IDENTIFYING AS HUSBANDS, FATHERS, AND SCHOOL LEADERS: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF DOCTORAL PERSISTENCE AMONG LIMITED RESIDENCY STUDENTS

by

John Patterson

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

2017
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ABSTRACT

This transcendental phenomenological study investigated doctoral persistence for males ($N = 13$) who completed their limited residency doctoral program (LRDP) while managing their family roles as fathers and husbands, and while performing their work role as a K-12 lead school administrator. Participants were selected via snowball sampling from private universities that offered a LRDP in the United States. The theories guiding this study were Tinto’s (1975, 1993, 2006) student integration theory (SIT) and Hobfoll’s (1989) conservation of resource model (COR). Tinto’s (1975, 1993, 2006) SIT explained the academic and social interaction between the individual and the institution, while Hobfoll’s (1989) COR model explains relationships between work and family roles and the effect of life changing events on stress levels. Data was collected via questionnaire, survey, in-depth semi-structured interview, and a letter of advice and analyzed using Moustakas’ (1994) procedures for conducting a transcendental phenomenological study. The essence of the phenomenon was the dynamic support of the spouse who gave the male, LRDP student, husband, father, and school leader the space needed to use his grit to complete the LRDP, and the structure of the LRDP gave the male the flexibility to persist without neglecting other roles and responsibilities.

Keywords: Persistence, work-family, school administrator, transcendental phenomenology, student integration theory (SIT), conservation of resources (COR) model, limited residency doctoral program (LRDP).
Dedication

To all those current brothers in school leadership who are doing everything they can to lead their families and are on the brink of beginning their doctoral degree. I pray this study acts as a blueprint for you to take the next step.

This study is dedicated to Dr. Richard Meckes, my high school principal. I always wanted to be like him, and now at least we have the same title. I know he would be so proud.
Acknowledgements

I want to thank my wife Cindy and my daughter Grace. Their unconditional love and space allowed me to finish this effort. I also want to thank my Mom and Dad for instilling the work ethic that is required to accomplish this endeavor.

I want to thank Dr. Cindi Spaulding for seeing someone who needed a push and for standing by me through the process. She is one of the most amazing people I have ever met. To Dr. Ben Forrest, thank you for your sense of humor and support through this process. To Dr. Jared Bigham, for your consistent encouragement, I am thankful.

Lastly, to King Jesus. My prayer is “thy will be done” through this doctoral degree.
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List of Abbreviations

All-but-Dissertation (ABD)
Conservation of Resources (COR)
Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)
Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)
Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
Limited Residency Doctoral (LRD)
Limited Residency Doctoral Program (LRDP)
No Child Left Behind (NCLB)
Student Integration Theory (SIT)
The Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM)
United States (US)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

School leadership may be the hallmark of all leadership opportunities because of its unpredictability, diversity, and impact on the world (Grissom & Mitani, 2016). The number and diversity of challenges faced by school leaders have soared in recent years causing school leadership and stress to be related (Cushing, Kerrins, & Johnstone, 2003; De Leon, 2006; Friedman, 2002; Garcia-Garduno, Slater, Lopez-Gorosave, 2011; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2005; Sogunro, 2012). The stress has led to high turnover and a decreasing pool of qualified school leaders (DiaPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Forderaro, 2006; Gajda & Militello, 2008; Nussbaum, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2005). Yet, the need for leaders who possess a doctoral degree has grown (Goldring & Gray, 2013; Servage, 2009). A majority of school leadership positions require or highly encourage a doctoral degree for employment, because of this, obtaining the doctoral degree is emphatically important and stressful to an aspiring school leader (Bitterman, Goldring, & Gray, 2013; Glass & Franceschini, 2006; Servage, 2009).

Attaining a doctoral degree is a difficult task. While the average completion rate for students enrolled in traditional doctoral programs hovers around 50% (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Council of Graduate Schools, 2010; Hawley, 2010; Leeds et al., 2013), limited residency doctoral programs (LRDP) in the field of education are the worst offenders of attrition with approximately 30% finishing their program (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2011; Terrell, 2005). As posited by Walker et al. (2008), “Serious thinking about what works in doctoral education and what no longer works, is an urgent matter” (p. 5).
School leaders who are working on their limited residency doctoral program (LRDP) must also consider the needs of their spouse and children. The demands on school leaders can result in stress on the family; marital tension is common (Klatt, 2014). Research establishes that school leaders who perceive insufficient time and energy to successfully perform work and family roles are subject to work and family dissatisfaction, work and family tension, depression, and life stress (Greenhaus, Collins, Singh, & Parasuraman, 1997; Watkins & Subich, 1995).

Doctoral persistence has not been a well-researched phenomenon qualitatively (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Bade, 2014). Recognizing this tendency, and seeing a gap in the literature, researchers have begun to look specifically at the experiences of female doctoral candidates (Castro, Cavazos, Castro, & Garcia, 2011; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2015; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2016; Spaulding, Rockinson-Szapkiw, & Spaulding, 2015; Spaulding, Rockinson-Szapkiw, & Williams, 2016), as well as candidates from backgrounds of poverty in doctoral programs (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, Swezey, & Wicks, 2014), and LRDP students encompassing all genders and races together (Gomez, 2013; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Bade, 2014; Spaulding, & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). What becomes apparent when looking at the related literature of doctoral experiences and persistence is that there are no studies that focus on male K-12 school leaders who identify as husbands and fathers during the course of their LRDP studies. Therefore, the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the unique experiences of husbands/fathers who completed their LRDP while serving in the role of a K-12 lead school administrator.

In Chapter One, the background of the problem, motivations in pursuing the study, definitions of the purpose and significance of the study, delineations of the specific research questions to be studied, and the development of the research plan of the study are discussed.
Chapter Two offers the theoretical framework being used as well as an in-depth review of the literature around the topic of school leadership, doctoral persistence, and work-family balance. Chapter Three focuses on the methods used to conduct the study beginning with a detailed explanation of the research design. Chapter Three also includes a discussion of the setting, participants, procedures, role of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and the ethical considerations of the study. Chapter Four captures the results of the study based on the themes learned from a snowball sample of 13 men who completed their LRDP while serving as husbands and fathers and working as school leaders (superintendent, head of school, principal). Lastly, Chapter Five discusses the implication, limitations, recommendations for future research, and then offers a general summary of the study.

**Background**

This study weaves together three, uniquely related areas of research. As will soon be evident, the interrelationship of these areas of research are not necessarily connected—except when the research is focused on the gap in the current literature. The three veins of research explored are (a) the need and limitations of effective K-12 school leadership recruitment and retention, (b) doctoral persistence in/among LRDP students fitting in these first two categories, and (c) the work-family balance of male administrators in K-12 school leadership roles.

**Need for and Limitations of Effective K-12 School Leadership**

Leadership is a cultural construct; it is a way of interacting with individuals and organizations in an efficient and professional manner (Tierney, 2006). As suggested by Grissom and Mitani (2016), school leadership is difficult, but extraordinarily important. As posited by West, Peck, Reitzug, and Crane (2014), effective school leaders are essential for student academic improvement. Since the early 1980s, school effectiveness research has focused on
school leadership with respect to school success (Garcia-Garduno et al., 2011). Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) concluded that “school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning” (p. 27). While the school leader (i.e., superintendent, head of school, lead principal) is the chief executive officer of the school or district and responsible for the academic and character development of every young person in their domain (Grissom & Mitani, 2016), school leadership has undergone a tremendous change due to the inconsistent political agendas and unprecedented cultural shifts (Cheung & Walker, 2006). Changes in society such as demographic fluctuations, economic downturns, political shifts, long hours, growing lists of responsibility outside the job description, state and federal funding deficits, standardized testing requirements, and rising accountability standards, have created a culture of stress for school leaders (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Combs, Edmonson, & Jackson (2009); Forderaro, 2006; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2005). School leaders are under more pressure than ever to keep their position and novice principals are at a greater risk of attrition to the profession (Garcia-Garduno, et al., 2011). As stated by Paul Houston, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, “individuals who may be considering the superintendency look at those already in the role, see how unbalanced their lives are and say thanks but no thanks” (as cited in Klatt, 2014, p. 453).

The stress of school leadership is something that is evident around the world, and all school leaders, in various cultures and contexts, face similar challenges (Garcia-Garduno et al., 2011). Primarily, this stress is due to the conflict stemming from social, academic, emotional, physical, and vocational problems between students, teachers, parents, supervisors, boards, and the community at large (Garcia-Garduno et al., 2011). Hobson et al. (2003) and Weindling (2000) specifically listed the stressors that an appointed school leader faces:
feelings of professional isolation and loneliness;

- dealing with the legacy, practice, and style of the previous school leader;

- dealing with multiple tasks, managing time, and priorities;

- managing the school budget;

- dealing with (e.g., supporting, warning, dismissing) ineffective staff;

- communication and consulting with the staff;

- low staff morale;

- creating a better image of the school;

- implementing new government initiatives, notably new curricula or school improvement projects;

- and maintenance of school buildings.

The era of standards-based reform, ushered in by No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), most recently re-authorized by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), transformed the landscape of school leadership. Enacted in January of 2002, NCLB (2001) was defined by many researchers as a high stakes, test-measured accountability system and has been the central means to determine public school teacher and administrative success (Vinovskis, 2009). In this high stakes test centered environment, it is the school leader who has been positioned to improve academic success or reap the consequences of not meeting a government set standard (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). The focus, per NCLB (2001) and now ESSA (2015), is on schools characterized by failure in order to accelerate the test scores of these substandard schools (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2013; Ratner, 2016; US Department of Education, 2008). However, the means by accelerating test scores differs between NCLB (2001) and ESSA (2015). As posited by Ratner (2016):
NCLB had implicitly assumed that pressuring Title I schools to raise test scores at the 
pain of being labelled failing and subjected to escalating sanctions would induce them to 
work harder and do whatever was necessary to dramatically improve learning. This was 
a false premise because typically low-achieving schools do not have the knowledge, 
skills, and other resources to turn themselves around on their own. By contrast, ESSA recognizes, in effect, that to turn around low-achieving schools it’s necessary for school 
districts to collaborate with stakeholders to provide them structure, technical assistance, 
and support for making comprehensive changes in the schools’ operations and help them 
focus on what works. (Retrieved from https://www.dcbar.org/about-the-bar/news/essa- 
impact-no-child-left-behind.cfm)

Furthermore, those school leaders who have been able to resurrect low achieving schools, based 
on standardized assessments, have been elevated to iconic status in policies and procedures (Peck 
& Reitzug, 2014). The new definition of effective school leadership is achieved through the lens 
of high test scores (West et al., 2014).

In recent studies, there has been great concern regarding the relationship between 
effective school leadership and improving standardized test scores (West et al., 2014; West, 
Peck, & Reitzug, 2010). This high stakes environment of assessment that standardized testing 
produces affects the personal attitudes of school leaders toward success and learning, provides 
undue stress on an already demanding position, and also affects the well-being of the school 
leader (West et al., 2014). This pressure is most often revealed on school leaders in the increased 
rate of school leadership turnover over the duration of NCLB (2001) (Cushing et al., 2003; 
Mcghee & Nelson, 2005; West et al., 2010). The perception of school leadership with regards to 
stress levels continues to dissuade many qualified and seasoned teachers from entering into the
profession of school leadership (DiaPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Gajda & Militello, 2008). More importantly, researchers have summarized that school leaders are so overburdened by managerial duties and standardized requirements that they neglect their central responsibility as the instructional leader of the school (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013).

Males in school leadership. This study focused on males who are working as principals, heads of school, or superintendents while maintaining their roles as husbands and fathers while completing their LRDP. First, when men are highly involved in their careers, they devote less time to their families which puts stress on the family unit (Beutell & Greenhaus, 1982). Secondly, the number of men serving in school leadership positions is significant. In private and public schools combined, males comprise approximately 48% of all principals or heads of school (Bitterman, Goldring, & Gray, 2013) and 77% of all public school superintendents (Wallace, 2014). With the proportion of females in the superintendency increasing by only 7% annually, it may be concluded that males will dominate the position of superintendent for many years to come (Wallace, 2014). Moreover, while the underrepresentation of women in school leadership positions is a documented concern and warrants further research, this study is delimited to the male gender archetype given their underrepresentation in the combined literature regarding LRDP persistence, school leadership, and work/family stress.

School leadership on the decline. The stress caused by school leadership is a primary reason for high turnover and a decreasing pool of qualified school leaders (DiaPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Forderaro, 2006; Gajda & Militello, 2008; Nussbaum, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2005). Ultimately, the stress of working in school has placed the profession of teaching and educational leadership in turmoil (De Leon, 2006; Department for Professional Employees, 2010; Department for Professional Employees, 2014; Wesson & Marshall, 2013). The
Department of Professional Employees (2014) reported that since 2011 there has been a decrease of educational administrators by 5.7% due to the politics and difficulty of the profession. To further support this topic of declining school leadership, as of 2003, 40% of the 92,000 public school principals were eligible to retire (Hine, 2003). Many educational administration positions require a doctoral degree, therefore doctoral persistence is an important issue due to the projected need of educational administrators (Bitterman et al., 2013; Glass & Franceschini, 2006). To fuel this issue, U.S. school enrollment is expected to increase by 5% to 52.1 million by 2023-24 (The Department of Professional Employees, 2014). As concluded by the Department of Professional Employees (2014) and Wesson and Marshall (2013), the projected increase in U.S. student enrollment, shortage of qualified lead educational administrators, and requirement to have a doctoral degree does not correlate to equivalent growth in the educational sector.

With the growing number of lead administrative positions available in U.S. schools both rural and urban (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008-2009; Klatt, 2014), and the decrease in qualified educational administrators (Department for Professional Employees, 2014; Forderaro, 2006; Nussbaum, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2005; Wesson & Marshall, 2013), the impact of doctoral completion is especially significant to the field of education. Furthermore, doctoral persistence is especially important to school leaders who are currently serving in school leadership without a doctoral degree or to those in the field of education who have aspirations to advance in the field of educational leadership. As posited by Wellington and Sikes (2006), “Within the first extrinsic group were those at the start of their careers, and who saw the qualifications as a means of professional ‘initiation’ and as a catalyst for career development and accelerated promotion” (p. 724).
While the doctoral degree is a preferred instrument in the public school community for current and aspiring school leaders, doctoral attainment is not common. The United States Census Bureau (2015) reported that approximately 1.7% of the U.S. population had earned a doctoral degree at the end of 2015. Specific to education, 9.7% of all principals hold a doctoral degree. (Bitterman et al., 2013). However, it is the leadership at the Superintendent level which displays the need for doctoral attainment in the profession of education with over 50% of all K-12 superintendents possessing a doctoral degree (Glass & Franceschini, 2006). Moreover, Glass and Franceschini (2006) reported that 97% of all superintendents who lead a school district of 5,000 students or above possess a doctoral degree. These statistics are not likely to increase with the number of American students earning doctoral degrees projected to fall by more than 8% from 2011-2016 (Smallwood, 2016). However, the Doctorate of Education (Ed.D.) or a Doctorate of Philosophy in Education (Ph.D.) is a needed qualification in many K-12 U.S. school leadership positions (e.g., principals, superintendents, heads of school), and it makes the likelihood of attaining a school leadership position more probable (Bitterman et al., 2013; Glass & Franceschini, 2006; Servage, 2009). As one participant in a qualitative study conducted by Wellington and Sikes (2006) suggested, “A number of people came into our department with Ph.D.s and made it quite clear to the rest of us they were superior . . . . Furthermore, the Head of School told a number of us that we were virtually unemployable because we didn’t have doctorates” (p. 727). While difficult, the expectation of possessing a doctoral degree is not a new concept to the culture of educational leadership.

With the understanding that it is helpful for school leaders to attain doctoral degrees, Klatt (2014) reported that there is a growing number of lead administrative positions available in U.S. schools both rural and urban. In support of Klatt (2014), the Bureau of Labor Statistics
(2008-2009) projected that by the year 2016, the need for school leaders with earned doctoral
degrees would increase 23% from its 2006 level. Additionally, the Department of Labor
projected an increase of 37,100 educational administration positions from 2008 to 2018
(Department for Professional Employees, 2010).

This shortage in school leaders begins with a shortage of teachers. With a tremendous
number of beginning teachers exiting the teaching profession within the first few years of their
career, fewer students pursuing the field of education as a career, and a large number of
experienced teachers retiring, the pool of school leaders is waning (Wesson & Marshall, 2013).
Wesson and Marshall (2013) explained:

Because the domino effect of fewer prospective teachers and fewer prospective
administrators greatly impacts the pool of applicants for superintendents’ positions,
school boards are finding it more and more challenging to attract and retain quality
applicants for teaching positions, principalships, and superintendency vacancies. (p. 89)

In essence, since school leaders most often begin their educational career as classroom teachers,
fewer teachers liken to less school leaders (Wesson & Marshall, 2013). Trending in 2001,
Archie McAfee, the Executive Director for the Texas Association of Secondary School
Principals, noted that there were insufficient numbers of certified teachers and those pursuing
school administrative licensure to fill the anticipated school leadership vacancies in the state of
Texas (Wesson & Marshall, 2013). This trend has not changed (Wesson & Marshall, 2013). In
addition, McAfee suggested that 40% of the current population of secondary principals in the
state of Texas would be eligible for retirement in five to eight years (2018-21), thereby creating
an unmanageable shortfall of school leaders (Wesson & Marshall, 2013). The need for recruiting
people into the field of education and educational leadership is more critical today than ever in
the past (Wesson & Marshall, 2013). As postulated by Wesson and Marshall (2013), “Even after people have been recruited into an educational career, the need for research on how to encourage educators to pursue top-level administrative careers is urgent” (p.91).

Doctoral attrition plays a primary factor for the deficit in the number of qualified candidates eligible for lead K-12 school leader positions (Golde, 2005). Doctoral attrition prevents talented and gifted individuals from filling essential and influential roles in the leadership of schools (Golde, 2005). Staying current in the field of education and the pursuit of advanced degrees is essential to the current educational advancement of the United States (U.S.) (Kirby, Biever, Martinez, & Gomez, 2004). Kirby et al. (2004) explained, “Staying current in one’s field, learning new knowledge and skills, and changing careers through formal education are essential in the current economic environment of the United States” (p. 65).

**Flexibility of the Limited Residency Doctoral Program.** The number of educational doctoral programs that have been developed to meet the educational needs of older, non-traditional students has grown rapidly (Kirby et al., 2004). Due to the flexibility of LRDPs, more full time educators have the ability to work on their doctoral degree without a residential requirement (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Terrell, Snyder, Dringus, & Maddrey, 2012; Zahl, 2015). It was not long ago when working on a doctoral degree was a full-time venture (Baker, 2014). Students were required to physically come onto the college campus and take classes in a face to face method with their instructor (Baker, 2014). Today, however, a doctoral degree may be attempted by any qualified person who possesses a computer and has the ability to access the internet (Baker, 2014). The flexibility and convenience of limited residency learning has added a new dimension to the pursuit of the doctorate, but has not improved doctoral persistence statistics (Terrell et al., 2012). According to the Council of Graduate Schools (2012), some
disciplines are reporting LRDP participation percentages as high as 57% of the total doctoral work completed. The increasing number of part-time doctoral students combined with attrition rates of around 70% (Berelson, 1960; Council of Graduate Students, 2008; Hawley, 2010; Lovitts, 2001; Tinto, 1993) warrant special attention to this group of LRDP students in the field of education (Zahl, 2015). Ultimately, LRDPs allow aspiring school leaders the flexibility to focus on their doctoral work while remaining in their current profession, which is necessary for career upward mobility in a K-12 school setting (Zahl, 2015).

**Limited Residency Doctoral Program Persistence**

Coupled with the occupational stress of the school leader, doctoral persistence remains a challenge for the American educational system. Because a majority of school leadership positions require or highly encourage a doctoral degree for employment, obtaining the doctoral degree is emphatically important and stressful to an aspiring school leader (Bitterman et al., 2013; Glass & Franceschini, 2006; Servage, 2009). The stress of doctoral completion not only adds to the positional stress of school leadership, but completing a doctoral program is time consuming and difficult (United States Census Bureau, 2015). Overall, projections of the number of doctoral students who complete their doctoral program is less than 50% and there has been little change to this attrition rate over the past 50 years (Berelson, 1960; Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Council of Graduate Schools, 2010; Hawley, 2010; Leeds et al., 2013).

LRDPs offer an even grimmer outlook. According to Leeds et al. (2013), students drop out of LRDP classes at rates up to 20% higher than residential doctoral courses and traditional retention strategies have done little to change this dynamic. Specifically, LRDP in the field of education are the worst offenders with approximately 30% actually finishing their program (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2011; Terrell, 2005).
Yet, the phenomenon of doctoral persistence has not been well researched qualitatively with even fewer studies examining doctoral persistence specifically in the field of education (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Bade, 2014).

Coupled with doctoral attrition, the time to doctoral completion is also of concern (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). As posited by Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011), “Students, educators, employers, and other stakeholders are concerned by the continued lengthening of time to attainment of the doctorate” (p. 115). Educational doctorates report the longest time to doctoral attainment than any other field (Bowen, 1992). Over the last two decades, graduate level time to degree completion rates have increased in educational programs while decreasing in other academic disciplines, (National Science Foundation, 2009; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). This is likely because doctoral students in the field of education are often full time professionals (e.g., current or aspiring school leaders) whose time is stretched due to work and family (Galvin, 2006). As posited by Wellington and Sikes (2006), “Committing oneself to a minimum of four years of high-level study while working full time, usually in a demanding and senior job, is a serious undertaking. Doing so, at a time of life when many people face practical, emotional and financial demands from children and parents compound matters” (p. 731).

While Tinto (1993, 2006) acknowledged student persistence was one of the most extensively studied areas in higher education, he also highlighted there is still much to be discovered. Society perceives an individual who carries the term doctor before their name to be of the highest academic caliber (Grover, 2007). A doctorate is the highest formal educational level in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, 2008). As stated by Bowen and Rudenstein (1992), the doctorate is “the apex of the country’s system of higher education in the arts and sciences” (p. 3). However, given the doctoral attrition statistics,
the pursuit of a doctoral degree is a risky endeavor (Brailsford, 2010). Projections of the number of doctoral students who leave their program ranges from 30% to 70% (Council of Graduate Schools, 2012; Hawley, 2010; Lovitts, 2001; Nettles & Millet, 2006, Tinto, 1993) with around 70% reported as a normal attrition rate for limited residency education doctoral programs (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Kennedy, Terrell, & Lohle, 2015; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2011; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Terrell, 2005). This rate negatively outpaces the fields of the social sciences and the humanities which report attrition rates of around 50% (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008). Moreover, despite many national programs and institutional efforts to decrease doctoral student attrition, there has been little change in attrition rates over the last 50 years (Berelson, 1960; Council of Graduate Schools, 2008). This 30% approximate success rate is even more startling when compared with U.S. law schools that report completion rates of 90% or above consistently (Denecke, Frasier, & Redd, 2009). As posited by Denecke et al. (2009):

>This attrition should concern us nationally in the United States, for across all fields doctoral programs continue to lose a large portion of students who have been judged by faculty and admissions committees to be among the very brightest and most talented in the world. (p. 36)

Work-Family Balance of Male Administrators in K-12 Leadership Roles

Research indicates that school leaders who perceive insufficient time and energy to successfully perform work and family roles are subject to work and family dissatisfaction, work and family tension, depression, and life stress (Greenhaus et al., 1997; Watkins & Subich, 1995). As posited by Hobfoll and Hobfoll (1994), “Time with your family is one of your most critical resources and one that is constantly threatened by outside demands” (p. 104). There are few
areas of contemporary psychology that receive more attention than family stress or have a longer history of study (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 1992). As suggested by Hobfoll (1989), “This literature reflects researchers’ belief that stress is a major factor affecting people’s lives, is intimately tied with mental health, and is very possibly linked with many problems of physical health” (p. 513). Depression, debilitating anxiety, heavy drinking, drug use, physical illness like ulcers, heart problems, weight gain, eating disorders, and high blood pressure may all be related to high levels of stress (Hobfoll & Hobfoll, 1994).

The pursuit of the doctorate may come at the expense of the well-being of self and the family (Lovitts, 2001). Family dysfunction and even suicide can be a very real outcome of the doctoral pursuit (Lovitts, 2001). Individuals who seek a doctorate are of the highest academic caliber and have lived a life of academic achievement (Lovitts, 2001; Smallwood, 2016). The health and welfare of the doctoral student as a functioning member of the traditional family is also identified as a problem. Individuals who reach this doctoral pinnacle have completed their masters work, met all the qualifications to be accepted into a doctoral program, have been successful their entire life, and view themselves as superior students (Lovitts, 2001). They are people who believe they can surmount any academic obstacle and finish what they start (Lovitts, 2001). Yet, when these type of people suffer failure for the first time in their lives, the experience can be devastating. Lovitts (2001) stated that this failure to succeed in their doctoral work can be “gut-wrenching” and the doctoral student may feel “disappointed, and depressed” (p. 6). Lovitts (2001) found that some of these previously successful individuals feel suicidal and actually attempt it. In an interview completed by Lovitts (2001), one of 30 doctoral non-completers reported feeling suicidal many years following doctoral failure, and at least two females of the 305 non-completers in the survey actually attempted suicide. To put these
statistics into context, the National Institute of Mental Health (1996) reported that more men commit suicide (4:1 ratio) while more women attempt suicide (2:1 ratio). In addition, The National Institute of Mental Health (1996) reported an American suicide rate of 15.2 suicides per 100,000 individuals in the 25-29 year old population. To further analyze this statistic, the National Institute of Mental Health (1996) stated a suicide rate of 4.9 women per 100,000 and 25.4 per 100,000 men in 1996. Lovitts’ (2001) data was qualitative and not a statistical analysis that was generalizable to the entire audience of doctoral students. However, these thoughts and attempts of suicide result from extreme distress and severe depression caused by the feeling of failure of the doctoral program and specifically the dissertation phase (The National Institute of Mental Health, 1996). Students who leave their doctoral program prior to completion often have to reconstruct their lives and reconstruct their self-image (Lovitts, 2001). This doctoral attrition is not only costly to the university and welfare of school leadership, it may be a life or death situation for the aspiring LRDP student (Lovitts, 2001).

In addition, the pressure of completing the LRDP degree may create role conflict for a school leader who is integrating his or her doctoral studies with professional and familial roles (Crossfield, Kinman, & Jones, 2005). The pursuit of the doctorate may lead to a gamut of personal issues to include divorce and family dysfunction (Galvin, 2006). In a study observing graduate student marriages at a university mental health clinic, Scheinkman (1988) reported that marriages during graduate school were susceptible to high divorce rates. Scheinkman (1988) also posited that graduate school had a negative impact on the state of most marriages due to the high levels of stress. Specifically, younger marriages were most vulnerable to divorce caused by the stress of graduate work (Scheinkman, 1988). Baird (1997) affirmed that the writing of the doctoral dissertation specifically is a “problematic task” (p. 99). Marriage and children tend to
delay or end progress toward a doctoral degree (Baird, 1997; Scheinkman, 1998). Research indicates that academic completion rates, overall academic performance, work satisfaction, and overall life satisfaction are linked to marriage contentment (Hawley, Blume, & Smiley, 2006; Kirby et al., 2004). Kahn, Wolfe, Wuinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964) defined role conflict as the “simultaneous occurrence of two or more sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other” (p. 19). Kahn et al.’s (1964) position is a direct reflection of the competing pressures of school leadership and the pursuit of the doctoral degree.

As advanced by Meehan and Negy (2003), stress in one area of a person’s life that affects other areas of their lives as well. Herman and Gyllstrom (1977) found that married persons experience more work-family conflict than unmarried persons. In a similar idea, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) surmised that married persons with children experience more work-family conflict than nonparents. Bohen and Viveros-Long (1981) went as far to report that the raising of children may be the most significant factor to work-family balance.

Furthermore, studies show that parents of younger children experience more work-family balance issues than parents of older children likely due to the time required to meet the demands of younger children (Beutell & Greenhaus, 1980; Greenhaus & Kopleman, 1981; Pleck, Staines, & Lang, 1980). Larger families, which are more likely to be time demanding, also show higher levels of work-family imbalance (Cartwright, 1978). The male’s attitude toward work may be the most influential issue with regards to work-family balance (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Beutell and Greenhaus (1982) reported that that men who are highly involved in their careers devoted less time to their families, thereby increasing the heavy time demands on the women in
the home. As detailed by Keith and Schaeffer (1980), the level of work-family balance is directly related to the number of hours the husband works per week.

Meehan and Negy (2003) proposed that a person’s overall wellness may be affected by multiple stressors. While the influence of work on family is well documented (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Hood, 1993; Kahn et al., 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Voydanoff, 1980; Zedeck, 1992), there is clear gap in the literature regarding male doctoral students who participate LRDPs and the impact LRDPs have on their families with regards to persistence (Kirby et al., 2004).

While school leadership in itself is a stressful occupation (Klatt, 2014), the stress caused by balancing the family while adding the role of LRDP student to advance his or her professional career must be addressed (Bitterman et al., 2013; Glass & Franceschini, 2006; Servage, 2009).

The role of husband and father are competing roles with that of being a LRDP student and school leader. As cited by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), “Multiple roles may compete for a person’s time. Time spent on activities within one role generally cannot be devoted to activities within another role” (p. 77). A second practice of work family discord that must be taken into account involves responsibility produced anxiety (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). This tension creates work stressors which can produce worry, lethargy, depression, indifference, and petulance (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1980). This means that the strain created by one role makes it difficult to comply with the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The road to the LRDP is rigorous and school leaders who are already overloaded are more likely to allow work to interfere with their family life and be in poorer physical and mental health (Duxbury & Higgins, 2012). Empirical studies report that many younger educational leaders with school aged children do not apply for superintendent openings because they are concerned about the effects of the position on their personal and family lives (Klatt, 2014; Orr, 2006). The competition for time and the strain that
results from limited time may play into LRDP persistence for a male serving in the capacity of school leader, husband, and father.

**Clarifying the Literature Gap**

Most doctoral persistence research conducted to this point focuses on traditional doctoral programs. These traditional programs are residency programs where students attend school full time, and the students physically attend class. However, in recent years, doctoral education has shifted toward a more non-traditional approach. LRDPs, non-traditional programs, online programs, or limited residency programs are more common than ever (Terrell et al., 2012). As posited by Zahl (2015), “the number of part time students pursuing doctoral degrees continues to grow” (p. 301). These programs provide the student the option to perform nearly all their limited residency work at home except for a visit to campus over one week or a few extended weekends (Terrell et al., 2012). The part-time LRDP student is one who takes less than eight credit hours per semester (Zahl, 2015). Allen and Seaman (2013) defined limited residency or limited residency students as those who perform over 80% of their coursework limited residency via the computer. As limited residency programs allow school leaders to remain committed to their profession and eliminate the need to uproot their family to move closer to the physical institution, limited residency programs have become increasingly popular for leaders of K-12 schools (Allen & Seaman, 2013). The Council of Graduate Schools (2012) support Terrell et al. (2012) reporting around 33% of all doctoral students in the U.S. are enrolled in part-time programs with some disciplines reporting percentages as high as 57% (Council of Graduate Schools, 2012). Allen and Seaman (2013) reported that over 6.7 million students were taking at least one LRDP class during the fall 2012 semester which represents 32% of all higher education students. As stated by Croxton (2014), “Limited residency learning holds great appeal to a large
number of students because it offers flexibility in participation, ease of access, and convenience” (p. 314). In addition, from 2011 to 2012, LRDP community increased 9.3% which far exceeded the 2% growth of residential doctoral students (Croxton, 2014). With 33% to 57% of all doctoral students in the U.S. attending school part time, LRDPs are the trend of the future (Council of Graduate Schools, 2012). Zahl (2015) posited, “The increasing numbers of part-time doctoral students combined with attrition rates of up to 70% warrant special attention on this population of doctoral students” (p. 302). However, these very factors, commitment to work and commitment to family, may influence the doctoral candidate’s commitment to the doctoral program, increasing the risk of attrition. Research is needed to describe how men who are fathers, husbands, and school leaders, persist to doctoral completion.

