

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH PAPER: Unfixing the Doctorate from Gender and Age (Part I): A Report on the Special Circumstances of Older Women Pursuing an English-Related Ph.D.

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PAGES: 34

This report identifies motivations, challenges, support, and rewards identified by more than 200 respondents to a survey as part of a research project to examine the lived experiences of women who entered English-related doctoral programs at ages 30 or older. It found respondents were both motivated and rewarded by professional and personal development associated with earning a Ph.D., even as the number of traditional tenure-track positions associated with the archetype “fixed” definition decreases. There were pressures of time and finances unique to older graduate students, who also experienced professional and familial support differently than their younger classmates. Institutional and program structure often does not account for the special circumstances or existing knowledge and experience of older graduate students. Still, most would do it again.