ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Doctoral Education in Athletic Training: Pursuit of the Degree and Its Influence on Career Aspirations

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Context: Athletic trainers pursue higher education to obtain positions in academia, which often include scholarship and/or teaching responsibilities. Previous research has investigated the preparation and transition phases for doctoral students moving from student to junior faculty member as well as their professional socialization. However, the reasons for the pursuit of a doctoral degree and doctoral students' career goals postgraduation are not yet understood.

Objective: To explore the motivational factors and attractors for the pursuit of a doctoral degree among athletic trainers in doctoral programs. Secondarily, to examine how doctoral experiences shape career goals and aspirations.

Design: Qualitative phenomenology.

Setting: Higher education institutions.

Patients or Other Participants: Twelve academic doctoral students (8 female, 4 male; 6.0 ± 4 years Board of Certification–certified; 5.0 ± 3.0 years clinical athletic training practice) completed the study.

Main Outcome Measure(s): Participants completed a single one-on-one telephone interview, which was recorded and transcribed. Analysis followed the phenomenological paradigm. Credibility was established through peer review and multi-analyst triangulation.

Results: Past experiences, mentorship, and professional development served as motivators for pursuit of an academic doctoral degree. Past experiences were supported by (1) previous educational experiences and (2) time in a nonacademic role. Additionally, our participants' career aspirations were shaped through mentorship and legitimization during their doctoral programs.

Conclusions: Pursuit of a doctoral degree was primarily influenced by the previous educational experiences that provided students with exposure to responsibilities that accompany a faculty role. Strong mentorship helped support the decision to pursue a doctoral degree, as well as to develop a career plan. Engaging in the role of faculty member via an assistantship also supported the development of career plans.

Key Words: Mentors, professional development, legitimization

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KEY POINTS

- Athletic trainers pursue academic doctorate degrees because of a desire to assume the roles of a faculty member in the future.
- Mentorship was a facilitator for our participants when deciding to pursue and when selecting a doctoral program to attend.
- Engaging in the various aspects of the faculty role via an assistantship supported career goals and the socialization process for our participants.

INTRODUCTION

The faculty role is founded on the tripartite mission, which includes a combination of teaching, research, and service. Faculty are prepared and often socialized into these roles during their doctoral education experiences.[1] The framework of socialization is grounded in development, and actualization of the future role is part of the process of learning and being socialized.[2] Thus, it can be summarized that a primary purpose of a doctoral degree program is to develop individuals to be competent in teaching, conducting research, and serving in various leadership and service roles.[3,4] To reach this aim, doctoral students can expect to engage in various activities that encompass these 3 specific areas.

Mazerolle and colleagues[5] found "authentic experiences" during the doctoral program, as well as mentorship, to be primary facilitators in the socialization process. Specifically, experiences in doctoral training provided role understanding, and doctoral advisors were perceived as mentors, guiding various learning experiences for the doctoral students.[5] A study by Bowman et al[6] found mixed results in the effective socialization of doctoral students. Bowman et al[6] identified that comprehensive and autonomous research experiences provided doctor of philosophy students with a sense of confidence in their ability to perform research postgraduation.[6] However, they noted a lack of exposure to other common responsibilities that a faculty position entails, such as teaching and pedagogical strategies.[6] Golde and Dore[7] reported findings similar to Bowman et al,[6] in that the training doctoral students receive does not prepare them for the future jobs they take. They clarified that graduate programs prepare students better for careers at research universities, rather than positions focusing on teaching and service.[7] These 3 studies agree that it is important for doctoral students to experience aspects of their future role within their degree program. However, they also identify that the emphasis of those experiences seems to be on scholarly endeavors to the detriment of teaching and service experiences. This shows students are not prepared for all of their future roles.

Although previous literature has examined how doctoral degree programs prepare students for future careers,[5–7] we do not know why athletic training doctoral students pursue the degree or their career aspirations after its attainment. Doctoral students in other programs have multiple motives, but the most common reasons include professional advancement or the desire to enter academia.[8] With the increasing numbers of individuals pursuing higher education,[9] now, more than ever, is the time to gain insight on the motivational factors that influence pursuit and continuation of a doctoral degree. Therefore, the purpose of our study was to better understand athletic training doctoral students' motivational factors for pursuing an academic doctorate, and how their current experiences relate to their future professional goals.