The reason more students are participating in doctoral programs not only includes the flexibility of the limited residency program, but also because of the quality of the LRDPs. Kuo, Walker, Belland, and Schroder (2013) reported that quality limited residency education better prepares learners for collaboration, distance communication, and presentations. In addition, Zupek (2010) reported that 83% of executives in corporate America viewed a LRDP degree as credible compared to one earned in a traditional residential program. Yet, doctoral student persistence remains one of “academia’s well-kept secrets” (Golde, 2000, p. 199). While convenient and more popular, these programs can quickly lead to feelings of isolation and disconnectedness which also supports doctoral attrition (Grover, 2007; Lovitts, 2001; Zahl, 2015). Hall (1998) posited that the inattention to the subject of doctoral attrition encourages students to withdraw quietly, with the occasional student committing suicide perhaps in an effort to draw more attention to the problem.
Doctoral attrition is a problem that must be better explored due to the consequences of what it at stake for individuals as well as the U.S. global economy (Denecke et al., 2009; Lovitts, 2001). If the future competitiveness and prosperity of the U.S. depends on the ability to expand knowledge through the gifts of higher thinking, intelligence, innovation, and most importantly, school leadership, there is a strong argument to be made for studying doctoral attrition and persistence. Certainly, dropouts are expected given that doctoral work is considered advanced work (Smallwood, 2016). While it was once thought that the issue of doctoral persistence was purely a student financial issue, there are growing pressures for institutions to be held more accountable for the performance of their doctoral candidates and for their efforts to make their doctoral candidates successful (Croxton, 2014; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Nwenyi & Baghurst, 2013). Recently, the issue of doctoral persistence received even more attention as it was one of the most talked about issues at the recent meeting of the Council of Graduate Schools in San Francisco, California (Smallwood, 2016). Lewis Siegel, the chairman of the council and dean of the Graduate School at Duke University called the issue of doctoral persistence “the central issue in doctoral education today” (as cited in Smallwood, 2016, p.1).

A majority of persistence research has focused on undergraduate students. Tinto’s (1975, 1993) model of student integration provided the foundational lens to view student persistence (Zahl, 2015). Tinto’s (1975) model proposed that student persistence is dependent upon the relationship a student develops with the social and academic systems of the institution. As posited by Zahl (2015), “The extent and quality of the interactions in these systems determine the degree to which doctoral students become integrated and ultimately persist to complete the program (p. 302). However, while Tinto’s (1975) student attrition model has been influential in explaining attrition in higher education programs, the model was developed with the on-campus
program and undergraduate student in mind (Golde, 2000; Rovai, 2002). According to Rovai (2002), Tinto’s (1975) model of student attrition is only broadly relevant to distance education programs and limited in its ability to explain limited residency student attrition. Thus, as mentioned by Zahl, (2015), “this one size fits all approach fails to address the needs and experiences of certain groups of students, particularly part time students” [LRDP students] (p. 303). Thus, there is a hidden nature regarding doctoral student research and attrition (Golde, 2000). This is a legitimate concern due to the number of students now taking LRDP classes (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Zahl, 2015). Recently, with the popularity of LRDPs, there is more research regarding the LRDP student. However, the research is limited. Additionally, there is very little research on specific gender and ethnic groups with regards to doctoral persistence.

A study describing persistence is significant due to the number of men employed in educational leadership positions in American schools and to their family-work balance as they press toward doctoral attainment. In 2000, 86.8% of all educational superintendents were men (Glass, 2000), and respectively made up 77% of all superintendents in 2016 (Schmitz, 2016). Moreover, the Department for Professional Employees (2014) reported that males made up approximately 48% of all school administrators in 2014 in the U.S. In spite of the various challenges these school leaders face as husbands and fathers, a study exploring how these men persist in their doctoral studies will fill a gap in the current literature. This study is significant to men in the field of educational leadership who desire to attain their doctoral degree (Glass, 2000; Department for Professional Employees, 2014). This needed study addressed a gap in the literature by exploring the experiences of men who persisted in their LRDPs while serving as K-12 lead school administrators, and while managing in the roles of husbands and fathers.
Situation to Self

As a school leader of a pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade private Christian school, husband, father, and doctoral candidate in a LRDP, I am living the experience of what I am studying. Like many before me, I often wanted to quit. I am able to fully embrace the reality of males serving in the roles of LRDP students, K-12 lead administrators, and husbands and fathers. However, I hold the ontological assumption that not all experiences are the same or will mirror mine, and my goal is to report how the participants in my study persisted to doctoral completion (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, my duty is to link the common threads among the participant narratives to determine the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In order for the voices of my participants to be heard, I must remove myself from the study. For this purpose, I have selected a transcendental phenomenological design that explicates procedures for bracketing out the experiences of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994).

Epistemologically, it is my goal to identify the essential experiences of my participants so that what is recounted is as close as possible to the participant experiences (Creswell, 2013). As articulated by Guba and Lincoln (1988), I must minimize the “objective separateness” (p. 94) between my participants and myself. I simply want to know the experience of those who have attained their LRDP goal in the field of education while balancing their roles as a lead K-12 education administrator, husband, and father (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2011; Terrell, 2005).

Lastly, from an axiological position, I must admit the biases and values I bring to this study (Creswell, 2013). Because I am living out the experience I am examining, I bring to this research certain presuppositions regarding life as a PreK-12 lead school administrator, LRDP student, and husband/father. First, I currently serve as the superintendent of the largest private
Christian school system in the state of Virginia. While performing my duties as the leader of this school system, I also serve as a husband to a full time elementary school teacher and a father to a high academic 16 year old who is involved with two major sports throughout the school year. The reason doctoral persistence is a personal struggle is because of the obligations I have in these various roles. While my family is very supportive of my efforts, I often feel as if I do not have time to give full attention to these competing interests, which causes me stress, anxiety, and at times, depression.

As a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, with a mathematical and engineering background, I bring a positivist mindset (Creswell, 2013). With this understanding of my background and this study being a qualitative phenomenological study, I must adopt a more social constructivist approach (Creswell, 2013). My goal is to seek to understand the experience of males who completed their LRDP while managing their family roles and serving in the capacity of a K-12 school leader. Thus, I am seeking to understand the world in which these men study, live, and work (Creswell, 2013). It is my desire for this study to be utilized as a model for males who are working on their limited residency doctoral degree while leading their K-12 schools in a full-time capacity and doing their best to fulfill their roles as husbands and fathers. I have many great leaders on my current staff who are stuck at the all-but-dissertated (ABD) stage of their doctoral program. These men and women are trapped by the duties and responsibilities at work, at home, and by their LRDP. Specifically, I desire for this study to serve as a blueprint for how my ABD staff and others might persist in completing their LRDP while fulfilling all roles. Personally and professionally, there is far too much at stake for K-12 school leaders to give up on their limited residency doctoral degree. Failure in this effort can be detrimental to leadership development of the next generation of academic leaders (Lovitts,
In addition to the loss in their personal and professional lives, Lovitts (2001) conveyed the huge cost to society regarding doctoral attrition by stating:

Society needs highly educated people from all disciplines to fill a wide variety of positions both inside and outside of academe. Consequently, many bright and able graduate students leave without the terminal degree and self-select out of or are de facto excluded from consideration for high-level positions they could have otherwise filled.

(pp. 4-5)

In the end, I want this study to benefit the educational leadership society by encouraging great school leaders who are husbands and fathers to persist in their LRDP degree. But more importantly, I want this study to help these men understand how to attain a proper work-family balance as they attain their LRDP degree.

**Problem Statement**

K-12 school leaders experience many demands. The stressors of school leadership coupled with the work of the LRDP easily result in stress on the family and marital tension (Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Orr, 2006). Additionally, many public school divisions carry the expectation that school leaders earn a doctoral degree to attain or keep their school leadership position (Bitterman et al., 2013; Klatt, 2014). While the flexibility of the LRDP makes it the most viable option for professionals in the field of education seeking their doctoral degree (Terrell et al., 2012), LRDPs report attrition rates of around 70% (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2011; Terrell, 2005). While research has examined male attrition and persistence in traditional programs (Gomez, 2013; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Bade, 2014; Spaulding, & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012), and female persistence in limited residency programs (Castro, Cavazos, Castro, & Garcia, 2011;
there are no studies that describe the unique lived experiences of males who persisted in LRDPs who serve as K-12 school leaders, husbands, and fathers. With a potential future shortage in school leaders (Department for Professional Employees, 2010), research is needed to explain how men who are K-12 school leaders persist in LRDPs while maintaining their commitment as husbands and fathers.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the lived experiences of males who completed their LRDP while managing the roles of husband, father, and lead administrator in a K-12 school in the U.S. For this study, *persistence* is operationally defined as successfully defending the doctoral dissertation proceeded by the doctoral degree conferment. *School administrators* are defined as individuals serving in the role of lead K-12 principal, head of school, or superintendent who completed their LRDP. A LRDP is defined as a program where at least 80% of the content is delivered limited residency (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Here, I used the term, *family men*, as males who are legally married to one woman with the wife living in the same home and have a minimum of one child in up to 12th grade living in the home at the completion of their LRDP.

The theories guiding this study are Tinto’s (1975, 1993, 2006) student attrition theory (SIT) and Hobfoll’s (1989) conservations of resource model (COR). Tinto’s (1975, 1993, 2006) theory explains the academic and social interaction between the individual and the institution. Hobfoll’s (1989) COR theory addresses the relationship between work and family roles, allows for predictions about moderating relationship of self-esteem, and incorporates the effect of life
change events on stress levels. Together, these theories guided this study investigating the experiences of K-12 school leaders who persisted in a LRDP while maintaining their commitment as husbands and fathers.

**Significance of the Study**

This study has empirical, theoretical, and practical significance with regards to research, theory, and practice related to K-12 leadership and doctoral education. Empirically, there is no study that examines the experience of the K-12 school leader who is leading his family as a husband and father while completing his LRDP degree. Theoretically, Tinto’s (1975, 1993, 2006) SIT and Hobfoll’s (1989) COR model were applied. Practically, this study may serve as a blueprint for current or aspiring school leaders to attain a LRDP degree while acting as a husband and father.

**Empirical Significance**

Currently, there is no study that specifically examines the experiences of K-12 school leaders who persisted in their doctoral programs while maintaining their commitment as husbands and fathers. This study will fill the gap and give other men a model for succeeding in such an endeavor. Empirically, there is doctoral persistence research on the experiences of female doctoral candidates (Castro et al., 2011; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2015; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2016; Spaulding, Rockinson-Szapkiw, & Spaulding, 2015; Spaulding, Rockinson-Szapkiw, & Williams, 2016), candidates from backgrounds of poverty (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, Swezey, & Wicks, 2014), and limited residency doctoral students that encompass all genders and races (Gomez, 2013; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Bade, 2014; Spaulding, & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). The gap in the literature is a specific
study on the experiences of male K-12 lead school administrators who balanced the duties of husbands and fathers while completing their LRDP degree.

Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, Tinto’s (1975, 1993, 2006) SIT and Hobfoll’s (1989) COR model will be applied. Tinto (1975, 1993, 2006) explains the relationship between the student and the institution and how this relationship effects completion of the program. Although Tinto (1975) does not focus on limited residency, non-traditional doctoral students, his model is limited but valid. Hobfoll’s (1989) COR model suggests that individuals need to acquire and maintain resources, and that stress is a reaction to an environment where there is the threat of a loss of resources to include objects, conditions, personal characteristics, and energies. Using the COR as a framework, the study has the potential to illustrate how men conserve and successfully allocate resources in a way that allows them to complete their doctoral program, while internally and externally managing their varied roles and responsibilities as K-12 school leaders, husbands, and fathers. Specifically, this study may extend the COR model. This theory typically focuses on the relationship between two dimensions, work and family. However, this study will add the third dimension of the LRDP student.

Practical Significance

While this study has empirical and theoretical significance, it is specifically designed to act as a model for male K-12 leaders who are acting as husbands, fathers, and LRDP students. With the research showing that interest in school leadership positions is on the decline (DiaPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Forderaro, 2006; Gajda & Militello, 2008; Klatt, 2014; Nussbaum, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2005; Wesson & Marshall, 2013) and a majority of school leadership positions requiring or highly encouraging a doctoral degree for employment (Bitterman et al.,
the doctoral degree is vocationally vital for aspiring school leaders. The practical goal of this study is to provide aspiring male school leaders who need a doctoral degree a model to follow to persist to doctoral completion. Besides the LRDP student who is serving as a lead school administrator, husband, and father, academic institutions that offer Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs are also primary stakeholders (Denecke et al., 2009). Doctoral completion rates are of utmost importance to universities because attrition carries financial as well as reputational costs (Denecke et al., 2009). Higher education administrators know that it is more economical to maintain a student than to recruit a new one (Bean, 1980; Lovitts, 2001). Thus, failure to complete a doctoral program results in an economic loss to the institution and an intellectual loss for society (Gardner, 2010; Golde, 2005; Gomez; 2013; Kennedy et al., 2015). Denecke et al. (2009) posited that there is nothing more damaging to a university than attrition:

As new doctoral assessment ratings and consumer employment rates, placement statistics, completion rates, and average time to degree statistics are more accessible to prospective parents, those student may begin weighing more traditional attractors such as reputation and faculty recognition with the risks implicit in attending a program where a high percentage do not complete their Ph.D. program. (p. 37)

To make this argument more practical, in a study on doctoral attrition, the University of Notre Dame determined it could save around one million dollars in stipends alone if it was able to improve doctoral attrition by just 10% (Smallwood, 2016). The ultimate goal of this study is to provide practical recommendations for increasing the persistence of a specific subgroup of the at-risk LRDP student population.
Research Questions

The research questions are designed to provide structure and narrow the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2013). The research questions are the core of the study and remain “viable and alive throughout the investigation” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 105). The questions are strategically open ended, evolving, non-directional (Creswell, 2013) and focused on getting at the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In the end, the questions allow for the essential experiences of the participants to be described (Moustakas, 1994).

1. Research Question 1: What are the experiences of males who persisted to completion in their LRDP, while serving as husbands, fathers, and lead administrators of a K-12 school or district?

The first research question is the foundation for exploring the experiences of men who have completed their LRDP while working as a K-12 lead administrator while serving in the family roles of husband and father. The question is grounded in the theoretical framework of Tinto’s (1975) SIT and Hobfoll’s (1989) COR model.

2. Research Question 2: How do males who are husbands, fathers and lead administrators in a K-12 school district persist to completing their LRDP?

The second research question focuses on both Tinto’s (1975) student integration model which focuses on the academic and social relationship the student has with the institution and how this relationship fits into the doctoral student’s roles as school leaders and family men, and Hofoll’s (1987) COR model which explores how a person conserves and balances resources. In study findings by Thurmond, Wambach, Connors, and Frey (2002), the relationship between interactivity in their limited residency courses and satisfaction with their educational experience were dependent. Thurmond et al. (2002) supported Tinto (1975) in that the integration of the
limited residency student was both academically and socially dependent on receiving timely comments from the instructor and having a personal relationship with the instructor. As stated by Croxton (2014), “the context of the learning environment can play a significant role in a student’s decision to drop out of a limited residency course” (p. 314). It is widely accepted that the academic and social relationship revolves around the student-faculty relationship (Tinto, 2006). The actions of the faculty both inside and outside the classroom are key to the institutional efforts to improve student retention (Tinto, 2006). Likewise, Hobfoll’s (1987) COR model will act as a model of how the men of the study shifted responsibilities and efforts to make space for the LRDP, and to ultimately persist to completion.

**Definitions**

1. *Advisor/chair* – The person who oversees the dissertation process of a doctoral candidate and leads the dissertation committee.

2. *Asynchronous limited residency learning* – Limited residency classes that one may take on their own schedule.

3. *Attrition* – A student who quits his or her Ed.D. or Ph.D. program.

4. *Distance Education, Distance Learning, Limited Residency Education, Limited Residency Learning, Limited Residency Program* – Planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching, requiring special course design and instruction techniques, communication through various technologies, and special organizational and administrative arrangements (Moore & Kearsley, 2005)

5. *Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)* – The Ed.D. requires mastery of a specific subject and expansion of the existing body of knowledge (Peterson, 2009). The Ed.D. is aimed at the educational practitioner who desires to focus more on teaching than on conducting
research (Nelson & Coorough, 1994). The Ed.D. dissertation is more likely to include survey research and be more common in educational administrative research (Nelson & Coorough, 1994).

6. Doctor of Philosophy in Education (Ph.D.) – The Ph.D. requires mastery of a specific subject and expansion of the existing body of knowledge (Peterson, 2009). The Ph.D. is more likely to include multivariate statistics, have a wider generalizability, and be more prevalent in certain areas of concentration (Nelson & Coorough, 1994).


8. Limited residency student – A student where at least 80% of the content is delivered limited residency (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

9. Non-traditional student – A non-residential student who is likely to live off campus with his or her own family and work communities outside the academic environment (Knowles, 1980).

10. Synchronous limited residency learning – Limited residency classes that require students and instructors to be limited residency at the same time.

**Summary**

This chapter began with a discussion of the difficulty and stressors of being a school leader in the current educational setting, discussed some key statistics and elements of doctoral persistence, and noted challenges of being a family man in the midst of work and the pursuit of a LRDP degree. The problem and purpose of the study were identified and the significance of the study explained. It is established that there is no such research giving voice to the male who finished his LRDP while serving in the roles of lead K-12 school administrator, husband, and
father. The research questions were listed and discussed to provide focus to the study. In the next chapter, a review of the literature is provided.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

Researchers have uncovered many reasons candidates fail to finish their doctoral program. Doctoral work is an extremely rigorous process which requires time and support (Lovitts, 2001; Powers & Swick, 2012). The literature suggests that there is little to no academic difference between those who persist to doctoral completion compared to those who do not (Lovitts, 2001; Smallwood, 2016). In most cases, students who are accepted into doctoral programs have shown a pattern of success, are competent to complete the program, and are highly motivated (Grover, 2007). Yet, it is reported that only 30% of limited residency doctoral (LRDP) candidates in the field of education complete their doctoral program culminating with the dissertation (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2011; Terrell, 2005). As stated by Golde (2000):

The most academically capable, most academically successful, most stringently evaluated, and the most carefully selected students in the entire higher education system – doctoral students – are the least likely to complete their chosen academic goals. (p. 199)

Golde (2000) implies that there are external obstacles and internal demons which affect the doctoral candidate’s ability to complete their doctoral program. Perhaps, the most important reason to examine the issue of doctoral persistence is because quitting the doctoral process may ruin the life of the person pursuing the degree (Lovitts, 2001). Lovitts (2001) posited, “The costs of attrition on the financial, personal, emotional, and professional lives of students who leave are not small, and they can be devastating and long lasting” (p. 7).

This chapter begins by examining literature regarding school leadership, LRDP persistence, and work-family balance. I begin with broad and general categories while working
downwards towards a synthesis which explains the focus of this study on the experience of a male LRDP student who is serving as a K-12 head of school, husband, and father. Secondly, the chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical foundation that guides this study regarding school leadership, LRDP persistence, and work-family balance.

**Related Literature**

This literature review takes into account the stress of school leadership, the concept and issues with doctoral persistence, and the responsibilities of the father and husband in the traditional family. In essence, when an individual has conflict between their roles and responsibilities, tension is imminent (Hobfoll, 1989). While the focus of the study begins with school leadership, the pressure of doctoral attainment, and responsibilities of the family man are all of equal importance. This review of the literature brings the most important elements of each forward. This review begins with a discussion on leadership in general and school leadership. Moreover, I discuss the stress of school leadership, coping skill to manage the stress of school leadership, and a review of the shortage in the profession. I next review doctoral persistence with regards to the limited residency student, and then move into a discussion on work-family balance. Lastly, I provide a review of the theoretical frameworks that apply to the study.

**Leadership**

Leadership attracts universal attention (Hackman & Johnson, 2009), because leadership directs world changing (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2006). For years, historians, philosophers, and social scientists have attempted to understand, bring meaning, give guidance, and define leadership (Hackman & Johnson, 2009). However, as argued by Burns (1978), “Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” (p. 2). While leadership is one of the greatest areas of study of the 21st century, there seems to be no simple, universally
accepted understanding of what leaders do (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2006). One reason that leadership is so intriguing is that in all facets of life, leadership can and does emerge (Hackman & Johnson, 2009). The world points at leadership as the success or failure to our society (Hackman & Johnson, 2009). As stated by Hackman and Johnson (2009), “Wherever society exists, leadership exists. Leadership seems to be linked to what it means to be human” (p. 5). As posited by Kraft (2010), without the right kind of leader organizations may become bloated bureaucracies concerned with policy, politics, and procedures instead of creativity and innovation.

**School Leadership**

Research establishes that the school leader makes a positive difference in terms of staff achievement, student achievement, parent involvement, morale and culture of the school, and overall program success (Edmonds, 1979; Larsen, 1989; Sergiovanni, 1995; Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2004). Regardless of the impact on the school, research reported conflicting information regarding how school leaders feel about their occupation (Boyland, 2011). The positives include helping students, leading a faculty towards a vision, community involvement, working collaboratively, serving as a change agent, and managing an efficiently run organization (Sergiovanni, 1995; Malone, Sharp, & Walter, 2001). In addition, Malone et al. (2001) reported that a majority of school leaders find their work rewarding.

However, the research also suggests school leaders often feel overwhelmed in their positions. Combs et al. (2009) defined the position as “unrelenting” (p. 4). Klatt (2014) posited that while the research is limited, superintendents in the current educational system experience a higher level of stress than their predecessors. These stressors are multifaceted and complex to include budget management, competing community and school groups, hiring, politics and
bureaucracy, community pressure to perform, social media, and life balance just to name a few (Gill & Arnold, 2015; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Hawk & Martin, 2011). Glass et al. (2000), Foderaro (2006), and Gill and Arnold (2015), specifically reported that the superintendent’s primary role has transformed from a focus on school leadership and working with stakeholders to build solid schools to being a facilitator of federal mandates and following directions from their respective Department of Education. Gill and Arnold (2015) posited that “schools are increasingly being developed in terms of a business management model rather than the humanistic learning environments that once characterized elementary schooling” (p. 20). Given that most school leaders gained their position through demonstrable success as academic leaders in the classroom, it is little wonder that some would feel unprepared and anxious to work in a school environment where management is the primary needed skill set (Gill & Arnold, 2015). “Indeed principals often lament that the motivation that drew them into teaching—loving working with young people, excitement about learning—appears ever more irrelevant to their job as principals” (Gill & Arnold, 2015, p. 22).

**School leadership and masculinity.** School leadership is often associated with masculinity. “To some extent, the initial questioning of gender boundaries in school governance was probably inspired by the second wave feminist movement in the 1970s and 1980s” (Gill & Arnold, 2015, p. 20). In 1970, the typical school leader was a Caucasian male between the ages of 40 and 60 (Knezevich, 1971). Until the closing decades of the last century, school leadership in western countries was very much the unquestioned province of men (Gill & Arnold, 2015). Until the late 20th century, the philosophy was common that the “men are the leaders, they have the position of being in charge, while women are the workers, they have the job of being led, of following orders and conforming to the rules of the more powerful men” (Gill & Arnold, 2015,
Specifically, a study by Knezevich in 1971 found 98.7% of all superintendents in the U.S. were male. This statistic moved slightly as reported by Glass et al. (2000) in that 86.8% of all superintendents in the U.S. were male in the year 2000. The male persona being attached to school leadership is true for the student also. Smith and Grimwood’s (1983) study revealed that by their second year of school, young children associate the men as school leaders and the women as teachers. To further support, the Texas Education Agency (2001) reported that while 87.3% of all superintendents were males, 77.3% of all teachers were females in the state of Texas. As posited by Gill and Arnold (2015), students “constructed a positional order based on sex differences to account for the different levels of men and woman in their regular school experience” (p. 20). The higher the position in school leadership, the more blatant the over representation of males existed (Glass et al., 2000; Texas Education Agency, 2001).

While the underrepresentation of women in school leadership positions is a documented concern and warrants further research, this study is delimited to the male gender archetype given their underrepresentation in the literature regarding LRDP persistence and literature suggesting that work/family stress is not limited to women. The stereotype of school leadership evokes images of the male persona (Klatt, 2014). Psychological archetypes are first prints or patterns that form the plan of human personality (Van Eewnyk, 1997). As posited by Klatt (2014), “In most societies [the father] acts instrumentally as the bridge between family life and the life of society at large, in contrast with the mothers’ more expressive role, concerned with home and family” (p. 455). The concept of archetypes are often associated with Carl Jung (1964) who determined that similar images in the thoughts and dreams of individuals act as positive or negative images. For example, the father archetype may be personified with king, elder, leader, warrior, or someone who is a visionary (Arrien, 1993; Klatt, 2014). As posited by Arrien (1993),
“The developed warrior shows honor and respect to all things, employs judicious communication, sets limits and boundaries, is responsible and disciplined, demonstrates right use of power, and understands universal powers” (p. 455). The warrior archetype is most associated with the male leader who is strong and definitive (Klatt, 2014). Klatt (2014) posited that early leadership literature defined superintendents as strong and in-charge men who were rarely challenged by the school board, teachers, or the community. In essence, the word father may be most associated with the Eternal Father in heaven which represents a defender of faith and defense against all enemies (Klatt, 2014). Superintendents were viewed as strong decision makers with decisive management styles (Bass, 1985). According to Klatt (2014), “Such descriptors evoked fatherly images of the older (male) superintendent with the knowledge and authority to make decisions and create systems that reward subordinates for effective work” (p. 456). Thus, when a male who has risen to the ranks of school leadership is defeated by the LRDP process, the feelings of disappointment and depression may be more pronounced than in women lending to this male archetype of leader and achiever. Due to the historical position of men in the educational community, men may experience failure in a different capacity than women leaders (Klatt, 2014). As posited by Klatt (2014), the pressure to perform is greater for males due to the historical expectations.

With regard to the stress, time commitment, and responsibilities of the school leader, having a working spouse may add to the tension felt by the school leader. The National Commission on Working Women (2000) reported that 80% of women between the ages of 25-54 were paid U.S. Employees in 2000. As postulated by Gupta and Jenkins (1985), the increased role of females in the workforce means that more couples are juggling both work and family roles. Additionally, the non-working wife of the school leader can also create stress in the family
as it may lead to greater expectations on the school leader by the school board (Klatt, 2014). This was affirmed by Klatt (2014) suggesting, “When the male superintendent was hired, school board members knew that he was married to a stay-at-home wife and mother; therefore, they expected him to be fully present for numerous district challenges” (pp. 477-478).

**Stress of school leadership.** School leadership is a stressful occupation (Sogunro, 2012). As posited by Sogunro (2012), “The stress in today’s school is more than it has ever been. Evidence abounds that today’s principals operate in a stress-strained environment” (p. 664). Stress, according to Brock and Grady (2002), is the body’s non-specific response to stressors within a given environment. Lyles (2005) agreed, calling stress the mental and physical wear and tear that an individual experiences as they live their life. Prolonged stress over the emerging state of stress can create a chronic state of tension over the body’s system which are linked to heart disease, hypertension, high blood cholesterol, and obesity (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001).

Although some stress is both common and necessary, excessive unmanaged stress which exists in many school leadership positions has been linked to chronic stress (Colbert, 2008; Weil, 2007). As advanced by Colbert (2008), high levels of ongoing stress produce an excessive amount of stress hormones which over time may cause damage to cells, organs, and tissues as well as muscle tension and pain, memory loss, suppression of the immune system, and even damage to the heart. Additionally, Larimore (2003) reported that chronic stress can result in depleted energy which may not allow an individual to perform their job as needed. Left untreated, Colbert (2008) reported that stress may lead to exhaustion, burnout, and serious mental illness. Unabated high stress levels in extreme cases can lead to burnout, suicide, or even unexpected death (Sogunro, 2012). Halbesleben (2010) defined burnout as “a response to
chronic work stress, with common symptoms including exhaustion, disengagement, and reduced personal efficacy” (p. 33). In the year 2000, the National Center for Health Statistics avowed that between 70 to 80% of all diseases and illness are stress related, most notably coronary heart disease, cancer, the common cold, migraine headaches, warts, ulcers, insomnia, hypertension, and some cases of female infertility (Seaward, 2006).

In terms of school leadership, the issue of stress has even broader implications because an entire school community can be negatively affected when a school leader becomes ill or can no longer fulfill their job at optimal levels due to stress (Boyland, 2011). As posited by Kelehean (2004), “when school leaders are in a high state of stress, they tend to create a school culture that is under stress as well and that schools that regularly function in an atmosphere of unmanaged stress begin to be dysfunctional and unhealthy” (p. 30).

While stress may conjure negative undertones, not all stress is unproductive. As research suggests, stress is part of life and can increase performance when applied at the right times and places (Bremner, 2002; Evans, 2001; Wong & Wong, 2006). Without any stress, leaders may tend to be complacent or too relaxed (Sogunro, 2012). The correct balance regarding stress is the key to its successful use (Sogunro, 2012).

School superintendents, heads of schools, and lead principals deal with a tremendous amount of stress (Boyland, 2011; Hawk & Martin, 2011; Sogunro, 2012) to the point that a large number of principals are considering quitting or seeking early retirement (Forderaro, 2006; Nussbaum, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2005; Sogunro, 2012; Wesson & Marshall, 2013). For this study, this occupational stress is in addition to that of earning an LRDP degree and providing for the family—relationally, financially, and emotionally. School leadership, by the nature of its responsibilities, is stressful (Sogunro, 2012). The superintendent is the chief executive officer of
the district, responsible for sharing a clear vision and goals for the school system, building a supportive environment to achieve these goals, evaluating personnel and education programs, recruiting educators and leaders with strong qualifications, and managing the district’s finances efficiently and effectively (Alsbury, 2003; Waters & Marzano, 2006). The position of school superintendent or head of school is often at the top of any educational organization and due to its expectations is considered to be a stressful position (Hawk & Martin, 2011). Because school leadership focuses primarily on the interaction and relationship between the family and the school it has long been described as a challenging occupation and one that produces chronic stress (Cushing et al., 2003; Friedman, 2002, Queen & Queen, 2005). Chronic stress is something that builds over time as a result of the demanding environment and continues to take a toll on the professional and private lives of school leaders and those whom they administer (Sogunro, 2012). For this study, stress is a word “used to describe the level of tension people feel is placed on their minds and souls by the demands of their jobs, relationships, and responsibilities in their personal lives” (Seaward, 2006, p. 5). In addition, Seaward (2006) added that stimuli, situations, circumstances, or events that are considered to be threatening are stressors and vary considerably from person to person. To further the understanding of stress, Seaward (2006) identified three types of stress:

- Eustress is a good stress and arises in any situation or circumstance that a person finds motivating or inspiring . . . usually, situations that are classified as eustress are enjoyable and for this reason are not considered to be a threat. Neustress describes sensory stimuli that have no consequential effect; it is considered neither good nor bad. News of an earthquake in a remote corner of the world might fall into this category. The third type of stress, distress, is considered bad and often is abbreviated simply as stress. There are two
kinds of distress: acute stress, or that which surfaces quite intensely and disappears quickly, and chronic stress, or that which may not appear quite so intense, yet seems to linger for prolonged periods of time (e.g., hours, days, weeks, or months). (p. 7)

**Coping with school leadership stress.** The greater problem may be that school leaders are not trained to deal with the stress associated with the role (Sogunro, 2012). As posited by Sogunro (2012), “While it is obvious that school principals have numerous stressful situations from their jobs, neither has the impact of stress on school principals been fully explored nor coping skills developed” (p. 667). Hawk and Martin (2011) focused on the issue of stress and school leadership. Hawk and Martin (2011) performed a mixed methods study to explore the work-related occupational stressors and coping mechanisms as perceived by a group of public school superintendents ($N = 100$) in the state of Missouri. The study specifically focused on the work-related stressors, coping mechanisms, and strategies used to maintain balance in the personal and professional lives of superintendents. The mixed method study reported that legislative mandates and budgets were the two items that created the most stress (Hawk & Martin, 2011). In addition, the researchers found that stress management was something totally left to the superintendent to determine how to counter. As posited by Hawk and Martin (2011), “Superintendents are on their own to figure out ways to deal with the daily stressors of the job” (p. 374).

Overall, the fact remains that stress is an enduring phenomenon in school leadership. However, very little is done to prepare current and potential school leaders to cope with such stress (Sogunro, 2012). In a qualitative case study of 52 high school principals across the state of Connecticut, Sogunro (2012) concluded that chronic stress is an inescapable entity in school administration and that the position predisposes principals to various physical, psychological,
and socioemotional problems. This stress caused the school leader to underperform which affected student achievement (Sogunro, 2012). Sogunro (2012) also specified that school leaders did not have the coping mechanisms to deal with their stress.

