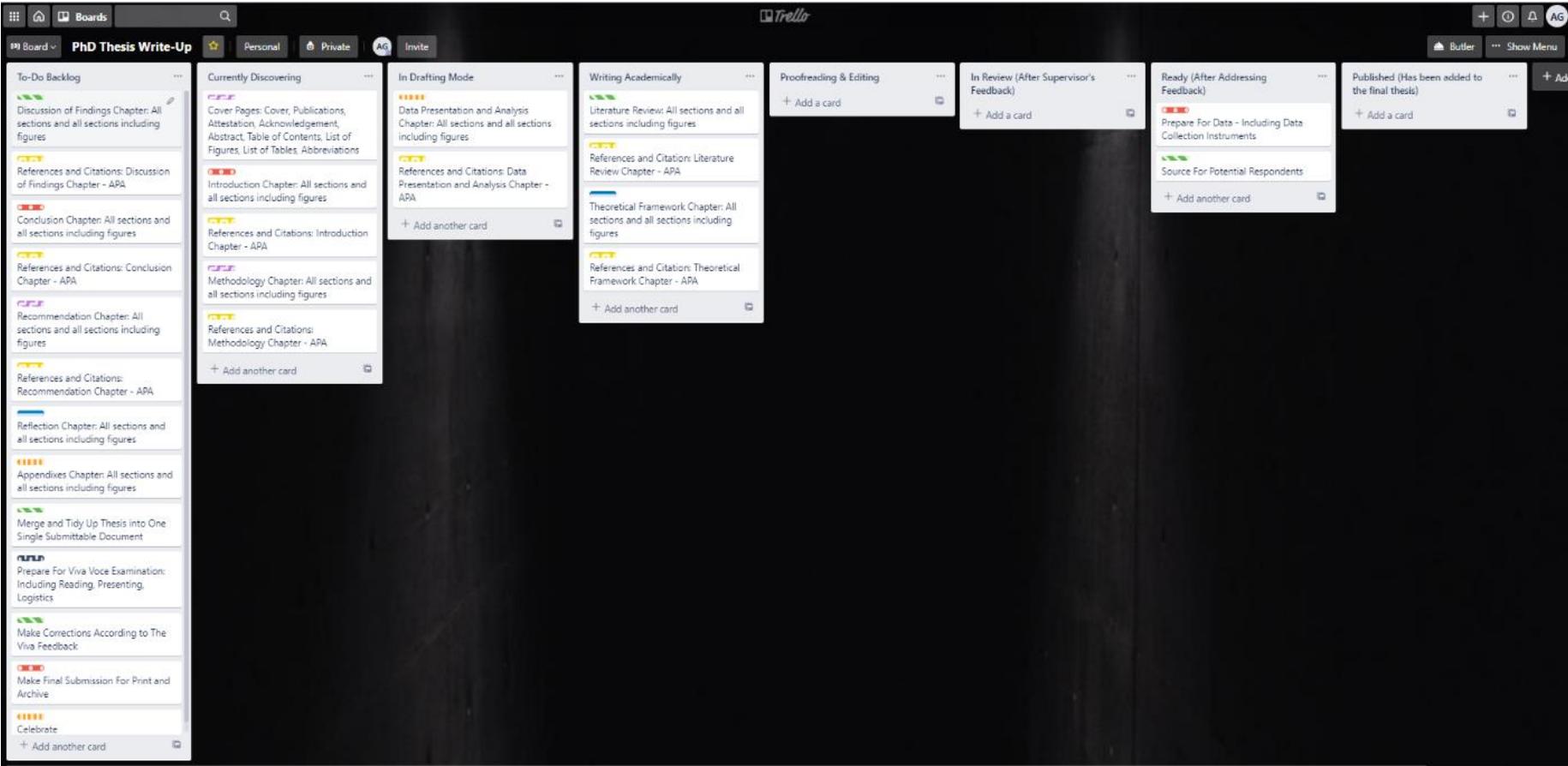
14. The motivation for studying a doctoral degree

I don't quit and I am a massive believer in completing whatever you start. I am very driven and ambitious, and I've wanted to do it for a very long time before I eventually started. [Jess, Female, Education, 4th Year]

Appendix O: Overview of study findings using Hodgins's (2018) PCB

Findings	Dimensions of Belonging							Realms of Identity				
	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	R1	R2	R3	RX1	RX2
Distance doctoral community and oneness	Green	Green	White	Green	Green	White	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red
Sense of belonging and scholarly community of practice	Green	Green	White	White	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red
Building relationships with peers	Green	Green	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red
Building relationships with staff members	Green	Green	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red
Lack of research opportunities	Green	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red
Managing role conflict	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red
Financial constraints	Green	White	White	White	Green	Green	White	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red
Distinct realities in the use of technology	White	White	Green	White	Green	Green	White	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red
Against all odds: Persisting from a distance	White	White	Green	Green	Green	Green	White	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red

Appendix P: Research Management Tool



Appendix Q: Research Tracker

Year	Month	Research Activity	Progress
2018			
2018	January – March	Write and submit study proposal	First draft in and awaiting further modifications (if required).
2018	April – May	Obtain ethical approval for the study	Submitted and awaiting outcome
2018	May – June	Introduction: Write the introductory chapter of the thesis.	This would be a build on from some of the points raised in the proposal.
2018	July – October	Literature review – search, read and review all relevant literature. <i>(Supervisor feedback for the previous chapter would be evaluated and addressed in addition to the first draft of this chapter)</i>	Readings are already underway within the body of literature deemed relevant to the study.
2018	October – November	Theoretical Framework: Situate my study within an existing theory towards adding to the literature and/or theory. <i>(Supervisor feedback for the previous chapter would be evaluated and addressed in addition to the first draft of this chapter)</i>	Not started
2018	December 2018 – January 2019	Research design and methodology: ...	Not started
2019			
2019	December 2018 – January 2019	Research design and methodology: Review, identify, justify and discuss the application of the methodology. <i>(Supervisor feedback for the previous chapter would be evaluated and addressed in addition to the first draft of this chapter)</i>	Not started
2019	February – March	Presentation and analysis of data. <i>(Supervisor feedback for the previous chapter would be evaluated and addressed in addition to the first draft of this chapter)</i>	Not started
2019	April – July	Discussion and significance of findings. <i>(Supervisor feedback for the previous chapter would be evaluated and addressed in addition to the first draft of this chapter)</i>	Not started
2019	August – September	Conclusion and further research. <i>(Supervisor feedback for the previous chapter would be evaluated and addressed in addition to the first draft of this chapter)</i>	Not started
2019	October – December	Thesis sections amalgamation, revision and review: Complete the proposed final thesis and prepare for the final exam.	Not started
2020			
2020	January – March (Tentative)	Prepare and attend viva (Tentative)	To be confirmed (Tentative)
2020	April – To be confirmed	To be confirmed (Tentative)	To be confirmed (Tentative)

Progress Grid Legend	
Completed	
In Progress	
Not Started	

