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**THE MANUSCRIPT DISSERTATION:  
A MEANS OF INCREASING COMPETITIVE EDGE FOR  
TENURE-TRACK FACULTY POSITIONS**

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**ABSTRACT**

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Aim/Purpose	The traditional doctoral dissertation is the first major research project that is led by doctoral students, but it does not necessarily prepare them to publish shorter articles in journals. The manuscript dissertation provides a way for doctoral students to establish themselves as researchers while gaining the experience of developing peer-reviewed manuscripts before graduation, thus enhancing career opportunities as tenure-track faculty.
Background	This paper demonstrates how the manuscript dissertation can be employed to increase doctoral student publications before graduation.
Methodology	This article uses autoethnography to describe the process and results of writing a manuscript dissertation.
Contribution	This paper contrasts dissertation styles, explaining the benefits and challenges of the manuscript dissertation option in particular.
Findings	I found that it was important to have an influential and established dissertation chair, develop credibility by displaying competence and clear goals, being curious about what you don't know may be an asset and to be humble and comfortable with sharing what you don't know. I also discuss the personal benefits I gained from developing a manuscript dissertation including producing refereed articles earlier, committee members serve as peer-reviewers of your chapters and gaining the opportunity to learn and master multiple methodological approaches. I also shared the challenges I encountered during my dissertation process which included, committee members not being familiar with and not being willing to invest the time to support me in developing the manuscript dissertation, the timeframe for completion of my dissertation was extended, and balancing my responsibilities as a doctoral can-

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	didate. I also discussed challenges that I had not experienced but still could be an issue for others utilizing this style of dissertation including, insuring the cohesion of publications and having the copyediting support.
Recommendations for Practitioners	Dissertation advisors and chairs should consider recommending the manuscript dissertation to doctoral students interested in gaining the experience of developing peer-reviewed manuscripts and becoming tenure-track faculty.
Recommendation for Researchers	Doctoral students interested in becoming tenure-track faculty should consider the manuscript dissertation option as a means of producing publications before graduation, thus increasing competitive edge in the academic job market.
Impact on Society	Publication before graduation will help young scholars to produce high-quality research earlier in their academic careers.
Future Research	Future research should examine the prevalence of the manuscript dissertation, allowing researchers to determine where and how commonly it is used.
Keywords	manuscript dissertation, doctoral dissertation, publication, tenure-track faculty, doctoral advisors

## INTRODUCTION

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The doctoral dissertation is a familiar concept even to those outside of academia. The very mention of the word *dissertation* in casual conversation is likely to evoke images of a researcher writing laboriously away until he or she has completed the book-like document that marks the individual's entry into the world of emerging scholars. The traditional dissertation is a document intended to prove the writer's ability to conduct in-depth research. The dissertation functions as a well-recognized gateway to the doctoral degree and, in many cases, the professoriate (Rogers, 2015). However, in some university programs, the traditional 5-section/chapter dissertation is not the only option available to doctoral candidates (Vickers, 2016). Some candidates opt to develop a manuscript dissertation (MDIS). Another name for this style of dissertation is *the dissertation by publication* (Brien, 2008; Draper, 2012, Durling, 2013). The MDIS generally includes distinct chapters (typically 2 or 3) written in a peer-reviewed article manuscript format based on a similar theme but addressing varying research problems and questions. The student author has the option to use varied research methodologies for each of the manuscripts. This approach is often chosen as a means of enabling emerging scholars to submit and/or publish information from their dissertation during or shortly after completing their dissertation process giving them a head start in a competitive faculty job market and launching their future careers in the professoriate.

To be competitive on the faculty job market at research institutions, students in doctoral programs are highly encouraged to produce publications (Freeman, 2014; Freeman & Diramio, 2016; Tomlinson & Freeman, 2017). Published peer reviewed articles allow an individual to be set apart and are perceived to be better prepared for a career as a faculty member, as I discovered during the MDIS process.

When completing my MDIS at a U.S. institution (which integrated research and coursework, as is typical of American doctoral programs), I was reminded multiple times that developing those articles was important to developing my academic career. I wanted to be a professor at a research university, having experience developing such manuscripts would enhance my competitiveness in the search for such a position. I was particularly conscious of the need to publish because my doctoral program was designed for practitioners – those who wanted to be administrators in the higher education sector.

The program that I studied in did not formally include socialization and training regarding scholarly publication development, which necessitated a personal effort on my part to publish. The process at first seemed simple, and perhaps one that I seemed not to appreciate as fully as I could have. I found that producing a MDIS was a lengthier process than producing a standard dissertation, an idea that I had not fully accepted as a reality when completing the dissertation. It took me a semester longer than I originally estimated it would take to complete the dissertation; however, in that timeframe, I believe I learned more than I could have during the regular process. Although my dissertation chair forewarned me that it would likely take additional time to complete this style of dissertation, I initially thought that I would be an exception. However, given the added complexity of identifying and addressing three distinct problems and questions via this style of dissertation, I came to discover the importance of taking my time to ensure that I had deep, rich, and descriptive qualitative data. Each of the three manuscripts included in my dissertation would have to be able to stand up to the scrutiny of my dissertation committee members and peer-reviewers once I had completed the entire document and submitted the articles to various journals.

Completing the MDIS was an enriching experience, as the process afforded me resources and experiences that a normal dissertation would not have provided (e.g., learning how to structure manuscripts for peer-reviewed journals). By the end of my journey, I had published three articles, a feat that many doctoral students have also accomplished via the MDIS process, but one that could be more difficult to achieve by means of a traditional dissertation.

This research article depicts my MDIS experience through the lens of the following research questions: (1) What were the lessons that I learned from completing a MDIS? (2) What were the benefits of completing a MDIS? (3) What were the challenges of completing a MDIS?

