

Thriving as a PhD Mentee: Mediating Mentor-Mentee Conflicts

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Introduction

For many, the PhD degree represents the pinnacle of academic success, a distinctive marker that one has made it in the academy as an emerging scholar. The attainment of a doctoral degree is no easy task as many of you can testify: the large number of what Americans refer to as ABDs¹ (All But the Dissertations), which is equivalent in many African universities to the excruciating length of time it takes to complete the degree. It has been estimated that the ‘dysfunctional graduate departments, toxic faculty, and the Navy Seal-like brutality of the PhD. process all contribute to the burnout experienced by the estimated 50-plus percent of PhD. students who fail to earn their doctorates’ in the United States of America (Yesko 2014). The numbers differ depending on the actual field of study, with 55-64 per cent being in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) field, approximately 56 per cent in the social sciences, and roughly 49 per cent in the humanities, according to the PhD Completion Project (Schuman 2014). Equally, PhD completion rates in Africa are no less depressing. Despite shared optimism on the importance of knowledge economy in national progress, doctoral training is hampered by slow graduation rates. These are the outcomes of a weak research infrastructure alongside inadequate regulatory mechanisms and policies to guide the implementation of research strategies and plans (Garwe 2015; Khodabocus 2016; Molla and Cuthbert 2016).

When Sternberg wrote his classic, *How to Complete and Survive a Doctoral Dissertation* (1981), he was merely echoing the frustration that the United States academia had experienced with an inordinate number of ABDs who had given up after cycles of stop-again, start again, in futile efforts to finish their degrees. While the book explores both the mechanical side of the dissertation writing process and relationships with committee members, the notion that one needs to 'survive' the process is untenable. Doctoral students need not merely survive; they are called upon to thrive and prosper during the entire process. When all the pertinent contextual variables are lined up properly, doctoral studies can be a very fulfilling experience that provides opportunities for career growth and long-lasting professional relationships.

This chapter focuses on how to make the doctoral research program a fulfilling and rewarding experience for the student and his/her committee or mentors. Rather than being a 'how to' self-help guide, the chapter contextualizes the problems inherent in a doctoral research mentorship, highlighting sources of potential challenges and possible solutions to mitigate them. It invites the reader, albeit unconsciously, to reflect on the issues raised and the solutions offered as a way of seeing doctoral research as a process with both back-end and front-end linkages that are essential for its successful completion. The chapter begins by addressing the notion of mentorship as a conceptual framework in doctoral research, working with academic mentors within the institutional framework, and attaining professional growth while undertaking doctoral research.

Why Mentoring?

In many African universities, the term supervisor is used for the faculty assigned to oversee a doctoral or master's student's research project. In American universities, the group of academics assigned the role (ranging from 3 to 5) is known as a dissertation committee. In the African context, the supervisors, usually two to three in number, will guide and supervise the doctoral candidate as he or she writes the thesis. The first supervisor also serves as the internal examiner of the work when it is finally concluded. In the United States context, the dissertation committee has a chair, who serves as the primary overseer of the research and writing process, and other members providing critical input based on their expertise which can either be content or methodology. When the student finishes writing, all committee members become examiners of the dissertation. Another important faculty member encountered during one's doctoral studies in United States universities is the academic advisor. Due to the complexity of doctoral

programs, an academic advisor is assigned to a student at the start of his/her studies to help manage the student's academic progress, including academic planning, adherence to requirements, setting objectives and goals, and degree completion.

Both supervisor and committee nomenclatures presuppose circumscribed roles focused on getting the doctoral candidates to complete writing their research projects, successfully defend their work during the viva examination followed by graduation. At CODESRIA, we prefer to use the notion of 'mentor' to encapsulate the expanded responsibilities that are inherent in guiding doctoral research work. These expanded responsibilities are beyond the formal institutional assignments that are required of thesis/dissertation supervisors or committee members. Not only do mentors serve as student advocates, they also facilitate students' access to other mentors when deemed appropriate. The term 'mentor' is derived from the Greek epic, *Odyssey*, by Homer (composed 8th century BC). In the epic, Mentor served as a surrogate father to Odysseus's son, Telemachus, as he struggled to return home from the Trojan wars. Mentor successfully guided Telemachus who triumphantly returned home.