METHODS

Research Design

Phenomenology[10,11] provided the underpinning for the investigation, as it allowed for an understanding of the meaning placed by doctoral students on their education, their pursuit of the doctoral degree, and how that education influenced their career plans. Data collection occurred through interviewing individuals meeting the study's inclusion criteria. Participants' individual reflections allowed the researchers to develop a thematic understanding of doctoral program pursuit, continuation, and career goals.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

We used criterion-sampling strategies[10] to initially identify potential athletic training doctoral students. Each participant met the following inclusion criteria to participate: (1) was enrolled in a degree program that leads to an academic doctorate (EdD, PhD), (2) had completed a minimum of 1 year in the degree program, (3) was a licensed and board-certified athletic trainer, and (4) was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student on a college campus. Participants were excluded if they were pursuing a clinical doctorate in athletic training (DAT), had completed less than 1 year in the degree program, were enrolled in an online program, or were not a licensed/board certified athletic trainer. A minimum of 1 year in the degree program ensured the student had gained sufficient involvement within the program to reflect on and speak to the influence of his or her current experiences on future professional goals.

Participant recruitment was initiated after institutional review board approval, through a convenience sample, using the researchers' personal connections to gain access to athletic training doctoral students via advisors and mentors. E-mail addresses for participants matching our inclusion criteria were provided through our professional connections. We then sent recruitment e-mails to potential participants to begin data collection procedures.

Participants

Twelve participants (4 male, 8 female) met our inclusion criteria (age = 30 ± 3 years). All 12 participants were licensed athletic trainers, with 6 ± 4 years of certification by the Board of Certification, and had engaged in 5 ± 3 years of clinical athletic training practice at the time of the study. Three participants were enrolled in a 3-year degree program and 9 were enrolled in a 4-year degree program. All participants but one were completing degree requirements for a PhD (n = 1 EdD). At the time of the study, 5 participants were in their second year of doctoral education, 6 were in their third year of doctoral education, and 1 was in her fourth year of doctoral education. The Table provides individual participant information.

Procedures

A research team, using the socialization framework as the foundation, developed an interview guide to address the aims of the study (Appendix). The research team comprised 6 doctoral students currently enrolled in a qualitative methods course. The members of the research team fit the criteria for inclusion but did not complete the study. Using their own experiences, they helped develop the interview protocol used in the study. A researcher with content knowledge (ie, socialization framework), experience as an advisor to doctoral students, and expertise in qualitative research methods led the research team. The research guide was divided into 3 sections to address the study's purpose. The first section consisted of demographic questions, the next section concerned motivational components to pursue a doctoral degree, and the final section contained questions pertaining to the participants' professional career goals and aspirations. Before data collection, the interview guide was reviewed for content and flow by an additional member of the research team who possesses content knowledge and experience in qualitative methods. The researcher provided constructive feedback, which resulted in reorganization of the questions to improve flow and the addition of other questions to ensure all aspects of the doctoral student experience were explored.

The phone interviews were conducted in a semistructured manner, to promote dialogue between the participant and researcher and to allow for follow-up on experiences shared during the interview session. All interviews were recorded after verbal consent from the participant and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis and Credibility

Using the phenomenological paradigm,[10,11] the data were coded systematically through a stepwise process by one researcher. First, the transcripts were read globally, allowing the researcher to become immersed in the experiences of the doctoral students. Then, using the open-coding process, the data were inductively reduced by assigning descriptive codes to segments of textual data that represented the meaning of the data. The codes were grouped together and categorized to combine like-minded concepts and experiences. These groups were defined and given labels, and collectively became the overarching themes of the data, representing the common experiences and reflections shared by the participants.

We used data saturation, researcher triangulation, and peer review to establish rigor surrounding the collection procedures

Table. Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age, y	Sex	Years Certified (Board of Certification)	Year in Degree Program
Daniel	31	M	9	Third
Amy	28	F	6	Third (final)
Emmerson	35	F	14	Third
Sharon	31	F	10	Second
Janice	34	F	7	Fourth
Don	25	M	3	Second
Karen	27	F	5	Third
Kyle	31	M	7	Second
Jason	26	M	2	Second
Jasmine	26	F	3	Second
Lisa	25	F	3	Third
Naomi	29	F	5	Third

Abbreviations: F, female; M, male.

and analyses of the data. The procedures for researcher triangulation was grounded by the research team and were used to develop the interview protocol.[12] The use of a team allowed for all perspectives to be explored, including those of individuals actively enrolled as graduate students and researchers with experience in the framework being used in the study. We used an experienced qualitative researcher with extensive knowledge on the socialization framework to confirm interview protocol before data collection and then our findings after the analyses process was done. The peer reviewed the interview protocol after the research team completed the development. The peer was provided several coded transcripts and operational definitions of the emergent themes, including raw data to support the emergent themes. The peer confirmed the initial coding process and provided confirmation for the final emerging themes.