I begin this paper with a review of the literature on dissertation. This is followed by a detailed account of my personal experience with the development of my own MDIS. Finally, I provide a discussion and conclusion regarding what I learned from my experience and provide recommendations for students interested in utilizing and developing a MDIS and faculty interested in learning more about and facilitating student dissertations utilizing this approach.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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Before I share my experience with developing a MDIS, I first would like to review the purpose of and define a MDIS. R. Thomas, West, and Rich (2016) state that the purpose of the PhD student dissertation requirement is “to train young scholars in proper research methodology and to contribute original findings to research” (p. 83). However, these researchers raise concerns that the traditional dissertation, a lengthy, five-chapter research paper on a single topic, lacks both “dissemination” and “authenticity” (p. 83). They highlight the difficulties of publishing from a traditional dissertation, which is written in such a way that, in general, it must be extensively revised before it can be made to yield articles of publishable quality for scholarly journals. For recent students who are pursuing and/or have landed demanding careers, the prospect of heavy, time-consuming revision may discourage the publication of dissertation-based research. Additionally, writing a dissertation is a notably different experience from the research manuscripts graduates are likely to develop during their careers as faculty. Particularly, many academic fields and disciplines require faculty to produce peer-reviewed articles (Helmreich, 2013), which are generally shorter academic documents and provide less space for details, whereas dissertations are generally book-length.

### *DEFINING THE MDIS APPROACH*

In response to the limitations of the traditional dissertation, R. Thomas et al. (2016) propose an alternative research writing project for PhD students: the MDIS, also known as a Publication-Based Thesis (Sharmini, Spronken-Smith, Goldman, & Harland, 2015), a PhD by publication (Butt, 2013), a PhD by published work (Badley, 2009), and a paper-based thesis (Pretorius, 2016). Although universi-

ties commonly impose differing requirements for this type of dissertation, MDIS are characterized as a lengthy, scholarly document that includes multiple published or publication-ready research articles. According to Baggs (2011), the MDIS most commonly contains an introduction, three chapters in the form of articles that are of publishable quality (ready to be submitted to a peer-reviewed/refereed journal outlet), and a conclusion. This format may vary slightly in various settings.

Examples of varying countries facilitating differing formats include the UK, where the PhD is normally a three-year research apprenticeship with limited focus on coursework (Christianson, Elliott, & Massey, 2015), the dissertation is commonly an 80,000 to 100,000-word document that must include an original contribution to the knowledge base of the scholar's field; the specific number of articles for a MDIS are not emphasized (Park, 2005). Although the format may vary slightly, the originality requirement is relevant in multiple contexts. U.S.-based researchers, Gross, Alhusen, and Jennings (2012), add that "At least one of the publishable manuscripts must present original research findings" (p. 431). In humanities disciplines, the MD may also be structured as an exegesis or introduction followed by one or more articles already submitted for publication (Anonymous, personal communication, August 16, 2017). R. Thomas et al. (2016) suggest that since these articles are written in the format required for publication, the format in which PhD graduates will frame their future work, the MDIS can be both convenient and more relevant to the future careers of students who plan to publish.

### ***BENEFITS OF THE MDIS APPROACH***

Doctoral students who desire to work at research universities are expected to demonstrate that they can develop a research agenda and publish scholarly/peer-reviewed articles. The MDIS approach is one way in which a student could have a head start in developing such a record. R. Thomas et al. (2016) suggest that students who opt to write MDIS may experience several advantages over their traditional dissertation-writing peers. First, since the MDIS by its nature requires several different research projects, MDIS writers may be able to publish articles from their dissertation work faster and more prolifically than traditional dissertation writers, who engage in a single time-consuming research project. Secondly, since MDIS writers can publish faster and more prolifically, they are able to enter their fields better established and more prepared to compete in fields requiring professional publications (Finch, Deephouse, O'Reilly, Massie, & Hillenbrand, 2016). Dowling, Gorman-Murray, Power, and Luzia (2011) concur, referring to the MDIS as a means of generating scholars. Francis, Mills, Chapman, and Birks (2009) suggest that engaging in developing a MDIS allows students to practice producing research articles of the sort they will be expected to publish in their future faculty careers. Finally, R. Thomas et al. (2016) state that this increase in publishable work can offer benefits not only to students, but to their advisors, who may serve as co-authors for students' research articles.

According to R. Thomas et al. (2016), students tend to express a sense of satisfaction with the MDIS process and its result. Because MDIS require students to focus on comparatively small, discrete units of the dissertation, students tend to be less likely to become overwhelmed with the enormity of their research projects. Finishing one article helps to build a sense of accomplishment, which in turn helps to provide the momentum necessary for most students to finish the entire dissertation. In harmony with these findings, other researchers indicate that PhD students who opt to write MDIS are encouraged by the peer review process and the idea that they are potentially making contributions to their fields with the material they were seeking to publish (De Jong, Moser, & Hall 2005; Robinson & Dracup, 2008). There is a growing body of literature in this area and more students and faculty are beginning to share their positive experiences with the MDIS approach (Davies & Rolfe, 2009; Green & Powell, 2005; Jackson, 2013; Lee, 2010; Niven & Grant, 2012; Peacock, 2017; Powell, 2004; Robins & Kanowski, 2008; Sharmini et al., 2015; Thomson, 2013; Wilson, 2002).

### ***LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES OF THE MDIS***

While highlighting the benefits of the MDIS, R. Thomas et al. (2016) do not neglect to acknowledge its limitations and challenges. One prominent concern often raised with the MDIS is that of the depth of the research projects. Some worry that students need to develop deep research skills that they will need to be able to use when performing research writing during their careers and that these deep research skills will not be adequately formed by the MDIS (Lee, 2010; Robinson & Dracup, 2008). Additionally, R. Thomas et al. (2016) report that advisors (and dissertation committee members) may be unfamiliar with the MDIS and, therefore, uncomfortable in advising students who are writing such research projects. Finally, there are institutional challenges related to MDIS, such as copyright issues when students wish to publish the articles embedded in their dissertations.

These obstacles are not insurmountable, however. Advisors who are unfamiliar with the MDIS format are still likely to be familiar with the format of articles ready for publication. Advisors may also reach out to their colleagues for assistance or they may learn and practice new skills simultaneously. J. R. Thomas, Nelson, and Magill, (1986) note that when research depth is a concern, students may be required to elaborate on several sections of each article by including appendices at the end of the dissertation. This might extend the dissertation process, but it would ensure that students learn in-depth research skills while still allowing them to produce several publishable academic articles in the process.