Put differently, mentors are inextricably involved in the professional development of their mentees. Not only do they oversee the doctoral students' research projects, they also facilitate the mentees' entry into the professions. At its very basic level, a good mentor displays professionalism, demystifies the doctoral experience, and extends their relationship with the mentees beyond graduate school by providing assistance and advice at critical moments during students' careers. Mentors are regarded as problem-solvers, consultants and supporters of their mentees. During the research process, they provide constructive feedback so that their student can graduate on time. They also offer career guidance information, professional contacts, information about research grants, fellowships and job opportunities. They also write letters of recommendation throughout a mentee's professional career. Indeed, numerous cases abound where mentors and mentees have become fervent collaborators in scholarship long after the doctoral studies have been concluded.

Seen from the preceding conception, mentorship is the cornerstone of any good doctoral program. To reach its apex, the mentor-mentee relationship blossoms over the course of the research process from the initial one-on-one meeting to broader mentoring networks and ardent engagement with the discipline and the field. Doctoral students with effective mentors take shorter time to complete their studies, are more productive, have high engagement with the discipline and the field, have better connections professionally, and are more successful in post-graduation careers (Sternberg 1981).

Working with Your Mentors

Timely completion of doctoral studies is a complex process. It involves mediating relationships with university-sanctioned academic mentors, the academic discipline, personal life and, often, a career. Appreciating these relationships is best done within the framework of three interrelated factors: (1) the nature of the academic mentors, (2) the characteristics of a mentee, and (3) the mentorship process during the research phase. These factors are discussed in the following sub-sections.

Nature of Academic Mentors

The process of identifying mentors for a research project can be a messy one. Many factors are at play, not the least being the personality fit as well as discipline specialization. If you are in an institution where mentors are assigned to you, the problem of identifying suitable ones is minimized, although you still have the challenge of building a collegial bond. Where you are required to form your own committee as is common in American universities or you are asked for possible names of supervisors as in some African universities, the task can present significant challenges. In his study on the process of forming his dissertation committee, Hernandez notes the following from one of the respondents:

The dissertation is only a part of the picture albeit a major feature. Your chair can also be your mentor, someone who can help you take the next few steps in your career... The dissertation process can be a very intense one, so you want to be able to feel comfortable with your chair. Of course there will be times when both sides feel stressed out with the process... If you know a faculty person now and feel like you can talk to that person, then you have a good sense that the relationship part of chairing is there (1996:9).

Arising from the analysis of the data collected from interviewing several faculty members, Harnandez came up with the following as qualities for a dissertation chair:

Doctorate in Family Therapy or related field required. This is approximately a two-year commitment, although positions can range from one to five years. Previous experience is helpful, but not required. Expertise in systematic thinking, qualitative research, and academic writing is absolutely necessary. Interest in a student's content area (to be refined later) is extremely helpful. Sense of humor, creativity, and ability to generate visionary ideas are necessary for this position. Members must be authoritative yet collaborative, patient yet assertive, and inspirational yet practical. Must be accessible in case of emergency (such as writer's block, flight of ideas, or delusions of grandeur), yet able to "back off" and provide "space" when

necessary. Benefits are not guaranteed; however, benefit potential (in admiration, gratitude, and productivity) is great (1996:11-12).

We glean from these two quotations that good chemistry is integral to a good mentor; he/she should not only be friend, confidant and collaborator, but should also be endowed with skills in critical and systematic thinking. Expertise in subject matter is important but it is not the only consideration. Other ancillary characteristics that are germane to the mentorship context also need to be given due considerations.

Whether the mentor is assigned by the university or you form a committee yourself, you will encounter three types of possible mentors, be it in Africa or elsewhere: (1) senior scholar, (2) mid-career scholar, and (3) junior scholar (Columbia University, 2010 p. 2-3). Working with either of these has enormous implications for a mentor-mentee relationship as well as how soon one will complete the research. The characteristics of each their implications for mentoring are presented as follows:

Senior Scholar: This is a seasoned academic with considerable respect at the institutional level and within the profession. S/he has a well-developed professional network, including former students, which is invaluable for job opportunities, fellowships and grants. The scholar has vast experience in research and access to important sources of funding. The drawbacks of a senior scholar, however, include (a) having less time to devote to you and (b) that they may adopt a more 'laissez faire' approach to advising.