*The stressor of time.* The stress of prioritizing one’s time is perhaps the greatest issue for the school leader (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001). Increasingly long hours in the evening away from family is arguably the greatest stressor the school leader faces (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Combs et al., 2009; Cushing et al., 2003; Friedman, 2002, Queen & Queen, 2005). The reason for the superintendent deficiency may be attributed to the detrimental work-family perception that is tied to the school leader/superintendent position (Glass, 2000; Klatt, 2014). As posited by Glass (2000), the average superintendent spends more than 50 hours per week at work, including night meetings and events. This type of work week is often not appealing to child centered families who prefer a more appropriate balance between work and family life (Glass, 2000). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report (2008) indicated that increasing demands on school leaders continues to lead to great job stress. According to this report, approximately 35% of the 415,400 education administrators employed in America in 2008 worked more than 40 hours per week on average (The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Report, 2008). In addition, many educational administrators report that their job was year round to include supervising activities at night and on the weekends (Sogunro, 2012). Cushing et al. (2003) reported that many principals work 60-70 hours per week and still feel that they are not able to get their job done. These long hours and sense of ineffectiveness to get everything accomplished leads to chronic stress. As posited by Attridge (2000), the chronic stress placed on administrators and lead teachers effects student performance and overall school performance.
Work related stress and the family are directly related. As posited by Sogunro (2012), “The year-round and everyday long-hours demands of the school administrator’s job is a familiar stressor robbing principals of their leisure time” (p. 671). Trenberth and Dewe (2005) reported that 89.6% of the principals and 87.4% of the assistant principals who participated in their study reported working an average of 62 hours a week and reported high stress levels. These long hours directly interfered with the family time that is needed to create healthy relationships in the home. Consistent with Trenberth and Dewe (2005), Palmer, Cooper, and Thomas (2003) suggested that personal relationships at home suffer when people work long hours and have demands on them that are more than what is expected. In homes where work hours and family time conflict, short temperedness, lack of concentration, anger towards family members, and an increase consumption in alcohol are more prevalent (Palmer et al., 2003).

**Other stressors.** While the work load and time are certainly a primary stress for school leaders, they are not the only sources of stress. Sogunro (2012) explained, among other things, increasing changes in school structures and demographics, demands of new policies, deadlines for meeting educational goals, as well as socioeconomic downturn, rampant school violence, and sporadic terrorist attacks and environmental disasters, continue to engender new and persistent challenges for schools. In most school settings, these challenges can be stressful, and the pinch is felt mostly by principals, since they are the leaders responsible for the education of all students in their schools. (p. 665)

While school leadership was once thought of as a robust position of leading instruction, and reporting and accounting, principals are now responsible for such areas as budget analysis and fund raising efforts to create finances for initiatives beyond those provided by the state and federal government (Gill & Arnold, 2015). Current research describes school administrative
leadership positions as beset with ever-mounting formal evaluations and policies that seek to define the form and function of school leadership per the ideologies of those over them (Gronn & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2003; Starr, 1999). Finally, the scrutiny of the school leader is at an all-time high in this era of standards based reform and school accountability. As posited by Mullford, Edmunds, Kendall, Kendall, and Bishop (2008), the central office is no longer a support mechanism to the school leader but more of a surveillance institution that has taken away the autonomy of the building principal. Per Gill and Arnold (2015), “the principal can no longer be seen as having the final say on all things to do with the school – staffing allocation, resources, funding, and maintenance are all set by the central authority” (p. 22). To add to the stress level of the school leader, the operational climate of the school is more challenged than ever by political school boards, uninformed but vocal parents, students of different religions and values, social media, technology, and even teachers with different value structures (Gill & Arnold, 2015). While a majority of principals lament that the motivation that drew them to the profession of education was the love for young people and excitement for learning, these reasons appear more irrelevant to their job as a school leader as ever (Gill & Arnold, 2015).

School leadership is becoming a more difficult occupation. As posited by Cushing et al. (2003), “Stress comes from high levels of responsibility, while authority and flexibility are simultaneously reduced via union contracts and fiscal requirements” (p. 29). In recent years, the challenges faced by school superintendents have soared (Hawk & Martin, 2011). In the 1980s, Hembling and Gilliland (1981) and Hiebert and Mendaglio (1988) reported that school leaders reported a moderate level of stress. By the mid-1990s and early 2000s job-related stress was identified as a growing problem for school leaders (Brock & Grady; 2002; Carr, 1994; Whitaker & Turner, 2000). Brock and Grady (2002) reported that over the last 20 years, principals have
indicated higher levels of exhaustion and stress which resulted in reduced mental and physical stamina. In this new era, Queen and Queen (2005) called the position of principal as “undoable” (p. 10) claiming that the increased demands in an ever changing society caused stress that was too great to remain mentally and physically healthy. Cushing et al. (2003) supported the position of Queen and Queen (2005) reporting that the long hours and high stress could not help but to affect a person’s personal life and health. In a quantitative study by Combs et al. (2009), 8.8% of the elementary school principals studied were stressed to the point of burnout. Mitchell (2010) supported this study positing that due to the pressures of the principal position, many individuals in his study of urban principals were considering leaving the position.

In a case study of 52 principals across the state of Connecticut, Sogunro (2012) investigated principal stress levels and coping strategies. The data was collected through personal interviews conducted face to face and by phone (Sogunro, 2012). The sample was comprised of all levels of principals, males and females, and principal experience from one to 20 years (Sogunro, 2012). The findings were dramatic with nearly 100% of the respondents stating that unpleasant relationships, people conflicts, time issues, school crisis, and changing policies and government mandates were the primary stress creators (Sogunro, 2012).

According to Klatt (2014), more than 60% of new superintendents report that the position is more stressful than they anticipated. In a study by Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella (2000), the researchers reported that 90% of superintendents affirmed that their respective school board should offer them more support to ensure their well-being. In support, Glass and Franceschini (2007) posited that “coping, understanding, and reducing superintendent stress should be a high priority for school boards and professional associations” (p. 47). While the school leader of today faces a myriad of challenges (Glass et al., 2000), the greatest stress may be the pressure to
reconcile and appease the conflicting expectations of different constituents (Goens, 1998; Richardson, 1998). In fact, Glass et al. (2000) reported that nearly 25% of superintendents who leave their post in small districts do so because of the stress created by attempting to meet the expectations of the different ideologies presented by their school board. To cite Cooper et al., (2000), “The popular perception of the superintendency is that of an impossible job which even the best and the brightest confront escalating and competing demands” (p. 6). Nussbaum (2007) went as far to posit that if school leaders continue to have difficulty managing the stress of their leadership positions, the end result will be a shortage of educational leaders. An even worse scenario is for these school leaders to remain in their position with the inability or resources to handle their level of stress. This scenario leads to fatigue, burnout, and depression affecting the physical, mental, and emotional health of the individual, not to mention the damage that is done to the school district the individual is attempting to lead (Demerouti et al., 2001; Queen & Queen, 2005). Specifically, this type of stress may lead to physical disorders, family dysfunction, divorce, and even drug or alcohol use (Colgan, 2003).

**The stress of federal standardized programs.** Programs like No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), most recently re-authorized as the Every Child Succeeds Act (ECSA, 2015), present additional stressors for school leaders. NCLB called for higher academic standards and a focus on student achievement (Jones, Mundy, & Perez, 2014). NCLB brought the challenges of mandatory standardized student testing, highly qualified teacher requirements, the pressure of principals and their teachers to meet adequate yearly progress goals, and most dangerously, the threat of sanctions to include principal replacement for inadequate student testing performance (Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2002). With these new standards, which were deemed reachable for some students but not for all, school leadership was held more accountable; school leaders
incurred additional implementation costs which included additional staff and additional resources to pass the exam (Jones et al., 2014). Thus, school leaders changed their mission to figure out ways for students to pass the NCLB (2001) act so not to lose their state and federal funding and their school leadership position instead of focusing on differentiated instruction to reach students (Jones et al., 2014). School leaders began pushing their teachers to focus and teach to the standardized test (Jones et al., 2014). For the first time, a standardized test determined job stability in the world of the school leader.

**Shortage in the school leadership community.** The demands of school leadership may be such that many superintendents are worn down and leave their job under duress or decline to renew their contract (Tekniepe, 2015). Either way, this stress is detrimental to the school district’s stability and negatively affects the short term and long term performance of the district (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). The research is clear in that all stressors lead to high superintendent turnover and a decreasing pool of qualified superintendents (Forderaro, 2006; Nussbaum, 2007; Queen & Queen, 2005). Fewer school leaders begins with a shortage of teachers who aspire to become school leaders (Wesson & Marshall, 2013). This shortage in aspiring school leaders is coupled with a significant number of beginning teachers leaving the teaching profession within the first few years of their career (Wesson & Marshall, 2013). In addition, the field of education is reporting a smaller number of the millennial generation pursuing teaching and school leadership (Wesson & Marshall, 2013). All of these facts lead to a diminishing number of much needed school leaders. Due to the stressful experience of school leadership, the state of Texas is facing a school leadership shortfall. Wesson and Marshall (2013) reported that there were insufficient numbers of qualified people pursuing school administrative licensure to fill the anticipated school leadership vacancies. In addition, Wesson
and Marshall (2013) suggested that around 40% of the current serving secondary principals in the state of Texas eligible for retirement would be accepting retirement in the next five to eight years due to the stress of the position.

The educational leadership system is at a crossroads, and the issue begins with the stress associated with school leadership. The perception of stress and long hours hurts the profession of school leadership as less and less capable people join the profession of education (Wesson & Marshall, 2013). The second issue that must be explored is to understand the experience of the school leader who is working on his doctoral degree while serving as a father and husband in a traditional family. Coupled with the need for licensed and qualified school leaders, administrators must possess the proper terminal degree to allow them to be eligible for school leadership positions (Bitterman et al., 2013; Glass & Franceschini, 2006; Servage, 2009). Aspiring educational leaders also view the doctoral degree as something that is needed to reach their goals (Wellington & Sikes, 2006). As posited by Wellington and Sikes (2006), young ambitious educators who aspire to be school leaders one day look at the doctoral qualification as a professional initiation. In the qualitative study conducted by Wellington and Sikes (2006), the professional doctoral granted a credibility for the student and made them feel as if they were respected as a scholarly professional. In addition, the participants of the qualitative study conducted by Wellington and Sikes (2006) continually reiterated the power the doctorate had with appointment panels. “Not only was the actual award seen to have legitimacy in the eyes of the appointment panels, but the messages about knowledge and understanding, and indeed the professional awareness and skills gained, were believed to be a real benefit” (Wellington & Sikes, 2006, p. 730). With the understanding that a terminal degree is required for many school leadership positions, the next section examines doctoral persistence.
Doctoral Persistence

Widespread concerns over persistence for doctoral students translated into multiple studies, programs, and initiatives over the years (Gardner, 2008). However, these efforts have not determined one particular reason for doctoral student persistence (Gardner, 2008). As posited by Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, and Bade (2014), “the phenomenon of doctoral persistence has not been well researched qualitatively” (p. 294). Further, the search for the answer to doctoral attrition is multifaceted (Lovitts, 2001; Nettles & Millet, 2006). While not exhaustive, Croxton (2014) referenced contextual, internal, and external factors as most influential with regard to persistence in a limited residency doctoral program.

As posited by Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spaulding (2014), “the doctoral journey is unlike any other educational experience” (p. 1). The doctoral student walks through five distinct and sequential stages (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). First is the entry stage where a doctoral student selects a program that aligns with the student’s “personality, preferences, values, and lifestyle” (p. 2). With limited residency learning now becoming more popular due to its flexibility, the options for the doctoral students are greater than ever (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding 2014; Terrell et al., 2013). However, doctoral students must consider their financial situation, family dynamics, and professional responsibility as they begin the doctoral journey (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014).

Following the entry stage, the doctoral student begins a stage of knowledge and skill development (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). This stage is concluded when the coursework is completed which further improves the doctoral student’s critical thinking skills, writing skills, and knowledge (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). While working through the coursework, the student begins to think about potential topics for the dissertation (Rockinson-
The knowledge and skill development stage also ignites relationships with other limited residency students and more importantly, with faculty who may serve in support of the dissertation (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). This stage is extremely important for the relationship between doctoral student and their community (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). Many researchers identify a strong link between attrition and relationship with students’ community to include most strongly, the faculty in their department of study (Antony, 2002; Lovitts, 2001; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). Gardner (2008), Lovitts and Nelson (2000), and Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) all posit that a lack of interaction with faculty and peers can lead to loneliness, stress, isolation, confusion, and ultimately, attrition.

Following the knowledge and skill development stage, the doctoral student embarks on the consolidation phase (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). This stage includes the doctoral student moving from being an autonomous learner to a more self-directed learner as the student completes the comprehensive exams (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). In this stage the student must demonstrate his or her readiness to move into the dissertation phase of the degree (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). Moreover, this stage includes the building of professional relationships with specific faculty members who are going to help the doctoral student through the dissertation (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014).

Similar to the consolidation phase, the student progresses to the research and scholarship stage where he or she transitions to a researcher (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). “In this stage, the student completes the final academic requirement for the doctoral program, the dissertation, and demonstrates the ability to independently design, conduct, analyze, and present research” (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2015, p. 3). The execution of the dissertation
defense shows evidence that the doctoral student has made the transition from student to researcher.

The final element of the doctoral journey is the completion stage (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). This culmination shows the student to be an expert in the chosen field of study with the ability to contribute new information.

**Independent nature of doctoral process.** It is well established that during the dissertation portion of the program, the student faces obstacles far above those faced while completing doctoral coursework (Tinto, 1993; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2014). One common explanation is that attrition in the dissertation stage is caused by the very independent nature of the doctoral process. Because the LRDP process is highly autonomous and isolated, LRPD work may lend to higher attrition rates (Denecke, Slimowitz, Lorden, & Stewart, 2004; Lovitts, 2001). These non-traditional students are typically older, working full-time in professional occupations, and have families that they are balancing with their doctoral work (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Terrell et al., 2012). Additionally, these students are geographically diverse with only a few residing in the local area.

**Contextual factors.** The context of the learning environment plays a primary role in doctoral persistence in a limited residency program (Croxton, 2007). While Bean and Metzner (1985) might disagree with this idea, research suggests that contextual factors are imperative to whether a limited residency doctoral student persists (Levy, 2007). Some of these contextual factors include poorly designed curriculum, competency with technology, lack of accountability, lack of interactivity with classmates, relationship and climate of the program, and feelings of isolation (Rochester & Pradel, 2008).
**Relationships with program faculty.** The contextual factor that the research most often recognizes regarding doctoral persistence is the relationship the LRDP student has with his/her program advisors, faculty, and dissertation chair (Bair, 1999; Croxton, 2009; Dupont, Meert, Galand & Nils, 2012; Gardner, 2009; Golde, 2000; Golde, 2005; Kelley & Salisbury-Glennon, 2016; Rochester & Pradel, 2008; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; West Gokalp, Pena, Fischer, & Gupton., 2011). As stated in a literature review by Croxton (2014), “researchers found student satisfaction to be significantly positively correlated with receiving timely comments from the instructor, having a variety of ways of being assessed, and knowing the instructor” (p. 316). Positive relationships with the faculty support persistence, specifically during the later phases of the doctoral program (Zahl, 2015). Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, and Bade (2014), also supported the concept of relationship building between the faculty and student. As posited by Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, and Bade (2014), “Some individuals believed being invited to assist faculty with research and developing collegial relationships throughout the program helped them persist” (p. 299). Activities such as researching, writing, and presenting with faculty also provided a sense of community with the faculty which supported the student’s ability to persist (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Bade, 2014).

The research suggests that limited residency programs with a high level of interactivity lead to higher levels of student motivation and essentially, to a greater level of student persistence (Park & Choi, 2009). In a quantitative study by Park and Choi (2009) incorporating 147 adult learners who either completed or dropped out of three limited residency courses offered at a large university, the researchers found that limited residency learners easily lose their motivation if their instructors and advisors do not engage and interact with them on a consistent basis. As stated by Zhao, Golde, and McCormick (2005), “Good or bad, the quality of the
relationship between the doctoral student and advisor directly influences the quality of the doctoral education experience, as research has shown” (p. 1). Participants cited varying reasons for this lack of relationship to include a general lack of communication, a catering to full-time doctoral students, and proximity (Zahl, 2015). A common theme through the 10 participants study was that “faculty members were very busy and had more important things to do and manage” (p. 310). Croxton (2014) concurred in her intensive literature reviewing stating, “one of the greatest predictors of student satisfaction is the prevalence, quality, and timeliness of student-instructor communication” (p. 318). The Kennedy et al. (2015) research lined up specifically with Terrell et al. (2012) grounded theory of connectivity and persistence in a LRDP. The Terrell et al. (2012) study, with a sample size of 17, reported six axial codes. Nearly two-thirds of the participants who dropped out reported a “perceived lack of caring on the part of the faculty” (p. 4).

**Relationships with peers.** The relationship one has with those engaged in the same academic journey is also important. As posited by Wellington and Sikes (2006) in summary of their qualitative study on 29 doctoral students, “many put high value on the collegiality, support, friendship, and social interaction that is often a feature of professional doctorates” (p. 732). Zahl (2015) conducted a qualitative case study with 10 part-time doctoral students from the fields of nursing and education, defining part-time as one taking less than eight hours credit hours in the given semester. One major theme that resulted from this study was how a student defined a sense of community within his or her academic department was connected to his or her doctoral persistence communication and relationships amongst LRDP students, their peers and faculty affect persistence (Zahl, 2015). As stated by Zahl (2015), “Almost all of the participants...
described difficulties connecting with peers due to limited proximity (time, place, or occurrence)” (p. 309).

In another such qualitative study by Terrell et al. (2012), data was collected from 17 students actively working on their limited residency doctoral program (LRDP). This LRDP included the option of coming on campus for either two extended weekends or one entire week (Terrell et al., 2012). While the group yearned for social opportunities with their peers, the opportunity for such activities did not exist due to the limited residency program and the little time spent on campus (Terrell et al., 2012). In the open ended qualitative survey given by Terrell et al., 2012, nearly two-thirds of respondents perceived a lack of caring on the part of their program which led to an issue of persistence. Terrell et al. (2012) posited, “The value of the student-to-student and student-to-faculty communication becomes important to doctoral candidates while working on their dissertations in a limited residency program” (p. 7).

In relation to Terrell et al. (2012), Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, and Bade (2014) found that peer relationships were a factor in doctoral persistence. As posited by Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, and Bade (2014), “Learning from peers was frequently acknowledged; however, non-academic interactions were also noted as important” (p. 300). Additionally, peer interactions in formal and informal discussions, university facebook groups, collaboration on projects and publications, and class activities supported doctoral persistence (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Bade, 2014). In a similar study, Zahl (2015) conducted a qualitative case study with 10 part-time doctoral students from the fields of nursing and education, defining part-time as one taking less than eight hours credit hours in the given semester. One primary theme linked the peer relationships the doctoral student developed to doctoral persistence (Zahl, 2015).
**Cohort programs.** The research also supports cohort programs in combination with the peer relationship improved doctoral persistence. As defined by Santicola (2013), “This type of academic program [i.e., the cohort model] enables students to progress through their studies as a collective group” (p. 253). In a literature review on doctoral persistence, Brill, Belcanoff, Land, Gogarty, and Turner (2014) identified cohort programs as a best practice. Brill et al. (2014) argued that cohort programs in combination with trained advisors provide assistance and support that leads to greater persistence. There is also evidence from West et al. (2011) that students in a cohort perform more successfully and feel more supported than non-cohort students. Santicola (2013) also supported the need for cohort programs to improve doctoral persistence. These types of programs are a collaborative learning model where members have the same series of classes with the same faculty members (Santicola, 2013). Santicola’s (2013) study found that commitment and discipline were the primary indicators of doctoral success.

**Relationship with dissertation chair.** An often identified reason for attrition is a doctorate candidate’s poor professional relationship with the chair of his or her dissertation committee (Bair, 1999; Croxton, 2009; Dupont et al., 2012; Gardner, 2009; Golde, 2000; Golde, 2005; Kelley & Salisbury-Glennon, 2016; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; West et al., 2011). The mentoring relationship between the student and chair of the dissertation plays an integral role in the candidate’s socialization to the program, mental health, and ability to meet the requirements of the doctoral dissertation (West et al., 2011). When any of these factors come into play, whether solely or combined, doctoral student persistence may be affected (Levy, 2007). While the research varies on the importance of the academic and social environment with regards to limited residency student persistence, the importance of the relationship between the LRDP student and his/her chair is well established.
Nwenyi and Baghurst (2013) supported Terell et al. (2012) in their study on the doctoral student environment. Using a quantitative regression analysis with a sample size of 132, it was discovered that university services, advisors, and relationships with faculty and other students all acted as significant predictor variables to doctoral persistence (Nwenyi & Baghurst, 2013). Specifically, the quality of the relationship between the chair and the student was a predictor of student persistence in the study. Nwenyi and Baghurst (2013) stated that “as students progress in the program by year, their dissatisfaction increases. This could be due to the increasing pressures of successfully completing the dissertation” (p. 53). The dissertation pressure can be diminished if higher educational administrators would consider the interests of the student and advisor being compatible, the changing of advisor be made simple, and ensuring advisors are receiving training on what it means to maintaining healthy advisor-student relationships (Nwenyi & Baghurst, 2013). Institutions are now more focused on student experiences and the culture of the campus environment for their undergraduates but often forget about the doctoral students who have worked in academia for a longer period of time and are at the end of their academic journey (Nwenyi & Baghurst, 2013). Doctoral level students, specifically those focused on their dissertation, are at a different life stage and thus must be addressed differently in order to support their persistence and decision to stay at the institution (Bolton, 2006).

The advisor-student relationship is emphasized by both Tinto’s (1975) theory of student integration and Bean and Metzner’s (1985) conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. It is widely recognized that the relationship between the doctoral student and his or her committee and chair of the committee specifically can be the deciding factor of the doctoral student completing or not completing their doctoral program (Baird, 1992; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Lovitts, 2001; Smith, Maroney, Nelson, Abel, & Abel, 2006).
Literature on doctoral persistence across disciplines continues to emphasize the importance of support specifically from the dissertation chair. Kennedy et al. (2015) focused on the support aspect of doctoral persistence. This grounded theory study examined participants’ experiences as doctoral students in a LRDP and their reasons for withdrawal while working on their dissertation (Kennedy et al., 2015). With a sample size of 17 participants, Kennedy et al. (2015) found that “advisor support issues,” “inadequate dissertation support,” and “program support issues” were the primary reasons for leaving the LRDP (pp. 219-220). Castle (2004), in a comprehensive literature review, reported that the one factor that emerged from the literature more than any other was “support for the student” (p. 169). While the literature did not point to support from one group being more important than support from another, the literature did point towards the support from the institution as the most highly regarded (Castles, 2004). Specifically, Castles (2004) reported that the personality of the tutor (i.e., dissertation chair and committee members) and the care taken to grow that positive relationship with the student was most important.

Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) also emphasized the importance of the advisor-student relationship. As students shift from the instructor-led coursework to the self-directed world of dissertation work, the need for support is evident (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) conducted a qualitative phenomenological study of 42 women and 34 men with earned doctorates in the field of education to add to the literature on doctoral persistence. The authors posited:

While balancing priorities, working through the writing process, and conducting statistics presented a challenge for various participants, the most frequently noted challenge in participant discourse related to the difficulty with dissertation chairs and committee
members. Frustrations typically pointed to chairpersons who were challenging to work with, offered very little guidance in the process, or left participants insufficiently prepared for a defense. (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012, p. 208)

Kennedy et al. (2015) conducted a phenomenological study of 17 doctoral candidates who left their doctoral program prior to completing their dissertation. The interviews were unstructured and the study imitated Willis and Carmichael’s (2011) study which focused on late term attrition. Findings suggested that the primary reason for dropout was a general lack of support. These support areas included advisor support, dissertation support, and program support (Kennedy, et al., 2015). Similar to the study conducted by Terrell et al. (2012), where approximately two-thirds of the doctoral students perceived a lack of care by the faculty and advisors, this study by Kennedy et al. (2015) followed the same impression on doctoral persistence. As concluded by Zhao et al. (2005), “Selecting the right advisor might be the most important act, or satisfaction with the relationship might depend more on specific advisor behaviors once the relationship is undertaken” (p. 3). The relationship between the advisor or dissertation chair and the doctoral candidate regarding the support they felt was suggested to be a primary reason for the lack in doctoral persistence across the field of study (Croxton, 2014; Di Pierro, 2007; Gardner, 2009; Kurtz-Costes, Helmke, Ulku-Steiner, 2006; O’Meara, Knudsen, & Jones, 2013). The final role of the chair might be that of “exemplar or inspirer” (Baird, 1997, p. 104). By performing these roles, the chair pushes the student to produce the highest quality of work and can convey the true professionalism of the mentor-student relationship (Baird, 1997).

**External factors influencing doctoral persistence.** External factors for doctoral (e.g., limited residency or traditional) student attrition are numerous to include finances, program
flexibility, independent nature of the process, work-family balance, and family support. The research indicates that these factors may contribute to doctoral student persistence.

**Finances.** Finances have always been a common reason that doctoral students fail to persist (Nettles & Millet, 2006; Terrell et al., 2012; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Earl-Novell (2006) reported that doctoral students who are forced to finance their education on their own are much less likely to persist to completion. As posited by Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, and Bade (2014), “Financial survival is central to doctoral program persistence” (p. 297). The study of the relationship regarding money and doctoral programs has been established (Bowen, 1992; Nettles & Millet, 2006). Without financial support, it is very unlikely that a promising and able individual will pursue an advanced degree (Nettles & Millet, 2006). Nettles and Millet (2006) explain, “Finances are a complex matter involving both tangibles, such as cost, price, personal income, multiple types of assistantships, and fellowships, and many intangibles, such as various personal attitudes toward, understanding of, and psychological approaches to acquiring money” (p. 71). Doctoral students who receive funding in the form of scholarships, grant and aid, or internships experience lower levels of stress than those without financial support (McAlpine & Norton, 2006). As articulated by Nettles and Millet, “Students use a variety of strategies to finance their doctoral education, including fellowships and positions as teaching assistants (TAs) or research assistants (RAs)” (p. 139). However, LRDP students who are working on their doctoral degree, the idea of work studies or internships to pay their tuition are irrelevant. These strategies are normally unavailable to the LRDP students. A non-residential student is likely to live off campus with his or her own family and work communities outside the academic environment (Knowles, 1980). This is likely because LRDP students in the field of education are often full time professionals whose time is stretched due to work and family (Galvin, 2006).
While Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011) detailed the importance of fellowships and scholarships to financially support a student completing his/her doctoral program, a central problem with doctoral students and finances is the limited amount of programs available to help the doctoral student (Baird, 1997). Nettles and Millet (2006) studied the effects of financial debt and resources on doctoral persistence. Examining and comparing the debt a student accumulated at various stages of the educational process, Nettles and Millet (2006) reported that around 30% of doctoral students accumulated debt. Student aid at the doctoral level is based on merit rather than need (Nettles & Millet, 2006). With that stated, students of a lower social economic status or lower household incomes incurred more debt (Nettles & Millet, 2006). African American students incurred twice as much debt as Caucasian students which gave one explanation to why African American students persist in their doctoral work at a lesser rate (Lovitts, 2001; Nettles & Millet, 2006).

The research, however, is not conclusive when it comes to the role of financial support in fostering doctoral persistence. In a quantitative study by Groen, Jakubson, Ehrenberg, Condie, and Liu (2008) of 22,994 doctoral students who received financial aid in order to remain in his/her doctoral program, the gains in persistence were modest. With a significant amount of financial assistance given to selected programs, the study returned a persistence increase of 6%. As stated by Groen et al., (2008), “Although the impact of aid on attrition is considerable, even the most generous financial-aid packages are associated with considerable attrition. Thus, attrition decisions are not primarily due to financial-support problems” (p. 123).

In a study performed by Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011), work and financial support were moderately associated with the persistence of educational doctoral students. This study focused on the particular work performed by doctoral students to fund their education. Faculty members
recognized that students who had a job outside the university had more difficulty finishing their dissertation while doctoral students who found employment on-campus enhanced their ability to complete their dissertation (Wao & Onwuegbuzie 2011). In many cases, the on-campus jobs allowed the student dual involvement and better proximity to complete their dissertation (Wao & Onwuegbuzie 2011). Whether, on-campus work or off-campus work, doctoral students within the field of education understand the importance of economic factors (Lovitts, 2001; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Wao & Onwuegbuzie 2011).

Program flexibility. Program design must be examined when discussing doctoral persistence (Baker, 2014). There are two types of programs that exist, asynchronous and synchronous (Baker, 2014). Asynchronous programs are more flexible, because students can use the internet to complete their work on their own time (Baker, 2014). Many asynchronous programs assume students have significant work experience and may link the student’s courses and assignments into their current work environments (Baker, 2014). Synchronous programs are not as user-friendly to the full-time professional. Though synchronous programs may foster greater community and connectivity among peers and faculty, they are less flexible as students have to be present in real time which may or may not be conducive to their familial and professional commitments.

LRDPs appeal to a large number of students due to flexibility, ease of use, and convenience (Croxton, 2014; Smith et al., 2006). Furthermore, a lack of flexibility in doctoral programs can be a primary reason that doctoral students quit their doctoral program (Smith et al., 2006). It is essential that doctoral programs explore creative methods in (a) course offerings, (b) scheduling of courses, (c) acceptable research topics and research topic support (d) satisfactory research paradigms, and (e) use of campus facilities to include laboratories and libraries (Smith...
et al., 2006). When flexibility is not prioritized in a doctoral program, the program may feel rigid and uncaring which leads to doctoral dropout (Smith et al., 2006).

**Internal factors.** Internal factors regarding limited residency doctoral persistence include professional or personal motivation, self-regulation, self-determination, and self-efficacy (Amelink & Meszaros, 2011; Grover, 2007; Kelley & Salisbury-Glennon, 2016; Mahl, 2011; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Bade, 2014; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, Sweezy, & Wicks, 2014; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Terrell et al., 2012). Professional motivation to include career advancement, increased salary, and the title of “doctor” added motivation for some students internally (Grover, 2007). In a study conducted by Amelink and Meszaros (2011), the top factor for both male and female candidates to persist was salary potential and future employment. As stated by Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012), “earning a doctorate opened up career opportunities otherwise closed” (p. 209) to participants. These motivations are especially real for doctoral candidates who come from backgrounds of poverty. Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, Swezey, and Wicks (2014) conducted a grounded theory study with 12 doctoral candidates who came from a backgrounds of poverty in childhood. These participants adamantly expressed a growing sense of self-reliance to transcend the grip of poverty. One individual called the journey toward doctoral completion the “ticket out of poverty” (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, Swezey, & Wicks, 2014, p. 190).