RESULTS

Three main findings pertaining to the pursuit of a doctoral degree in fields related to athletic training emerged from the data (Figure 1). Specifically, the influence of past experiences was identified and supported by 2 subthemes: (1) previous educational experiences and (2) time in a nonacademic role. Mentorship and professional development were also factors influencing our participants' decisions to pursue an academic doctoral degree. Two main findings emerged regarding career aspirations: mentorship and legitimization (Figure 2).

Pursuit of an Academic Doctoral Degree

Past Experiences. Our participants shared that experiences occurring before their doctoral education served as motivation for them to pursue an academic doctoral degree. These reflections were specific to the educational experiences gained in their graduate studies as a master's student and primarily related to the role of research exposure. Additionally, participants described the impact of a period of time when they were not engaged in an academic role.

Previous Educational Experiences. Most participants articulated that they knew they wanted to pursue a doctoral degree while they were pursuing a master's degree Jason

Figure 1. Factors influencing a decision to pursue a doctoral degree.
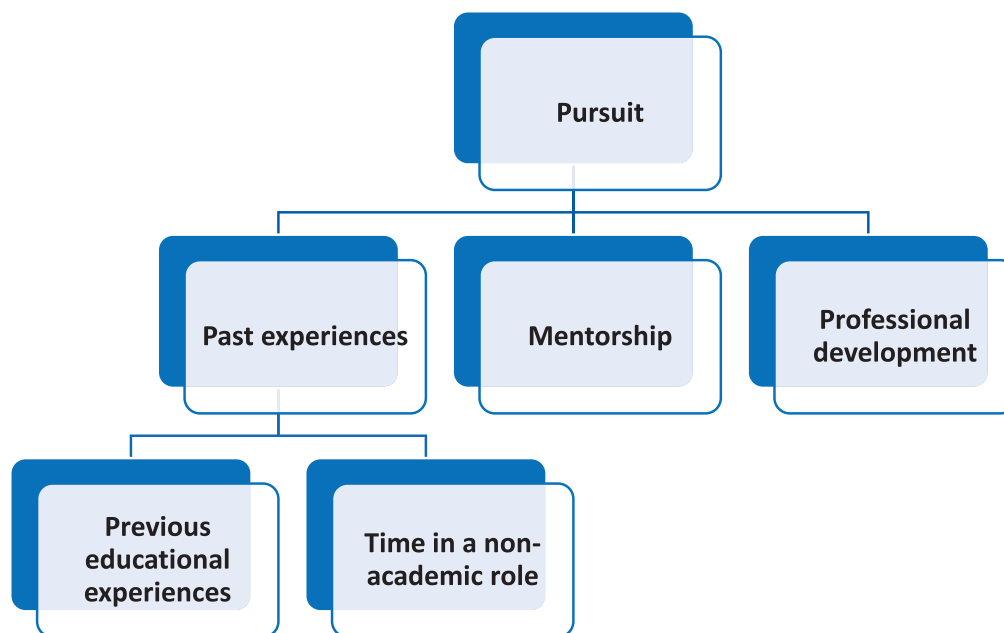
elaborated on his rationale for pursuing his doctoral degree when he stated:

> During the second summer [of the master's program] we started our research studies looking into where we wanted to go for our master's thesis. That's where I really got interested in research. Seeing the whole [research] component as well as the educational system, and how I'd be able to have a role in all of it interested me to pursue [a doctoral degree].

Similarly, Don was within his master's program when he identified his interest in pursuing a doctoral degree, saying, "I think I kind of made my mind up probably about summer going into my second year of my masters. I hadn't really thought about it much before that."