As for the institutional copyright issues the MDIS can cause, R. Thomas et al. (2016) state that “Initial implementation of the multiple article format has ... called for changes in practice” (p. 85). Universities can alter the way they publish and store MDIS to facilitate the publication of articles from MDIS, but this does require open-mindedness and a willingness to change on the part of the institution (R. Thomas et al., 2016). Specific ways universities and individuals can address copyright issues caused by MDIS will be discussed in more depth in the section “Ethical considerations for writers of manuscript dissertations.”

Much of the available literature regarding MDIS has been written by professionals and educators in the fields of science and healthcare, where the MDIS has gained popularity because it facilitates publication. According to Kearney (2014), however, publishers in non-Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields are much less likely than publishers in science fields to accept work that has already been made available electronically, even if it has only reached a dissertation database such as ProQuest. One way to deal with this would be to limit the access to the dissertation for up to four years, to give the author an opportunity to publish it in other venues before it becomes available through this venue. Thus, although doctoral students in non-STEM fields would be likely to benefit from the opportunity to employ the MDIS option, there appears to be no published evidence that non-STEM fields are increasingly embracing the use of MDIS.

### ***ETHICAL AND PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR WRITERS OF MDIS***

In a 2012 editorial written to encourage scholarly discussion, Gross et al. pose several important questions pertaining to the ethics of MDIS publishing. Noting that these questions are not unique to MDIS, but rather more noticeable in their cases, these authors sought to solve the following problems: “Who merits authorship?” “How should the order of faculty co-authorship be determined?” and “How much assistance should student authors receive?”

In exploring the question “Who merits authorship?” Gross et al. (2012) reference the well-known guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA) (2010) and the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE, 2010). While both associations express their guidelines uniquely, they similarly require those credited with authorship to make large contributions to the substance of the work in question. However, Gross et al. (2012) note that a “power imbalance” exists among graduate students and faculty; namely, students must decide which assisting faculty members to credit with co-authorship and, in the case of the MDIS, they must do this before defending their work to

the committee that is likely comprised of those very professors” (p. 432). Regardless of the potential discomfort associated with making authorship decisions, the authors encourage students not to acquiesce to the political pressure to include professors who did not meet established guidelines for authorship credit.

In answering their second ethical question, “How should the order of faculty co-authorship be determined?” Gross et al. (2012) recommend again that publications developed from student dissertations should adhere to APA (2002) guidelines regarding authorship credit: namely, that the student should be listed as the first author. Gross et al. (2012) write that in general, authors should be listed in descending order according to the weight of their contributions; that is, the author who has contributed least should be listed last. They acknowledge, however, that ranking faculty co-authors could present great difficulties for both students and faculty members themselves (in such situations, for example, as those when lower-ranking faculty members are listed before higher-ranking ones according to their participation in the research project). To combat this problem, the researchers recommend that universities should clearly articulate policies regarding the ranking of co-authors; in this manner, PhD students and members of their dissertation committees would be spared the angst of making politically charged decisions.

In answering the question “How much assistance should student authors receive?” Gross et al. (2012) argue that while the dissertation is primarily the responsibility of the student, faculty members who are listed as co-authors on publications developed from it have an obligation to respond not only to the content of the work to be published, but also to the writing itself. Indeed, according to the ICMJE (2010), poorly written publications bearing several names reflect badly on all those listed as authors. Thus, anyone listed as an author would need to be prepared to take responsibility for the quality of the work bearing his or her name. Issues of quality and authorship must be addressed anytime there is more than one author and thus, the MDIS process appears to offer the student another opportunity for gaining insight and understanding into the publication process and thus may be another good reason for selecting this option if one wishes to enter higher education at a research institution.

Kearney’s (2014) work brings to light yet another ethical and practical concern for writers of dissertations: the potential difficulty of republishing a dissertation that has been made available electronically. Even if the university does not exacerbate copyright issues, publishers may not be willing to accept work that has been previously made available electronically. This is more likely to be a problem in certain fields than in others; while Kearney notes study that most science and health publishers are willing to accept manuscripts that were originally conceived as dissertations. However, Thomas & Shirkey (2013) found that in creative fields (such as poetry, fiction, or other arts) publishers are much less likely to accept manuscripts that they view as having been previously published. They cite the following reasons for this occurrence:

- Concern for journal markets being affected. People would reference the dissertation first before reading and citing the published journal article version.
- Concern over their publications not being able to claim the first opportunities to present creative materials.
- Concern that published dissertations would be viewed as a prior publication.

Kearney (2014) recommends the MDIS option as one remedy to this problem. PhD students who wish to publish from their dissertations can circumvent a host of copyright issues by publishing before they graduate, a tactic that is facilitated by the MDIS in which students are able to complete one research project at a time and, after completion of each project, to submit their manuscripts for publication before compiling them into their dissertations. It is also possible for graduate students to embargo their dissertations, or to refuse to release them online immediately after they are completed; the embargo process can give students up to six years to publish from their dissertations before making them public in databases such as ProQuest (Patton, 2017). Once again, going through this pro-

cess and understanding the issues related to publication and the guidelines that journals editors use when deciding whether research is publishable should broaden the student's professional knowledge and thus may be another potential positive outcome of engaging in this type of dissertation process

## METHODOLOGY

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For this paper, I have selected autoethnography as the most appropriate approach for my research inquiry. Autoethnography "is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze ... personal experiences ... in order to understand cultural experiences" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, para. 1). Employing this method as "both [a] process and product", the autoethnography challenges the status quo of sociological and qualitative research by "blur[ring] boundaries, crafting fictions and other ways of being true in the interests of rewriting selves in the social world" (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 1), as well as by explicitly acknowledging the researcher as an agent (Sparkes, 2000). Autoethnography is a controversial method, often a target of criticism from "those who advocate canonical forms of doing and writing research" and the "neutral, impersonal ... stance[s]" preferred in traditional, objective research (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 3). However, autoethnography allows investigators the freedom that more "objective" forms of research do not. It enables researchers to see from participants' perspectives because it allows them to enter participants' worlds; it allows researchers to find the meaning behind experiences and motivations, and even behind the research itself. According to Spry (2001), it also allows researchers to view themselves as others, to view themselves from afar as they consider their own experiences. Autoethnography influences "interpretations of what we study, how we study it, and what we say about our topic" for futures to come (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 4).