Mid-Career Scholar: This is an academic who is on course to achieving a professional reputation, both at the institutional level and within the discipline. S/he has attained tenure at his/her institution, which means job security is not a major consideration. Because s/he aims to attain the zenith of their academic career, s/he may have the following drawback: (a) limited time to devote to students' research projects due to demands of sabbatical and research leaves along with departmental obligations.

Junior Scholar: This scholar is usually beginning his/her university career, having just completed his/her doctorate degree. As such, s/he has a better grasp of what mentees are going through. Additionally, s/he is preparing for tenure at the universities, so s/he has incentives to publish and mentor graduate students. Nevertheless, a junior scholar has the following constraints as a mentor: (a) limited time to devote to mentees due to pressure to obtain tenure and promotion, (b) less mentoring experience, (c) less access to research funding, and (d) may not have achieved the professional visibility for which a doctorate student may be looking.

In assessing the suitability of your mentors, it is important to ask yourself these essential questions:

- a- is the scholar interested in the work I am contemplating doing, and will s/he be patient and dedicated enough to devote time to bring the project to fruition?
- b- how good is the mentor's record in working with other graduate students at my level?
- c- do you have open communication channels with the mentor, and is s/he easy to interact with?
- d- is the mentor able to contribute to your intellectual growth and provide critical feedback to your scholarship?
- e- what is the potential of your mentor to initiate and further your professional career goals?

All said, it is better to have a combination of a senior or mid-career scholar with a junior one. This ensures that the mentee gets the intellectual/disciplinary exposure and network resources from the more experienced scholars and a hands-on advice and empathy from the junior scholar.

On Being a Good Mentee

Just as there are problematic mentors, there are also bad mentees; the type that many mentors cringe at the thought of having to work with. In any relationship, there will always be one party who does not adhere to his/her part of the bargain or has unrealistic expectations. Doctoral research is challenging enough to invite characteristics that are injurious to a healthy mentor-mentee working relationship. A toxic relationship with mentors is one of the major causes of delays in completing doctoral studies besides the low quality of research output.

Being a good mentee requires a proactive stance, a call for discipline and endurance. Being a bad mentee on the contrary, is quite easy. Unprofessionalism and failure to appreciate doctoral research as a journey that entails collaboration and reasonable patience are the triggers of a bad mentee. A bad mentee will epitomize the following attributes: (a) anticipate instant review and attendant feedback of their draft chapters from all their mentors; (b) fail to plan and have a focused agenda for any meetings with their mentors; (c) expect a mentor to be a confidante, a therapist, and a friend; (d) react negatively to constructive criticism of his/her work; criticism, to a bad mentee, is equated to outright rejection of the work; and (e) anticipate explicit instructions on what to research and the write up about the thesis. These characteristics display traits of a mentee who does not

aspire to be a scholar. They also typify a mentee who is academically uninspiring, and scholarly disengaged².

It follows, therefore, that a good mentee is one embodied with characteristics antithetical to those exhibited by a bad mentee. A good mentee has realistic expectations from his/her mentors, uses any scheduled meeting time optimally, carefully narrows down the key areas where the mentors will provide the most significant contributions to the work and focuses on these. In Table 1.1, a summary of the key responsibilities that are essential for one to qualify as a good mentee culled from Emory University (2015) are presented.

It should be said that mentors must also be cognizant of the foregoing mentee responsibilities and how they (mentors) can facilitate their successful accomplishment. For instance, it is imperative that mentors be aware of institutional policies and procedures relating to graduate school and doctoral studies. Policies and procedures that touch on milestones and deadlines, curricular requirements, code of conduct, and procedures for resolving conflicts are important for both the mentors and the mentees. Equally, both parties should have a clear understanding on meetings and communications timelines. A consensus on how often to meet, rescheduling meetings, and means of communication (including emergencies) ensures that both parties are in regular contact. Finally, a mentor should also be transparent about the research project dissemination expectations – conference presentation, journal article, or book. Both should have a mutual understanding of authorship collaboration in either one or more of these artifacts.

Table 1.1: Key Responsibilities of a Good Mentee

Area of Mentee Responsibility	Mentee Task
Timeliness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mindful & respectful of mentor time; mentors have personal & professional commitments. • Be on time for scheduled meetings; cancel meeting or reschedule in a timely manner. • Note program requirements & deadlines; set goals & develop work plans around them. • Know when to expect feedback on chapters. • Factor agreed timelines for submission and receiving comments when submitting work. • Work with mentor for timeline to work on comments & revisions.