Daniel stated, "I did not know I wanted to pursue a doctoral program until I came for my master's program and learned more about what it entailed." Theresa also identified her master's degree as the tipping point to pursue a doctorate program, specifically speaking to the research experience she was provided during that time. "I would say I knew 100% during my master's after I started really getting involved in research." She continued to discuss the specific opportunities during her master's that played a large role in the decision to pursue her doctoral degree. She said, "I knew from the tutoring [experiences] that I enjoyed the teaching aspect, and I got a little dose of the research side of things my last year. That definitely played a role." When engaged in their master's

Figure 2. Factors influencing career planning in doctoral students.

degrees, the participants of our study were exposed to the possibility of earning a doctoral degree and became motivated to pursue it. Many participants indicated specifically that the research component of their thesis project provided the greatest motivation for them to pursue a doctoral degree, where they could engage further in the research process.

Time in a Nonacademic Role. Time spent away from the classroom between their master's degrees and entrance into their doctorate programs was also identified by our participants as a facilitator to their terminal degree Though many participants were motivated to pursue their doctoral degree while enrolled in their master's programs, the time they spent working before engagement in the doctoral degree was also influential. Janice discussed that she was working clinically, after earning her master's degree, when she realized she wanted to pursue a doctoral degree. Carrie said,

> The times that I really enjoyed being at work, as an athletic trainer, was when I was a preceptor. I was teaching students and providing mentorship to them and walking them through my day and showing them and helping them develop their skill sets, that's what I really enjoyed, so I knew that I wanted to pursue being a professor.

Carrie then took a teaching position at a university where she had responsibilities facilitating classes and mentoring students. Through this work experience she described feeling inadequate and missing the skills to fully execute her position at the level she wanted. Therefore, she determined it was time to pursue her terminal degree. She shared,

> I always felt like I wanted to be better than what I was giving, and I felt like I had to somehow grow those skills outside of this job…so [I felt that] this would be the time to pursue a terminal degree.

Like Carrie, Karen also worked clinically after earning her master's degree. She elaborated on her thought process during her year off from education, saying:
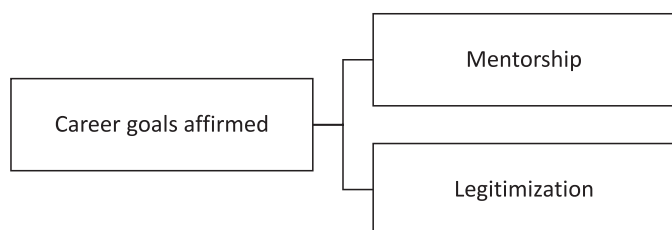
I thought, I need to stop doing school. I completed some research during a yearlong position [I took after graduate school], and it kind of piqued my interest in potentially going back [for a doctoral degree]. So, during my between year was when I really started thinking about pursuing a [doctoral] degree.

Similarly, Kyle described the role clinical practice had in his motivation to pursue his doctoral degree:

I went right from undergrad to my master's degree . . . Then I went and practiced clinically for a few years and during that time decided to go back and get my doctorate. I was able to use the time as a clinical athletic trainer to decide what happened next.

Jason echoed a similar progression from education to clinical practice and back to a doctoral degree:

I started as an undergraduate student . . . then I was accepted into the master's of science in athletic training program at [the same institution] . . . After 1 year out of school working clinically, I decided to enroll in a PhD program.

Jason, like Kyle, was able to determine during his year of clinical practice that he wanted to pursue his doctorate. Time away from graduate school allowed for reflection, which facilitated the desire to return for a doctoral degree. The time in which they were engaged in clinical practice allowed our participants to determine the interests and desires related to their role in athletic training that led them to a doctoral degree program.

Mentorship. Mentoring also emerged as an influential factor on participants' pursuit of a doctoral degree. Amy shared that her relationship with her master's degree advisor, who eventually became her doctoral advisor and mentor, supported her reasons for continuing into her doctoral program. She said, "I would say I primarily chose to get my doctoral degree from here, because my master's advisor would be my PhD mentor." Similarly, Janice was influenced by mentors in her professional life: she acknowledged the mentors from her graduate studies as individuals who encouraged her to apply to doctoral programs. When asked about her decision to enter a doctoral program, Janice shared:

I have phenomenal mentors from my master's years as well as my first year in a fellowship program. So, between those individuals, who were deep into academics and research, I was able to get guidelines and take their advice to solidify where I wanted to be.

Several participants reflected on interactions with faculty members from their educational experiences that influenced their thoughts on a doctoral program. Sharon reflected on her educational experiences and the relationships built between athletic training faculty and students. She recognized the value of those relationships, and the mentoring that occurred that influenced her reasons to get a PhD. Sharon said,

Two of my professors from my undergraduate studies, I really liked their lifestyle and the chance to interact with students regularly. They really mentored me and pushed me to see the importance of getting my doctoral degree.