**Motivation.** Motivation is an important factor to doctoral persistence (Grover, 2007). Research shows that individual/internal factors play a huge role in doctoral persistence; students must be highly motivated to persist in a doctoral program (Grover, 2007). As posited by Grover (2007), “Motivation is required in order to be willing and enthusiastic about engaging in the unstructured and often frustrating process of knowledge creation” (p. 9). The individual factors
may include motivations for pursuing the degree, reasons for personal persistence, and strategies for dissertation completion (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). The doctorate may be a personal fulfillment of a lifelong dream (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). One participant in Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw’s (2012) study stated, “I’ve always been motivated and value education. I knew I would get it someday” (p. 209). Grover (2007) expressed the need for the correct attitude and motivation. Doctoral students must embody a minimum threshold of motivation and be willing and enthusiastic about engaging in the often frustrating process of the doctoral program (Grover, 2007). With this motivation, Grover (2007) mentioned the need for competency for learning which requires “efficient knowledge absorption, integration, deployment of tools, and ultimately, creation of a quality knowledge product” (p. 9). For others, there was a love or enjoyment for the learning or a simple internal desire to acquire the degree (Amelink & Meszaros, 2011; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Bade, 2014; Terrell et al., 2012). The educational example of doctoral completion also played as a factor in one reaching their doctoral goal; in most cases, this example was that of a parent or a person close to the family (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

In a mixed-methods study conducted by Cross (2014), the concept of grit was analyzed. Grit, as defined by Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007), relates to the passion and persistence of long-term goals. Grit is viewed as a non-cognitive measure of one’s ability to persevere to completion of a goal (Duckworth et al., 2007). Cross (2014) attained a sample size of 350 non-traditional doctoral students based on a general population of 3,200. Although Cross (2014) felt the study warranted further investigation, findings indicated that grit was related in some way to the success of the non-traditional doctoral student. Cross (2014) argued that the concept of grit was more important than IQ, standardized test scores, or previous grades.
**Self-regulation and self-efficacy.** Self-regulation and self-efficacy also play into doctoral persistence. Woolfolk, Winne, and Perry (2006) gave a general meaning to self-regulation as the active process where individuals analyze tasks, set goals, and then attempt to monitor and regulate their cognition, motivation, and behavior in support of these goals. The research suggests that across a variety of settings, self-regulation can lead to a plethora of benefits to include “improved job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and performance” (Gomez, 2013, p. 17). Kelley and Salisbury-Glennon (2016) produced a mixed methodological, quasi-experimental design study to examine the effect of self-regulation on doctoral completion. The study included 95 all-but-dissertation (ABD) doctoral candidates and 45 participants who had completed their doctoral dissertation from all fields of study (Kelley & Salisbury-Glennon, 2015). While much of the prior research on this idea revolved around the notion that doctoral candidates must be self-motivated, self-disciplined, and self-directed, Kelley and Salisbury-Glennon (2015) found the doctoral completion was directly linked to the level of self-regulation a student possessed. Doctoral students are expected to engage in a multifaceted, pressure-packed academic task that is often very different from anything that the doctoral student has participated in before; moreover in many cases, doctoral students are left to complete the dissertation without much professional guidance from the dissertation chair or committee members (Barnes & Austin, 2009). Kelley and Salisbury-Glennon (2015) stated the following: “Since the completion of the dissertation requires high motivation and effective cognitive strategies, it is plausible that self-regulated learning may be vital to the completion of the dissertation” (p. 89). In a comprehensive literature review, Castles (2004) concurred with Kelly and Salisbury-Glennon (2015) reporting that good coping abilities and self-confidence are essential elements to persisting to the LRDP degree.
Kelley and Salisbury-Glennon (2015) suggested that “incorporating self-regulated learning strategies within doctoral curricula had the potential to improve doctoral candidates’ rates of degree completion” (Kelley & Salisbury-Glennon, 2015, p. 97). Castro et al. (2011) reviewed the motivation of female doctoral students. They used a three and a half hour focus group and facilitated by an open ended questionnaire to gain their data (Castro et al., 2011). The researchers discovered two overarching themes. The first being that the attributes, attitudes, and most importantly, motivation, of the female student is what allowed them to reach their goal of doctoral completion (Castro et al., 2011). Secondly, the researchers found that extrinsic supportive factors led to more female doctoral students completed their doctoral program. Six of the seven participants in the study reported they were motivated internally by the desire to demonstrate that they could success at the doctoral level (Castro et al., 2011). Additionally, most of the participants in this study cited the support of their families as the main reason for their success (Castro et al., 2011). Dupont et al. (2013) conducted a study to identify factors which predicted postponement in the completion of the final dissertation. The researchers used a questionnaire to assess 341 students a few months before the deadline of their final dissertation (Dupont et al., 2013). While the researcher presented many factors that predicted the postponement in the completion of the dissertation, the researchers found that self-efficacy and motivational beliefs were a direct indicator of dissertation completion (Dupont et al., 2013). As posited by Dupont et al. (2013), “For such a task as the FD [final dissertation], which demands continual effort, autonomy, and self-regulated learning, the beliefs that students hold about their abilities are important in helping them to persist when they encounter difficulties” (p. 634). Santicola (2013) conducted a study focused on motivation as the key predictor in doctoral persistence. While this study examined the phenomenon of doctoral cohorts, commitment and
discipline was the ultimate factor in determining doctoral persistence (Santicola, 2013). As suggested by Santicola (2013), “Of all the characteristics discussed by the participants, the concepts of commitment and discipline were the most widely discovered in the results” (p. 257).

By all accounts, males who complete their dissertation and those who do not complete their dissertation are equally academically able (Lovitts, 2001). Men who reach this doctoral pinnacle have completed their master’s degree, met all the qualifications to be accepted into a doctoral program, have a proven record of success, and view themselves as superior students (Lovitts, 2001).

**Work-Family Balance**

It is well established that the roles of school leader and doctoral student independently and collectively elevate family stress. The study of family stress has a long history (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 1992). In its earliest studies, family stress was examined primarily from the perspective of what the parents did wrong (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 1992). A seminal study on family stress was conducted by Hill (1949) and focused on the separation and reunion of families during and after World War II. Hill’s (1949) work on family stress focused on the ABC-X stress model. The A factor of the model represented the stressor which included life events that were sufficient enough to create a change in the family system (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 1992). The B factor in Hill’s (1949) model represented the resources and strengths of the family system, and the C factor represented the perceptions of the family members with regards to the stress (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 1992). The X factor represented the outcome or crisis that followed the stressful events and the coping process to counter the stress (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 1992).

However, Hill’s (1949) work was part of a broader revolution in family psychology and sociology that emphasized how families adjusted to crisis (Caplan, 1964; Lindemann, 1944).
Later, Caplan (1964) and Jahoda (1958), building off Hill’s (1949) framework, studied “what individuals and families did right in successfully adjusting to and adapting to the normal and unusual demands placed on people through the natural course of life” (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 1992, p. 99).

In the context that stress is normal, Hill (1949), Caplan (1964), and Jahoda (1958) found four central suppositions regarding family stress: (a) stress is a normal part of life, (b) stress may place extraordinary demands on a family, (c) most families are able to adapt to a given stress over time, (d) if a family is unable to adapt to the stress, negative outcomes will result (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 1992). With those suppositions, stress may be defined as a state in which individuals’ resources are challenged by the environment in a way that overtaxes their coping ability and endangers their well-being (Hobfoll, 1989). Much like the definition of stress, as posited by Hobfoll and Spielberg (1992), family stress then may be defined as “an extension of individual stress applied to the family domain” (p. 99).

One of the most significant contributions to family stress research was the concept of systems level resources (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 1992). The concept of systems level resources became inherently important because it provides a specific counter-strategy against stress for the family (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 1992). These resources included: (a) flexibility of the family instead of rigidity, (b) cohesion of the family unit instead of separateness, (c) communication among family members instead of privacy, (d) boundary clarity instead of unclear expectations, and (e) order instead of chaos (Boss, 1987; Reiss, 1981).

Hobfoll’s (1989) conservation of resources (COR) theory changed the landscape of family stress research by developing a theory applicable for the framework of family stress (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 1992). As posited by Hobfoll and Spielberger, 1992:
This model, called COR theory, depicts resources as a product of widely shared values and meaning as to what is valuable to people. The role of resources is the pivotal construct in COR theory, in which the central tenet is that individuals (alone and in systems) strive to maximize resource gain and minimize resource loss. Therefore, major sources of stress are (a) threat of loss of resources; (b) actual loss of resources; or (c) the failure to gain resources after significant resource investment. Seen in this way, events are stressful to the extent they threaten or result in loss of critical family resources. To the extent that an event threatens or results in a loss in family cohesiveness, depletes family mastery, or attacks family order, families will react to the event as stressful. (pp. 107-108)

The balancing of time between work and family breeds stress. There are two schools of thoughts regarding the concept of work-family balance. One advocates that work is the aggressor and invades the family while the other believes that it is the family that intrudes on the responsibilities one has at work (Viswanathan, 2013). As posited by Viswanathan (2013), “work life balance is about people’s ability to exercise control and have a tight grip of what happens at work as well as at family, without compromising on the deliverables in both the roles at all times” (p. 47).

Technology has played a major role in the changing landscape of the work-family relationship and the related stress. People are able to carry more work home with them in the evening due to smart phones, email, text messaging, tablets, and portable computers (Viswanathan, 2013). While initially thought of as tools to connect professionals to their work and family, mobile technology has actually integrated the work life and family life into the same timeframe (Viswanathan, 2013). As explained by Viswanathan (2013),
Now professionals find themselves working even when they are on vacation. Employees at times, tend to get in ‘work’ mode even from home by checking their emails, getting engaged in telephonic discussions or perform work from home on weekends thereby allowing family time to be reduced, even though there is no pressing need to do ‘work’ on the weekends. (pp. 47- 48)

Employers and employees now have more flexibility in how they work and how they ask others to work (Viswanathan, 2013).

The fast paced life style of the 21st century population puts the work-family balance in even greater jeopardy. The hunger to acquire material comforts and wealth pushed the millennial population to work longer hours which jeopardizes the proper work family balance (Viswanathan, 2013). According to the Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM), in a 2001 survey, over 80% of men and women reported that family time was a top priority (as cited in Viswanathan, 2013). However, the average North American worker spent an average of 1,898 hours at work in 1998 and 90% of all working adults were concerned that they did not spend enough time with their family (Viswanathan, 2013).

Friedman and Greenhaus (2000) pioneered a study of more than 800 business professionals to understand the choices that influence the work family balance. They found that the dominate life roles of work and family were the most dominate roles for most employed people in contemporary society and that these roles had the ability to both help and hurt each other. To find any balance in the roles of work and family working adults learned to build networks of support at home, at work, and in the community. Furthermore, Friedman and Greenhaus (2000) discovered that the conflict between work and family had severe consequences and significantly affected the quality of family life and career goals. In another 2002 work family
balance study of more than 1,500 employees, 70% of professionals stated that they did not have a healthy balance between their work and family life (Viswanathan, 2013).

The meaning individuals place on their work may affect their family life (Thompson & Bunderson, 1997). The feelings of insufficient time and energy to successfully perform school leader work and family roles have been associated with stress, job and family dissatisfaction, tension in the home, depression, anxiety, poor physical health, and alcohol and drug use (Greenhaus et al., 1997, Iwasaki et al., 2004; Nelson & Burk, 2002; Shields, 2003). Kahn et al’s (1964) role theory is most cited to support this work-family conflict. Role theory suggests that experiencing vagueness and conflict with a role will result in an undesirable state, and lead to personal conflict as it becomes more difficult to balance an perform each role (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999; Kahn et al., 1964). Role theory recognized such inter-role conflict as a major source of pressure for approximately one third of the men in their national sample (Kahn et al., 1964). However, the problem with using role theory solely as the basis to discuss work-family conflict is that it has little focus on the specifics of family role which is essential to understanding work-family conflict (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999).

**Familial support.** When discussing an individual pursuing a doctoral degree, the impact this effort has on the family must be discussed. Doctoral programs are rigorous and time consuming (Lovitts, 2001) and require the support of spouses and children (Powers & Swick, 2012; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). As posited by Wellington and Sikes (2006) in summarizing their qualitative study of 29 students pursuing their professional doctorate:

Committing oneself to a minimum of four years of high-level study whilst working full time, usually in a demanding and senior job, is a serious undertaking. Doing so, at a time of life when many people face practical, emotional and financial demands from children
and parents compound matters. Whilst there is no doubt that our informants accrued immense personal and professional satisfaction, increased their self-esteem and confidence, and often advanced their career and improved their salaries, as a result of enrolling on the professional doctorate, there were often costs. Family and personal relationships are sometimes strained and can even break down as a result of a student’s involvement in their studies. (p. 731)

Santicola (2013) reported that the priority of putting the doctorate first was a key component in persistence. As posited by Santicola (2013), “This required much understanding from family members and friends due to the time constraints of being a doctoral student” (p. 258). In addition to support, the sadness the doctoral candidate felt from missing their children’s events and the strain that occurred in the doctoral student’s marriage due to the long hours working on the degree made the doctoral student wonder if the work was worth all their time and effort (Santicola, 2013). The strength of an individual’s marriage and family has been found to negatively or positively impact the experience of the graduate student (Galvin, 2006; Hagedorn, 1993; Hawley et al., 2006; Kirby et al., 2004; Johnson & Remus, 1985). As posited by Wellington and Sikes (2006), “family and personal relationships are sometimes strained and can even break down as a result of a student’s involvement in their studies” (p. 731). Should a family support the LRDP student, the student is more likely to complete the doctoral program.

However, if the LRDP student does not feel supported by the family, the student is less likely to complete his or her program. Smith et al. (2006) confirmed that “Decisions are constantly made on how to balance study time with family time” (p. 23). Feelings such as guilt, worry, anxiety, and anger are symptoms felt as students attempt to balance their doctoral work, job, and role within the family (Lipschutz, 1993; Lovitts, 2001). As noted by Smith et al. (2006),
“For most doctoral students, challenges and pressure of time continue throughout their program of study and beyond. Stress becomes a constant, and too often a destructive force” (p. 23). This pressure can seem endless and unendurable, leading to drop out (Smith et al., 2006). Family dynamics are also directly related to stress. Eagle, Miles, and Icenogle (1997) reported that the number of children living in the home and the marital status of the doctoral candidate related directly to work-family stress. In essence, more children in the home would mean less of the valued resource of time and energy (Eagle et al., 1997). Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) identified that marital satisfaction and partner support effect a doctoral student’s mental state, stress, persistence, and inevitably, their commitment and ability to finish. Furthermore, the balance of family time and academic requirements also added to stress and potential dropout (West et al., 2011). Indirectly, this may not be the fault of the family. The rigor of the doctoral process is new to all members of the family and disrupts the nature of family time (Patton, 2012). The family member may criticize or joke about the efforts of the doctoral candidate which may lead to a feeling of disrespect or the doctoral candidate feeling as an outsider in his or her own home (Patton, 2012). Santicola (2013) posited, “The data showed that sacrifices were made in order for the participants to accomplish this goal, including long hours and time away from family” (p. 258).

**Divorce.** In 2006, 45% of all non-traditional students reported being married or living with a partner and 27% reported having children (Galvin, 2006) while 33% reported being separated, divorced, or widowed (O’Donnell, 2005). Although, there are no statistics on the divorce rate of LRDP students, many studies did confirm that family and marital change is a common barrier in students who did not complete their dissertation (Baird, 1997; Bowen, 1992; Burnett, 1999; Monaghan, 1989). The research indicated that academic completion rates, overall
academic performance, work satisfaction, and overall life satisfaction are linked to marriage contentment (Hawley et al., 2006; Kirby et al., 2004). As posited by Meehan and Neg (2003), when individuals experience family distress other areas of their lives are affected to include their overall wellness. Some of these distresses as posited in Kirby’s et al. (2004) study included less availability to assist in parental duties, less time for family and marital activities, less social life, less support with home chores, and a general preoccupation with either work or doctoral work. As disclosed by Galvin (2006), “As a graduate student, instructor for non-traditional undergraduate students, and assistant professor, I have witnessed students dealing with relational distress, with some students’ marriages either ending or nearly ending while they finished their course work” (p. 420).

While there are no direct statistics on the divorce rates of LRDP students, there is research on the effect of graduate school on marriage. Gerstein and Russell (1990) described graduate school as a major life event that can easily result in marriage problems. In the same vein, Gilbert (1982) found that graduate school can put enormous stress on the family and the marriage convenient. These stressors caused from graduate school include: financial adjustments, adjustments to changes in schedules, changes to social life, lack of time spent with their family and/or partner (Scheinkman, 1988). As posited by Scheinkman (1988), graduate school is associated with a higher risk of divorce and family dysfunction. While systematic research on marriage and family stress is generally limited (Brannock, Litten, & Smith, 2000), Scheinkman (1988) conducted a study to physically observe student marriages at a university mental health clinic. Scheinkman (1988) found that marriages during graduate school were highly susceptible to stress, dysfunction, and in many cases, divorce. The divorce was primarily attributed to the lack of time spent together and the priority of graduate work over family
The study also found younger marriages to be at a much higher risk for divorce (Scheinkman, 1988). In a similar study, Sori, Wetchler, Ray, and Niedner (1996) found that marriages suffered during graduate school namely due to the lack of time spent with the spouse and a general lack of energy left for the marriage and family due to the graduate level studying.

While the risk of divorce is high during graduate school, McLaughlin (1985) and Polson and Nida (1998) reported that graduate school had an impact on the well-being of the entire family unit. McLaughlin (1985) and Polson and Nida (1998) attributed this family dysfunction due to the change in the eight hour work day. The areas of dysfunction for the family included “communication problems, sexual dissatisfaction, financial issues, lack of leisure time and recreational pursuits, role conflicts, and restricted social life” (McLaughlin, 1985, p. 489).

**Familial integration.** Familial integration is defined as the degree to which a doctoral candidate is linked with family members while pursuing the doctorate (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, Swezey, & Wicks, 2014). Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2014) found that familial integration was not only important in deciding to pursue the doctoral degree but also to persist to completion. The role of the supportive family has been linked to doctoral persistence (Kirby et al., 2004), but Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2014) operationalized this construct to include “the fit between the degree and family values and the altruistic motive to see offspring overcome the generational effect of poverty and have means and opportunities not afforded when growing up in poverty” (p. 196). In the Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2014) study, participants exhibited the concept of familial integration by adjusting or delaying their own desires and needs to ensure their family was taken care of and valued through the varied stages of the doctoral journey.
Additionally, the importance of the doctoral student and spouse being unified and understanding the sacrifices of the doctoral program is essential to success (Kirby et al., 2004). In a quantitative study using regression analysis with 566 adult students, Kirby et al. (2004), reported that doctoral course work had a direct impact on their marriage. Kirby’s et al. (2004) study explored the importance of students involving their spouses in the college decision making process. Both the spouses and students reported the impact of college was stressful on the family and the marriage (Kirby et al., 2004). Specifically, Kirby’s et al. (2004) study reported the following regarding doctoral work and the family: less availability to parent, less quality time for the family, less quality time for the marriage, less time and availability to help with chores, and a general preoccupation with school. Santicola (2013) found that a necessary component of doctoral completion was the concept of “putting the doctorate first” (p. 258). In some situations, the family being against the LRDP process only added to the complexities of persisting to completion (Santicola, 2013). As posited by Sanitcola (2013), “In addition to support, the sadness felt from missing their children’s events and distance in marital bonds were mentioned as a strain that occurred for some participants due to the long hours and time commitment required for the doctoral program” (p. 258).

When discussing the issue of work-life balance, the concept of balance must be defined (Klatt, 2014). Balance implies a scale which measures the weight or importance of one action against another (Galinsky, 2007) while Reiter (2007) believed that balance is in the eye of the beholder. Klatt (2014) stated that “work-family conflict arose when one particular aspect of one’s life (work) is out of balance with other aspects” (p. 459). However one defines balance, the research implies that it is important to the stability of the family. Allen, Herst, Bruck, and Sutton (2000) maintained, as evidenced by research, the negative consequences of the work-
family conflict. Allen et al. (2000) reported that burnout and depression are serious and widespread with regards to the position of the superintendency due to the stress of maintaining work-family balance. Moreover, Westerhaus (2004) reported that the work-family balance experienced by school leaders and specifically superintendents led to “high rates of alcoholism, divorce, depression, and suicide” (p. 20).

Stress, created from an individual’s work and family, can be a difficult obstacle to limited residency doctoral persistence. Grandey and Cropanzano (1999) conducted a large quantitative study regarding work-family conflict and family-work conflict. The study included 326 participants in the first round and 148 participants in the second round of the study. The study used a five point Likert-type scale to measure the following categories: work role stress, family role stress, work family conflict, family work conflict, job distress, family distress, poor physical health, turnover intentions, self-esteem, and critical change events (Grandey & Cropanzano 1999). Grandey and Cropanzano (1999) reported:

As the chronic work and family stressors drained resources over time, the participants experienced job and family dissatisfaction and tension, life distress, and lack of physical health. As predicted by the COR model, experiencing these negative states was related to a desire to minimize this loss of resources, in this case by intending to leave the job. (p. 356)

As stated by Hobfoll and Hobfoll (1994), “Resources are those things that we value or that serve as a means of obtaining what we value” (p. 18). These resources include objects, skills, conditions, and energies (Hobfoll & Hobfoll, 1994). When these resources are drained over time, and the individual realizes that something has to give, leaving the job of school leader may
be the best option. This hurts not only the individual and the family system, but also the school community.

The family of the doctoral student can be a hindrance or a support (Gardner, 2009). Gardner (2009) surveyed 60 doctoral students and 34 faculty members from six disciplines to determine the primary reasons for doctoral students not completing their doctoral work. The most common theme in the study expressed by the students related to their family and family responsibilities. As stated by Gardner (2009), “For those with families, in particular, the students related the great strain this placed on those responsibilities” (p.106). The bottom line is that multiple roles of family and work compete for time and resources (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Thus, this work-family conflict creates stress which may lead to a change in a person’s resources (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

School leaders sometimes face unfair expectations as they direct and have authority over life’s most precious commodity, the future generation. The stereotype for the school leader may be described as warrior, healer, teacher, and visionary (Arrien, 1993). School communities tend to personify school leaders as mythological characters which is not fair or real (Klatt, 2014). Once a good school leader is found, the retention of the head of school, school superintendent, or principal becomes an important goal for the success of the school system. However, the factors contributing to superintendent retention are poorly understood (Grisson & Mitani, 2016). The position of superintendent or school leader necessitates long hours on the job which equates to an unbalanced work and home life (Bass, 1985). As explained by Klatt (2014), “work-family wellness, balance, or life quality issues are rarely considered in even the most recent superintendent literature” (p.457). The bottom line is that educational school leaders are expected to maintain long hours of work at the expense of family and personal life quality (Klatt,
Glass and Franceschini, (2007) and Orr (2006) support Klatt’s (2014) ideas reporting that many younger educational leaders with school-aged children do not apply for higher educational administrative positions because they are concerned with the negative effects that the higher leadership position will have on their personal and family lives. With regards to the work-family balance for school leaders, Klatt (2014) posited, “Family concerns rank among the top reasons why male and female central office administrators and principals are hesitant to apply for their first superintendency positions” (p. 453). In a study by Lamkin (2006), school community members expressed gender expectations for their male superintendent candidates by mentioning they wanted strong decisive father figures but also expected them to fulfill the sometimes all-encompassing duties and responsibilities required to be a superintendent. In order to live up to those types of expectations, Klatt (2014) discussed that life must be compartmentalized by working long hours at work instead of being at home. Inevitably, work stress leaks into the home due to the work-family conflict and resources must be compromised which may create health issues, anxiety, depression, marital tension, and even thoughts of suicide (Hobfoll & Hobfoll, 1987). While research on work-family balance provides general guidelines, scholars have not examined how superintendents with school-age children prioritize and sustain their personal and family lives amid such expectations from school communities not to mention adding the responsibility of LRDP work to the list of responsibilities (Klatt, 2014).

**Theoretical Framework**

Philosophers and scientists over the ages have affirmed that all knowledge is theory-laden (Mitchell & Cody, 1993). By nature, inquiry, discovery, and theoretical interpretation in a phenomenological study coexist simultaneously and must be recognized as such (Mitchell & Cody, 1993). In essence, the role of theory is to guide the inquiry (Creswell, 2013) and explain
the discovery (Mitchell & Cody, 1993). As posited by Tavallaei and Abu Talib (2010), “the word theory merely refers to a particular kind of explanation” (p. 572). In a qualitative design, theory equates to the methodologies used in conduction of the research and the epistemologies underlying them (Tavallaei & Abu Talib, 2010). As argued by Tavallaei and Abu Talib (2010), “the researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework that specifies a set of questions that he/she examines in specific ways. The discussion reveals a clear link between theories and methodologies” (p. 574). The theories driving this study are Tinto’s (1975, 1993, 2006) student integration model and Hobfoll’s (1989) conservation of resources (COR) model.

**Tinto’s Student Integration Model**

Persistence is “the behavior of continuing action despite the presence of barriers” (Rovai, 2002, p. 1). Tinto (1975, 1993, 2006) is the theorist most often cited with regard to student persistence. Tinto’s (1975) student integration model explained the “processes of interaction between the individuals and the institution that lead differing individuals to drop out from institutions of higher education, and that also distinguishes between those processes that result in definably different forms of dropout behavior” (p. 90). Tinto’s (1975, 2006) student integration model is rooted in Durkheim, Spaulding, and Simpson’s (1961) theory of suicide. The premise of this theory is that individuals who are not integrated into the fabric of their environment do not persist (i.e., suicide, dropout of a program) (Spady, 1970).

The concepts of academic and social integration are understood through the relationship between individual and the society in which these individuals exist (Tinto, 2006). Specifically, connections must be made between the student and the academic and social systems of the institution (Tinto, 1975). Central to Tinto’s (1975) model were the patterns and consistency of these interactions.
Academic integration. Academic integration addresses the student’s academic relationship with the institution (Tinto, 1975). As defined by Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011), academic integration includes academic accomplishment, level of involvement in course activities, and the curriculum organization. The academic system includes the formal education of the student (Tinto, 1975). A student’s academic integration is based on his or her grade performance and intellectual development (Tinto, 1975). This academic system encompasses the classrooms and laboratories, curriculum, grading system, and offerings to educate the student (Tinto, 1975). The grade performance is more related to the student meeting well-defined standards of the academic system (Tinto, 1975). Mainly, Tinto (1975) refers to academic grades as the most recognizable extrinsic award. The academic grade or cumulative grade point average (GPA) may be utilized later as the “tangible resource” for future career mobility (Tinto, 1975, p. 104). The intellectual development refers to the student’s evaluation of the academic system (Tinto, 1975).

Social integration. Social integration addresses the student’s social relationship within the institution (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2006). As defined by Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011), “social integration refers to the nature of interaction that students experience with peers and faculty as they engage in departmental activities” (p. 117). Likewise, Tinto (1975) viewed social persistence as the “longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and institution (peers, faculty, administration, etc.) in which he [she] was registered” (p. 103). The faculty provide the role of teacher, mentor, and in some cases, friend, which makes their relationship more intimate (Tinto, 1975). Tinto (1975) found that “college dropouts perceive themselves as having less social interaction than do college persisters” (p. 107). Spady (1971) went as far to say that the relationship a student has with his or her faculty influences both social and academic
integration. The social system centers around the daily life and personal needs of the student (Tinto, 2006) to include peer group associations, social interaction, extracurricular activities, and interaction with the faculty and staff (Tinto, 1975). As stated by Tinto (1975), “social integration should increase the likelihood that the person will remain in college” (p. 107). However, Tinto (1975) found that the two systems are not symmetrical. While a student may be able to gain academic integration, the student may drop out because he/she cannot establish themselves into the social environment of the institution (Tinto 1975). The opposite of this may be true also as a student may gain social integration but fail to persist due to poor academic integration (e.g., low grades) (Tinto, 1975).

Tinto’s (1975) model focused only on the academic and social environments of the student, but others argue that integration is much more complex. Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011) reported that academic and social factors play most heavily into the concept of integration and student persistence, but also detailed economic and personal factors as influential in whether a student feels integrated. Economic factors include work and financial support while the personal factors include level of motivation, and even family obligations (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). In addition, Szapkiw et al. (2014) added that the family has great influence on integration and persistence. The issue of integration is clearly complex and multi-faceted and must be studied from more than the two filters offered by Tinto (1975, 1993, 2006).

First, one must understand that there are many different reasons individuals do not persist in their doctoral journey. Thus, there is a significant difference in reasoning between students who do not persist and dropout. Tinto (1975) made the claim that a dropout can result from an academic failure, from a voluntary withdraw, or for a desire to transfer. Tinto (1975) viewed his theory as a longitudinal process of exchanges between the student and the academic and social
systems of the institution during a student’s experiences in those systems which lead to persistence or a varying form of dropout. Tinto’s (1975) model of persistence takes into account background characteristics and individual attributes (e.g., sex, race, pre-college grade-point average, academic and social attainments family variables) and posits they have influence on the “development of the educational expectations and commitments the individual brings with him into the college environment” (p. 94). In the end, Tinto’s (1975, 1993) model focused on the assimilation and relationship that the students have with the academic and social systems of the institution. This assimilation builds “institutional commitment” which influences whether the doctoral candidate will persist (Tinto, 1975, p. 96). For the sake of this study, students who persisted are operationally defined as those who successfully defended their doctoral dissertation and whose degree was conferred.

**Student characteristics.** While academic and social integration are of utmost importance, one must understand that everything in Tinto’s (1975, 1993, 2006) model begins with the elements of family background, individual attributes, and pre-college schooling. These individual characteristics lead to how committed the student is to goal completion or persistence. Goal commitment is the most influential variable with regards to doctoral persistence (Tinto, 1975). It is also important to highlight that Tinto’s (1975, 1993) model was primarily focused on undergraduate residential students.

The literature suggests that non-traditional students with their own family and work communities outside the academic environment (Knowles, 1980) have less need for social interaction than undergraduate students who often live on campus and are engaged with the university or college culture (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Distance education or limited residency students are by definition non-traditional (Rovai, 2002). Non-traditional students most often live
off-campus, belong to social groups unassociated with the institution, have a family, and attend college part-time (Rovai, 2002). Non-traditional students have a different perspective on what is important due to their priorities and where they are in their phase of life (Terrell et al., 2012, Rovai, 2002). These students typically have professional careers and families that they are balancing with their doctoral work (Terrell et al., 2012). In addition, due to the limited residency setting, these students are often geographically diverse with very few living in the immediate area (Terrell et al., 2012). These factors make social interaction and university engagement nearly impossible. As posited by Terrell et al. (2012), “these students will have a different life experience during their tenure in the program and that their decision to persist will be based on factors not entirely the same as students in a more traditional setting” (p. 2). Kennedy et al. (2015) agreed saying, “Given the uniqueness of the [limited residency] population, it is reasonable to assume that these students will have different experiences during their doctoral studies than students in traditional programs” (p. 216).

While Tinto’s (1975) model certainly is relatable to doctoral persistence, the limited residency student brings an entirely new perspective. Wood (1996) reported that over 70% of graduates enrolled in distance education programs are employed in full-time jobs. Having a full-time job while attempting to complete a doctoral program comes with numerous challenges, namely communication and being disengaged from the campus culture. Communication is largely through email, and social interaction with peers and professors is infrequent (Terrell et al., 2012). Thus, LRDP students arguably have less of a need in the area of social connection to their institution as they are socially integrated into their profession and family (Rovai, 2002). As stated by Rovai (2003) in reference to Tinto’s (1975, 1993, 2006) student integration model focused on undergraduate students and Bean and Metzner’s (1985) student attrition model
dealing with the non-traditional students, “these models were developed with on-campus programs in mind and, although they are broadly relevant to distance education programs, their ability to explain the persistence of limited residency students is limited” (p. 1).

Additionally, Bean and Metzner (1985) argued that Tinto’s (1975) model was not useful for studying the attrition of non-traditional students due to the fact that social interaction to the institution may be less important. While Tinto (1975) researched undergraduate attrition, Bean and Metzner (1985) took a different approach to student attrition by researching the non-traditional undergraduate student. Bean and Metzner (1985) recognized a growing group of non-traditional students and stated, “Older, part-time, and commuter students have composed an increasingly larger proportion of undergraduate collegiate student bodies and are predicted to continue this trend as the number of traditional age college students decreases” (p. 485). Bean and Metzner (1985) recognized that not only was this group increasing in number but also dropping out at a higher rate. Thus, Bean and Metzner (1985) developed a conceptual model of the dropout process for the non-traditional undergraduate student while Tinto developed a conceptual attrition model for undergraduate students. As stated by Bean and Metzner (1985), “While traditional students attend college for both social and academic reasons, for nontraditional students, academic reasons are paramount” (p. 489). The non-traditional student does not change his/her social environment which means the social environment of the institution is not as important (Bean & Metzner, 1985). With this understanding, Bean and Metzner (1985) defined the non-traditional student as older than 24, not living on campus, studying part-time, not greatly influenced by the social environment of the institution, and concerned primarily about the institutions academic offerings.
In Bean and Metzner’s (1985) non-traditional student attrition path model, the authors focused on background variables (e.g., age enrollment status, residence, educational goals, high school performance, ethnicity, gender), academic variables (e.g., study habits, academic advising, absenteeism, major certainty, course availability) and environmental variables (e.g., finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, family responsibilities, opportunity transfer) to determine the action of dropping out of an undergraduate program. In the end however, Tinto’s (1975, 1993, 2006) student integration model is more relevant for the non-traditional, limited residency student because the research backs the importance of the social component. However, as Rovai (2002) affirmed with regard to Tinto (1975) and Bean and Metzner (1985), the theories “should be adapted to the needs of limited residency learners in order to better explain persistence and attrition in distance education programs” (p. 8).

There are many reasons students drop out of their graduate or doctoral program (Tinto, 1975). With this perspective, this study purposefully focuses on those doctoral students who persisted through their dissertation defense. With this focus on the persisting LRDP student, this study will attempt to understand how these individuals addressed the factors working against their completion and how they managed to overcome those stresses instead of departing. Without the distinction that I am studying those that persisted to LRDP completion, the study of dropouts may lead to contradictory findings of persistence (Tinto, 1975).