Quality and Professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit a polished and presentable draft; edit it for typos. • Keep mentors apprised of any changes in perspectives, directions in research foci. • Accept feedback offered by mentors as meant to improve work; be professional in discussing differences of opinions. • Summarize main discussion items after meeting mentors and share it with them. Ensures you all on the same page.
Professionalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on success in a doctoral program which students lack on admission – presentation, publication process, research grants & professional networks. Ask mentors: • Which professional association & conference to join • How to prepare project for presentation • How to navigate the publishing process & prepare for submission. • How to locate and apply for research funding from local & international organizations • How to identify, establish and maintain professional networks.

Source: Self-generated by the Author

Framing Mentor-Mentee Conflict in the Research Process

Getting mentors may be the easy part; working coherently as a team, however, is more difficult. Doctoral research mentoring is replete with horror stories of tensions, conflicts, and even abandoned studies. What was initially expected to be a coherent team with a clear focus can often degenerate into an academic contest as egos and important ideas collide. In most cases, differing perceptions of quality and the study's contribution to the academic discipline underlie the conflicts. This section looks at conflicts that may arise between mentors and mentees during the actual writing of the research projects, the prime reason why many doctoral candidates do not complete their doctoral degrees (Nettles & Millet 2006; Bowen & Rudenstine 1992).

Philosophical Differences are Healthy

It is important to caution that diversity of opinions about a mentee's work does not necessarily mean hardened positions and irreconcilable differences. The social science is a minefield with a plethora of theoretical constructs for understanding and interpreting phenomena. Almost any issue will appear as a contested terrain with a multiplicity of interpretations gleaned from a myriad of theoretical schools. A university, for instance, can be analyzed from economic theories, organizational theories, institutional theories, political economy, sociological theory, and psychological theory, among others (Source?). Different perspectives on a research topic on the university could have its genesis on the different theoretical conceptions that mentors hold about the academy.

Getting a variety of perspectives in a form of advice is healthy and, indeed, it is one of the reasons why doctoral candidates have more than one mentor. It is akin to getting a second medical opinion in order to make an accurate diagnosis of a disease. Prior to continuing to the surgical phase of treating an illness, it makes sense to get a second, perhaps third, opinion to forestall major mistakes coupled with costly and ineffective procedures. Different opinions about a research product are akin to multiple peer reviews and are a good preparation for the viva hearing (defense). Providing a perspective on this, Jalongo avers as follows:

Scholarly work is all about cautiously interpreting results, viewing work from differing perspectives, and responding to peer review. When grappling with advice from more than one individual on how to strengthen the document, the first step is to go through the manuscript one page at a time and look at each committee member's comments on each section. Often, what appeared to be incompatible in terms of recommendations is simply an indication that the section in question was not clear (2007:2).

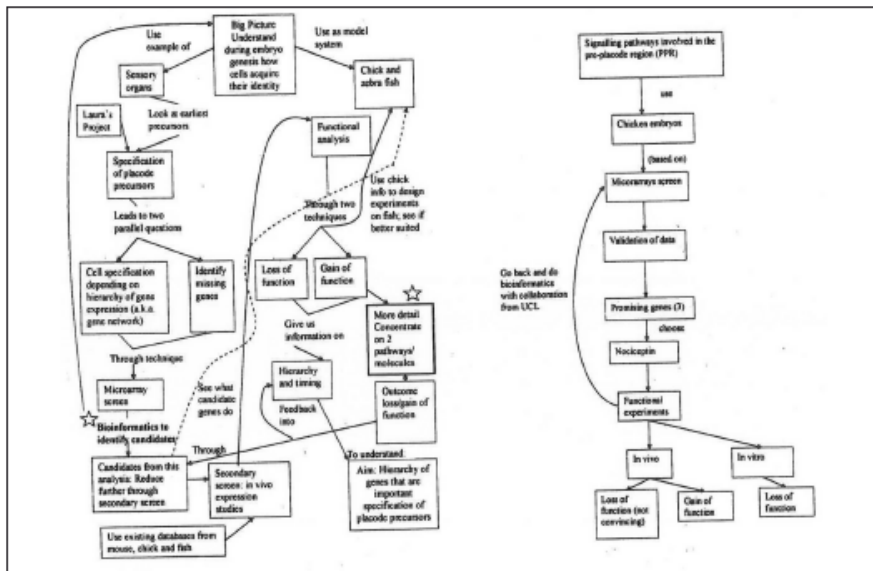


Figure 1.1: Differing Conception of Research between Mentor and Mentee
Source: Kandiko and Kinchin (2012:4) used here with permission