Likewise, Jason had "positive interactions with my master's advisor," and those interactions "supported my decision to stay and pursue my doctoral degree."

Professional Development. The decision to pursue a doctoral degree was based on professional interest. Participants felt earning their doctoral degree would be a catalyst to achieve their long-term goals of working in higher education. Gaining a career as a faculty member in higher education was identified as a motivator by many of our participants. Specifically, 2 participants (Lisa and Carrie) acknowledged they had always had the goal of becoming a professor early on in their careers. Lisa shared that she "came into this program pretty driven to become a full-time faculty member in an athletic training program." In regard to when she knew she wanted to pursue a PhD, Carrie said:

I don't know how serious I could have thought this was, but I've wanted to pursue my PhD since high school. I probably didn't know much about it, but I knew that I wanted to attain the highest-level degree that I could because I really enjoyed school and I wanted to be a college professor, and I really wanted to be part of academia,

indicating that she had early realizations of her ultimate career goal. Several other participants, like Carrie and Lisa, shared an interest in a role within higher education before entering their degree programs and used that career goal as a motivator to enroll in their doctoral programs.

Career Planning Affirmation

Two main findings that emerged related to career planning were mentorship and legitimation. Participants identified the importance of having support from a mentor and experiences in their future role to affirm they were on the correct career path. Many of the participants identified their career goal as working in higher education. They felt that throughout their doctoral degree programs their mentors helped in career planning. Further, as they engaged in assistantships, they acquired knowledge about life in higher education, which legitimized their aspirations. Our participants' career aspirations were reinforced, rather than modified, during their doctoral degree program.

Mentorship. Participants described not only the important role mentors had in motivating them to select a doctoral program, but also the role mentorship played in their career aspirations. Mentors provided affirmation to the participants for seeking positions in higher education. The faculty members who supervised the participants during their doctoral education were their primary mentors. For example, Daniel, reflecting on his career plans, identified his doctoral advisor as a mentor. He said,

My mentor has a definite understanding of hierarchy [within higher education], and at the same time he's also willing to take time out of his own time and work with me on teachable moments and set goals with me [including what comes next for me], and I think he's very good at guiding individual steps in my career development.

Daniel's mentor helped him gain experiences that solidified his career planning. Amy, similarly to Daniel, distinguished her advisor as more than just academic support and explained how her advisor created various opportunities for her to

develop a niche that affirmed her pursuit of a doctorate and led her to a career in higher education. She stated,

My advisor has definitely been very supportive about helping me seek out different opportunities [during my studies]. My mentor has really helped me get ready for the next steps, by giving me these different learning experiences and opportunities to learn [about the academy].

Lisa described her mentors as the athletic training faculty members at her institution. Her mentors provided her with knowledge and skills focused on research and service, as those areas would help her to succeed in the future as a faculty member. Lisa shared,

They help me figure out what it is that I want to do (in higher education]. And have provided encouragement and opportunities for me to branch out and be involved with some service opportunities and to give me opportunities to bring me on board with their research and kind of involving me in their research so that I can gain that experience and gain a better handle on my own research or my own scholarship.

Lisa's relationship with her mentors allowed her to grow as a researcher, as well as gain experience with the requirements for the role of a faculty member in an athletic training program.

Carrie described her relationship with her doctoral advisor as a professional mentoring relationship because of the impact it has had in motivating her career aspirations. She said,

She's a mentor, kind of a life mentor, she's an example of what I would hope to attain to be, she's a mom, a professor, has her own clinic, and so she's really helped [give] me an example of what you can do when you really put your heart into everything.

Our participants recognized their mentors' support of their educational development as allowing them to actualize a career in higher education. Naomi shared how the faculty at her institution had been supportive and have really "listened to what I want and help[ed] me get it as well." She continued to share how her mentors had assisted her in developing professionally for her future role, saying:

And so, I am advocating for myself and they're advocating for me. They allow me to take initiative with my own education as well. Ownership helped me figure out what I liked, and what things I did not.

Lisa described support from her mentors as she navigated her doctoral program, saying that her doctoral advisor helps her develop knowledge related to scholarship:

We're on the same page and he's supporting me and sponsoring me on some internal grants. And helping me find some funding for some presentations that are not related to higher education but are related to athletic training.