**Conservations of Research Model (COR)**

Understanding what is at stake regarding the professional lives of doctoral candidates (Lovitts, 2001), one must theorize more than just the academic and social integration to the institution. For the male LRDP student serving in the roles of K-12 lead school administrator, father, and husband, there is much stake. Coupled with student integration into the academic and
social setting of the institution, the concept of roles and resources must be discussed. This study focuses on male limited residency doctoral students who are lead K-12 administrators and husbands and fathers, and because of that, it is important to examine a theory that relates to these external LRDP student roles as school leaders and family men. In an effort to correct the ambiguous conceptualizations of stress and to establish a clearer framework, Hobfoll (1989) presented the COR model as an alternative. As posited by Hobfoll (1989), “This resource-oriented model is based on the supposition that people strive to retain, protect, and build resources and that what is threatening to them is the potential or actual loss of these valued resources” (p. 513). The COR model inherently confronts what individuals do when confronted with stress and when not confronted with stress (Hobfoll, 1989). Specifically, when confronted with stress, individuals are expected to minimize the stress per the model (Hobfoll, 1989). However, when not confronted with stress, the model predicts that the individual will strive to develop resource surpluses in order to offset the possibility of future loss (Hobfoll, 1989). The resources Hobfoll (1989) recognizes are object resources, conditions, personal characteristics, and energies.

It is well established that insufficient time and energy to properly perform work and family roles are associated with job and family dissatisfaction, work and family tension, depression, and life stress (Watkins & Subich, 1995). Research on work-family conflict rely heavily upon role theory (Kahn et al., 1964) which advocates that conflict within one role will result in an undesirable state with another role. Role theory also proposes that multiple roles lead to personal conflict as it becomes more difficult to perform each role successfully due to the conflicting demands on time, energy, or incompatibility amongst the different roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kahn et al., 1964). However, role theory is limited when applied to work-
family tension (Grandy & Compranzano, 1999). More specifically, role theory does not give the needed attention to moderating variables which might buffer the relationships between work and family stressors (Jackson & Schuler, 1985). There are other theories more specific to the work-family relationship such as spillover theory and segmentation models (Zedeck & Mosier, 1990). While role theory, spillover theory, and segmentation models reflect some of the issues within the work-family dynamic, these models have not been integrated into one comprehensive theory (Kelley & Streeter, 1992).

For this study, focusing on the roles and stress of the male LRDP student functioning as a K-12 school leader, father, and husband, the COR functions as a viable option. While role theory, spillover theory, and segmentation models reveal some of the issues with regards to the work-family dynamic, COR (1989) encompasses and incorporates all the aforementioned stress theories as well as indirectly focusing on the addition of being a doctoral student (Hobfoll, 1989).

Together, Tinto’s (1975) student integration theory and Hobfoll’s (1989) COR theory form theoretical foundation and framework for this study. The COR model suggests that individuals need to acquire and maintain resources, and that stress is a reaction to an environment where there is the threat of a loss of resources to include objects, conditions, personal characteristics, and energies (Hobfoll, 1989). Hobfoll (1989) detailed these energies to include resources such as time, money, and knowledge. The loss of these resources or threat of losing these resources may be the catalyst of stress and dysfunction (Hobfoll, 1989).

The COR model focuses on both intra-role and inter-role stress (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). As stated by Grandey and Cropanzano (1999), “employees experiencing work role conflict may come to believe that they cannot successfully perform the job” (p. 352).
Consequently, they may be forced to invest more time and resources into the work role for fear of losing their job status. The COR model proposes that inter-role conflict leads to stress because “resources are lost in the process of juggling both work and family roles” (p. 352). This study juggles the additional role of LRDP student to the work-family dynamic which is covered by the COR model. This loss of resources leads to feelings of dissatisfaction, depression, anxiety, and/or psychological tension which may lead to exhaustion (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). The COR model also focuses on individual difference variables (Hobfoll, 1989; Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). These individual resources may be treated as resources that may or may not lead to stress based on the skills of the individual (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). Grandey and Cropanzano (1999) offered this example:

Those who have high self-esteem may have a ‘reserve’ of self-worth and confidence upon which to draw in problematic situations. Thus those with high self-esteem may not be as bothered by the potential loss of time and energy because they know they can cope with such a loss. (p. 352)

Lastly, the COR model not only focuses on the work-family conflict, but also provides additional insight on critical events that are a source of stress or strain as well (Hobfoll, 1989). This is what really separates this work-family theory from the others. Hobfoll (1989) posited, “events which result in a loss of resources are predicted to create stress” (p. 352). This critical event may come in the form of divorce, financial downfall, or a sick relative (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). In such events, the resources of marital status, money, and time are lost (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). The doctoral dissertation may be added to the critical events list presented by Grandey and Cropanzano (1999). The on-going stress of the doctoral program and the isolation the candidate experiences coupled with the effort to maintain balance in with work and family
creates stress which may force one of these resources to give (Hobfoll, 1989). In the end, when one resource is not given up for another resource, burnout may ensue as a result (Hobfoll & Shirom, 1993; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998).

The COR model also supports the expectation of a net gain of resources (Hobfoll, 1989), or the potential for work-family enrichment. As posited by Hobfoll (1989), “Specifically, individuals are motivated to gain resources” (p. 520). This motivation drives people to invest in stressors that support and encourage them (Hobfoll, 1989). This idea may be observed in a supportive family environment where a person is enriched from the work-family dynamic and specifically, marriage may be considered a valued resource (Grandy & Copranzano, 1999). For example, family may be considered a valued resource due to the support one receives from their family in times where the work-family balance is not in order (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). As posited by Grandey and Cropanzano (1999), “Those who are married/living together may have more resources to draw on (i.e., their spouse, more finances), than those who are not living in a committed relationship” (p. 353). The COR model supports that those who have family might have lower levels of stress due to the emotional and financial support, thus strengthening the argument that family improves the dynamics of the work family relationship (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). It is important to note that this literature focuses on a heterosexual lifestyle (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999).

Tinto’s (1975, 1993) student integration theory coupled with Hobfoll’s (1989) conservation of resources model drives the theoretical framework of this study. First, one must review the relationship between the academic and social environment of the limited residency doctoral student. While Tinto (1975) does not focus directly on the non-traditional student, the theory still applies. The persistence of the traditional or non-traditional doctoral student is
connected to the student’s academic development and to their relationship with their dissertation committee and specifically with their chair (Tinto, 1975; Bean & Metzner, 1985). Both Tinto (1975, 1993, 2006) and Bean and Metzner (1985) support that academic and social support is essential to persistence. Tinto’s (1975) theory of student integration covers the relationship between the student and the institution, while Hobfoll’s (1989) conservation of resource theory addresses the work-family dynamic and the stress of the limited residency doctoral program. Together, these two theories will function as theoretical framework for this study.

Summary

School leadership is a difficult task, but it has never been more important (Sogunro, 2012). The difficulty of the position is well documented and evidenced in the statistics. The Department for Professional Employees (2014) reported that since 2011 there has been a decrease of educational administrators by 5.7%. Increasingly long hours in the evening away from family is arguably the greatest stressor the school leader faces (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Combs et al., 2009; Cushing et al., 2003; Friedman, 2002, Queen & Queen, 2005). The stress of school leadership has hurt the aspiring school leader from attaining a limited residency doctoral degree. There is vast research on doctoral persistence (Tinto, 2006). While some researchers have begun to look specifically at the experiences of female doctoral candidates (Castro et al., 2011; Glass, 2000; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2015; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2016; Spaulding, Rockinson-Szapkiw, & Spaulding, 2015; Spaulding, Rockinson-Szapkiw, & Williams, 2016), Latino doctoral candidates (Torres & Solberg, 2000), doctoral candidates from backgrounds of poverty (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, Swezey, & Wicks, 2014), and doctoral students encompassing all genders and races in one study (Gomez, 2013; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Bade, 2014; Spaulding, & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012), there are no studies that
focus on male K-12 lead school administrators who identify as husbands and fathers and completed their doctoral program, limited residency.

Limited residency education has boomed over the last decade. In 2003, approximately 10% of students took a limited residency course (Christensen, Horn, Caldera, & Soares, 2011). In 2012, this number grew to 36% (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). While limited residency education continues to climb, traditional higher education course growth remains flat (Allen & Seaman, 2008). However popular the LRDP track appears, doctoral candidates, specifically those in limited residency programs, are persisting at a rate of approximately 30% (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2011; Terrell, 2005). There is a host of research on the reason for this percentage and what might be done to raise the level of persistence. In an effort to combat attrition rates of up to 70%, various interventions have been mentioned, proposed, and practiced. Per the Council of Graduate Schools (2012), some of these routines include financial support, incentives to faculty members and departments, building a support networks and programs, family accommodations, early research experiences, writing assistance, graduate professional development opportunities, and dissertation retreats.

Relationships continue to be a primary emphasis in the research on doctoral persistence. While the research has a primary focus on the proper and supportive relationship between the student and dissertation chair (Croxton, 2014; Di Pierro, 2007; Gardner, 2009; Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006; O’Meara et al., 2013), the research is clear that relationships within the family are of equal or even greater importance (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Bade, 2014). With respect to the relationship component, the issue of work related stress also factors. The need for professionals with a doctorate degree has never been higher (Cross, 2014) and the continuation
of doctoral education is of utmost importance (Lovitts, 2001). The bottom line is that the field of education is losing potential leaders due to doctoral attrition. The gap in the literature pertains to the issue of LRDP persistence for men at the upper levels of educational leadership (i.e., principals, superintendents).
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

School leadership, by itself, is a challenging occupation (Grissom & Mitani, 2016; Tekniepe, 2015). When one adds the responsibilities of being a husband and father while pursuing doctoral studies, the work-family dynamic is stressed as personal resources are exhausted (Hobfoll, 1989). The life of the school leader evokes images of an individual loyal to their service, who spends long hours on the job with much of the work revolving around decisive assignments that effect the learning environment of future leaders (Bass, 1985). As posited by Klatt (2014), these traditional images of effectiveness on the job are often equated with an unbalanced work and home life. This study focused on the experiences of males who persisted in their limited residency doctoral program (LRDP) while identifying as husbands, fathers, and school leaders (i.e., superintendents, heads of schools, principals). The goal of this study was to provide a blueprint of success to encourage LRDP persistence. This goal supports retention in the LRDP and equips a new generation of school leaders to attain their terminal degrees.

In this chapter, I discuss the research design of the study and explain why a transcendental phenomenological approach was chosen. I readdress my research questions and introduce the research setting. Following the explanation of the setting, I discuss the participants, procedures, and my role in the research. I describe my personal experiences and also bracket out my experiences across data collection and data analysis to reduce my human bias. Finally, I end with a discussion about the data collection, data analysis, and the trustworthiness and ethical considerations necessary for the study.
Design

This study on LRDP persistence was designed to explain the essence of the experience for these male, K-12, lead school administrators who persisted to their doctoral degree completion while also serving as husbands and fathers. A qualitative approach was chosen in order to locate the researcher into the lifeworld of the participants to understand their experiences and hear their stories (Patton, 2002). Van Kamm (1966) explained that this design is by nature “object-centered rather than method-centered” (p. 14). In addition, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) posited that the qualitative approach attempts to “turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self” (p. 3). Essentially, this study entered into the life world of the male K-12 lead administrator who completed their LRDP while functioning as husbands and fathers (Patton, 2002; Riessman, 1993). Moreover, this study explored and described the experiences of these men through the meanings and explanations they brought (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Phenomenology as Qualitative Design

Because this study was designed to describe the lived experiences of several individuals who shared experiences with the defined phenomenon, a phenomenological design was chosen for analysis and evaluative purposes (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology ascended as a philosophy in Germany prior to World War One and has since taken a prominent position in modern philosophy (Dowling, 2007). As posited by Dowling (2007), phenomenology “challenged the dominant views on the origin and nature of truth of the time” (p. 132). While the term phenomenology was introduced by Kant and Hegel in the 18th century, Husserl became the primary philosopher of phenomenology (Giorgi, 2006). However, the inspiration for Husserl was neither Kant nor Hegel, but Franz Brentano who believed that phenomenology was
descriptive psychology (Moran, 2000). Brentano’s greatest influence on Husserl was the concept of intentionality which referred to the internal experience of being conscious of something (Moustakas, 1994). The key aspect regarding how the philosophy of phenomenology segued into a research methodology was that, for Husserl, the aim of phenomenology. This aim was the rigorous and unbiased study of things as they appear in order to arrive at an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989).

This study captured the experiences of 13 male K-12 lead school administrators who persisted through their LRDP while serving as fathers and husbands. As phenomenology purposes to arrive at essential understanding, this method aligned with the goals of this research proposal – which also sought to arrive at the essence of the experience. Phenomenological studies focus specifically on an experience in order to achieve “comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essence of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13).

**Transcendental Phenomenology**

Two of the more popular veins of phenomenology are hermeneutic and transcendental (Creswell, 2013). The difference in the two forms of phenomenology is that a hermeneutic approach leads the researcher to interpret the lived experiences of the participants (van Manen, 1990) while the transcendental phenomenology attempts to study occurrences where “everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). The key difference is that in transcendental phenomenology, the researcher stands above the experience, actively working to limit his or her biases so that the participant experiences are those reported and explored (Moustakas, 1994). The key to transcendental phenomenology is the role of bracketing or *epoche* (Moustakas, 1994). As posited by Moustakas (1994):
The researcher following a transcendental phenomenological approach engages in disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated (known as the Epoche process) in order to launch the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experiences and professional studies – to be completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated. (p. 22)

Because I shared in the experiences of the participants I studied, hermeneutic phenomenology was not the best choice as it might introduce bias in my interpretation of the lived experiences of the participants. Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental approach was most fitting given its expectation that the researcher starts with bracketing his or her preconceived experiences that relate to the topic at hand (Moustakas, 1994). The goal, as stated by Moutakas (1994), was that “the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego” (p. 33). In a transcendental phenomenological study, the researcher is most focused on the experiences of the participants and not on any interpretation by the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, the epoche or bracketing of personal experiences was of utmost importance.

The concept of bracketing out personal experiences was difficult given that the research topic was one in which I was familiar and currently experiencing (van Manen, 1990). However, this was exactly why I chose this design. I consciously and intentionally placed myself out of the study and focused on the participants’ stories, striving to see the phenomenon with a fresh perspective. The way this is accomplished is for the researcher to embrace his or her experiences
prior to beginning the project (Creswell, 2013). As suggested by Moustakas (1994), the concept of epoche is a very difficult process because it affects one’s own experiences, emotions, and thoughts. Prior to conducting any interviews, I reviewed my questions and focused and thought about my responsibility to stick to the script and not add any of my bias or experiences to this discussion. Additionally, I did not tell any of the participants that I was working through a similar experience as them. Thus, as the researcher I began the process of bracketing through the role of the researcher section below, and continued to do so across the data collection and analysis.

**Researcher’s Role**

Phenomenology does not rely primarily on questionnaires or instruments created by other researchers (Creswell, 2013). Instead, the qualitative researcher, as the human instrument, collects data in the natural setting of the participants using a variety of methods which can include open ended interviewing, document analysis, focus panels, and case study observation (Creswell, 2013). For phenomenological research, Moustakas (1994) explained that:

> The only way I can come to know things and people is to go out to them, to return again and again to them, to immerse myself completely in what is there before me, look, see, listen, hear, touch, from many different vantage points. (p. 65)

While this phenomenology was transcendental and I attempted to epoche my bias, I understood that bias will always exist. The primary bias I brought as a human instrument to this study was that I was living the experience I was studying. I had my own assumptions and ideas regarding the positives and negatives of the lived experience. Primarily, the assumptions that I brought to this study revolved around the issue of time management. As a current superintendent of schools, husband to a full-time elementary school teacher, and father to a high school student,
my time was of greatest demand and stress was the result. Essentially, in order to complete my LRDP, a resource was compromised, even though I sought to maintain all my current resources (Grandy & Cropanzano, 1999; Hobfoll, 1989). My primary assumption and fear was that I was cheating my family by my pursuit of a doctorate. This compromise or feeling led to an inter-role conflict which led to stress which often resulted in feelings of depression, dissatisfaction, anxiety, and at times, burnout (Grandy & Cropanzano, 1999; Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll & Shirmom, 1993). This is congruent with Hobfoll’s (1989) COR theory, which happened to be the framework for this study. Thus, as I researched, I was intentional about focusing on the lived experiences of my participants and not on my own lived experiences and assumptions (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Second, as a school superintendent of a local school system, I was concerned that I might have participants in my study who had children attending one of the schools I lead. While I decided to include these individuals, I decided not to include any of the faculty who I assumed any type of supervisory role over. It was an interesting dynamic that had to be recognized as I desired to have transparent interviews with my participants. However, as my participants presented themselves, I had no one in my school system who participated. I previously knew none of the participants in my study.

**Research Questions**

The research questions were grounded in the theoretical framework of Tinto’s (1975) student integration model and Hobfoll’s (1989) conservation of resources model. The questions were the foundation of exploring the experiences of male, K-12 school leaders, who earned their doctoral degree while serving in the roles of husband and father. In support of the research question, the following sub-questions were developed:
RQ1: What are the experiences of males who persisted to completion in their LRDP, while serving as husbands, fathers, and lead administrators of a K-12 school or district?

RQ2: How did males, who were husbands, fathers and lead administrators in a K-12 school district, persist in completion of their LRDP?

**Setting**

This study took place in the life-world of the research participants, and the participants represented states from all across the U.S. to include Hawaii. Sampling began with a convenience sampling of males recommended through a snowball sampling process. This began through personal connections from my dissertation chair and committee and extended from there. The participants were graduates of many different universities from all over the U.S. that offered a LRDP. Allen and Seaman (2013) defined a LRDP as a program where at least 80% of the content is delivered in a limited residency fashion or online (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

To provide additional context, for years the field of education has toiled to find a balance between the practice of education and research in developing doctoral programs to meet the needs of a diverse student population (Shulman, Golde, Bueschel, & Garbedian, 2006). As a reflection of this research, practice, and need for a terminal degree, the field of education first created the Doctorate of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Education, and then secondly, the Doctorate of Education (Ed.D.) (Shulman et al., 2006). The Ph.D. was designed after the German University model and first granted at Columbia University in 1893 (Nelson & Coorough, 1994; Shulman et al., 2006). The first Ed.D. was awarded from Harvard University in 1920 in response to an expressed need for more practitioners to possess a doctorate degree (Mayhew & Ford, 1974). Over 250 universities now offer educational Ed.D. or Ph.D. programs (Levine, 2005). As argued by Servage (2009), the professional doctorate is a very valuable degree. Most notably, the
doctoral degree “serves as an entry point for inquiry into what might otherwise be taken up as a
diffuse and unsystematic array of reform efforts across multiple countries and policy contexts”
(Servage, 2009, p. 768). However, since the 1960s and previous decades of steady growth, the
number of Ed.D.s awarded is on the decline (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Shulman, et al., 2006)
even though the need for people with doctoral degrees has increased (Bitterman et al., 2013;
Glass & Franceschini, 2006; Klatt, 2014; Servage, 2009; The Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008-

The most important difference between a Ph.D. and an Ed.D is the focus. While both
degrees focus on a higher level of education beyond a master’s degree, the Ed.D. is aimed at the
educational practitioner who desires to focus more on teaching or administration than on
conducting research (Nelson & Coorough, 1994). The Ed.D. dissertation is more likely to
include survey research and focus more commonly on pedagogical and administrative questions
(Nelson & Coorough, 1994). On the other hand, the Ph.D. is more likely to include multivariate
statistics and have a wider generalizability (Nelson & Coorough, 1994). The focus of this study
was largely on Ed.D. graduates who remained in school administration positions (e.g., principal,
head of school, superintendent). However, one participant held a Ph.D. and another a Doctorate
of Ministry; both of these participants met all the qualifications to participate.

Participants

A purposeful sample was chosen based on locating individuals who shared the experience
of the phenomenon being investigated and were willing to share their lived experiences
(Creswell, 2013; Dukes, 1984; Moustakas, 1994). The selection criteria focused on the
following four characteristics: Participants were (a) males, (b) served as K-12 lead administrators
during the completion of their LRDP (c) identified as a father and (d) husband in a traditional
marriage. The male K-12 administrators were chosen to participate if they were employed as a principal of a K-12 school or employed as a superintendent or head of school of a school system or district during the completion of his LRDP. Husband was defined as a male who was legally married in a traditional marriage and lived in the same home as his wife at the completion of his LRDP. Likewise, father was defined as having children from birth to 12th grade living in the home at the completion of the LRDP.

In spite of the narrow focus on males who were K-12 lead school administrators during their LRDP while serving in the roles as husbands and fathers, I strove for maximum variation in the sample (Creswell, 2013). I sought variation in terms of age, ethnicity, family stage, years of marriage, occupation of wife, number of children, type and major of degree earned, type of academic institutional employment at time of LRDP to include public school and private Christian school, and the position of school leadership to include district superintendent, head of school, and lead elementary, middle, or secondary principal. A convenience sample was used to save time, money, and effort (Creswell, 2013). From this convenience sample, I used a snowball sampling technique to identify additional male K-12 school lead administrators who identified as husbands and fathers and who completed their LRDP (Creswell, 2013).

The final sample comprised of 13 men who met the qualifications of a school leader (head of school, superintendent, principal), LRDP student, husband to one wife who was living in the home during the time of the LRDP, and the father to at least one child who was living in the home during the time of the LRDP. The sample consisted of 11 Caucasians, one American Indian, and one Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. All the men identified themselves as Christians.

The men varied in age from 37 to 58 with the mean, median, and mode age being 47 years. With regards to their school employment, five of the men led in public school education
and eight in a private Christian School setting. The men all shared a passion for education with an average of 20.69 years in the field. The minimum number of years the group served in the field of education was 11 while the maximum was 35. The average number of years the men served in their current position was 3.31 years with the minimum being one year and the maximum being eight years.

All the men professed to be engaged in satisfying and healthy marriages with the range of marriage being 11 to 38 years. All men professed to be married only one time. The average number of years the men reported being married was 22.54 with the median and mode both being 21 years of marriage. The occupation of their wives was diverse: five served in education, five were homemakers, two were self-employed, and one worked in the field of insurance. The men all had children in the home during the time of the LRDP with the maximum number of children being five and the minimum number of children being two; on average, the men had three children living in the home during the time of their LRDP.

The men reported a wide dispersion of the time it took them to complete their LRDP. The maximum reported was ten years while the minimum was two years. The average amount of time it took these 13 men to complete their LRDP was 4.36 years. The men attended different universities to attain their LRDP, but all 13 men achieved their LRDP at a private university or college. The degree attained was dominated by the Ed.D. with 11, with one who achieved a Ph.D., and one who achieved his doctorate in ministry. Lastly, eight men completed their LRDP with a degree in educational leadership while three attained a degree in curriculum and instruction, one in teaching and learning, and one in ministry.
Table 1

Participant Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>LRDP &amp; Year</th>
<th>Years Married</th>
<th>Children (during LRDP)</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesse</td>
<td>Educational Leadership (2009)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>Curriculum &amp; Instruction (2013)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>American Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Ministry (2015)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raymond</td>
<td>Curriculum &amp; Instruction (2016)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd</td>
<td>Educational Leadership (2008)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>School Leadership (2011)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lou</td>
<td>Educational Leadership (2017)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Educational Leadership (2013)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Organizational Leadership (2017)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abe</td>
<td>School Leadership (2014)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remy</td>
<td>Teaching &amp; Learning (2017)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedures

In order to obtain my participants, I submitted an application and followed the steps required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and received permission to collect my data (Appendix A). Following IRB approval, I provided an email invitation (Appendix B) to the dissertation coordinator at a local university asking her to disseminate it to all of the doctoral faculty and dissertation chairpersons to then forward to their recent male LRDP graduates. The email included an informed consent form (Appendix C) which explained the purpose of my study, requested contact and demographic information, and asked some general questions to help
me understand their work-family experience while finishing their LRDP. Additionally, I made the same request to the Director of Research at the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). I asked the participant to complete the LRDP demographic questionnaire. Once I received the responses, I evaluated whether or not they met the participant criteria noted above. Following this, I contacted those who qualified for an interview (Appendix D). Prior to the interview, my committee members reviewed the questions to ensure face and content validity. During the interviews, I asked the participants to forward my study invitation to any contacts who they believed matched the selection criteria. However, I received no additional participants from asking my current participants about potential leads. My goal was to find a range of ten to fifteen men (Dukes, 1984) who served as lead K-12 school administrators while acting in the roles of husband and father while completing their LRDP, or until the data was saturated. I found the data to be saturated after the eight interview (sample interview letter, Appendix E). As posited by O’Reilly and Parker (2012), thematic data saturation usually means that the data should be collected until there are fewer surprises in the data and no more patterns or themes emerge from the data. Saturation always has a practical weakness in that there is always new data that might be discovered with time. Practically, data can never be fully saturated (Wray, Markovic, & Manderson, 2007). The focus was more associated on sample adequacy than sample size. However, Dukes (1984) reminded me that ten to fifteen participants was respectable. As suggested by Guest (2006), saturation is an indication of quality. Due to the repetition of themes and common language, I concluded that this study was saturated. However, O’Reilly and Parker surmised that the inability to meet data saturation does not invalidate the findings; rather it means that the phenomenon has not yet been fully explored, as is acknowledged with suggestions for future research in Chapter Five. Following the interview, I
asked each participant to dictate or write a letter of advice to another male, K-12 lead administrator, husband and father who was contemplating beginning a similar LRDP experience (see Appendix F for exhibit of letter). I protected the privacy of my participants by using pseudonyms for each individual and for any related sites or settings. I secured all electronic data through password protected computers. I had the transcription company send me a signed confidentiality statement (Appendix G).

**Data Collection**

As the qualitative researcher, I collected the data myself and served as the human instrument (Creswell 2013). No data was collected until the IRB granted approval (Appendix A) and until informed consent forms were received from participants (Appendix C). I used a questionnaire to find my purposeful sample of men who completed their doctoral program while employed as a lead administrator in a K-12 school while serving in the roles of husband and father. Following the questionnaire, I initiated a survey that offered me some baseline perceptions of the work-family-LRDP balance of the participants. After analyzing the data produced from the questionnaire and survey, I contacted those who qualified for an interview (Appendix D) and conducted in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews with each participant (Appendix E). Lastly, I completed my data collection by requesting a written letter of advice by each participant to a real or theoretical male acquaintance who was a husband, father, and school leader who was beginning or contemplating beginning his LRDP journey (Appendix F). Various sets of data were gathered because data triangulation “involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251) and increased the dependability and credibility of my study.
Questionnaire

The first responsibility I had as a researcher was to find my sample and ensure each participant met the study criteria. I initiated sampling by submitting a self-created survey monkey questionnaire (Appendix C) to a group of faculty members via the dissertation coordinator at a local university offering a LRDP to be forwarded to male acquaintances or former students who completed their LRDP. There were two parts to the questionnaire including (a) a demographics section and (b) a brief survey investigating work-life balance during the LRDP.

Demographics. In the first section of the questionnaire, I asked about the demographics and characteristics of each participant to determine whether he might qualify as a participant (Appendix C). Questions addressed topics such as marital status, number of children, employment status, year degree was conferred, etc. The purpose of these questions was to ensure my selected sample met the study criteria, as well as to consider maximum variation in terms of ethnicity, type of school employed (i.e., public, private, Christian), parenting stage, and degree program.

Work-Life Balance Survey. If the participant qualified for the study, I used the online Survey Monkey program to automatically initiate a survey comprised of eleven questions (Appendix C). This survey included items modified from an instrument measuring work-life balance. The purpose of this survey instrument was to gain a general sense of the participant’s orientation to their work-family balance while completing their LRDP, fine-tune my interview questions, add a richer depiction of each participant, and to ensure data triangulation. The survey (Appendix C) was modified and scored based on the Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist created by Daniels and McCarraher (2000). The purpose of the modified instrument was to gain
descriptive data on the experiences of the participants with regard to their work-family-LRDP balance during the completion of their LRDP, and to use this baseline for discussion during the interview. I emailed the authors of the Industrial Society’s work-life checklist on two separate occasions asking for permission to modify the survey. Those emails were never returned.

While I intentionally used as much of the language in the published and validated survey by Daniels and McCarraher (2000), the original survey only focused on work-life balance. Therefore, I modified the survey (Appendix C) to take into account the element of the LRDP. No surveys existed that addressed the balance of all three of my components: work, family, LRDP. The modified Daniels and McCarraher (2000) survey further contributed to data analysis and specifically, to my efforts of attaining data triangulation. In addition, this triangulation of data from the surveys, interviews, and letters of advice increased the reliability of my findings.

To establish face and content validity of the survey, my dissertation committee members conducted an expert review of each item. I analyzed the data generated from the survey items before conducting interviews and asked follow-up questions in the interviews.

**Interviews**

Once I selected my sample and analyzed the demographic and survey data from the questionnaire, I arranged open-ended, semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the qualified participants (Creswell, 2013; Duke, 1984). As stated by Moustakas (1994), “Typically in the phenomenological investigation the long interview is the method through which data is collected on a topic and question” (p. 114). These interviews were recorded and transcribed (Moustakas, 1994). The interview opened with a social conversation and then shifted to a more interactive process using open-ended questions (Moustakas, 1994). The interviews took place at a time that was most convenient to the respective participant. All of the interviews were performed via
FaceTime or over a phone with a speaker. The interview questions were generated from and grounded in the literature on the topic of the LRDP, the Student Integration Theory (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2006), Conservation of Resources Model (Hobfoll, 1989), and work-family balance. In order to get more systematic data, I encouraged the participant to speak freely and prompted them for elaboration when I felt necessary (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of my interview questions were to gather information about the lived experiences of the phenomenon of LRDP persistence (Creswell, 2013). During the interview, I focused on my questions, completed the interview in the allotted time, was respectful and courteous, and attempted to be a good listener (Creswell, 2013). A listing of the interview questions follow:

**Introductory Questions**

- Please tell me about yourself and how you would introduce yourself to someone for the first time.
- Please tell me about your spouse (does she work outside of the home, in the home, etc?)
- Please tell me about your children.
- How did you get your start in the field of education?
- How long were you a teacher?
- How long have you been an administrator?
- How long have you served in your current position?
- What do you most love about the field of education?

**Leader/Educator Identity**

- What motivated you to become a school leader?
- How would you characterize your leadership style?
• What is the most challenging aspect of school leadership (Sogunro, 2012)?
• Please describe how your position as a school leader influenced/ influences your family.
• How did you balance your roles as a family man and school leader (Hobfoll, 1989)?
• Please describe the stress level of your position in terms of normal or excessive (Boyland, 2011; Hawk & Martin, 2011; Sogunro, 2012).
• Please discuss the different areas that cause you stress. (Gill & Arnold, 2015; Glass et al., 2000; Hawk & Martin, 2011).
• How do you cope with stress in these areas?

**Academic and Social Identity**

• Why did you choose to begin your doctoral degree?
• Tell me about the factors that influenced where you chose to study and when you chose to begin (Croxton, 2014; Smith et al., 2006).
• Please tell me about your experiences during coursework and the dissertation.
• What was the most challenging aspect of the doctoral process?
• To what do you attribute your persistence to completion (Grovner, 2007)?
• Please discuss your thoughts of persevering through your program. Did you have thoughts of quitting?
• Please discuss your feelings and thoughts toward the doctoral education you received.
• How, if at all, has your attainment of the degree influenced your leadership style or practices?
• Please discuss your feeling of connectedness to your peers in your limited residency program? (Bair, 1999; Croxton, 2009; Dupont et al., 2012; Gardner, 2009; Golde,
Please discuss your feeling of connectedness to your instructors during your coursework? (Bair, 1999; Croxton, 2009; Dupont et al., 2012; Gardner, 2009; Golde, 2000; Golde, 2005; Kelley & Salisbury-Glennon, 2016; Rochester & Pradel, 2008; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; West et al., 2011).

Please discuss your feeling of connectedness to the chair of your dissertation? (Bair, 1999; Croxton, 2009; Dupont et al., 2012; Gardner, 2009; Golde, 2000; Golde, 2005; Kelley & Salisbury-Glennon, 2016; Rochester & Pradel, 2008; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; West et al., 2011).

Were finances ever a deterrent in you persisting? Why or why not (Nettles & Millet, 2006; Terrell et al., 2012; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011)?

Please describe the dissertation phase of the journey and any challenges specific to this stage. (Denecke et al., 2004; Lovitts, 2001).

**Family Identity**

Please tell me about your family and your role in your family.

What was the occupation of your spouse during your limited residency doctoral program?

Please tell me about how you and your wife divided up household and childcare responsibilities during your doctorate.

What are the things your family values and chooses to spend time doing together?

What are the effects of being a school leader on your family? On your children, on your marriage (Hobfoll, 1989)?
• What were the effects of being a doctoral student on your family? On children, marriage (Hobfoll, 1989)?

• To what or to whom do you attribute your ability to persist to completion?

