

Beyond the Pride and the Privilege: The Stories of Doctoral Students and Work-Life Balance

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— reviewed by [Dino Sossi](#) January 12, 2016

— **Title:** Beyond the Pride and the Privilege: The Stories of Doctoral Students and Work-Life Balance

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Studying for a doctoral degree can be a lonely, dispiriting experience. You huddle in the library during yet another weekend away from loved ones, frantically searching the basement for an ancient tome that you desperately need to finish your literature review. Life appears to devolve into a numbing monotony punctuated by paralyzing moments of stress and the occasional minor success. When you reach the all but dissertation (ABD) stage, your waking hours seem to endlessly revolve around a few mundane tasks: read, write, edit until you have successfully completed your oral defense. During the bleakest hours, well before the end is in sight, when your money, health, and resolve are at a collective nadir, it can feel like your path is too long and you are making no progress. Suffering through these moments of tremendous self-doubt, it can feel like there are too many obstacles and not enough support to finish this long, solitary, tortuous journey.

Beyond the Pride and the Privilege: The Stories of Doctoral Students and Work-Life Balance could prove to be a welcome companion for haggard doctoral students muddling through their studies. It shares a wealth of narratives from a diverse array of authors. The stories of African American, Latina, and international students, as well as a host of other voices from hopeful, newly matriculated students to more jaded recent graduates describe their difficult doctoral journeys and small triumphs. These tales share a number of perspectives on how to manage academic requirements, balance work commitments, and carve out rare time to see loved ones. Think *Chicken Soup for the Struggling Doctoral Students Sorry Soul*.

Beyond the Pride and the Privilege is comprised of 21 short, tidy chapters. Although they are not divided along discrete themes, many authors use their chapter titles to

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broadcast their intentions along racial, gender, and ethnic lines, as well as convey personal interests that helped them through their troubles. Given the large number of chapters, there is some degree of variability in quality; however, the editors direct authors to focus on stories that provide some degree of uniformity. The chapters are almost exclusively written in a confessional style that foregrounds each author's unique circumstances.

Given its subject matter and overall tone, *Beyond the Pride and the Privilege* is probably best suited for doctoral students experiencing an acute crisis of confidence when their academic trajectory has flattened, as happens to most of these young apprentices over the course of their lengthy studies. Skim the table of contents, find a title that matches your interests, and you will have a new companion who successfully wrestled with the same issues you are experiencing to put you at ease.

This book is less useful when read in a sustained sequential manner. Although each story is unique, and some journeys are more atypical than others, there tends to be a uniformity of experience. Regardless of academic discipline, doctoral study has become homogenized, especially with regard to the approval process: coursework, qualifying exams, certification, writing, and an oral defense are normally required regardless of field of study. Doctoral students from time immemorial have complained about a lack of institutional support, inadequate funding, and an itinerant will-o'-the-wisp muse that constantly eludes them. This book legitimizes these complaints among a group of confidants who understand the perils of doctoral study, an experience that can only be fully understood by enduring this unique crucible.

If you have gained admission to a doctoral program, are coming to terms with the idiosyncratic reality of its seemingly endless bureaucratic demands, and are questioning your resolve, *Beyond the Pride and the Privilege* should help comfort you. Read a story, commune with a kindred spirit, and summon up the courage to return to that musty old basement once more to finish off your modest contribution to academia.