Additionally, Carrie described how her doctoral advisor also serves a role in mentoring her through educational choices, saying:

I'm able to talk to her about any issues or get advice about any work situations or other classes and I'm just starting to

dive into my research interests with her and the conversation has been easy because she is actually one of the leaders in the interprofessional program and getting those initiatives together at the university.

Mentoring during the socialization process for the doctoral students in our study was helpful. The relationship between mentor and student provided insights to role responsibilities and assisted with educational outcomes through engagement, experience, and professional discourse.

Legitimization. Legitimization describes the experiences that reinforced our participants' career aspirations related to higher education. The chance to affirm their desire for a position in higher education was done with ongoing authentic experiences that were provided during their doctoral education. For many participants those experiences were rooted in research and teaching experiences. Kyle's experiences as a doctoral student with an assistantship included chances to engage in research as well as teach and supervise students. Kyle explained,

The experience of a terminal degree, getting the experience of conducting research as well as setting up my future research agenda, along with working in the education program, has secured my desires.

He acknowledged that "working with the faculty as well, it has helped me appreciate the faculty role, and gain affirmation that it's for me." Kyle stated that his experiences as doctoral graduate assistant "set him up to achieve his professional goals."

Daniel talked about how his research experiences, and the opportunity to be exposed to the entire research process, legitimized his career aspiration of becoming a researcher in higher academia:

I have plenty of opportunities to be writing grant proposals and institutional review board proposals and participating in all sorts of the research process from forming the ideas to publishing and presenting. These experiences are crucial for success in the future.

Daniel's reflections illustrate the importance of the opportunities he gained in his assistantship, setting him up to be a successful faculty member.

Others, like Daniel, shared sentiments about the chance to experience faculty life through their assistantships, which affirmed their pursuit of academic roles in the future. Lisa shared,

The nice thing about my assistantship is that going in, the program faculty said, we want to tailor this to what you want to be doing. So, I really had the ability to come in and mold my assistantship to where I needed to grow. I know that I needed experience in research, so they started out really strong, involving me in the research that they were doing.

Theresa was given the chance to teach as a part of her assistantship, she emphasized how her teaching experiences influenced her formulation of career goals:

I think the experiences I have gotten from teaching the classes has been really helpful and I've been teaching for 3 years. The

improvements I personally have made, and my teaching style have been really reassuring.

Maria, who had little previous teaching experience before her assistantship in her doctoral degree, discussed how the experience of being in a classroom helped affirm her career aspirations. When asked if she felt prepared for her future goals, she said:

For me, being out of the clinical setting in a college for a year and a half and not teaching, being able to do that again is really solidifying me wanting to do that. Realizing how much I do actually like teaching students and giving back, so to speak, to the profession, and helping develop more young professionals.

Engagement in various aspects of the faculty role through an assistantship allowed for awareness of responsibilities and expectations, but more importantly those authentic experiences provided affirmation for the faculty role.

DISCUSSION

Doctoral education provides the platform for a successful transition to a faculty role. We sought to better understand what attracts an athletic trainer to a doctoral degree, and how experiences in doctoral education shape career goals. We found that a doctoral degree is often facilitated by positive encouragement from mentors, which served to motivate the students to pursue their degree in the first place, in addition to experiences they had before their enrollment.

Pursuit of the Doctoral Degree

Socialization is a process characterized by learning through experience, which allows a newcomer to understand the traditions, expectations, values, skills, and knowledge of established groups they intend to join.[1,13] For our participants, their past experiences facilitated a period of time to reflect and thus realize their interest and desire to pursue a doctoral degree. Realization came from experiences within graduate-level training or during the first few years of clinical practice. The role of past experiences as described by our participants, including clinical and academic, in an athletic trainer's decision to pursue of a terminal degree has not been previously investigated in the literature. The intention to pursue a degree in higher education has been studied minimally in the field of nursing. Broussard and White,[14] in a study of nurses in Louisiana, identified that approximately 66% of respondents were highly motivated to pursue higher education based on their professional goals, and 53.7% were motivated by opportunities for advancement within the profession. The doctoral students similarly mentioned the doctoral degree as a means of achieving their professional goals. While engaged in their master's degrees and in clinical practice, our participants felt a desire to gain an advanced degree.