• What decisions did you make when it came to balancing time invested in work, the doctorate, and your family? How did you make these decisions and what role did your family play in these decisions? (Hobfoll, 1989).

• Is there anything else you would like to share related to the topics covered?

Prior to the interview, my committee members reviewed the questions to ensure face and content validity. This expert review was conducted to gain helpful feedback to make the questions clearer, better understood, and determine how the questions might be adjusted to maximize my time. My committee advised me to change the order of my questions so that they flowed more easily and ensured all my questions were grounded in the theoretical and empirical literature. They also added a few questions that they felt would be beneficial to my study.

I also piloted these interview questions with a local school administrator to get a feel for how long the interview would take and whether the questions were effective. The purpose was to reduce or revise the interview questions for clarity and focus. The mock interview was extremely valuable. In this practice, I learned that some of my questions were redundant and could be integrated into other questions or eliminated. This experience allowed me to determine the approximate length of the interview and what questions required follow-up questions. See Appendix E for an example transcript of one interview.

Letter of Advice

To deepen the feedback about their experience, following the interview, I asked each participant to dictate or write a letter of advice to another male, K-12 lead administrator, husband
and father who was contemplating beginning a similar LRDP experience. The request, with directions and the choice for prompts, was sent to each participant via email. I asked each participant to reply to the email with their prompts. The following prompts gave the participant some direction on what to advice. Prior to giving the prompts and writing of the letter, I asked the participant to consult with his wife and children to allow any feedback, guidance, or advice they might have to add to the letter of advice.

1. What should men like yourself, who are beginning their limited residency doctorate, know about the process of earning a doctorate before they begin? In other words, what should they anticipate experiencing in the process and across each stage in the journey?

2. What advice do you have for men like yourself in terms of strategies for coping and persisting to completion? To what or who do you attribute your ability to persist, and what advice do you have based on this?

Understanding the importance of security, all transcribed interviews, documents, emails, and letters, were stored on a secure drive to which only I had access. See Appendix F to view one of the letters of advice written by a participant.

Data Analysis

I followed Moustakas’ (1994) steps in the phenomenological data analysis process. First, I described my personal experiences with the study phenomenon. Second, through purposeful reflection I bracketed out my experiences across data collection and data analysis to reduce my human bias. Across the analysis process, I aimed to grasp the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Analyzing data is a challenging task for any qualitative researcher (Creswell, 2013). As confirmed by Creswell (2013), “Data Analysis consists of preparing and organizing the data” (p.
My analysis began as I collected data through my questionnaires, surveys, and interviews. The modified Industrial Society’s work-life checklist survey created by Daniels and McCarraher (2000) allowed me the opportunity to begin seeing and thinking about themes for my research questions. While I was living the experiences of my participants, I bracketed out my own experiences in order to listen to my participants. I remained attentive for thematic saturation during data collection by transliterating my interviews and concentrating on what themes were exemplified (Moustakes, 1994). Data from each data collection protocol was analyzed in the order received.

**Bracketing**

Bracketing, otherwise known as epoche, supports understanding in a reflective move that cultivates curiosity (LeVasseur, 2003). While phenomenology requires at least some understanding of the broader philosophical assumptions and the author should identify all these assumption and biases, it is difficult for the researcher to completely eliminate himself or herself from the study (Creswell, 2013). Yet, this is the expectation. First, the researcher must ensure the participants are carefully chosen so that the participant has, in detail, experienced the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). Secondly, the researcher must make a deliberate focus to remove himself or herself from the study. This is performed by intently focusing on the interview questions and actively listening. However, this may be difficult due to the fact that interpretations of the data always incorporate the bias and assumptions the researcher brings to the topic (van Manen, 1990). In order to bracket myself from the study, I examined my experiences, assumptions, and biases toward the subject. I focused on listening to my participants and recording in my effort to get the cleanest explanation of the participant’s experiences.
**Organization**

For this study, I prepared the data by using three recording devices with each interview and having standardized prompts for the participant to write their letter of advice to a candidate who was beginning their doctoral program in the same fashion as they did. The letter of advice was sent from my participants to me via email communication. I used a professional transcription company to conduct all of the interview transcriptions. I uploaded all the interview and letter transcripts into a coding software program to manage the finding of common codes and themes. Most notably, a good coding program allows the researcher to have a designated storage location for their transcribed interviews and to easily retrieve memos with codes, themes, and documents (Creswell, 2013). I used ATLAS.ti – version eight as my qualitative data analysis software (QDAS). First, the coding software supported my effort to process the large amounts of data I collected. Second, the software allowed me to arrange, reassemble, manage my data, and determine connections that led me to identify the essence of my participants’ experiences.

**Analysis of Questionnaire Data**

The questionnaire (Appendix C) data was used to determine whether the person met the needed qualifications for the study. If the person met all the qualifications, the survey allowed the participant to continue to the researcher-created survey items modified from the Daniels and McCarraher (2000) survey. The purpose of the survey items were to gain a general sense of the participant’s orientation to their work-family balance while completing their LRDP, fine-tune and personalize the interview questions, add a richer depiction of each participant, and to allow for data triangulation. The following guidelines were designed to analyze the data from the
survey (Appendix C). This measuring tool was a modification from Daniels and McCarraher (2000).

**If you checked all or mostly As** then you perceived yourself to be under considerable stress from your lack of work-life-LRDP balance. Over time, your productivity may have suffered along with relationships, your health, and long-term employment.

**If you checked all or mostly Bs** then you perceived yourself to be not entirely happy with your work-life-LRDP balance, but you did not let the situation get out of control.

**If you checked all or mostly Cs** then you perceived that you set your own priorities in work-life-LRDP balance, making them work for you.

Once the survey was completed, I scored the survey and provided the score to the participant at the interview and explained what the score meant. If there were any items that seemed to contradict one another, I followed-up at the interview. This data allowed me to generate descriptions of each participant. After the interviews, I triangulated the survey responses on an item by item basis with the interview responses to triangulate and see if the findings converged or diverged.

**Analysis of Interviews and Letters of Advice**

I read the transcribed interviews and letters of advice multiple times, and analyzed the data through a robust method of phenomenological analysis prescribed by Moustakas (1994):

1. Using the phenomenological approach, obtain a full description of your own experience of the phenomenon.

2. From the verbatim transcript of your experience complete the following steps
   a. Consider each statement with respect to significance for description of the experience.
b. Record all relevant statements.

c. List each non-repetitive, non-overlapping statement. These are the invariant horizons or meaning units of the experience.

d. Relate and cluster the invariant meaning into themes.

e. Synthesize the invariant meaning units and themes into a description of the textures of the experience. Include verbatim examples.

f. Reflect on your own textural description. Through imaginative variation, construct a description of the structures of your experience.

g. Construct a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of your experience.

3. From the verbatim transcript of the experience of each of the other co-researchers, complete the above steps, a through g.

4. From the individual textural-structural descriptions of all co-researchers’ experiences, construct a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience, integrating all individual textural-structural descriptions into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122)

Per Moustakas’ (1994) emphasis on horizontalization, I began by listing the statements and quotes. I treated every statement or quote with equal worth and combined like statements and quotes into themes or “meaning units/clusters of meaning” (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). The research questions were designed to cover both the textural and structural descriptions. Research question one focused on the textural description of what the participants experienced. Specifically, the obstacles and challenges they faced. Research question two focused on the structural description
of how my participants experienced the phenomenon. Specifically, this data discussed how the participants overcame the obstacles and challenges discussed in research question one. Lastly, I combined these two descriptions to convey the essence of their experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Triangulation was important in enhancing the credibility of my qualitative study. As posited by Creswell (2013) regarding the subject of triangulation, “Typically, this process involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (p. 251). Throughout the data analysis process I examined all sources of data in order to triangulate and validate my findings (Creswell, 2013).

Following the steps provided above by Moustakas (1994), I reached the essence of the phenomenon studied. Throughout the process I utilized the ATLAS.ti software to store, organize, and code the data. Upon receiving the interviews in a Microsoft word format from the transcriber, I listened to the interviews while reviewing the transcriptions. In addition, upon my receiving the letters of advice from the participant, I would read them multiple times to make sure I understood the intent of the participant. I called the participants if there was anything in the letter of advice that I did not understand. I then compared the letters of advice to the interview transcription to determine whether there were any contradictions.

Following this process of verification, I created a listing and preliminary grouping which supported my effort to create horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). Following the reception of all 13 interview transcripts and letters of advice, my analysis generated 208 codes. In this process, I focused on “being receptive to every statement” and “granting each comment equal value” to get full disclosure of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). To accomplish this, I tested each expression for two requirements as listed in Moustakas (1994). First, “does it contain a moment
of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?” (p. 121). Second, “Is it possible to abstract and label it?” (p. 121). As posited by Moustakas (1994), “Expressions not meeting the above requirements are eliminated. Overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions are also eliminated or presented in more exact descriptive terms” (p. 121). These 208 codes are listed in Appendix H.

To reduce these 208 codes, I followed Moustakas (1994) and eliminated redundant or overlapping codes to determine the invariant constituents. By following the guidelines from Moustakas (1994), I clustered the 208 codes into 11 themes. These 11 themes are listed in Figure 1 below. From these 11 themes, I was able to further reduce to six main themes and one central essence of the phenomenon.

![Figure 1. Flow chart of codes.](image-url)
Member Checks

As a final step in my analysis, I provided participants with a description of the main themes for each to member check and affirm that the description of the phenomenon was authentic and representative of their experiences. As mentioned by Stake (1995), throughout the study, the researcher must ask, “Did I get it right?” (p. 107). This process provided an external check of my research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The purpose in of the member check was to solicit the participants’ views of my findings and understandings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) so that they could judge the accuracy and credibility of the account (Creswell, 2013). Lincoln and Guba (1985) believed the step of member checking to be “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). I shared the six major themes with four of my participants, but only two returned any feedback. Raymond responded back to the email saying that the essence and final themes were perfect and lined up with his LRDP journey. Sam agreed with everything in the findings accept the support of the chair. Sam had a very difficult experience with his chair that did not represent the theme of having a supporting chair.

Trustworthiness

There are multiple ways to address trustworthiness or validation in a qualitative study (Creswell, 2013). Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed trustworthiness as the means for garnering validity in a qualitative research study. Their approach to trustworthiness focused on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

Credibility, akin to internal validity in qualitative studies, stems from using many different data gathering methods. This idea is known as triangulation which means that the researcher uses different methods and sources of data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For
data triangulation, I used a questionnaire and survey, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and a letter of advice written to another male, K-12 administrator serving in the roles of husband and father who was beginning a similar LRDP. Additionally, quality engagement in the interview process built credibility with my study (Moustakes, 1994). This included building trust with my participants by genuinely caring about them and getting to know them, learning the family culture of each participant, and note member checking of transcripts and analysis with the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability is a key component to any study. While the definition of dependability varies based on the type of study and perspective, Eisner (1991) defined dependability as “a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility, that allows us to feel confident about our observations, interpretations, and conclusion” (p. 300) or inherently to do everything in our power to render an honest experience (Stake, 1995). This strive for understanding comes from “visiting personally with participants, spending extensive time in the field, and probing to obtain detailed meanings” (Creswell, 2013, p. 243). Thick descriptive data was part of this dependability and was used to describe the context and setting for my study. I ensured that the study was consistent through rich detail (Creswell, 2013). In addition, my dissertation committee audited my work. The committee was comprised of two individuals with experience researching persistence and another male who experienced the study phenomenon and was an experienced qualitative researcher. As cited by Creswell (2013), “In accessing the product, the auditor examines whether or not the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data” (p. 252). Lastly, the member checking gave my study additional dependability.
Transferability

Rich, thick description is the key to allow the reader to determine whether findings are transferable to other sites and populations (Creswell, 2013). When other researchers are able to identify mutual thoughts and characteristics, the reader can decide what is transferable (Creswell, 2013). In spite of the narrow focus on males who were husbands, fathers, and K-12 school administrators during their LRDP, the sample represented participant variation (Creswell, 2013) in terms of age, ethnicity, family stage, and level of school leadership to include public and private Christian school superintendents/heads of school, lead elementary, middle, and secondary principals.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are of utmost importance in any research involving human subjects (Creswell, 2013). As stated by Creswell (2013), “a common misconception is that these issues only surface during data collection. They arise, however, during several phases of the research process” (p. 56). First, I confirmed IRB approval (Appendix A), and had participants sign an informed consent form (Appendix B) before collecting data. Second, I protected the privacy of my participants by using pseudonyms for each individual and for any related sites or settings. Third, security of data was of utmost importance as I secured all electronic data through password protected computers. Fourth, I had the transcription company send me a signed confidentiality statement (Appendix G). Last, I respected the time I requested from my participants and focused on keeping all relationships respectful and positive.

Summary

In Chapter Three, I explained the methods used to investigate LRDP persistence of male K-12 school administrators who served in the roles of husbands and fathers by using a
transcendental phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas’ transcendental phenomenology was chosen because it allowed me, as the researcher, to epoche my own experiences so the voices of these men could be heard while minimizing researcher bias. While doctoral persistence had been studied with different groups (Castro et al., 2011; Gomez, 2013; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2015; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Bade, 2014; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, Swezey, & Wicks, 2014; Spaulding, & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2016; Spaulding, Rockinson-Szapkiw, & Williams, 2016; Torres & Solberg, 2000), the gap remained for a study on the experiences of husbands and fathers serving as male K-12 school administrators while persisting to doctoral completion in a limited residency program.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the unique experiences of husbands and fathers who completed their limited residency doctoral program (LRDP) while serving in the role of a K-12 lead school administrator. The purpose of Chapter Four is to present the results of the study and answer the two research questions which provide the organization of this chapter.

1. What are the experiences of males who persisted to completion in their limited residency doctoral programs, while serving as husbands, fathers, and lead administrators of a K-12 school or district?

2. How do males, who are husbands, fathers and lead administrators in a K-12 school district, persist to complete their limited residency doctoral program?

The study involved 13 husbands and fathers who persisted in their LRDP while functioning as school leaders. The phenomenology began with a survey based on the Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000), continued with an interview, and ended with a letter of advice written by the participant to a doctoral student who was just beginning his LRDP journey. The triangulation of the survey, interview, and letter may be viewed as corroborating evidence for the credibility of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As posited by Creswell (2013), “corroborating evidence from different sources shed light on a theme or perspective” (p. 251).

The remainder of this chapter specifically focuses on answering the research questions above. The first research question is answered by offering the themes found in the experiences and challenges of the 13 men who participated in the study. This component of the study
references what the participants experienced and specifically, the challenges and obstacles they faced (Moustakas, 1994). Research question two is answered with themes describing how the participants overcame their challenges in persisting to LRDP completion (Moustakas, 1994). A combination of the textural descriptions (what) and structural descriptions (how) suggests an over-all essence of the experience of men who persisted in their LRDP while serving as husbands, fathers, and school leaders (Moustakas, 1994).

**Individual Portraits**

This section presents the general portrait of each man who participated in the study. As noted previously, all the names of the participants are pseudonyms.

**Jesse**

Jesse is a 47 year old Caucasian father of three, married 21 years, finished his LRDP in 2009, has been in education for 22 years, and currently serves as leader in a private Christian school. Jesse’s educational career began at a university in the south where he double majored in chemistry and math with intentional aspirations of becoming a head of school and ultimately, a professor at the college level. While enrolled in the chemistry Ph.D. program at Stanford University, Jesse felt called by God to leave the Ph.D. program and begin teaching at the high school level. While teaching high school, Jesse earned his master’s degree in curriculum and instruction. Following his time as a teacher, he became a school counselor and then principal at a private Christian school and earned his doctoral degree at a private university offering a LRDP. Jesse has been a life-long student, and he enjoyed the process of earning his doctoral degree.

Through his survey and interview, Jesse expressed that it was difficult to find time to relax during his LRDP, and he worried that the stress of the LRDP would prevent him from fulfilling his family roles. However, he did not feel like he compromised in his role as a husband
and felt like he did not allow the dissertation to totally take him away from his children. Jesse did not perceive that the LRDP affected his work ethic as a school leader. He claimed that the sacrifices he made as a student were part of his normal life, and that he persisted through his LRDP while his children were quite young.

Overall, as measured on the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000), Jesse perceived himself to be under considerable stress from his lack of work-life-LRDP balance. According to the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist Jesse may have experienced a decrease in his productivity and may have suffered in his relationships, health, and long-term employment.

Chad

Chad is a 54 year old Native American father of two, married 23 years, finished his LRDP in 2013, has been in education for 22 years, and currently serves as leader in a public school. Chad defined himself as a spiritual leader and provider for his family. Chad’s father was a pastor which supports his focus on his faith which is dear to his heart. With his mother serving as a teacher and retiring as a principal, Chad had no aspirations to enter education. Although his teachers discouraged him due to his race, Chad used that discouragement into motivation. He stated,

Being a Native American, I was made to feel that I couldn’t do certain things. It was very hard growing up that way. Some teachers would say to me you can’t do mathematics and I just heard that thing on the inside of me saying yes, you can do it; yes you can do it. I wasn’t out to prove anything to anybody other than probably to prove it to myself.
In college, he majored in math and computer science initially. Once he arrived in the corporate world, he became financially successful. However, Chad found himself discouraged and unfulfilled in the field of informational technology. With the influence of his father, Chad began teaching at the local community college and fell in love with the art of teaching. With this newfound love for teaching, Chad returned to get two master’s degrees. In 2001, Chad had a child who was born with spinal bifida. This event pushed him out of the classroom and into the role of school administrator.

Through his survey and interview, Chad expressed that that he never allowed his quest for the dissertation to become the primary thing in his life. Although he communicated a desire for a better work-family-LRDP relationship, he felt that he maintained his relationships with his wife, his children, and his friends during his LRDP. Chad also perceived that he maintained his effectiveness as a school leader during his LRDP. Overall, through the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000) used in the initial survey, Chad perceived himself to be not entirely happy with his work-life-LRDP balance, but he felt he did not allow the situation of earning his LRDP to get out of balance.

Bob

Bob is a 37 year old Caucasian father of three, married 15 years, finished his LRDP in 2015, has been in education for 13 years, and currently serves as leader in a private Christian school. Bob’s story is different than the others in that he serves as a school leader and as a pastor in his local community. While working on his bachelor’s degree to be a pastor, Bob chose a minor in religious education. Following graduation, he was looking for work and applied at the Christian school down the road from his college to become a Bible teacher. That initial introduction to education led him to believe he was fulfilling God’s calling on his life. That
experience was the beginning of his journey. Later, the school offered him the job of principal. He only agreed to move to the job as a principal if they allowed him to continue teaching three sections of Bible. Bob earned his doctorate in ministry, but he was called to use his degree to work as a school leader.

Through his survey and interview, Jesse expressed that it was difficult to find time to relax during his LRDP, and he worried that the stress of the LRDP would allow him to fulfill his family roles. However, he did not feel like he compromised in his role as a husband and felt like he did not allow the dissertation to totally take him away from his children. Jesse did not perceive that the LRDP greatly affected his performance as a school leader. Overall, through the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000) used in the initial survey, Chad perceived himself to be to be not entirely happy with his work-life-LRDP balance, but he felt as if he balanced his responsibilities in an effective manner.

**Raymond**

Raymond is a 47 year old Caucasian father of 5, married 25 years, finished his LRDP in 2016, has been in education for 11 years, and currently serves as a leader in a private Christian school. Raymond views himself as the protector of his family, and he believed in homeschooling for many years. Raymond was the pastor of a church that served 3,000 people, but became burned out do to the rigors of running a church. Because Raymond was a homeschooling parent and a pastor, he began speaking at many homeschooling conferences. Determined and fascinated by education, he attended a private online university and earned his master’s degree in education which led him to a position with a Christian educational consulting company. While the experience grounded him in his knowledge of education, the travel that ensued with this position was difficult for him and his family. However, this experience ignited
a passion for education in his heart. Raymond felt called to the school affiliated with the church he once pastored, and he accepted the position as head of school at his former church. Raymond shared during his interview that he had a passion to help struggling Christian schools, and he was in the process of moving his family to a new state to take a new position as the head of struggling Christian school.

Through his survey and interview, Raymond expressed that it was difficult to relax and forget about his LRDP work. Yet, he did not worry about the stress of the LRDP nor was he concerned about his ability to fulfill his family role as a husband and father. In addition, he did not feel like he compromised in his role as husband or father. Additionally, Raymond did not perceive that the LRDP affected his performance as a school leader. In his interview, Raymond stated that his family unit was so tight that no adjustments or sacrifices were made to his work-family-LRDP balance. This matched his feedback on the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000) used in the initial survey and the text in his letter of advice. In the checklist, Raymond perceived that he set his own priorities in work-life-LRDP balance and made it work for him.

Todd

Todd is a 58 year old Caucasian father of two, married 30 years, finished his LRDP in 2008 from a private university, has been in education for 21 years, and currently serves as a superintendent for a public school district. Todd began his career in education when the athletic director position came open in his town. While he had no experience in education, his state waived the requirement for state certification due to a shortage of teachers and coaches. This was a dream job for Todd as he had a passion for young people and for coaching. In his effort to gain more credibility with the teachers in his school, he pursued an educational specialist degree
which he found beneficial. Shortly thereafter, Todd pursued his LRDP due to his love for education and for high school students. He was the principal in six different buildings in his district before he was hired to be the superintendent. While none of Todd’s positions were dependent upon having a doctorate, Todd still felt it was the right direction for him.

Through his survey and interview, Todd expressed the stress and challenges created by the LRDP, and he worried that the stress of the LRDP would allow him to fulfill his family roles. He felt as if he marginally compromised in his role as a husband. However, he felt like he did not allow the LRDP to totally take him away from his children. Todd did not perceive that the LRDP affected his work ethic as a school leader. Overall, as measured on the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000), Todd perceived himself to be under considerable stress from his lack of work-life-LRDP balance which could reduce his productivity and the ability to maintain effective relationships over time. The survey also expressed concern for his overall health, and long-term employment (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000).

Sam

Sam is a 41 year old Caucasian father of three, married 19 years, finished his LRDP in 2011, from a private university, has been in education for 19 years, and currently serves as a public school elementary school principal. Sam began his educational journey wanting to be a coach and physical education teacher. After showing great aptitude as a school leader and teacher for seven years, Sam was sought by the district to participate in a leadership fellows program where he earned his master’s degree and eventually his doctoral degree. While Sam had no interest in being anything more than a physical education teacher and coach, Sam’s wife encouraged him to participate to better support the family financially. Sam was the first to attend
college in his family which made his family very proud of him. In addition, Sam saw some qualified people in his district get passed over for jobs because they did not possess a doctoral degree. Sam was part of a large cohort program that focused on relationship building and accountability.

Through his survey and interview Sam expressed many challenges associated with the LRDP, and he worried that the stress of the LRDP would not allow him to fulfill his family roles. He felt as if the LRDP forced him to compromise in his role as a husband and felt like he neglected his children in the LRDP process. Todd did not perceive that the LRDP affected his responsibilities as a school leader. Overall, as measured on the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000), Todd perceived himself to be under considerable stress from his lack of work-life-LRDP balance.

Lou

Lou is a 38 year old Hawaiian/Pacific Islander father of three, married 11 years, finished his LRDP in 2017, has been in education for 13 years, and currently serves as a leader in a private Christian school. Lou attained his bachelor’s and master’s degrees on the mainland of Hawaii, and God opened the door for him to stay in Hawaii and work in a Christian school. Church is the most important thing in the life of Lou’s family. Lou had aspirations of becoming a musician and saw education as a fall back in case that did not work. It was his student teaching experience that hooked him to the field of education when he realized that education was more than teaching and more about building relationships and mentoring young people. Following his bachelor’s and master’s degrees, Lou began teaching music education at the college level, but he felt called to work on his doctorate and become an administrator. In addition, Lou stated he began to feel bored in his position as a teacher and looked for a new challenge.
Through his survey, interview, and letter of advice, Lou expressed the pain and anxiety the LRDP took on his family, and he worried that the stress of the LRDP would allow him to fulfill his family roles. He felt that his relationship with his wife marginally suffered as a result of the LRDP and that he neglected his wife and children at times. Lou did not perceive that the LRDP affected his responsibilities as a school leader. Overall, as measured on the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000), Lou perceived himself to be under considerable tension from his lack of work-life-LRDP balance.

Jack

Jack is a 50 year old Caucasian father of two, married 29 years, finished his LRDP in 2013, has been in education for 25 years, and currently serves as a headmaster in a private Christian school. Jack began his education by attaining a bachelor’s in family counseling, but shortly thereafter, decided to go to medical school. As Jack began medical school, he found a part-time position at a Christian school to support him in paying his bills. As he stated, “and that was it . . . that was 25 years ago.” Jack fell in love with Christian education and specifically Christian schools on the brink of closing. He has been instrumental in saving four Christian schools over his career. Jack earned his Ph.D. because he felt that it carried more credit than an Ed.D., but it took him nine years to complete his doctoral program.

Through his survey and interview, Jack expressed the difficulty in relaxing and prioritizing his time with the LRDP lording over him, but he communicated that his stress level was marginal. He minimally worried about the stress of the LRDP and he was not concerned about his ability to fulfill his family role as a husband and father. Additionally, Jack did not perceive that the LRDP affected his performance as a school leader. Through the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000) used in the initial
questionnaire, Jack perceived himself to be to be not entirely happy with his work-life-LRDP balance, but he felt he kept his responsibilities in the proper perspective.

Kim

Kim is a 46 year old Caucasian father of seven, married 24 years, finished his LRDP in 2017, has been in education for 24 years, and currently serves as a leader in a private Christian school. Kim is a very soft spoken and humble man, and values family and faith as the two pillars in his life. Kim felt called to education in high school. His mother was a Sunday school teacher, and he received his introduction by watching and helping her on Sundays. He enjoyed helping teachers in elementary grades while in high school. He posited, “I just felt connecting with kids is something God had gifted me in.” Kim went to college and majored in elementary education. Following college, he came to the school he currently leads. He has only been at one school for his educational career. Kim served as a teacher for 13 years and has now served in administration for 11 years.

Kim perceived he gave up very little to persist to doctoral success although he did emphasize a need for addition communication with his spouse as he balanced the LRDP with other aspects of his life. He posited in his letter of advice, “Continued communication with your family concerning weeks with higher workloads is beneficial.” In his interview, Kim stated that his family unit was so supportive that no adjustments or sacrifices were made to his work-family-LRDP balance. This matched his feedback on the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000) used in the initial survey and the text in his letter of advice. In the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000) checklist, Kim perceived that he set his own priorities in his work-life-LRDP balance and was successful maintaining his priorities through the program.
Abe

Abe is a 47 year old Caucasian father of three, married 23 years, finished his LRDP in 2014, has been in education for 23 years, and currently serves as a leader in the public school system. He has served in numerous roles in the public school system. Abe determined in college that he wanted to be a teacher; he discovered he had a love for science and a love for students. He stated, “Students just don’t have voice, and they don’t have a family nucleus like we have, so they need someone.” Abe was a teacher for 12 years and has been an administrator for 11 years.

While he did his best not to sacrifice, Abe felt like adjustments had to be made during his LRDP. He would stay at the office late or come to the office early to work on his LRDP. In his letter of advice, Abe keyed on the topics of planning and preparation to complete one’s LRDP. He found it hard to remove himself from the doctoral process. He posited, “When you have any type of free time, your mind’s on that process.” Abe decisively communicated that he was under considerable stress from his lack of work-life-LRDP balance through the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000) used in the initial survey. He felt he could not relax, worried about the work-family-LRDP stressors, and marginally neglected his relationship with his wife and children. Abe even believed that his performance at work marginally suffered due to his LRDP. Over time, the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist reported that Abe’s productivity may have suffered along with his relationships, health, and long-term employment.

Jimmy

Jimmy is a 43 year old Caucasian father of three, married 21 years, finished his LRDP in 2012, has been in education for 19 years, and currently serves as a head of school in private
Christian setting. He was a principal for 16 years and has been a head of school for two years. Jimmy is a type-A personality and for as long as Jimmy could remember, he wanted to have a doctoral degree. He posited, “I remember being in grade school, middle school, high school, saying that I wanted to it because I wanted to know as much as anyone. When I ultimately landed in education, I wasn’t going to be satisfied without it.”

Jimmy perceived that he made no adjustments to his life as a father or husband during his LRDP. However, his employer allowed him an eight week sabbatical to finish his dissertation. Through his interview and, Jimmy expressed that the LRDP was a difficult and demanding experience. Yet, he did not worry about the stress of the LRDP nor was he concerned about his ability to fulfill his family role as a husband and father. In addition, he did not feel like he compromised in his role as husband or father in the least. Additionally, Jimmy did not perceive that the LRDP affected his performance as a school leader. In the modified Daniels and McCarrather checklist (2000), Jimmy perceived that he set his own priorities in work-life-LRDP balance, making it work for him.

Kyle

Kyle is a 58 year old Caucasian father of four, married 38 years, finished his LRDP in 2015, has been in education for 35 years, and currently serves as a leader in a private Christian setting. He began his career as an elementary school teacher and worked his way into the field of educational administration. Over his 35 years in education, he has served in nearly every administrative position in five different communities.

Kyle decisively perceived himself to be under considerable stress from his lack of work-life-LRDP balance through the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarrather, 2000) used in the initial questionnaire. First, he perceived that the doctoral work
was hard to forget thus making it hard to relax. Kyle worried about the work-family-LRDP stressors, and believed he had no choice but to neglect his relationship with his wife and children at times. Kyle even believed that his performance at work marginally suffered due to his LRDP. Overall, as measured on the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000), Kyle perceived himself to be under considerable stress from his lack of work-life-LRDP balance. This stress may have affected his relationships, health, and long term employment.

Remy

Remy is a 46 year old Caucasian father of two, married 18 years, finished his LRDP in 2017, has been in education for 23 years, and currently serves as a leader in the public school setting. Remy felt his calling to education while in college. He posited, “It was really the only thing I could think of for me that made sense, seemed to fit my personality.” Remy began his career as an elementary special education teacher, moved to middle school English, and then to become an administrator in the same school. Remy was a teacher for 16 years and has been in administration for seven years.

Remy freely admitted that the road to the doctoral degree was hard and required sacrifice to his work-family balance. He reflected, “What I remember doing was Thanksgiving break, the entire family is at home, and I really did not want to go and lock myself into a room and be invisible to my kids.” Remy perceived himself to be under considerable stress from his lack of work-life-LRDP balance through the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000) used in the initial survey. He felt as if he could not relax, worried about his stress levels, felt like he marginally neglected his wife and children, and overtly perceived his job performance job suffered. As indicated by the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life
Checklist (2000), Todd reported that he was under considerable stress and the areas of his life that were important to him may have been out of balance.

**Framework**

The theoretical framework guiding this study integrated two theoretical models: Tinto’s (1975, 1993, 2006) student integration theory (SIT) and Hobfoll’s (1989) conservation of resources (COR) model. Tinto’s (1975) SIT concentrates on the relationship between the institution and the student in his or her effort to persist. Tinto’s (1975) SIT explains the “processes of interaction between the individuals and the institution that lead differing individuals to drop out from institutions of higher education, and that also distinguishes between those processes that result in definably different forms of dropout behavior” (p. 90).

Coupled with the SIT (1975), Hobfoll’s (1989) COR model was used as the lens for examining work/family/academic balance in this study. Hobfoll (1989) posited, “This resource-oriented model is based on the supposition that people strive to retain, protect, and build resources and that what is threatening to them is the potential or actual loss of these valued resources” (p. 513). The COR model inherently addresses what individuals do when confronted with stress and when not confronted with stress (Hobfoll, 1989).

SIT (Tinto, 1975) and COR (Hobfoll, 1989) provided necessary frameworks to examine the persistence and perceived work/family/academic balance of husbands and fathers completing LRDPs while serving as lead administrators. Grit is “the ability to continually overcome obstacles within one’s life path. This is often associated with the idea of being able to pursue a goal and achieve it” (Cross, 2015, p. 5). In addition to SIT and COR, the concept of grit served as a fitting framework to describe and organize the study’s findings given its emphasis on persistence (Research Question Two) in the face of adversity (Research Question One). While
grit quickly surfaced as the most salient characteristic associated with the participants’ persistence, most instrumental in their ability to earn their doctorate was the support of their spouse. As described in the findings below, the essence of the phenomenon for this study was the dynamic support of the spouse, who gave the LRDP student, husband, father, and school leader the space needed to exercise his internal grit to complete the LRDP.

**Results of Research Question One**

Research question one asked, “What are the experiences of males who persisted to completion in their limited residency doctoral programs, while serving as husbands, fathers, and lead administrators of a K-12 school or district?” Jack detailed in his letter of advice, “You will not be able to keep life from happening during the course of your program.” The experiences of the participants centered around three themes: (a) personal challenges, (b) professional challenges, and (c) institutional challenges.