The differing conceptions of the research project between a mentee and their mentor are rooted in the different cultural and educational backgrounds of the two (Kandiko and Kinchin 2012). In their study, Kandiko and Kinchin note that whereas the mentors are interested in students’ ‘learning’ as they undertake research, the students are more focused on ‘doing’ in order to complete their projects. It is further apparent that while mentors have a more global view of the research project, relating the work to other closely and tangentially related subfields, mentees may have a more ‘check list’ approach to what needs to be done in order to complete the thesis as depicted in Figure 1.1. We see in this work that surmountable tensions and differences can arise based on the divergent views of the research work at a doctoral level between the mentors and the mentees. These differences manifest themselves in three areas: (1) appreciating the complexity of the research topic, (2) understanding the research process, and (3) the role of the research thesis.

The revisions required by mentors in the work of doctoral candidates are of two types according to Sternberg (1981). The first is the ‘affectively-neutral’ revisions and/or additions in methodology or theory. A mentor may advise

additions to the sample, the data collection strategies, or an additional theoretical construct to the study. Where such recommendations do not substantially change the study and are in tandem with anticipated changes, it is best for the mentee to execute them without complaint. Doing so may relieve the candidate of stress down the road. The second type of revision is the 'affectively-laden' revisions and/or additions. These may require extensive work and substantial alteration of the thesis, particularly bringing in a new theory and approach. If all the mentors feel this is then it is in a mentee's best interest to do it. Resistance to incorporating such feedback is sometimes related to the notion of 'magnum opus', writing the perfect thesis/dissertation. In this case, a mentee forgets that the thesis/dissertation is not a political statement about student rights under oppressive mentors but rather a document to enable one to obtain a doctorate degree. A difference of opinion does not mean that the mentors have contempt for the mentee's work; it just shows that there is a different way of looking at the issue which is worth consideration in the prevailing research context. It does not mean a perfect thesis/dissertation is being devalued but rather being enhanced. Simply put, the mentee should not lose focus of the goal of writing the dissertation: to get the doctoral degree, not to write a perfect research.

Pathological Differences are Dysfunctional

No matter how much advice is given or how often strategies are devised to ameliorate conflicts, working on a doctoral research project will likely entail some challenges. In many instances, disagreements on perspectives of the research are anticipated and, in many cases, healthy. They become detrimental when they are frequent and pathological. They become pathological when the differences are personalized; the mentee perceives the differences as an attack on his/her person while the mentor interprets the mentees behavior in a similar manner. The distinction between the healthy philosophical differences and the detrimental pathological differences rests on the personalization. In the former, the differences rest on the content of the work while in the latter differences are attributed to attack on the personality. In such cases, both are detrimental and destructive to the entire enterprise. Indeed, these types of conflicts are the most common reason for many non-completions of doctoral degrees (Source?). One may ask what are the mentors and mentees thinking and doing during the research process that generates these conflicts? Are there decisions that each party may take to mitigate them? These are the issues at the center of this section.

In a dramatic encapsulation of the tension and conflict that can occur in a research supervision setting, Gearity (mentee) and Mertz (mentor) capture the ensuing statements and reflection along these lines in this lived experience phenomenological study:

March 2007

What a bitch! Who says that to one of your doctoral advisees?

“Brian, if you would be more comfortable with a different chair you are free to do so.”

Why is she telling me that? What good can come out of saying that? I don't have any other options...viable options at least. It's not like I had much choice in picking her to be my dissertation chair.

“I have provided you with an abundance of feedback related to your dissertation prospectus. To be frank, it needs a lot of work. If you would be more comfortable with a different chair you may want to look into that.”

There it is again! I wish she would stop saying that. That's the third time. I can't do anything but just sit here and listen to her beat me up; beat up my writing and then tell me I should take a hike in some quasi-polite way. Silence as resistance...this evil woman, Dr. Mertz, must not be having a good day; there must be something wrong with her. *My writing is not that bad* (Gearity and Mertz 2012:6).