I selected the method of evocative autoethnography because it afforded me the opportunity to "retroactively and selectively write ... about past experiences" (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 5) in the manner of telling a story (Grant, Short, & Turner, 2013). However, this method allows for much more than recounting past experiences. Rather, personal narratives that are derived from this approach "focus ... on their [participants'] academic, research, and personal lives", giving an introspective and subjective view of the participants so that readers may understand "some aspect of life as it intersects with a cultural context ... and [be invited] to enter the author's world and to use what they learn there to reflect on ... their own lives" (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 22), for it is at depicting personal experiences that autoethnography is most effective (Mendez, 2013). Evocative ethnography, with its qualitative orientation and its emphasis on understanding the experiences of one person and applying them to the cultural context or experiences of another, is an ideal method for this study. As written by Bochner and Ellis (2016) in their book *Evocative autoethnography: Writing lives and telling stories*, this approach expands on what is known from a personal stance and helps authors articulate implications for the future, much like what I have accomplished in this paper. Indeed, autoethnography allows authors to become vulnerable in the expression of deeply personal experiences (Custer, 2014).

In Le Roux's (2016) article titled, "Criteria for rigour and trustworthiness in autoethnographic research", she provides four criteria to address issues of rigor related to applied ethnographic methodology they include, subjectivity, resonance, plausibility, and contribution. To ensure that I met the first criteria of subjectivity, which is to "re-enact and re-construct a noteworthy personal or institutional experience in search of self-understanding, and construct a reliable and credible narrative that constitutes the research" (p. 5). I chose the noteworthy topic MDIS that resonated with doctoral students that I had engaged with and worked with my graduate assistant via the construction of interview questions that's answers were analyzed for themes and created into a personal narrative. To ensure that I met the criteria of resonance, which is for the audience to be able to "enter into and engage with the writer's story on an intellectual and emotional level" (p. 5), I provided details regarding my specific experiences as a doctoral student that would be similar to that of most doctoral students experiences in addition to providing a scholarly literature throughout this manuscript, specifically in the findings and discussions sections where I provide my personal narrative. Next, I meet the criteria of

plausibility which means to “provide evidence authenticity, while the research process and reporting should be permeated by honesty” (p. 5) by writing in a way that is accessible and personal. And lastly, I meet the criteria of contribution, by extending knowledge on the topic of MDIS through reflection via my personal narrative, which I hope will “empower, inform, inspire, generate ongoing research, or improve practice” (p. 5) related to the dissertation process.

### ***RESEARCH INITIATION AND QUESTIONS***

I have served as a university professor for nearly 10 years. The last six of those years were after defending my dissertation and passing. As a professor I have chaired and served on numerous dissertation committees. It is inevitable that when students are deciding to whether to ask me to serve as a member of their dissertation committees that look up my dissertation. When that has happened many times students have inquired that my dissertation is very different than those they have seen before. Particularly that my dissertation has chapters that are written in the form of peer-reviewed articles. Those students who are interested in becoming professors are particularly intrigued as they are interested in understanding how to publish research prior to our soon after they graduate with their doctorate. After engaging in discussions regarding MDIS with students and faculty at my home institution and with others at other institutions through panel discussions and phone calls, I decided to recount my experiences with this dissertation approach to inform students and faculty interested in developing MDIS through this autoethnographic study. To ensure that I addressed the concerns of doctoral students, I enlisted the help of one of my graduate assistants to craft questions that directly addressed concerns of students interested in utilizing this methodology. The research questions addressed are: (1) What were the lessons that I learned from completing a MDIS? (2) What were the benefits of completing a MDIS? (3) What were the challenges of completing a MDIS?

In this autoethnography, I reflect on my own experiences with the MDIS, providing insight into the process and politics of utilizing this dissertation approach. I also incorporate advice for future and current students, as well as others interested in pursuing a MDIS at some point in the future.

### ***DATA COLLECTION***

I provided a graduate student who was interested in becoming a faculty member in the future with the following information to review: (a) the literature review section for this paper; (b) additional literature about what a MDIS was; and (c) my dissertation. The student crafted questions to ask me about my experience with developing a MDIS (the protocol is displayed in Appendix A). No diaries or notes were taken during the development of the dissertation process. The interview was audio recorded and lasted an hour. After the interview was completed, the student interviewer transcribed the data. The student then hand-coded the data for themes. I was able to engage in a form of member-checking as the student submitted the interview transcripts for my review. I performed the final coding and analysis.

The data provided in this manuscript are based on my reflections from my interview, review and feedback from my dissertation chair, and information that is included in my dissertation. Each of those three processes served as a form of triangulation for the study.

### **FINDINGS**

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The findings are organized into three sections: Lessons Learned, Benefits, and Challenges. Each address one of the research questions. I found through this study that it was important to select an influential and experienced advisor, develop credibility through competence and clear goals, have clarity about why you want to engage in this process and be a proactive learner. Some benefits that I found to be important from engaging in a MDIS process was peer-review from dissertation committee, opportunity for learning and mastering multiple methodological approaches and having the option to develop publishable refereed articles. The challenges that were found in this study are that



committee members may not be familiar with or willing to invest the time to mentor a student if this dissertation style is chosen, the timeframe for completion of the dissertation may be extended, and balancing responsibilities as a doctoral candidate can be challenging; I describe these themes in further detail below.

## ***LESSONS LEARNED***

### **Select an influential and experienced advisor**

One of the most intriguing and valuable lessons that I learned during the process of writing a MDIS was that the MDIS is a unique approach, requiring an experienced dissertation advisor. Identifying the most appropriate chair is one of the most political decisions a doctoral student will make (Flamez, Lenz, Balkin, & Smith, 2017) and also probably the most important one. At the time I began my dissertation, my first doctoral advisor, like many other assistant professors, was navigating the process of tenure and promotion. While he supported me in my choice of dissertation topic, he was not in a position to help me with a MDIS. It was an interesting conflict, one that required a switch in advisors. My determination to develop this type of dissertation led one of my other committee members to resign from the committee; consequently, I soon had to find two individuals to replace my dissertation advisor and the committee member who had stepped down from his role. Fortunately, my second dissertation advisor, the immediate past dean of the college, was a strong proponent of the MDIS who had served as chair for a number of students selecting this option; this opened my eyes to the level of respect and credibility one needs when advocating for a unique approach to the dissertation. Because of her successful experiences in guiding several other students through MDIS and her institutional credibility (due to being a past dean and a distinguished professor), I was able to replace not only my advisor, but the committee member who left the committee and my committee members became persuaded that I would ultimately produce a high-quality dissertation.