Baker and Pifer[15] found that professional relationships, including the academic advisor–student relationship, were necessary for success for the transitionary process. Our findings echo the work of Baker and Pifer[15] in that faculty members were identified as critical for helping students become aware of the importance of seeking opportunities for personal and professional development.[15] Our participants

identified that their faculty advisors and mentors assisted in creating opportunities for their professional growth through internships, networking, teaching, and research experiences.

The role of mentorship in athletic training doctoral education and for novice faculty members has previously been studied.[16,17] Mazerolle et al[16] defined a successful mentoring relationship during doctoral studies as (1) supportive, but yielding autonomy and collaboration; (2) one that includes opportunities for professional development; and (3) one that demonstrates mutual investment in the mentor-mentee relationship. For novice faculty members entering the field of academia, Barrett et al[17] reported active engagement, communication, and similar interests as attributes to effective mentorship.

All of our participants spoke about the support they received from their academic advisors and mentors, and of the importance of opportunities for professional development through their teaching assistant and/or research assistant responsibilities. Additionally, the role of the mentor in the students' success in both academic-related and personal factors, including illnesses and family circumstances, illustrated a mutual investment in the mentoring relationship. It was very apparent in our participants' testimonies that the role of the academic advisor and mentor heavily influenced the motivation to pursue a doctoral degree, the overall degree experience, and future career planning.

Career Planning

Mentorship is a mainstay in the literature in terms of its importance in facilitating role understanding, role inductance, and successful transition into the workplace.[18,19] Our participants spoke to the role of their faculty advisors/mentors in creating opportunities for professional growth through internships, networking, and teaching and research experiences, supporting the need for mentorship through the developmental period of the doctoral student. When studying the role of relationships in the transition from doctoral student to independent scholar, Baker and Pifer[15] found that professional relationships, including the academic advisor–student relationship, served as support when transitioning from student to scholar. The work of Baker and Pifer[15] demonstrates the importance of the relationships that can develop during doctoral education specifically between the student and doctoral advisors, which was echoed by our participants.

Professional socialization during the doctoral education experience is a process in which legitimization can occur.[20,21] Legitimization can occur through the experiences that doctoral students have throughout their degree process by way of their assistantship, opportunities they seek out, or through the mentorship of their faculty advisor. A study by Klossner[20] examined the role of legitimization in the professional socialization of second-year undergraduate athletic training students. Klossner[20] found that legitimization from various socializing agents initiated the professional socialization of the undergraduate students. Specifically, second-year athletic training students looked for affirmation from others who accepted them in their professional roles. Additionally, students needed to feel they had a role to play to demonstrate competence as an athletic trainer. Likewise, our

participants felt legitimized because they were able to have a well-rounded doctoral experience, facilitated by their assistantship and opportunities within their doctoral education experience. These experiences, like those reported by Klossner,[20] were grounded in engagement in a role that afforded feedback and interactions with those who represent the workplace they will assume full time.

Bowman et al[6] reported the importance of comprehensive autonomous experiences, specifically in research, as a means to increase the confidence of a doctoral student to perform the responsibilities of a faculty member. The common thread between this study[8] and our findings relates to comprehensive autonomous experiences that occur with doctoral assistantships. The opportunities provided to the doctoral students, including autonomy in research and teaching responsibilities, provided reassurance that they were on the right path to pursue the career of their choice. The personal growth and improvements observed from year to year, and the continued opportunities within the components of higher education, allowed our participants legitimization and professional socialization, especially with research and teaching roles, both being responsibilities required of a future faculty position. This affirmation of competence and the ability to fulfill the duties of a faculty member reinforced our participants' long-term goals and career aspirations to enter higher education.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION

Our study provides insight into the motivational factors for pursuit and career aspirations of students engaged in doctoral programs related to the field of athletic training. We do, however, recognize some limitations. First, our sample of doctoral students came from those who were pursuing their degrees as full-time students seeking an academic doctoral degree (PhD, EdD). Therefore, our findings can only speak to those who are being professionally socialized through an assistantship. In the future, we can include students who are pursuing their terminal degree online or part time to broaden our understanding of the socialization process and career planning. Those who are not full-time students may have different perspectives and motivations. Furthermore, our study included only individuals pursuing an academic doctorate and not a clinical doctorate in athletic training (ie, DAT). It would be valuable to examine the differences in experiences and motivation for individuals pursuing other forms of terminal degrees.