This snapshot oftense statements shows how quickly the mentor-mentee relationship can deteriorate to the point that the mentee was convinced that the mentor had a personal vendetta against him. The mentor, on the other hand, wants nothing to do with Gearity's dissertation. Eventually, both the mentor and mentee worked through their initial and ongoing conflicts until Gearity successfully defended his dissertation and was awarded his doctoral degree. As a mentor, Dr. Mertz was a teacher, critic, collaborator, friend, and counselor. Each part of the dissertation process required her to wear one of these hats.

Two types of conflicts can ensue in a supervision context according to Sternberg, (1981). The first type of conflict is that of the structural issues with a committee as a whole. In this type of conflict, the entire set of mentors may be out of sync. This is illustrated in Figure 1.2, whereby one of the members advocates for theory X and the other theory Y, while the head is either neutral or endorses one of the theoretical propositions. The mentee almost looks as if s/he is cast against the entire group of mentors. In most horror stories of failed dissertation or thesis projects, 'philosophical differences' among the committee members is the most cited. One solution would be for the mentee to respectively inform the lone dissenting mentor

that s/he is comfortable writing the work from one angle rather than the other and requires the mentor's support in this effort. An easy solution would be for the mentee to use the university administrative mechanisms to resolve the impasse, but this carries a disproportionate risk to the candidate. The doppelgänger of a 'wounded academic' can leave the mentee exposed to a prolonged snipping battle over the research work or the possible dissolution of the entire committee.

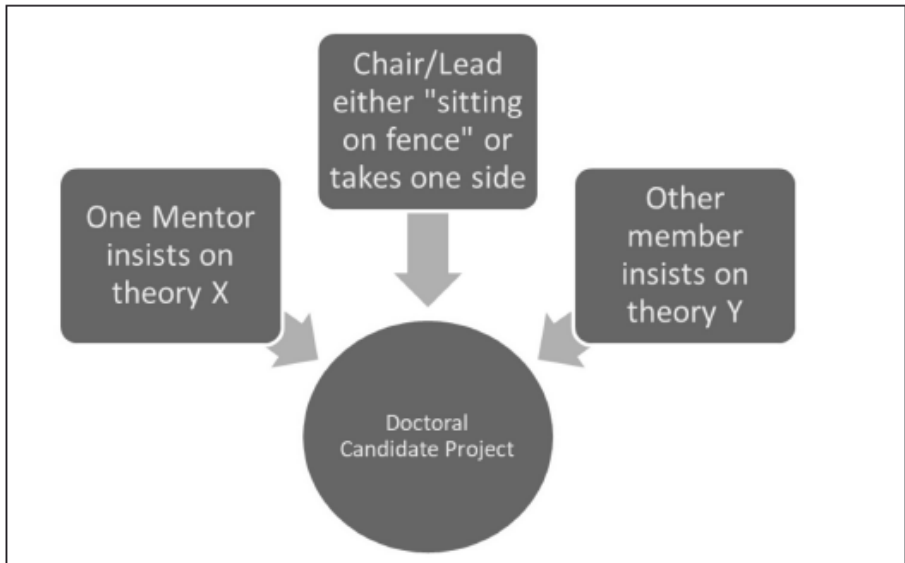


Figure 1.2: Mentors divided over a Candidates Research Project

Source: Self-generated by the Author

It is almost inevitable that a student will encounter a mentor for whom differences of opinion on the quality and substance of the research project become 'personal'. It is, however, important not to characterize every misunderstanding or difference as being 'personal'. Those mentors with a record of mentoring students can easily provide ample evidence of cordial and harmonious working relationships with other doctoral students and mentors in the doctoral program. Protestation against an intransigent mentor bears merit if several ABDs file comparable complaints.

Since problem mentors have the potential to ruin progress towards completion of the research and therefore, doctoral studies, it behooves us to identify the main traits of the various types of problem mentors in higher education. Because the psycho-social disposition of such 'problem mentors' may be injurious to the

completion of the research project, it is best for a mentee to avoid them if one has an advanced knowledge about their history with dissertations/theses or replace them immediately once it becomes apparent they will be problematic. Again, this is not an easy call and a mentee has to weigh the decision in the context of his/her own relationship with the 'problem mentor' and in the larger milieu of the departmental politics. Sternberg (1981) offers the following typology of eight problem mentors encountered by doctoral students:

The "Young Turk": A recent graduate, with an active research agenda. They are demanding, looking for a perfect research project. With career demands always in the background your work may be the first casualty through inordinate delay in getting feedback.