### **Develop credibility through competence and clear goals**

In pleading my case for the MDIS, it was important for me to explain how this dissertation style would help me achieve my professional goals. Ultimately, I aspired to be a college president. I had pursued a master's degree and Ph.D. in higher education leadership partially because of that career goal. Therefore, I decided to study the university presidency as a dissertation topic because I wanted to become a president later in my career. My process for choosing my topic was different than what was suggested by Olalere, De Iulio, Aldarbag, and Erdener (2014) when they share "topic selection is influenced by faculty member's (dissertation chair's) research agenda, departmental core courses, and network factors like professional experience, life experience, and practical experience" (p. 85). Traditionally, presidents at research universities begin their careers as professors, then transition into academic administration roles such as department head/chair, academic dean, and provost. After demonstrating successful leadership in those capacities, they become competitive for university presidential positions. However, it is important that they initially demonstrate superior scholarship and quality research while in faculty positions.

A previous mentor, from my time as an undergraduate student, had helped me to realize that I was not pursuing a doctorate merely because I loved higher education, but because I needed to be competitive and competent in higher education; this would prepare me for leadership as a president at a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). I had shadowed the university president of my undergraduate institution (an HBCU) during my senior year. Throughout that experience I gained first-hand insight regarding the role of the president; this experience inspired me to pursue graduate education. The president I shadowed once told me in private conversation that he would generally hire a person with a Ph.D. over someone with a master's degree for a senior cabinet position, all things being equal. Frankly, the PhD is seen in higher education as a union card of sorts; some would describe it as a license, enabling the individual to accomplish professional goals. Thus, the PhD was a necessary step toward my career goals.

As I worked through my program, I had been informed that it would be important for me to develop articles before leaving—something future faculty members would be expected to do. Nevertheless, I tried to take advantage of as many opportunities as I could to hone my professional skills in areas related to being a faculty member; this would help me in my career trajectory toward becoming a college and university president. During my doctoral experience, for example, I had the opportunity to be a part of the inaugural class of several students who earned a certificate in college and university teaching at my institution. I took classes with titles such as *The Professoriate*, *College Teaching*, and *Adult Education*. I even taught a class under the supervision of an experienced professor. I also served in diverse leadership capacities as a graduate assistant, which provided me with insights related to key components of a faculty member's job (including serving as a managing editor of a journal, where I learned how to facilitate the peer-review process of journal articles and serving as a research assistant in an office of research and innovation, which helped me understand how the grant identification and writing process worked). Because a previous mentor had told me that becoming a respected faculty member would be a crucial step in my preparation toward being recognized for academic leadership positions, I was eager to find opportunities that would prepare me to become an excellent scholar. I was not naïve enough to think that I would become a president immediately after completing my Ph.D., although there are rare cases when that has occurred. Rather, I felt that the lessons I learned about academic administration through my doctoral program, along with my dissertation research, would prepare me for either a faculty position or administrative position upon completion of my degree.

### **Have clarity about why you want to engage in this process**

The key difference between a traditional dissertation and a MDIS is that in a MDIS, the doctoral student must develop a number of distinct research questions (at least one for each article) while learning the craft of developing research articles. Having several articles published or nearly published is unquestionably helpful to an individual seeking professorship at a research institution, as I planned to do upon completing my dissertation. This, I believed, would help me face an increasingly competitive job market.

However, various authors suggest that there are various critiques and arguments that are made by faculty to dissuade students from developing this type of dissertation, which include students not being able to clearly articulate the overall research aims and focus of their dissertation; it can be viewed as a back door route to the completing a dissertation and viewed as less rigorous (Brien, 2008; Niven & Grant, 2012; Robins & Kanowski, 2008) and the belief that students will “lack experience in conceptualizing, organising and then writing a large substantial piece of work as is the case for those compiling a more traditional dissertation” (Peacock, 2017, p. 129). Therefore, it is vital that a student is very clear about why he or she wants to engage in this process and can articulate it to his or her advisor and committee along with assurances that he or she is willing to engage in a vigorous learning process in order to complete this task.

### **Be a proactive learner**

As I learned through my second dissertation advisor, the process of writing a MDIS is very different than that of writing a traditional dissertation. After I observed this advisor supporting another doctoral student and colleague through the completion of a MDIS, graduation, and an appointment to a tenure-track faculty position at a research university, I began to look for other dissertations that were developed in the same format at our institution. Because I had a positive relationship with my second advisor (at the time she served as the dean) we often talked about my future career plans. When I shared with her that I initially wanted to pursue a faculty career and eventually serve as a university president, she suggested that I might want to consider the MDIS option, which motivated me to investigate the feasibility of doing so.

Once I received permission to write a MDIS, I decided to view my dissertation question in three parts. I had approximately ten primary research questions I wanted to ask. As my dissertation dealt with the perceptions of college and university presidents on the quality of their preparation for their presidencies via higher education administration programs, I wanted to know why the presidents chose to earn degrees in higher education and how satisfied they were with their education; I wanted to explore the links between programs and preparedness for the presidency. I felt that this research topic was important because until the completion of my study, there was virtually nothing written about the effectiveness of higher education leadership programs and their impact on preparing individuals for the presidency. I had a personal interest in determining whether or not presidents who had earned similar doctoral degrees to my own felt that their programs actually helped them hone foundational skills, knowledge, and competencies useful to their careers. In my first set of questions, I probed to find the areas of the presidents' current positions in which they felt most and least prepared to perform. The second set of questions dealt with knowledge that could only be gained through experience. The third and final set of questions elicited the presidents' views on the "ideal" program to prepare college and university presidents; these questions motivated answers regarding the types of faculty, students, and curriculum necessary for successful programs.