Our sample included a diverse group of full-time students with various types of graduate assistantships (ie, research-based, teaching-based, etc), which can influence the time spent in various roles within higher education. Future research should investigate if the funding of doctoral students impacts their motivation for pursuing their degree or their career aspirations.

We collected our data during the doctoral education experience and believe that follow-up interviews can help determine job selection and readiness to assume those roles in the new position postgraduation. This information may offer doctoral programs more information on how to best prepare the doctoral student for employment.

CONCLUSIONS

Athletic training education is currently experiencing transition, and, as many baccalaureate programs close and others shift to the graduate-level degree, it is important to understand the factors influencing pursuit of a doctoral degree. This is of interest, as faculty positions may be more challenging to assume; based upon the reduction in programs, there could be a reduction in need. Doctoral education provides affirmation for doctoral candidates, as they gain firsthand experiences allowing the realization of their future roles as faculty members. These experiences provide legitimation through engagement, affirming that the doctoral student is on the appropriate career path. The motives to pursue doctoral education are multifactorial. They are driven by past experiences in both an academic and a clinical practice setting. Mentors also play a vital role in the encouragement and development of doctoral students, assisting them through both motivation to pursue a degree and support within the degree program.

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Appendix. Interview Guide

Demographics

1. What is your age?
2. What is your sex?
3. How many years have you been certified as an athletic trainer?
4. Are you currently licensed?
5. What degrees do you currently hold?
6. What doctoral degree are you pursuing?
   a. What is your field/major?
7. What year are you in the doctoral degree program?
8. How long do you anticipate your doctoral degree program to last?
9. Do you currently have a graduate assistantship (GA)?
   a. Is it a full GA, three-quarters, one-half, etc?
   b. What are your responsibilities (clinical, teaching, research, service, other)?
   c. What percentage of time do you spend on each of those responsibilities?
10. How many years of clinical practice experience do you have?
    a. How many as a GA? Part-time? Full-time?
11. What is the Carnegie classification of your doctoral institution? (If unknown, record school name)

Interview

1. Please describe your educational background.
   a. Tell me about your undergraduate experience and master's degree experience.
   b. Tell me about your current doctoral degree experience.
2. Can you talk about your relationship with your doctoral advisor?
   a. Has that relationship impacted your career aspirations?
   b. Do you consider your doctoral advisor to be your mentor? Why or why not?
   c. Are there other individuals that have impacted your career aspirations? If so, who and how?

Motivational

1. When did you know that you wanted to pursue a doctoral degree?
2. Talk about the experiences that helped support your decision to pursue a doctoral degree.
   a. Was there a particular experience or person that influenced your decision?
   b. If yes, who/what were they and how did they influence?
3. What were you looking for in a doctoral program?
   a. Explain from a personal and educational standpoint.
4. Why did you choose to attend your doctoral program?
   a. Was there a particular experience or person that influenced your decision?
5. Was this doctoral program your top choice?
   a. If yes, why?
   b. If no, why not? Where would you rather have attended?
   c. How many schools did you apply to?
6. Have you been satisfied thus far in your doctoral program?
   a. If yes, how so?
   b. If no, why not? What would make you more satisfied with your program?
7. Is there anything you would like to change about the program (add or remove)?
8. Was there anything in your doctoral program that didn't align with your expectations?
   a. If yes, why?
   b. If no, why not?

Career

1. What are your career aspirations?
2. Can you share with me how you arrived at those goals for your future?
3. How well do your current experiences as a doctoral student align with your future aspirations?
   a. Are there areas specific to your career aspirations that you feel well prepared for?
   b. If yes, what are those areas? What experiences have prepared you for these career aspirations?
   c. Are there areas specific to your career aspirations that you do not feel well prepared for?
   d. If yes, what are those areas? What would help you feel more prepared?
4. Once enrolled in your doctoral program, were there any motivational factors you can identify that reinforced your future career aspirations?
   a. If yes, describe. (Did you have an advisor or mentor that provided guidance? Did your teaching or research experiences impact your aspirations?)
5. Have your aspirations changed at all throughout your doctoral program?
   a. If yes, how have they changed? What has influenced those changes?
   b. If no, what has affirmed your aspirations?
6. Can you describe your ideal job postgraduation?
   a. In what ways do you feel your doctoral program is preparing you for this ideal job?
   b. What could your doctoral program do to better prepare you for your ideal job?