**Personal Challenges**

Personal challenges included health issues, death, financial challenges, and additions to their families through births, adoptions, or fostering. While school societies may view male school leaders as unshakable and tough, this perception does not exclude them from difficulties and trials (Bass, 1985; Klatt 2014). Ultimately, the 13 men in this study were not exempt from the personal challenges and obstacles of life during their LRDP. This was explained through the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000), the interview, and the letter of advice.

**Relationship with spouse and family.** Due to the strength of the marriages these men possessed, the participants made the relationship with their spouse and family a priority as discussed in their interviews and letters of advice. The men in the interviews and in the letters of
advice continually pointed to the supportive relationship they had with their wife. However, this supportive relationship did not always mean that they did not feel tension in their relationship with their family. As posited by Tim, “They were fully supportive, but that doesn’t mean there wasn’t any tension or stress during the time.” This tension was also identified in the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist created by Daniels and McCarraher (2000). Upon being asked to respond to the following: “Your relationship with your partner suffered because of the pressure/time commitment/responsibilities of your work and your commitment to completing your LRDP,” nine of the 13 participants answered that this was sometimes an issue, and four stated that they disagreed with the statement. Additionally, when the survey stated, “Your family missed out on your input, either because you did not see them enough or because you were too tired,” 11 of the 13 participants agreed with that statement. Lastly, when the participants were asked whether they felt like they neglected their partner and/or their children because of their LRDP, the answer was divided with three saying they agreed, five saying they sometimes agreed, and five stating that they disagreed. The participants all attempted to make family a priority, but a majority felt some tension at some point in fulfilling their responsibilities to their family.

**Personal health issues.** Three participants had to overcome personal health issues caused by the stress of enrollment in the LRDP. Stress is a major factor affecting people lives and physical health (Hobfoll & Hobfoll, 1994). Due to the stress of his LRDP and life challenges, Remy shared in his interview that he developed stomach issues and ultimately, diverticulitis, from the stress he felt from the LRDP. This forced him to take time off from work and from his LRDP. Jesse began having migraine headaches that he had never had before due to the long hours he was spending on doctorate. He posited, “About half way through my doctoral
program, I started developing migraines. I was getting so little sleep because I still had my work as well. That just physically beat me up. I would just go back to God and say to God, ‘what is going on here?’”  Kyle experienced vision issues due to his prolonged computer work on his LRDP. He posited in his interview,

> There were times when I was researching so much and reading so much on the computer that I was not able to read. I mean, I had no acuity in my vision because I’d been reading much. My eyes were so exhausted, so I had to take about a week off just to let my eyes sort of heal.

The modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000) supported the idea that the participants were concerned about their health. When the survey stated, “You worried about the effect of work stress, the stress caused from the LRDP, and the stress of fulfilling your family roles, on your health,” ten of the 13 selected that they at least sometimes agreed with the statement.

**Health issues of family members.** While three of the participants experienced personal health issues during the LRDP, two other participants were forced to manage the health of family members during their LRDP. During his LRDP, Remy’s mother suffered an unexpected heart attack and was in the hospital for a long while. Shortly thereafter, she fell and broke her hip. This landed his mother in the hospital again and put great stress on Remy’s life. He summed it up in his interview, “Just a lot of life happening.”

Jack was a participant who dealt with more adversity than any other. Having just moved to a new school, it was discovered that Jack’s wife had neuroendocrine cancer part way through his LRDP. As explained by Jack in his interview, “The nature of her cancer, the kind that it is, it really limited her activity.” Following this diagnoses, Jack took on all the roles in his family to
include becoming his wife’s primary care giver. He stated in his interview: “I sort of took on all the responsibilities of cooking and cleaning and the taking care of the home. Things that we normally divide up between us, I ended up doing all of it. So my role in the home is I’m the sole income. I normally take care of the home and take care of my wife. I’m very much a family care giver.” In addition to his wife’s cancer, Jack’s college aged son developed the H1N1 flu virus during his LRDP. His son was forced to move back into the home where Jack took care of him and his wife. His son was forced to withdraw from his classes for the semester while he healed. Jack went on to surmise in his letter of advice, “You will not be able to keep life from happening during the course of your program. You will have experiences.”

**Death of loved ones.** The death of loved ones may be the most traumatic experience in one’s life. Dealing with the death of someone close was something three of the participants needed to cope with through the LRDP experience. As Remy celebrated the life of his new baby, his father was diagnosed with cancer and passed away 13 months later. His father’s death, coupled with a job change, and the birth of a child led Remy to state in his interview, “So there’s a period of time there when I don’t even feel like I could do anything in terms of my doctorate.” Raymond also contended with the death of a family member during his LRDP. One year after Raymond began his doctorate, his father in law died tragically in a tractor accident. Raymond posited in his interview, “I seriously considered whether I was going to be able to continue.” Jesse was forced to deal with the death of students during his LRDP. This was overly traumatic for Jesse and led him take a leave of absence from the program. He recalled in his interview,

> We had two very recent alumni who had just graduated the previous year. They were popular students. They were involved in a car accident and were both killed. That was just an emotionally gut-wrenching thing to go through. I had stuff going on
simultaneously, and I had to withdraw from the class and take a hiatus for a couple months and from the program, because I just had too much going on. That was a rough spot, definitely. You know, one month because three, becomes six, becomes 12. I had to make a conscience decision that I’m going to start things up again.

Financial stress. There were financial challenges for six of the participants with two of the participants forced to take out loans to cover their LRDP expenses. As stated by Chad in his interview, “I’ve got loans. Of course, I am paying all those back now.” Bob posited in his letter of advice, “Get ready for sacrifices of time and money to get where you want to go.” Sam also faced adversity with his finances. He posited in his interview, “We budgeted. This is how much and this is three years, and we’re starting to realize if I go another semester, that’s another this many thousand dollars. It was a stressor.” Sam and his wife determined a long term financial plan to complete the LRDP, but they knew they would have to sacrifice. He affirmed in his interview, “You know, there were some things that didn’t happen, some vacations, and some different things as a sacrifice. We just really kept the end in mind. It was a stressor.” Lou also found challenges with the financial aspect of the LRDP: “It was a really big stressor. My wife and I invested four years to complete the degree. I ended up taking out loans the first two years. It’s really hard to tell our wife that we’re going to have to spend another $2,000.” Lou mentioned the financial obstacle in his letter of advice, “Your spouse needs to understand that budgets and time need to be negotiated. Many doctorates take longer than originally expected and this creates added financial stress.” Bob would ask the following question to his wife before he signed up for his classes to make sure she was in agreement with the financial sacrifice the family was making, “If I sign up for these two extra summer classes is that going to be okay? That means our vacation is going to be a two day weekend instead of a full week. Is that okay?”
Of all the participants, Raymond may have faced the greatest financial stress. Following his father in law’s unexpected death in a tractor accident, Raymond became the executor of his father in law’s estate and was faced with a massive judgment from the IRS for millions of dollars on the estate. Raymond was forced to take the lead in the management of the estate and worked daily with an IRS attorney to determine an outcome. This stopped any momentum Raymond had with his LRDP.

**Adding a member to the family.** A majority of the participants had additions to their family during their LRDP. Jesse started his LRDP one month after his second daughter was born, and he added a third daughter in the middle of his program. Remy’s wife, shortly after Remy’s job change and a family move, gave birth to a daughter. Remy posited in his interview, “There’s the whole challenge of trying to take care for a baby all the way up to everything that might entail with trying to be a parent.” Ultimately, Remy’s new baby had severe health issues and nearly died. This was traumatic for his family and halted him in progressing on his LRDP.

Kim, who had seven kids in all, had his youngest child within the first six months of his LRDP. The child was born early and had serious health problems. His wife stayed in the hospital for months as the child recovered. Kim posited in his interview, “So, I was basically a single parent with six kids, and it was my oldest son’s senior year.” Kim was also transferring to a new school to continue his LRDP program during this time which made the situation an even greater obstacle. Although Kim viewed his situation as one that he expected others to work through, he posited in his interview, “That was probably the most challenging time. “

Chad also experienced a challenge in the birth of his son during his LRDP. At the onset of his program, his wife gave birth to his son who had spina bifida. Chad had no idea how hard it was going to be to have a child with special needs and posited in his interview, “It [the LRDP]
was put on the back burner.” Like Remy and Chad, Jimmy and his wife faced incredible adversity through the birth of their son. During his LRDP, Jimmy’s son was born with Treacher Collins Syndrome. It required ten major surgeries over his first three years of life. His son required many plastic surgeries and spent the majority of a year in intensive care. Additionally, during these surgeries, Jimmy felt led to adopt which added more stress to his LRDP experience. As posited by Jimmy in his interview, “The Lord led us to adopt a five year old boy who was the product of a mother who used meth during her pregnancy.” With all the dynamics of Jimmy’s family to include his quest to earn his LRDP, Jimmy and his wife decided to attend regular sessions with a Christian counselor to make sure they were growing together.

Bob fostered children and ultimately, adopted, during his LRDP. While they had no children when he began his LRDP, he found himself with two children in one month at the beginning of his doctoral program. He posited in his interview, “On July the first, we had no kids. By the time August the first had gotten there, we had a six week old and an eighteen month old. We just jumped in with all four feet.” Ultimately, Bob and his wife worked through the process with the Department of Human Services and adopted the children all while Bob worked late into the evenings on his doctoral program.

Professional Challenges

Many of the candidates wrestled with professional obstacles as they worked through their LRDP. Work stress was an issue that was addressed on the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000), during the interview, and in the letter of advice. While many of these men certainly had professional challenges, the men of this study did not allow those challenges to keep them from persisting; with the support of their wives, they simply grinded through their issues while leading their schools.
**Work related stress.** In addition to his father in law’s tragic death and financial stress that ensued, Raymond experienced incredible stress in his workplace. During the dissertation of his LRDP, several of his school’s faculty members created their own union in an attempt to get better pay which created a school crisis. In the midst of that strike, his school board president resigned over a different offense, and Raymond found himself without the support he needed. Raymond explained in his interview and letter of advice,

> I just thought I was going to die. I just didn’t think it was going to work. I really struggled to maintain focus. I had very little emotional reserves to commit. I had to divert all my emotional energy to the school. While writing my proposal, I experienced a tremendous trial at work, which set me back about four months in my dissertation work. I had to give an enormous amount of emotional and spiritual energy to walking through that crisis, and it was very difficult to maintain momentum in my research and writing. I would imagine that all doctoral students who are also heads of school will face similar challenges. By grace and grit I was able to push through to a successful proposal defense.

In addition, work related stress was a primary topic on four questions of the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000). The first statement on the checklist was “Because your job demanded it, you usually worked long hours.” All 13 of the participants selected that they at least sometimes agreed with that statement. The second question relating to work related stress used on the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist created by Daniels and McCarraher (2000) asked the question, “You would have liked to reduce your working hours and stress levels but felt you had no control over this situation?” In response, 11 of the 13 participants answered that they agreed or sometimes agreed with that
statement. The third question relating to work related stress used on the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist created by Daniels and McCarraher (2000) asked the question whether the participant felt like he neglected his responsibilities at work. To this question, only Rodney, who dealt with more personal issues than any other candidate, stated that he did feel that he neglected his job as a school leader during the LRDP. Lastly, the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist created by Daniels and McCarraher (2000) asked the question, “Relaxing and forgetting about work issues was hard to do?” To this question, 12 of the 13 participants answered that they agreed or sometimes agreed. The men of this study were type-A high achieving leaders. Because of their desire to excel in their identity as a school leader, stress was a natural result. The LRDP compounded this stress.

**Job changes.** A change in school leadership was a constant theme of the participants in this study. Remy accepted a new school leadership position while working on his doctorate. This new position put him in the same school his wife worked in and created an issue for his oldest daughter who had to switch schools. The move of his daughter from a school she loved to a new school was “in and of itself a transition.” In addition, they moved their household during the course of the LRDP. Jesse also experienced a job change during his LRDP. When his second daughter was born and he started his LRDP his district moved him to the position of principal, which he did not want. He explained in his interview, “I started the doctorate program when I was officially a counselor and got demoted to principal during the course of the doctorate.” Kyle and Jack experienced the most dramatic job change as they found themselves out of work during their LRDP. Kyle posited in his interview, “They brought in the new head of school, and the first thing they did was they let all of the current administrators go.” Like Kyle, Jack explained, “Yes, there were challenges. Life is challenging. Going through two job
changes during the time was a challenge. During the time when the housing market collapsed, the school went from 900 to 500 students. Completely out of the blue, my job as the high and middle school principal was eliminated, and I was done in three weeks. Three weeks later, we unloaded our moving truck in the place where we lived for the next six years.”

**Institutional Challenges**

Coupled with personal stress and work stress, many candidates navigated obstacles created by their academic the institution. This included issues in the dissertation phase, problems with the chair of their committee, and stress caused from timelines created by their institution. In many cases, the men of this study were dealing with more than one of issue at a time.

**Dissertation challenges.** The dissertation was unequivocally the most difficult part of the doctoral journey. Remy posited in his interview what was implied by most of the participants, “Writing the dissertation was a whole different beast. That was when I felt like man, this is hard to balance.” Raymond had to manage the chaos of trying to recruit young adults for his dissertation. Inevitably, this delayed his proposal defense and undeniably made the process more difficult. As reflected on by Raymond in his interview, “These millennials had to commit to me and it was hard to nail all of them down. It took me several months to really perfect my strategy for how to nail them down and get them committed.” Raymond also struggled mightily with his research design. He confirmed in his letter of advice, “Many times, I thought I had been way too over-ambitious in choosing such a complicated research design. I would have to spend hours and hours just thinking and journaling to make sense of the mountain of data I had collected and analyzed.”

While Abe found the coursework “simple,” he experienced great difficulty in the outset of his dissertation as his chair changed his strategy and topic. He stated in his interview, “That
was a tough week. I knew what I wanted to do, but they changed me 15 times during that week.” Following the difficulty of changing his study completely, Abe found his data collection stressful while he attempted to maintain his roles as a school leader, husband, and father. He declared, “I did a lot of site interviews because I was doing professional learning communities. It about killed me.” Lou also found his dissertation process challenging due to a late topic change. He posited in his interview and letter of advice, “I wondered maybe it would be best if I just stopped here because I don’t know if this is every going to get done.”

Jesse may have faced the greatest obstacle when his dissertation was denied one week before his final defense by the Dean of the program. Jesse explained in his interview,

He would not let me move on to defense. I talked to him to help him understand; he could not get off his misread. He just said, ‘this guy doesn’t know how to conduct research as well as surveys.’ So, he said go back and redo all this research. I remember having the grief I was feeling was just like somebody close to me had died. I just found out somebody close to me had cancer. I rewrote about two-thirds to three fourths of my dissertation to change the entire focus of it. That was hard. That was very hard.

This feeling of anxiety due to the dissertation was also supported by one question on the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000). The participants were asked whether “Relaxing and forgetting about your doctoral work was hard to do.” None of the candidates disagreed with that statement. Unequivocally, the LRDP program and the dissertation phase specifically was a challenging and difficult endeavor for these men.

**Chair and committee challenges.** As a LRDP student works through his dissertation, the relationship with the dissertation committee is of utmost importance for completion. Chad and Sam were two participants who suffered through challenges with their chair during their
LRDP. However, in the experience of Chad and Sam, their struggle ensued within their LDRP. Chad suffered due to the chair of his dissertation committee being diagnosed with cancer, and Chad’s unwillingness to change to another chair. He posited in his interview, “I did not want another chair. I waited for like a year, and I didn’t do anything. I knew that she [the chair] would come around, things would get better, and we’d get moving again.” In addition, Chad had the struggle of a late change recommendation by his research consultant which forced him to delay his completion which “caused him the biggest stress.” His research consultant asked him to slightly change his research questions. As expressed by Chad in his interview, “My dissertation is almost 300 pages long. When you’re talking about moving every time I’d spoken about question one, which is now question two, and number two is now question 3, you can imagine. That really stressed me out.”

Sam also had an issue with the chair of his committee. Sam could not get his chair to communicate with him or return his revisions back to him in a timely manner. Sam posited in his interview, “I would hammer it [dissertation] out in two days, and try to get it back. But the policy is that they have two to three weeks to get all of your revisions back to you. He’s gotten other students he is chairing. It really helped me understand the importance of self-advocacy.”

This situation got to the point where Sam felt he was not going to make the graduation deadline. Ultimately, Sam contacted the president of the university who pushed the process through to completion. As posited by Sam in his letter of advice, “During my doctoral journey, there were so many obstacles and pitfalls to overcome to meet my goal. Writer’s block, slow revision turnarounds, personal commitments, and just life, all tried their hand at derailing my dream of degree completion.”
Bob also struggled with his chair and his dissertation process. Bob specified that six months into his dissertation, his chair left the school. His new chair did not like his topic or his research. He reflected in his interview, “I was pretty deep into it at that point, and I don’t think he felt comfortable. He was going to make me switch. That was a big challenge; I was trying to please a guy that wasn’t necessarily a fan of what I was doing.

**Timeline stressor.** With a few of the candidates, the timeline of the LRDP was an obstacle and a stress they had to overcome. Sam’s university heeded a three year graduation requirement. Sam stated in his interview, “So I started getting close to that three year mark, and I started to realize about six months out that there was no way I was going to be finished in that three year time.” For Abe, the timeline issue worked in an opposite manner. He had no timeline which he thought hurt his progress. He mentioned in his interview, “Yes. Having no completion date served as a stressor. So you didn’t have completion date where you said I have to be done by this date.” Lou continued the conversation but added the element of finances to the timeline issue: “I think not meeting the deadlines that I wanted to meet and having to pay out more money was a big stress in my life. When you are going through a doctorate, a lot of my colleagues, they are always asking, ‘When are you going to be done?’” Jack also viewed the timeline as an obstacle: “My goal was to finish in five years or less. So when it went longer than that, there were times that I struggled.” Like Abe, Raymond also found a lack of deadlines challenging, and posited in his interview, “Otherwise it was just not having deadlines, you know, being completely self-motivated and having to grow up so to speak, as a scholar.”

The issue of time was also an issue discovered on the survey. One of the questions asked regarding time was whether “You found it difficult to find time for hobbies, leisure activity, or to
maintain friendships and extended family relationships were difficult.” Of the 13 participants, 12 either agreed or sometimes agreed with the fact that time was an issue during the LRDP.

**Summary**

This section answered research question one by providing a textural description of what the participants experienced during their LRDP through the modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000), the personal interview, and the letter of advice. All 13 men experienced challenges and obstacles and ultimately, stress. However, most challenges and obstacles were expected and embraced by participants. As posited by Sam in his letter of advice, “You can expect road blocks. During my doctoral journey, there were so many obstacles and pitfalls to overcome in order to meet my goal.” Todd wrote in his letter of advice, “Simply put, you’ll be challenged to dig deeper, give more, and to support your position with research than in any other degree program. Don’t be afraid of this. Rather, embrace the challenge.” Additionally, as declared by Abe in his letter of advice, “Become the expert and be the expert.” Ultimately, regardless of their challenges and obstacles, each persisted to completion. The next section explains how they were able to overcome these obstacles.

**Results Research Question Two**

Research question two asked, “How do males who are husbands, fathers and lead administrators in a K-12 school district persist to completing their limited residency doctoral program?” Doctoral persistence is a multi-faceted phenomenon and the participants attributed their persistence to a range of factors including personal grit, feeling called, the prestige and advancement associated with earning the degree, the support of the committee chair, and the characteristics of the LRDP. However, the one overarching explanation for every participant’s
persistence was the support of his spouse. It was the support of the spouse that allowed the male participants to have the grit they needed to complete their program.

**Spousal Support**

While grit, by itself, was not derived from spousal support, the men of this study could not unleash their grit without the support of the spouse. Speaking about his wife, Jesse shared, “I would have walked on the program. Her support was a necessary condition to get me through.” The support of the spouse, or lack thereof, was the primary factor regarding the persistence of the male LRDP student.

The COR model inherently confronts how individuals respond when confronted with stress (Hobfoll, 1989). In this study on male persistence, through words of affirmation, taking up more responsibility within the family roles, and sheer love for their partner, it was the power of the spouse that created the space for the male to persist to completion. The spouses continually looked to operate as a unit, minimize the stress, and offset the loss generated by the LRDP. Moreover, the spouse inspired, motivated, communicated more specifically, and sacrificed for their spouse during the LRDP experience. Ultimately, just as Hobfoll’s (1989) COR model specifies, the spouse protected the husband so he could focus his resources on persisting in his doctorate while leading his school.

In all 13 of the participants, it was the support of the wife that was the greatest factor in their persistence. Jack stated simply, “She [my wife] would not let me quit!” The support given by the spouse created the space for the male student to be as gritty as needed to complete his program. As posited by Grande and Cropanzano (1999), the dynamic of a supportive family environment and specifically, a supportive marriage, may be considered a valued resource. The valued resource is essential when stress and unbalance occurs (Grandy & Copranzano, 1999).
This support came in a myriad of ways. As stated by Jack in his letter of advice, “It is absolutely vital that your spouse and family are going to be willing to walk through the process with you, to encourage you when you are discouraged, to challenge you when you are struggling, to lift you when you are down and want to quit.” Jesse expressed the same thought in his interview,

You need support to help you be successful. Challenges will come. Hurdles will arise.
You will get overwhelmed. You will get tired. Your strength will fail. You need people to help pick you up, to encourage you, to be a strength for you when strength is not enough. Your spouse is absolutely essential to be on your support team. She, more than any other person, will see your struggles and will be in a position to help you back up. If she says, ‘no,’ at your low point, you will likely not get back up and finish your journey in the program.”

The spouse as motivation. For a majority of the participants, the wife was the inspiration and motivation needed to persist. The wife took upon the role of keeping the family unit together as the husband worked through the program. First, it must be understood that most of the men in the study viewed their wives as the backbone of the family. Abe and Jesse referred to their wives as “the rock” for their families while Jack emphatically called his wife “the glue, the motivation, and when necessary, the whip cracker.” Sam stated in his interview, “She just really oversees our daily lives and makes sure we’re all in order. She takes care of the house needs, making sure our children are scheduled, going where we need to go, making sure I know where I need to go, to pick one up or take one here.”

In some cases, the participant gave the credit directly to their wives for their persistence. Raymond posited in his interview that his wife was absolutely the reason he was able to persist saying, “All the credit goes to her for being a cheerleader and a supporter. If I didn’t do this, she
would’ve made me do it.” The men mentioned that they had thoughts of quitting only to have their spouse remove any such thought. Sam explained, “It’s one of those things, she kind of smacks you and says, ‘come on, step out of it, you’ve done this, you’ve gone this far and no, you’re going to do this. We’re not going to just throw this away.” Ultimately, Sam gave the credit for his completion directly to his wife, stating, “I know without a doubt, however, that it was certainly the grace and blessings of God and the support of my wonderful wife that allowed me to accomplish this feat.” Jesse shared in this thought saying in his interview, “My wife encouraged me to keep going.” Raymond continued the conversation in his letter of advice saying, “They [wife and family] never once complained about the time I had to spend on my work, and occasionally my wife would even provide the motivation I needed to hit the books when I’d rather play games in the yard.”

In some cases, the wives used tough motivation strategies to encourage their husbands. Jimmy laughed as he mentioned the depths his wife went to motivate him saying, “She’s extremely supportive of me. In fact, she said, ‘you’re going to finish your doctorate before you die or I’m going to kill you.’” Jack also identified his wife as a motivator even though she was battling cancer at the time. Jack declared in his interview “support and encouragement from my wife to finish was everything. Telling me, you’ve taken enough of your family’s time. It’s time for you to get this done.” Bob agreed that his wife’s tough love style of motivation is what allowed him to succeed.

I finished because of her. If she had not been 1000% on board from my first class to my last one, I wouldn’t have finished. She was straight, shut up, go back to work, stop it. We agreed, we invested. She played hardball with me more than once. ‘You took some of our family’s money and
put it into this so you’re going follow through with it.’ Gave me the stewardship talk. I’m so thankful for it obviously.”

The participants clearly communicated the motivating power of the spouse to their beginning and persisting to completion. Kim posited in his interview, “The key to it all is having a wife and kids who are completely committed to me doing this. So, they always flexed if they needed to.” Jack’s wife, who battled cancer during his LRDP, was his inspiration for getting started. He posited in his interview, “I came home one day and my wife said, ‘I know you wanted to go on and get your doctorate degree.’ She’s the one that encouraged me to do it knowing that it was something I always wanted to do. So that’s why I started the program. That’s what started the process for me, a supportive wife.” Kyle was the only participate who mentioned that his wife hated the LRDP program. Yet, he was quick to mention that while she hated what he was going through, she was supportive. In Kyle’s interview, he explained. “I would say number one: If you’re married, you must feel like you have the support from your spouse. Even though mine did not really like it, she knew this was something that was important to me, and so she was willing to be able to support me. She never told me, ‘you have to quit.’ I think that is really important.” At the same time, in his letter of advice, Kyle mentioned the importance of supporting the wife also. “Make sure you carve out one night a week for a date night with your spouse. She will be a better supporter if she knows that you are all hers for a few hours each week.” Jimmy also mentioned this in his letter of advice saying, “I would also add that it’s extremely important to make time to spend with the bride of your youth, no matter how hectic life is.”

**Communication with the spouse.** The participants realized that communication with their spouse was a key component of success. Specifically, communication with the family was
key to the family supporting the LRDP work. Todd confirmed, “You’re not the only one impacted by taking on this additional workload. Your wife and children are involved and will be affected. Even the strongest marriages and families will experience additional stress and tension as you work through the program. Be aware and communicate with your wife and family.” Kim agreed with Todd in his letter of advice saying, “Open communication between you and your spouse and children is essential.” Raymond went on to mention that if there is not unity between the husband and wife with regards to pursuit of the LRDP, “that it would have been absolute misery.”

**The sacrifice of the spouse.** In the experience of nearly every candidate, it was stated that the wife accepted a greater responsibility with the family. As mentioned in the COR model (Hobfoll, 1987), the specific sacrifices made by the spouse were what conserved the family resources to give the space needed for the participants to unleash their grit and push to doctoral completion. In some cases, the wife was forced to act as a single parent. She assumed many of the roles of her husband to keep the family moving forward. As posited by Todd in his interview, “So she really filled a lot of dual roles there for the time I was in school. I think I spent a lot of time reassuring her. ‘This won’t last forever.’” Remy stated implicitly in his interview that his wife understood and accepted the sacrifice in order for him to attain his doctorate. He stated:

> There was a lot more responsibility on her shoulders. I think there were times that she had to be the natural born leader of the family but then at the same time, she was very accommodating, very understanding. I never felt at any time that she resented me for doing my doctorate.
When asked specifically about his wife’s sacrifice, Todd focused his comments on time. He explained in his interview, “But to narrow it down to one item, it was time. Time that she would have had to spend with me. Time that she would have had to spend for herself. Time is the thing that she had to sacrifice the most.” Kim supported Todd’s comments in his interview saying, “Probably just time. Giving me time to do what I needed to do. Giving me the freedom to do that, so she would have to adjust what she’s taking care of responsibility-wise at home.” In Kim’s case, with seven children in his family, his wife was so humble and supportive he could not identify where she sacrificed. Kim posited in his interview, “She made adjustments. I probably didn’t have to make as many because my wife made some and probably most of them without me knowing or telling me.” Kim’s statement aligns specifically with COR (1987) in that his wife protected his time and took on his responsibilities so he had the space he needed to succeed. Bob stated in his interview that his wife understood that she was going to have to take on more responsibility. “She took on a lot more. She gladly did it. She told me she would and she did.” It was the wife who was compassionate to her husband when he needed that and at times, she was compassionate to the financial struggles caused by the LRDP. Lou posited,

My wife and I had invested four years to complete the degree. We ended up taking out loans for the first two years. I just saw the weeks adding up and there’s no way I’m going to finish this. It’s really hard to tell your wife that we’re going to have to spend another $2,000. She was really understanding. She could’ve been pretty upset. However, in most cases the wife not only supported her husband in his goal of completion, but the wife understood and sacrificed. As posited by Sam in his interview, “I am sure there were times that I came home, and I might have been short or I just wanted to go to bed because I knew I was about to have to get back up and work for three hours in the middle of the night on the
But, I think this all goes back to the character of my wife that she understood.” Todd echoed these sentiments in his interview saying, “If your family isn’t 100% supportive that can cause some friction. And, I’m very, very fortunate that my wife and my kids totally understood, they totally supported me. When I had to miss things, I had to miss. They understood.” Like so many of the participants, Jesse cited his strong marriage as a reason his wife was willing to sacrifice. He explained, “I’m lucky. We have a very strong marriage. When I say how much I appreciated what she did, her sacrifice, her commitment, it really is an understatement of how much I appreciate it because I can’t put it in words.”

**Spousal integration.** Many participants recognized that their wives were academically and socially integrated to the process. Like the husbands, the wives lined up with Tinto’s SIT (1975). In many cases, the wives operated as a unit with their husbands and felt as if they were also earning a LRDP. While grateful for his wife’s sacrifice, Chad posited in his interview that his wife shared in his accomplishment: “I would say that she’s proud of it. She shares in that. She’s supportive and it wouldn’t have been possible without her.” In the case of Raymond, his wife was so supportive that she would help her husband in the actual presentation of his assignments and papers. In his interview Raymond gave, “all credit to her being so genuine about it and she would ask me what I am learning. She would let me read my papers to her in bed at night, before we go off to sleep, and tell me what she thinks. I mean, who does that?” Remy stated that his wife was also one he counted on for help with his assignments. “My wife would sit down and read and she would sometimes dictate. I remember there was one Saturday she was reading chapter four. She’s like, ‘All right, so I’ve read half of it, I’m going to take a nap and read the rest of it.’” Jimmy also posited in his interview regarding his wife’s support with his assignments, “And then the other thing she did was proofreading.”


**Spousal support was everything.** Ultimately, a number of the participants concluded that they simply would not have attempted or completed the LRDP program without the support of their wife. Raymond called the LRDP a “selfish pre-occupation” that was not possible without his wife’s support. Lou stated in his letter of advice not to even begin if the wife is not in support. He admonished, “Make sure your wife is on board with this decision. Your spouse needs to understand that budgets and time need to be negotiated.” Jesse may have been most emphatic about the support of his wife recognizing in his interview, “If she had pulled her support, or not been supportive, I would have walked on the program. Her support was a necessary condition to get me through.”

In the letter of advice written by each participant to a school leader who was just beginning the LRDP, every participant mentioned the support of the wife. Raymond specified, “My greatest cheerleaders are my wife and family.” Chad also made the support of the family and the wife the greatest emphasis in his letter of advice. “This process is going to require that the family is just as dedicated to you completing the process as you are. There must be complete buy-in by all parties. This conversation must be had before beginning the program.” Across all participants, the findings were clear regarding the support of the spouse: persisting would not have been possible without the support of the wife. The space the spouse provided for her husband allowed him to engage and channel his grit to persist in the face of life challenges. This grit was instrumental to the persistence of the participants and is the focus of the next section.

**Grit**

Because of the higher attrition rates for LRDPs and the nature of distance education programs, internal characteristics play an important role in success to the LRDP student (Cross, 2014). This ideal resonated throughout this study. Coupled with Tinto’s (1975) SIT and
Hobfoll’s (1989) COR, the theory of grit emerged as a fitting framework for the study. As defined by Duckworth et al. (2007), grit is the passion and persistence for long term goals. Cross (2014) further explained that “the concept of grit is rooted in the ideas of self-control and even more broadly conscientiousness” (p. 5). Conscientiousness describes a person’s aptitude for being organized, following through, and being self-reflective (Duckworth et al., 2007). In addition, the research revealed a link between higher levels of conscientiousness and higher levels of self-control (Cross, 2014). Furthermore, the concept of self-control and the idea of persistence have relatability (Cross, 2014).

While each participant persisted due to the support of the wife, this spousal support ultimately resulted in each man possessing the grit needed to finish the LRDP. Coupled with the support of the spouse, the grit of the individual LRDP participant was the most discussed topic with regards to persistence. Remy experienced incredible adversity throughout his entire program. Yet, Remy persisted. In the end, it was his personal grit that allowed him to finish. As posited by Remy in his interview,

I think that there is almost a sense of nothing less than this is acceptable. It’s all or nothing. It’s a go for the gold thing where if you were to look at the lives of the people you’re talking about, you probably would see that they have been persistent in many different areas. That internal locus of control where some people think that things happen to you and there are other people who think that the difference between successful people and non-successful people are the successful people just make it happen.