### **Being humble and comfortable with sharing what you don't know**

The process of writing a MDIS is a time where students have someone dedicated to providing feedback and peer review of their writing. Committee members can provide detailed, expert feedback of the sort that is not always available to newly minted graduates with faculty positions, so this dissertation process is a time to savor and apply commentary that will probably be scarce later on. For instance, when I initially reached the stage of performing data analysis, I became intimidated because I felt that I did not have enough experience doing that. My dissertation advisor helped me through it by sitting side-by-side with me and coaching me through the process. (I am happy to report that I now teach courses in data analysis, thanks to the timely assistance of my advisor). Additionally, I received feedback from my committee members that helped me to develop my own writing style and scholarly voice.

It has been my experience that most faculty members only have the chance to have one person review their work before they submit it to a journal for publication; US-based doctoral students, however, have a committee of three or four individuals in their roles as faculty who are paid to provide feedback. This opportunity to receive feedback should not be wasted! Though the MDIS journey will likely be a longer one, it will allow students to hone skills that will ultimately help them to a faster professional start.

## ***BENEFITS***

### **Peer-review from dissertation committee**

Another advantage of developing a MDIS is having a supporting team of experts to provide feedback on the development of your article manuscripts. It has been my experience that once you have completed your dissertation it is difficult to have colleagues take the time to provide feedback on drafts of your articles. Given that most professors have a lot of responsibilities including advising, teaching, research, service, and outreach, their time is limited regarding providing feedback on multiple drafts of a manuscript. Reising (2015) states that:

The faculty's responsibility is to recognize that additional work may be required before the final product is ready to be submitted to a journal and clearly conveying that message to students. Course and final product requirements differ from publication requirements. Consequently, faculty need to prepare students for the changes required to transform a paper produced for academic credit to a publishable manuscript so that the experience is neither daunting nor deflating (p. 419).

However, in the dissertation process, theoretically your committee members are being paid to provide high quality feedback and to coach you through the writing process. Additionally, many of them have invested themselves in you and your success. Each tends to have their own areas of expertise, thus providing a broad based of feedback from varied perspectives. Developing a MDIS also provides an opportunity for possible collaboration on manuscripts. In my case, I was able to collaborate on a book chapter and a peer-reviewed with my dissertation chair based on two different chapters developed in my dissertation.

### **Opportunity for learning and mastering multiple methodological approaches**

Although I discussed earlier how I identified and utilized multi-grounded theory as a methodological approach for my article that was not the only approach I used. I actually used three different methodologies, one for each chapter that I used a publication manuscript. The other two approaches that I used were phenomenology and case study methods. This was very important as I had to learn the epistemologies, axiologies and ontologies of each methodological approach. This was particularly valuable as it related to analyzing the data. I learned various forms of coding such as axial, open coding, thematic, in vivo, process, versus, and values. This was similar to Fischer's (2017) quantitative dissertation where each chapter applied differing methodological techniques and analysis. Having a strong grasp of multiple qualitative methodological approaches has enabled me to teach intermediate and advanced courses in qualitative methods.

### **Publishable refereed articles**

Institutions such as Ryerson University (2017) encourages their students to develop MDIS and state that this approach enables "early publication (and) facilitates a timely and wider dissemination and potentially more influential impact of the results of the research" (p. 1). I was not afforded the opportunity to write articles while I was engaged in masters and doctoral coursework. At that time, I primarily viewed myself as someone who would earn a Ph.D. and pursue an administrative role. The MDIS provided me with the opportunity to learn the craft of developing refereed manuscripts in a nurturing environment by receiving high-quality feedback from dissertation committee members. Thus, I was submitting my manuscripts as soon as I received the final feedback from my dissertation committee with the go-ahead to submit to refereed journals. Out of the initial three article style chapters that I submitted for my dissertation, two were published in refereed journals within months of completion of my dissertation, and the other was used as a book chapter in the first book that I had edited. I have gone on to publish five more peer-reviewed articles based on the content from my dissertation. Additionally, I have a peer-reviewed article publication average of four to five articles per year and I attribute it to the intense training and practice I received and engaged in completing a MDIS. It took many of my colleagues longer to get their research portfolios started once they completed their dissertation if they had no experience developing an article on their own. I initially secured an administrative position as a director of a teaching and learning center straight out of my doctoral program. I served in that capacity for three years and six months; in that time, I had over 15 publications, which made me highly competitive, receiving close to 10 interviews in one year and multiple offers, ultimately culminating in my securing an associate professorship. This is unique in that I have never served as an assistant professor. I attribute a part of this success to having developed a MDIS, which allowed me to learn how to develop various types of articles in a rigorous, safe, and supportive environment.

## ***CHALLENGES***

### **Committee members may not be familiar with or willing to invest the time to mentor a student if this dissertation style is chosen**

As I wrote about earlier in this manuscript, some of my original committee members were not interested in investing the time it would have taken to coach and guide me through developing a MDIS.

Even trying to induce them to participate with a proposal of giving them co-authorship credit based on future manuscripts that come from the dissertation did not get them to serve on a committee. I only wanted people on my committee who were excited about serving. People serve on committees for various reasons, such as they need to show service on committees, they are really excited about a topic, or they have some personal investment in the particular student. Whatever the case, it was important that in my dissertation process that they were willing to provide high quality feedback as I wanted to be prepared for the faculty job market.

### **Timeframe for completion of the dissertation may be extended.**

One of the biggest surprises for me in this process was the timeframe of completion for my dissertation. Although my dissertation advisor had informed me that it would take longer to complete the MDIS than it would to write a traditional dissertation, I planned to complete it in the same timeframe as a traditional dissertation; I felt pressured to complete my dissertation quickly because my graduate assistantship support was scheduled to conclude at the end of my third year in the program. My advisor's information proved to be correct; however, it took me at least a semester longer to complete my MDIS than it would have if I had opted for a traditional dissertation. This was not a problem, however. I believe it was well worth the extra time to produce three publishable articles before leaving my doctoral program; I believe I am a better faculty member and researcher for the experience. I also learned through that process that I am a more productive scholar when I work in community. For example, I worked and shared an office with a doctoral student colleague who was also completing his dissertation; even though we were writing on two separate topics, we were able to support and encourage each other through the process. Writing scholarship can be lonely, so having a writing partner, even one working on a different project, was useful to me in that it created an accountability system that helped ensure my research productivity. There are some doctoral students who do not begin producing articles on their own until they leave their programs, but I learned to do so while still in my dissertation process. Although some of my colleagues may have graduated before me, I felt that I was in competition with myself and ultimately that this dissertation process would prepare me to reach my ultimate goals.