The "Career ABD": This mentor took a decade or more to complete his/her doctoral studies. This type of mentor will rationalize the delays in such high-sounding phrases like 'soak in it more', 'read more around the issue', and 'scholarship cannot be rushed; like any good cooking, it has to be slow'.

The "Sadistic" Mentor: This type of mentor uses the power of a senior scholar to express upon the ABD his/her individual and job-related rages. His/her constant rationalization for this is 'demanding for more rigor', 'upholding standards', and the likes.

The "Sexist": This mentor converts the dissertation/thesis into a flirtation activity. Female students are especially vulnerable to patronizing behavior from their male mentors, sometimes with very few avenues for recourse. As more women have entered the ranks of academia, there have been cases of women mentors patronizing male ABDs.

The "Hamlet-Complex": This type of mentor doubts all versions of the work, including those s/he had endorsed earlier. Doubt and skepticism are important ingredients in academia, but neurotic skepticism that never ends is detrimental to successfully finishing a dissertation/thesis.

The "Passive-Aggressive" : This type mentor positions himself/herself as a friend and collaborator in the project but executes sabotage maneuver behind the scene. Psychologically passive-aggressive mentors do not like students and/or obligations accompanying university work such as dissertation/thesis advising. On the other hand, they feel guilty not fulfilling this important obligation.

The Jealous or Envious: This mentor senses your potential as a scholar and better in the field than s/he is. The mentor may use every weapon at his/her disposal to frustrate your competition.

Any of these means that both the mentor and mentee will be involved in a long unproductive activity of working through emotional blocks which is detrimental

to the success of a dissertation/thesis. It is advisable that in these situations, the mentee should look for a different mentor. Of course, this will call for a balancing act involving other mentors and possible administrative channels provided.

Conclusion

The doctoral degree is the epitome of scholarship, an aspiring academic's ultimate target. It is every doctoral student's definitive desire to successfully defend his/her dissertation/thesis, walk across the stage after being hooded by his/her academic mentor(s), and forever be endowed with the much coveted title of 'Dr.' in front of his/her name. Yet, many are those who embark on this academic voyage only to fail to complete it at the penultimate stage, forever baptised with that unflattering title of ADB—All But Dissertation.

This chapter has explored the context surrounding the failure to complete the doctoral degree by a good number of candidates in Africa and the USA. I also characterized completing a doctoral degree as going beyond survival; the reader saw the process as one of thriving so that the graduate becomes one who enters into the profession and continues to grow in his/her respective disciplines. Survival implies merely getting through with limited expectation that one will grow in the discipline both in intellectual and practical terms.

Successfully completing doctoral studies, I have argued, entails a process of mentoring rather than supervising or advising. Through mentoring, doctoral students have access to a broad array of supporting structures that are pertinent to a fulfilling doctoral experience that translates into a shortened timeline to complete the degree and successful career paths later. Mentors are not only students' advocates but they also facilitate access to other suitable mentors, model professionalism, assist students enter their profession, as well as provide critical advice during a student's career. Nevertheless, identifying suitable mentors is a deliberate balancing act on the part of the mentee. Similarly, being a good mentee means that the doctoral student has to take proactive measures in order to familiarize himself/herself with the institutional policies and procedures governing doctoral studies and research supervision. Mentees have to acquaint themselves with the basic responsibilities required of doctoral candidates, including timeliness, professionalism, and professionalization.

The most intractable mentor-mentee conflict ensues during the writing process. Structural problems with the committee as a whole may imperil student progress in the dissertation/thesis writing process. Resolving this dilemma requires a balancing act on the part of a mentee and may entail the dissolution of an

entire body of mentors as a last resort. Less drastic, however, would be for a doctoral mentee to work his/her way through the differences with a committee. More problematic are difficulties with a specific mentor, particularly problems that arise due to various psycho-social factors with the mentors. Additionally, mentees require a well-crafted strategy to isolate the problematic mentor from the committee.

Notes

1. Colloquially, ABDs refers to doctoral students who drop out the academic program without ever completing their doctoral dissertation which is a requirement for graduation. Rather than being PhD's if they had completed the work, they are known as ABDs to signify they did not meet the final requirement of the program.
2. Please note that where challenges of life get in the way of completing the dissertation, institutions do have policies and procedures for seeking leave of absence. It is important to take advantage of these provisions.

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