### **Balancing responsibilities as a doctoral candidate**

Another challenge I faced during my dissertation process was that of balancing employment with my research work. As I held a graduate assistantship, I worked for my institution on a part-time basis. During the time I spent completing my dissertation, I served as a research assistant in both an office of research and innovation and an office of governmental services. In most graduate assistantships, it is understood that the student's coursework and research must be prioritized over the assistantship. However, the assistantship still requires time and attention; some supervisors will not necessarily be flexible with graduate employees because they are writing dissertations. Thankfully, I was able to focus primarily on my dissertation. Both supervisors in each office were fully aware of my status as a doctoral student in the dissertation phase. They allowed me to have a flexible schedule and, when I had down time, they permitted me to work on my dissertation. Issues of school-work-life balance are something that many full-time doctoral students have to navigate. Martinez Ordu and Della Sala (2013, p. 39) provide four strategies to achieve this balance. They include:

1. purposefully managing their time, priorities, and roles and responsibilities;
2. seeking well-being by managing stress levels, maintaining their mental and physical health, and creating personal time;
3. finding support from various individuals and their institution; and
4. making tradeoffs.

I utilized steps one through three in my dissertation process; for instance, I made completion of my dissertation my central focus. I had been married for two years prior to starting the dissertation process. I spoke with my wife about the commitment that I would need to make to the process and that

my role as a husband may change because of that. Particularly, not taking on some of the household responsibilities such as managing the finances, and so forth. I sought to manage my stress levels by changing my diet and exercising more during my dissertation process. I also took a trip overseas by myself for a week to clear my head and create personal time for myself. And step three was addressed by my wife who provided the emotional support and cheerleading that I needed to get through the process. I also spent time at another university during the summer participating in a summer dissertation writing boot-camp which helped me focus on my writing and develop discipline.

Once my dissertation neared completion, I was also able to make use of a dissertation editing service available within my college. Though I had to pay for this service, the editor formatted my dissertation and helped me correct errors so that I could produce a high-quality dissertation. I then began focusing on securing a job and ensuring that my articles would be published. In the process of submitting articles to various journals, I learned to tailor my articles to the requirements of each journal; thus, the published articles were somewhat different than those I submitted in fulfillment of my dissertation requirements. Publishers and universities often have different formatting requirements. Generally, the differences were limited to formatting concerns; very few content changes were made. I also learned to incorporate the feedback given during the peer review process, refining my articles to meet the standards and expectations of each journal. Defending my dissertation, along with receiving constructive feedback through the peer-review process, helped me to learn how to deal effectively with criticism of my scholarship. I soon learned that it was sometimes better to get an article published in a mid-tier journal than to be consistently rejected by top-tier journals at the beginning of my career. I had been advised that, at the beginning of a career, an early career scholar should demonstrate a strong research agenda and the wherewithal to publish (Pinheiro, Melkers, & Youtie, 2014). As the scholar's career progresses, expectations regarding publishing primarily in top-tier journals would become more reasonable. As I advanced, I became more sophisticated regarding where I would submit my work. I also learned that sometimes I had to create my own opportunities; a particular manuscript might not be a perfect fit for a journal but could be better situated as a book chapter. This was the case with the manuscript that I thought was the strongest and most important. It was hard for me to identify an outlet that would accept it until I realized that it could form a chapter in my first edited book.

Once I had completed my MDIS, my defense was very much the same as it would have been if I had opted for a traditional dissertation. However, I divided my presentation into three parts, answering the first question and discussing each major section in the study before moving on to the next one. It was like defending three different studies in one. Because my literature review and research methodology were similar across each of my three manuscripts, I only addressed those sections once. However, I discussed the findings from each manuscript separately, emphasizing each manuscript's unique contribution to the literature base. In comparison to the many dissertation defenses I attended prior to my own, the structure of my presentation was unique, given that I presented data from three separate manuscripts.

Although not necessarily challenges in my case, several issues could be encountered by developing a MDIS. One issue could be insuring the cohesion of publications. Another issue could also be having the copyediting support to ensure the clarity, consistency and accuracy of a large given that a person will be developing two or more distinct manuscripts (Peacock, 2017). If you are not planning to develop a large-scale study that will include a large data set, it will be challenging to create separate and distinct articles. In my case I had over 80 pages of raw qualitative interview data that was "deep", "rich", and descriptive.

### ***DISCUSSION: ENCOURAGEMENT FOR INTERESTED STUDENTS AND FACULTY***

Based on my own experiences, I believe that the MDIS can be a valuable option for doctoral students. I would also advise students never to discard their data or codes. Because I have a lot of thick,

rich, and descriptive data I collected and stored a data bank based on my codes and themes. Almost six years later, I have enough data to write three or four more articles. I would also advise doctoral students to enjoy the process of writing a MDIS. I have many fond memories of my dissertation process, including raising money to conduct interviews for my dissertation; traveling to and interviewing presidents I had seen on television or on the internet; and staying up late writing my dissertation along with my doctoral colleagues who were writing at the same stage. My dissertation advisor informed me that she actually cried after telling me that I was not going to be able to graduate in the semester that I had planned on graduating. However, after I accepted that I was not going to graduate during that time period, I decided that I would enjoy the experience and become the best researcher I could be. My twin goals then became to finish my dissertation and to secure a faculty or administrative position.

### *SIGNIFICANCE AND FINAL THOUGHTS*

There is very little written about the MDIS and, in my own review, I have found only a few writings that present a personal perspective on the process. This personal reflection should thus be of value to those considering this option and faculty members who may want to engage in this type of endeavor and may also provide insights to those who have already served as chairs for students. The benefits that come from developing a MDIS can outweigh the challenges that may be experienced while engaging in this approach. I recommend that educators in doctoral programs be open to chairing and serving on dissertations that want to use the manuscript format. I would suggest that junior faculty wait until they secure tenure to chair a MDIS. I say this as I have found that it is important to senior colleagues that you can demonstrate that you can appropriately support students through the traditional dissertation process. This is also important because it will take a significant time commitment and it can take a time away from your own research if the study is not directly aligned with your research agenda. However, it can be a win-win opportunity if the topic aligns with your research agenda and can lead to ongoing research collaborations with the student well after the completion of the student's dissertation. I have found that to be the case in my writing relationship with my dissertation chair as we have written several publications together since the completion of my dissertation.

### *LIMITATIONS*

No matter which methodological approach the researcher chooses, there will be limitations inherent to engaging in a qualitative study; autoethnography is no exception. Evocative autoethnography, in particular, faces challenges to its reliability, generalizability, and conceptions of relational ethics. By nature, according to Ellis et al. (2011), “autoethnographers value narrative truth based on what a story of experience does – how it is used, understood, and responded to” (para. 30). Unfortunately, “memory is fallible, [and] it is impossible to recall or report events in language that exactly represents how those events were lived” (para. 30). As anyone who has ever heard an individual telling and repeating a personal story would recognize, the same experience can be described in many different ways and words—and stories have a way of changing over time as their tellers unintentionally embed within them new thoughts and actions. The shifting, inherently subjective nature of such narratives leaves room for the reliability of the autoethnography to be questioned (Deitering, 2017). If an autoethnography relies on memories of the participants' personal experiences, it is extremely difficult for researchers to be assured of complete accuracy. In addition to combating questions of reliability, autoethnography must also withstand challenges to its generalizability, a “social scientific meaning that stems from, and applies to, large random samples of respondents” (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 33). Stories from participants might not be relevant to their readers unless “a story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know” (para. 33). Therefore, it is the autoethnographer's responsibility to relay a general, but unfamiliar, experience to readers.

Perhaps the most troubling limitation of the autoethnography is the idea of relational ethics. According to Méndez (2013), “a personal narrative is developed ... the context and people interacting with

the subject start to emerge” (p. 282). People interact with other people; the researcher does “not exist in isolation” (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 26). Interpersonal ties are found, connections are implied, and eventually “intimates, clients or colleagues” may be “identified as characters” (Denshire, 2013, p. 7). Autoethnographers are at odds with the connected world and must not only maintain the value and respect of those in their surroundings, but also their own interpersonal ties with the situation and the participants (i.e., friendships with their participants, familial ties, and so forth). Relational ethics are decidedly complicated within this approach, requiring researchers to keep these concerns “in their minds throughout the research and writing process” (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 29).

The limitations identified did not hinder my research on the MDIS and my narrative of the experiences within. While it is impossible to recall all memories in detail, as individuals sometimes embellish their thoughts, I have been able to recount a general idea of my past process, providing details that are less easily fallible over time. Generalizability is avoided here, as the experiences recounted provide recommendations to future doctoral students pursuing a MDIS, a common approach to completing one’s dissertation and a growing area of interest. As more graduate programs begin encouraging students to utilize the MDIS, the experiences provided here will provide a valuable reference and guide for students and faculty new to this research form. Relational concerns are accounted for in this research, as I have deliberately minimized details identifying and relating to the colleagues and mentors who helped me in my journey.

## CONCLUSION

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Having to create multiple articles instead of a findings chapter in the final stage of a doctoral dissertation is an experience that can provide students with the skills and resources that may enable them to become strong faculty members and researchers. Throughout my journey I have learned and suggest to students desiring to develop a MDIS: they should enjoy the process. They should enjoy their time, be confident, and persevere. Engaging in this process offers, doctoral students resources and experiences not generally afforded to other students. The feedback that is provided throughout the process from one’s doctoral committee can be considered a unique characteristic of the MDIS. It is not every day that doctoral students have the luxury of such feedback as the opportunity to gain the reviews of three or four people before an article is submitted to a journal.

Had I the opportunity to complete my MDIS all over again, I would. While it may take longer to complete this dissertation option, the process provides many opportunities for students to hone their skills and become better researchers. Because of my experiences with the MDIS, I have been able to complete my responsibilities as a faculty member and a researcher at an advanced level; the articles and components of my dissertation forced me to think of who I was as a researcher. Though I faced challenges as I learned to analyze data and work through a lengthy process, and though I had my moment of embarrassment when I realized I did not know what to do, I took a leap of faith and immersed myself in a process that formed my future self.

While it is important for all doctoral students to develop a healthy balance of confidence and perseverance during the dissertation process. It is particularly important to note for all students completing a MDIS, given the length of time and complexity of completing a dissertation utilizing this format; it does take longer to complete an MDIS than a traditional dissertation. While students should enjoy their time, they should also realize that there will be frustrations. Completing a MDIS is hardly different than completing several articles to submit for publication in a journal, so it carries with it additional stresses. There will be edits and feedback, and this will be draining. But if students can persevere as I did, pushing through and remembering the advantages and experiences to be gained, they will stay on track. The MDIS allows students to transition from a student role to a competent researcher, which, after all, is the ultimate goal.



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## APPENDIX

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### Questions for Manuscript Dissertation Autoethnographic Study

1. What motivated you to pursue both a doctorate and complete a dissertation? What type of dissertation did you complete?
2. Before beginning your dissertation, what challenges or complications did you face?
3. Did you ever face any struggles, complications, etc. during your dissertation?
4. Were you supported during your dissertation at a university level? Community level? Familial level?
5. What resources were you provided while completing your dissertation? What resources were you lacking or missing?
6. What feeling, thoughts, emotions did you have after completing your dissertation?
7. Did you defend your dissertation? If so, can you describe your experience?
8. After completing your dissertation, what challenges or complications did you face?
9. If you could today, would you do it all over again? Why or why not? What would you do differently?
10. What made the manuscript type of dissertation different then doing a typical dissertation?
11. How has your doctoral experience influenced the approach you use with your doctoral students now that you are a dissertation advisor?
12. What advice would you give to those completing their dissertation?

## BIOGRAPHY

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