Jesse described a few elements of grit to include the concepts of enjoying the journey, embracing the journey, and embracing the frustrations and pain of the experience. Jesse stated in his letter
of advice, “Marvel at the boundaries that are expanding in your life, as you discover how much you are capable of doing.” Todd echoed Jesse’s sentiments in his letter of advice, “you’ll be challenged to dig deeper, give more, and to support your position with research than in other degree programs. Don’t be afraid of this. Rather, embrace the challenge. It will help you grow as a student and as a professional.” Abe emphasized to work to “become the expert and be the expert” in his letter of advice.

While all of the participants discussed the internal grit they displayed to finish the LRDP with words like determination, grind, perseverance, tenacity, self-discipline, courage, guts, and stick-to-it-iveness, Raymond used the word specifically, proclaiming in his interview, “Grace and grit are the two things that I really rely on, and individually I have a lot of grit.” Raymond concluded later in his interview that “being completely self-motivated” and “having to grow up as a scholar” was also a key to his persistence. Raymond indirectly mentioned the concept of grit in another way later in his interview saying, “It was a really rough season, but you know, it was like, there was no stopping me. I was getting it done no matter what.”

Sam also attributed grit to his persistence. When speaking about the number of peers in his cohort program who dropped out, Sam viewed this as motivation. He reflected on his self-talk in his interview, “It was a reality check, you know what this is. You’ve got to stick with this and make this or that’s what happens to you. But it was also a motivator. I would see that and say, ‘you know what, I’m not going to let this beat me. You know, I can do this,’ and yet it was a motivator.” Later, Sam simply stated, “You can’t stop now. And then the other thing is, I’ve already started this, and it’s just not going to beat me. I’m going to get it.” When asked directly in his interview what allowed him to persist, Sam frankly said, “I think it’s just guts. That’s just
really it. You’ve got to push through the trials because they’re going to be there in a lot of different ways. The ones that finish just sucked it up and that’s it.”

Abe also attributed his success to his goal commitment and work ethic. In his interview, he stated, “It’s your work ethic that is going to get it finished. Your team is there to help you, but this is on you.” Like Abe, a majority of the participants never questioned whether they would complete the LRDP. Abe posited, “I didn’t question finishing it. I knew I was. I knew I had to, so I didn’t question it.” Abe continued to come back to the concept that it was his gritty nature that allowed him to finish. He posited in the end of his interview,

I think it’s cutting time, meaning when you’re to that point, you either got it or you don’t have it. And some people may get to that point; they do all the coursework and they get to chapter one and two, or they get it approved, but they just don’t have the heart and the desire to get it. Some people do, some people don’t.

Sam, in his letter of advice summarized his thoughts in a similar way saying, “I was able to keep the faith and grind on.”

Remy, who stated that he came from a very humble background of a broken family and a lack of positive role models in his life, also pointed to his grit. He was the first to attend college in his family. He posited in his interview,

I had a need to pull myself out of poverty and out of a certain situation where people around me weren’t doing anything more than just working at the local mill. I don’t know, there was just something within me, this desire and there has always been this desire to do more. I have to go to the fullest extent possible before I feel like I’m satisfied.
Remy went on to state in his letter of advice, “I think it’s related to not as much behaviors as much as core values and characteristics and personality.”

In many cases, the participants talked about their heart or that the LRDP was a personal goal. Tom repeated this in his interview numerous times. “It was more of a personal goal. Again, it helped me professionally, but I just really wanted to be able to look in the mirror and know that I attained the terminal degree.” Near the end of his interview, Tom stated that he still chuckles at how often he said “I will finish this no matter what.” He reinforced this comment later saying in his interview, “My internal drive was such that I was simply not going to quit. I was not going to fail. I’m going to do this, and that’s all there is to it.”

Being a person who has grit includes the common bond of being self-disciplined. The participants were all very diligent about the organization of their schedules and made adjustments to work on their doctorate. Raymond stated in his letter of advice, “After several classes, I think I hit a good rhythm of life and was comfortable with the balance I achieved among work, family, and school.” Sam, like many of the participants referred to timelines and benchmarks in his interview. “Always have a plan for utilizing your time and have frequent checks to ensure that you are on pace to achieve your established timelines and benchmarks.”

Remy believed scheduling was the key. He stated in his letter of advice, “Set aside time each week to work on our coursework and/or your dissertation. Make this a part of your schedule so that you and your wife and kids know when to expect it, and so that it does not compete with daily routines.” Jack asked the rhetorical question in his letter of advice, “What’s your self-discipline like? What’s your organization like? Things that are necessary tools in being able to manage this, while life is going on. They would be the guys who finish things, who have a level of self-discipline and who know how to organize themselves.” Sam also suggested it was time
management that led to persistence saying, “You can expect to encounter some tough decisions in regards to prioritizing your commitments.”

The participants displayed their self-discipline by the way they organized their schedules to prioritize their family and their studies. They were acutely aware of the time their LRDP took from their families and demonstrated sensitivity to this by getting up early or studying late into the night to minimize the impact on family time. As posited by Sam in his interview, “I would be on the computer late at night. My wife’s over next to me and she’s asleep, so that’s good.”

However, as self-disciplined and sensitive these men were to minimize the impact on the family, a majority found themselves sacrificing family time at some point during the program. Lou stated, “My daughter remembers life before the doctorate when daddy had a lot more time. My middle son, all he’s ever known is daddy downstairs at his desk reading or writing, when I finally finished, for him, it was like, ‘wow, dad has a lot more time.’” Within the realm of their position as a school leader, every participant except Jimmy, stated that they did not sacrifice work time to pursue their LRDP. In fact, it may be perceived that these men were as committed to their work as they were to their own families. Only because it was demanded by his school board, Jimmy took a sabbatical to finish his LRDP. Otherwise, the participants echoed the sentiments of Sam who stated in his interview, “As an administrator, nothing ever gave on that. I didn’t work on it during the day. I didn’t take time off. So it all worked out that I could still be an effective administrator at the same time.” Abe stated, “I did not allow it to interfere with what I was doing as a leader of the school.” Sam stated in his letter of advice that he was intentional about his school administrator role: “I also made this choice as I did not want my educational pursuits to affect my full-time responsibilities as a school administrator.”
In this study on men who were working on their LRDP while serving in the capacity of head of school, husband, and father, it is evident that the concept of grit was key to their success. However, it must be understood that this grit was unleashed due to the space created by the spouse. This grit came from many different sources in the lives of these men to include their upbringing, their faith, and even the expectations of someone they loved. In essence, grit and self-discipline worked together to maximize a person’s chance for success. With support of the spouse guiding the grittiness of the participants, there were additional factors salient to the persistence of the participants which are outlined in the next sections.

**Christian Calling to Begin and Christian Faith to Persist**

With regard to persistence, every participant pointed to their faith as a reason for their persistence. It must be noted that all of the men in the study professed to be of the Christian faith, and because they valued their faith, it was a foundation for their LRDP and their life as a whole. Coupled with the support of his spouse and his grit, Sam posited in his letter of advice, “I know without a doubt that it was certainly the grace and blessings of God and the support of my wonderful wife that allowed me to accomplish this feat. Jimmy went as far to say that his faith and his church were one of the primary reasons he persisted. Jimmy stated in his interview, “It was the Lord and with his hands involved with our church family, our school family, and the Christian counselor.”

Many of the participants felt called through their faith to begin their LRDP and persist to doctoral completion. Bob stated clearly in his letter of advice, “If you feel called to it, embrace your experience for the glory of God. Understand that that big things attempted for the Lord require big sacrifices along the way.” Jimmy suggested in his letter of advice, “Spend a considerable amount of time discerning whether this is God’s calling on your life. The task at
hand is quite large and when it becomes difficult, the sense that God has called you to this education will be what sustains you.” Lou advised, “First, make sure that this ambitious goal is God’s will and not your will. Though God wants what is best for you, God’s best may not be earning another degree.” Lou also stated in his interview, “As long as we are in God’s will, no matter how hard the journey gets, God will carry us through.” Jesse wrote, “Ultimately, I was just praying about it [doctoral program]. Just really having a sense that God was indeed leading me to move into the doctorate. Ultimately, that sense is why I persevered through the doctorate.” Jack was firm in attributing his persistence to his faith “It would be the strength of the Lord. More than anything else, it would be God’s clear direction for my life. So I am grateful and give full recognition to him for allowing me to finish.” Jimmy went as far to say that he doubted he would have persisted without his faith. He encouraged in his letter of advice, “Be extremely intentional about committing time each and every day with the Lord. This will be what sustains throughout your course of study. And without it, it will be much more difficult if not impossible.” Lastly, Jimmy may have summed up best the idea that persistence is rooted in the faith of these men when he stated, “First and foremost, a committed believer who feels called to doing it [LRDP] is going to finish.”

Faith played out two ways for the participants. First, their faith called them to begin, and second, their faith allowed them to persist during difficult seasons of the LRDP. Jesse clearly stated in his interview when asked ultimately why he was able to persist in his LRDP journey, “Jesus Christ. Plain and simple. Nothing more nothing less.” Raymond stated in his letter of advice, “At the very beginning of my program, I made a conscience decision to make my scholarship a very spiritual matter. I invited God by his Holy Spirit into my studies, and I found that I developed a strong and real sense of partnership with him every step of the way, from
those first classes to my dissertation defense.” Lou claimed in his interview, “I really believe it was God’s provision that allowed me to finish it.” For Lou, his faith was a primary reason he persisted when dealing with adverse situations as he worked on his LRDP. He posited in his interview,

A lot of afternoons, I would just get real angry with myself that I wasn’t writing as much. I saw deadlines coming and going. After really praying and seeking God, I felt like God told me, ‘I want you to read 15 pages whether its research or a book, and I want you to write one page a day. I did that for about a month, and it got progressively easier and easier to where I was able to write multiple pages a day. In the dissertation process, there were a lot of days I was just angry. I was mad, and I poured my heart out to God and how angry I was that the process wasn’t as easy as it was during the course work.

Remy stated in his interview, “I saw it and still see it as there’s something that God has in store for me and for some reason it was important for Him for me to get this degree.” Remy explained that his LRDP was part of God’s plan for him. “I don’t know that I ever questioned it. I know that if I stopped and thought about it, there was certainly fear and anxiety over whether or not I was going to finish it . . . feeling this enormous sense of ‘Okay, this is God’s will. This is going to happen.’” Chad echoed Remy’s comments in his interview saying, “I had prayed about this thing before I started and God knew. I felt like my life was in His hand and it was his master plan in all this. I was okay with it.” Jesse, arguably the most vocal in the group regarding his faith, asserted, “There were definitely times where I was ready to say, I’m done. I was worn out. I beat my head against the wall. But I kept coming back to God saying ‘you led me into this, so God, I’m going to trust you to lead me through it.’” Bob saw prayer as a way to rely on God to persist to completion: “Lastly, pray. Pray early and often and seek the Lord. Don’t waste your
doctorate on lesser things.” Jesse encouraged others to use the LRDP as a chance to grow closer to God. He advised, “Most importantly of all, discover the incredible freedom that comes from discovering how God works to help you do something that is ultimately bigger than you can handle. When you realize that, you free God to do even bigger things in your life and to take you on to ever greater adventures.”

Three of the men in the study suffered from significant stress related symptoms due to the demands of the LRDP. Jesse, who began suffering from migraines during the LRDP, posited in his interview, “I was just physically beat up. I just had to go to God. Ultimately, the reason why I persisted was whenever I would hit these tough times, I would just go back to God and say to God, ‘what’s going on here?’ That’s where he kept reminding me, I got you into this, I will lead you through it.”

**Prestige and Advancement**

The prestige and advancement associated with earning a doctorate was an external persistence factor that was evident within the narratives of the thirteen participants. Hobfoll’s (1989) COR model applies to the desire for prestige and advancement. COR states that when one is confronted with stress, individuals are expected to minimize the stress per the model (Hobfoll, 1989). However, when not confronted with stress, the model predicts that the individual will strive to develop resource surpluses in order to offset the possibility of future loss (Hobfoll, 1989). The concept of advancement in resources, whether financial or position, led to the attainment of surpluses to offset the possibility of future loss.

The 13 men who participated in this study might be referred to as “type A” personalities. All of the men greatly cared for their career in a passionate way; each expressed an interest in doing their best and advancing in their career. While some discussed the financial gain
associated with having a doctorate, finances were by no means a motivation to persist. What
motivated them to persist was the idea of the doors that the doctorate would open for them in the
future. The focus was much more on the opportunity to serve and lead than financial gain.
However, it must be noted that positional advancement may be linked to greater financial
resources, but this was not how the men addressed the issue in the interviews or letters of advice.
In addition, none of the men stated that their current position required a doctoral degree. Yet, all
of them felt the doctoral degree gave them credibility which allowed them to be hired or to
advance their career. Todd best summarized the thoughts of the group when the issue of needing
a doctorate was discussed in his interview: “I believe that it [doctoral degree] helps get an
interview. The job was certainly not contingent, but I certainly do believe firmly that it opened
some doors and maybe got my resume in the ‘hey, we might consider this guy’ pile.” Also stated
in the interview with Jesse, “None [of the jobs] were officially dependent, but I have a strong
suspect that my doctoral degree was a significant influence in me getting them all. It’s given me
enormous credibility, when I brought them into the market place, being Dr. Jesse means a whole
lot more than being Mr. Jesse.”

The LRDP was a step participants felt necessary to advance in their career. Abe stated,
I’ve done a lot of different jobs. I’ve been an assistant superintendent, worked for the
state department, and have been a principal. Now this job here. I like moving up the
ladder. One on one, I knew that it would help me advance. I just thought it was
something I needed, a hurdle I needed to jump over. I just wanted to get it done because
I knew if I got it finished, I could jump to the next level.

Abe went as far as calling the doctoral degree a “union card.” He noted in his interview and
letter of advice, “So once you get that union card, you’ll be accepted into all the areas that a
people with a doctorate have.” A majority of the participants reflected on what they would gain professionally by having the doctorate and the prestige associated with being called doctor. Simply stated by Jesse and so many others, “It’s just automatic credibility I have.” Lou had aspirations of teaching at the college level and felt that the doctoral degree would allow him to accomplish that goal. For many of the participants, the doctorate was something they always wanted due to the respect and prestige that followed. Jimmy summed up this thought like so many others in his interview saying,

I always wanted to have a doctorate, as long as I can remember, before I even knew what it was going to be in. I remember being in grade school, high school, middle school, saying that I wanted to have it because I wanted to know as much as anybody. I didn’t even know at the time what it meant, but then fast forward again to education. When I ultimately landed in education, I wasn’t going to be satisfied without it. It became clear for me to have the impact and the seat that I wanted, I needed to have a doctorate. So that is why I did it.

Jack reflected in his interview, “When I have called somebody two or three times and I haven’t heard back, I will refer to myself as doctor.” Jesse complimented Jack’s comments regarding respect of the doctorate. “I have my doctoral diploma in view so that if I need to have one of ‘those kind’ of conversations, where I am sitting at my desk talking to somebody, they are going to see the diploma behind me when I do it. Just to have that as part of it.” Jack even went as far as to mention that he now receives preferential treatment because he is a doctor. He shared in his interview, “Now, when I go see him [medical doctor], he physically comes and gets me to take me into the examining room instead of a nurse, and in front of everybody in the waiting room he says, ‘Dr. Jack, you’re up.’” Sam witnessed the effect of the doctorate and advancement in his
district which motivated him to persist. “We had an assistant superintendent in our district who was going to have the opportunity to possibly be the superintendent in our district, and he did not have a terminal degree. And, that caused him not to be able to have that position, and he was the most qualified at that time. And right then, I just kind of decided, I did not want that to ever be a reason that I am not given a chance to be in a position that I may need to be in.”

Both Jimmy and Raymond summed up the prestige and global impact of persisting to the doctorate that was implied by so many. Jimmy stated in his letter of advice, “Education in America today is void of quality leaders and a doctoral program is the best way to contribute to that need.” Raymond posited, “If there is ever going to be any trans-local kind of maximum impact for me, I would need to have a doctorate. Certainly, there was some degree of external knowing that that would be an important credential.”

**Relationship with the Chair**

The relationship between the chair and the participant also played a significant role in persistence and related to Tinto’s (1975) SIT. Tinto (1975) related persistence based on the academic integration into the institution and the social relationships developed. As defined by Wao and Onwuegbuzie (2011), “social integration refers to the nature of interaction that students experience with peers and faculty as they engage in departmental activities” (p. 117). The committee chair provided the role of teacher, mentor, and in some cases, friend, which made their relationship more intimate thus leading to a greater opportunity for persistence (Tinto, 1975). As stated by Tinto (1975), “social integration should increase the likelihood that the person will remain in college” (p. 107). The relationship between the LRDP student and his committee chair mattered and played a role in the persistence of the 13 men in this study. In his letter of advice, Todd emphasized the importance of choosing the right chair and what that meant
in terms of persisting to completion. “One of the more important decisions you will make is the selection of your dissertation chair. Choose that person wisely. Remember that person is not going to put his or her name on your finished product unless they are comfortable with it.”

The support of the spouse and the support of the chair are related. Nearly every participant in some way mentioned his chair by name in fostering persistence. As stated by Todd in his interview, “The chair is not going to put his or her name on this thing unless it is truly representative of something they’re comfortable with.” With most participants, an obstacle presented itself during the dissertation phase of the program, and the support of the chair working with the LRDP candidate was key to persisting to success. Raymond struggled with his dissertation and continually attempted to push it back. It was not until Raymond’s chair courageously stepped in that he was able to finish. He posited in his interview, “Ultimately, I even tried to push my proposal off farther and he said, ‘Raymond, you just need to do it. You just need to make it happen’ because he was confident in me and he knew where I needed to be.” Raymond called his chair his “cheerleader” throughout the dissertation process and stated that his “experience in the dissertation phase was absolutely stellar because of the people that were there.” Abe loved the no-nonsense approach of his chair who pushed him to persist: “She gave me a lot of confidence. She took me aside one day and goes, you can do this. She did a great job of letting me grow and was not overbearing. So, she would check on me, but she left it up to me.”

Many of the participants referred to the honesty of their chairs and how that helped them persist. Lou stated in his interview, “He didn’t pull any punches. I felt like he was real honest. He would tell all of us in that class what was good about our research and what was bad. If you approached him, he’ll help you as much as possible.” Jesse was also grateful for the support of
his chair, describing him as “very helpful and encouraging, trying to push me forward. Making sure I was on track.” Jimmy called his chair “a rock” and also felt like she was a key to his persistence: “She was an encourager, a rock of strength. She knew when to love and encourage. I remember our direct conversations where she was just like, ‘Either get it done or quit wasting my time.’ That’s what I needed, but she was great at knowing, given what we were doing, what I was going through, when to play which card.” Jack, whose wife was battling cancer while he was working through his LRDP, also spoke to the attitude of his chair and the affect this had on him persisting to success. He stated in his interview regarding his chair,

When she interviewed me and we talked about family, one of the things that she said that stuck with me because we talked about my wife who had cancer and my kids and my family. She said, “Jack, one of the things that matters to us is that you’re coming into this program married, we want you to leave married to the same person.” Part of the reason it took me nine years, I went through some stuff with cancer. My chair, she actually put everything on hiatus for a year. More or less, she made me not do anything for a year to focus on taking care of my wife.

Todd also stated in his interview how important his chair was to his success when he stated, “If I was to get down about something, I would call her and say, ‘Hey, I’m struggling with this part. What do you think about this?’ Not only did she help me through the question I had but then would also spend a few extra minutes making sure that I was okay mentally. ‘Are you Okay? Are you doing well? We’ll get you through this. Don’t worry.’ My chair was very, very motivating.” Chad had anxiety the day of his dissertation defense, feared he could not do it, but his chair emotionally energized him to finish:
She started praying, and when she got through praying it was almost like chains had fallen off. I don’t know what happened. It was amazing. When I went into that room and started my defense, I didn’t even recognize myself. The words just came. It was beautiful.

Perhaps no participant was more emphatic about the support he received from his chair than Kyle,

The person who really, really supported me the most were my chair and my co-chair. Those were the two people that really gave me encouragement to finish, and told me how I was doing. They were two people that I relied on and they were the ones who kind of made me realize that I could get this done in the timeframe that I set.

**Characteristics of the LRDP**

A final but significant factor participants attributed to their persistence was the nature and characteristics of their LRDP. The LRDP is designed to offer flexibility in its educational design so doctoral candidates can continue their professional life while working towards an advanced degree. Due to the flexibility of the LRDP, more full time educators have the ability to work on their doctoral degree without a residential requirement than ever before (Zahl, 2015). The participants in this study were able to perform their jobs as full time school administrators, husbands, and fathers while finishing their terminal degree due to the versatility of the LRDP. Their LRDP gave the participants the gift of flexibility. Most of the candidates conducted their doctoral work in the early mornings, late at night, or on the weekends. This flexibility of when and where they worked allowed them to persist to completion. Sam stated in his letter of advice, “I made the choice to pursue a hybrid program which allowed me to work mostly at night once my children and wife headed to bed.” Kyle posited in his interview, “I would get up at about
4:00 a.m., and I would work for a couple of hours writing, reading, and then I’d go off to work. As soon as we got the kids to bed, which would be about 7:00 p.m., I would be back at it again usually between seven and midnight. That was kind of a routine for a while.” Ultimately, the flexibility of the LRDP allowed the participants to maintain their continuity in their life and their continuity in their profession which will be discussed in the sections below.

Continuity in life. Program flexibility allowed the participants to keep their family and work life fairly balanced while still working on their doctorate. Sam posited in his interview, “A large percentage of it was going to be online, which I could do late at night, weekends, you know, when the kids were all down.” Abe stated in his interview, “It was the right choice because of where I lived and location but also, you know, I liked the part about going to campus on a limited occasion.” Sam also explained in his interview that he chose the LRDP so he could continue to be a responsible husband and father, “As a husband and father, I made the choice to pursue a hybrid program which allowed me to work mostly at night once my children and wife headed to bed.”

For many of the participants, the ability to study in their own home was what allowed them to persist to completion. Chad based his decision purely on the fact that he could stay at home. He explained in his interview,

I really didn’t want to run back and forth from my wife. I didn’t want to travel a lot. I didn’t want it to become a battle between the two of us. She doesn’t mind if I walk in and say, ‘I’ve got some things to do’ when I’m here. That’s not a problem, but if I had to jump in a vehicle and travel somewhere two or three nights a week, she would have had major problems with that.
Continuity in the education profession. The fact that the participants could continue working in their profession of school leadership was also an important reason they chose the LRDP and persisted. One comment consistent among most of the participants was that they all were forced to sacrifice time to earn their LRDP. While Jimmy was given an eight week sabbatical to finish his doctoral work, the other twelve candidates all expressed that they made tweaks in their work and family life to make room for the LRDP. These tweaks illustrate how these participants conserved resources in order to finish their LRDP (Hobfoll, 1987). As detailed by Lou in his letter of advice, “There may be days that you need to take off to conduct research and/or complete a class.” While no one stated that they needed a doctorate to attain their current position, these men had worked hard to obtain their leadership positions and were all the primary source of income for their family. As declared by Kyle in his interview, “I really felt like doing it online would make it work with the amount of things I had going on with church, school, responsibilities here, and them my family.” Jesse also understood that he had to maintain his profession first and foremost. He stated in his interview, “I could still remain a full time employee. I did not have the luxury to quit my job to go get my doctorate. So I needed to find a program that I could try to make work with remaining in my current position. With the online program, the doctorate allowed me to do about 75 to 80 percent of it online.” Jimmy viewed his priorities as a family man and as a school leader as the number one responsibility in his life and the flexibility of the LRDP allowed him to add earning a doctorate to his priorities. Jimmy stated, “It [the LRDP] allowed me to honor my priorities, and the flexibility, all the reasons that people choose online education.” Jack, also serving as a head of school, explained in his interview that the LRDP gave him a chance to achieve his doctoral degree. “Everything was job embedded, portfolio driven online. Because for me, it was because I had a family and because I
was working as a headmaster at a school. With trying to manage your life, for me, there was just so much more appeal to be able to do a program that allowed me to function in my life, but connected with my job.” Bob succinctly explained the flexibility of the LRDP by stating, “All I had to have was internet capability and time.” Bob later posited in his letter of advice, “Flexibility for my family, flexibility for me. I could come home from school, I could eat supper my family, help my wife, give the kids a bath, put them in bed, and then open the books at 8:30 at night. For me that was invaluable. That was it for us. We didn’t have to move and we had that flexibility.”

**Summary of Findings**

Attaining a LRDP for a man who is a school leader, husband, and father is challenging. In fact, Grissom and Mitani (2016) argued that school leadership by itself is a daunting responsibility. While there are more LRDPs offered than ever before and more opportunities to attain a doctoral degree (Zahl, 2015), LRDPs are reporting attrition rates of up to 70% (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2015). The reason for this is because “it is hard.” As stated by Sam in his letter of advice, “First, you should know that the pursuit of the terminal degree, no matter the institution, will be a daunting task. As the old saying goes, ‘if it were easy, everyone would do it’ certainly holds true as not everyone does it.” Raymond echoed the same conclusion in his interview when he posited, “I often tell people that pursuing my terminal degree was the most unintelligent smart thing I have ever done simply because it was just so hard.” However, Bob reversed the negative energy created by so many others by stating in his letter of advice, “They should know it’s long, it’s hard, and it’s worth it.”

This chapter was framed by the study’s two research questions addressing what the participants experienced (RQ1) and how they overcame obstacles and persisted to completion.
(RQ2). With respect to these 13 men, the experiences were similar in that all struggled with some aspect of life throughout the process. However, even in the midst of adversity, they all persisted. Emphatically, these 13 men all had very similar reasons for persisting while approximately 70% of their counterparts quit (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2011; Terrell, 2005). First and foremost, the support of their wives allowed them to exercise the internal grit that each innately possessed. Internally, each possessed a high degree of determination, tenacity, and self-discipline. However, the support of their wife, which created margin in their life, coupled with their internal grit was the primary reason these men refused to back down from the pressures of the LRDP (Hobfoll, 1989). Additionally, the support and compassion of the chair, coupled with the support of the spouse, drove these men to persist to completion. Further, the internal desire for advancement and open doors strengthened the men’s resolve to persist. Lastly, the flexibility of the LRDP gave these men an educational format that allowed them the opportunity to gain a doctoral degree without sacrificing family or profession.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand doctoral persistence for males who were husbands, fathers, and lead administrators of a school or school district and completed their limited residency doctoral program (LRDP). Primarily, the persistence of these 13 men was due to the support of the spouse which unleashed the internal grit of the male leader. Additionally, the relationship with the chair, a desire for advancement, and the religious faith of the participant were the common themes in this study that allowed them to persist. Lastly, the flexibility of the LRDP gave the men a structure to persist while fulfilling their responsibilities as a husband and father while satisfying their profession requirements as a school leader. Following this overview is a summary of the findings, a discussion on the study findings in relation to the literature, implications and recommendations, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Research Question One asked, “What are the experiences of males who persisted to completion in their LRDP, while serving as husbands, fathers, and lead administrators of a K-12 school or district?” As presented in Chapter Four, the men in this study faced various challenges to include personal problems, professional adversity, and institutional challenges. Specifically, these challenges included health issues, the death of people close to them, financial stress, family additions, work stress, dissertation committee challenges, job changes, and timeline stressors. Moreover, these challenges were reflected in their responses to the modified Industrial Society’s work-life checklist survey (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000). Ten of the 13 participants were not entirely happy with their work-life-LRDP balance. While it is true that these men were school
leaders at the top of their field, these men were not invincible to the struggles and sacrifices of life. These men were vulnerable and humbled by their LRDP experience. Yet, through their adversity, they all managed their professional and personal lives and persisted to doctoral completion.

Research Question Two asked “How do males who are husbands, fathers and lead administrators in a K-12 school district persist to complete their limited residency doctoral program?” The essence of the study phenomenon was the uncompromising support of the spouse which stimulated the internal grit of the men and instilled confidence in their ability to persist to completion. The support of the spouse was the foundation of success, and the most important factor; the spouse could make or break the goal of doctoral persistence. In fact, spousal support was so critical to the persistence of the participants that most of the men would not have started or would have quit without the support of their spouse. Following spousal support, which encouraged the internal grit that each participant possessed, the additional themes of faith, a healthy relationship with the dissertation chair, the possibility of career advancement, and the flexibility of the LRDP all combined to allow these 13 men to persist to LRDP completion.

Discussion

The literature is diverse regarding doctoral persistence. Doctoral persistence is a complex issue (Nettles & Millet, 2006), and has not been researched well qualitatively in the past; new research seems to be growing on this important topic (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Bade, 2014). While there has been research conducted on residential doctoral programs for decades, the research on LRDPs is only emerging. However, research is clear that students enrolled in LRDPs are at a greater risk for attrition than their peers in traditional programs, with
up to 70% of students enrolling in LRDP failing to complete their program (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2011; Terrell, 2005). A majority of the literature regarding doctoral persistence is associated with traditional residential doctoral programs (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Council of Graduate Schools, 2010; Hawley, 2010; Leeds et al., 2013). While there is some research regarding online persistence, much of this research has centered on women (Castro et al., 2011; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2015; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2016; Spaulding, Rockinson-Szapkiw, & Spaulding, 2015; Spaulding, Rockinson-Szapkiw, & Williams, 2016). This study not only contributes to the literature on men participating in a non-traditional program, but also adds to the literature by focusing on school leaders who are husbands and fathers.

**School Leadership is Stressful**

This study affirms the previous research establishing that school leadership is demanding, multifaceted, and stressful (Combs, 2009; Klatt, 2014; Sogunro, 2012). As mentioned by Sogunro (2012), school leadership is challenging and complex. It was repeated many times by the participants that the demand on their time was difficult to manage due to all their different responsibilities. In addition, the men of this study did not feel like they understood the commitment or difficulty as they entered into the LRDP journey. In the Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000) 10 of the 13 men perceived themselves to be not entirely happy with their work-life-limited residency doctoral program balance. All 13 of the participants felt like they could not relax or forget about their doctoral work, and all 13 of the participants stated they worked long hours because their job demanded it. The modified Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000) also showed that 11 of the 13 participants felt specifically that their family missed out on their input, either because they
did not see them enough or because they were too tired. Both in the literature and in this study, LRDP candidates reported that school leaders are not trained and do a poor job managing the stress associated with school leadership (Hawk & Martin, 2011; Sogunro, 2012). In many cases, the candidates of this study felt naïve to the process and ill-equipped to manage their roles as a school leader, husband, father, and LRDP student together. Ultimately, contemporary research, as well as the findings in this study, are clear that the demand on time is the most difficult stressor the school leader faces which is amplified when one adds the role of doctoral student (Greenhaus et al., 1997; Watkins & Subich, 1995). This lack of time not only affects the school leader but directly impacts the family (Combs et al., 2009).

Additionally, the consequence of this stress leads to a shortage in the school leadership community and schools not living up to their potential (Tekniepe, 2015). This is consistent with the findings of this study as the participants stated that they were concerned regarding the ability to perform all their jobs to the best of their ability. With a majority of school leadership positions being dominated by men (Gill & Arnold, 2015; Glass et al., 2000), it was reported that many principals consider quitting or seeking early retirement as an option to mitigate or end the stress created from school leadership (Queen & Queen; Sogunro, 2012; Wesson & Marshall, 2013). However, the findings from the study diverged from the literature here. The men in this study had a great love for their profession and none were considering early retirement or quitting the field of education. They all felt called and committed to their terminal degree, school leadership, and to the impact they were making in their community. Ultimately, they felt their position was important and worth the stress and frustration that came with it.
A Need to Possess a Doctorate

While the literature suggests a doctorate is necessary degree for career advancement and goal realization in the field of education (Bitterman et al., 2013; Glass & Franceschini, 2006; Wellington & Sikes, 2006), this study did not support this idea. The statistics support that the doctoral degree is a necessary mark in the public school sector of the school superintendency. While only 9.7% of all principals hold a doctoral degree in public education, (Bitterman et al., 2013), over 50% of all K-12 superintendents possess a doctoral degree and 97% of all superintendents who lead a school district of 5,000 students or more possess a doctoral degree (Glass & Franceschini, 2006). As reflected in the literature, the Doctorate of Education (Ed.D.) or a Doctorate of Philosophy in Education (Ph.D.) is a needed qualification in many K-12 U.S. school leadership positions (e.g., principals, superintendents, heads of school), and it makes the likelihood of attaining a school leadership position more probable (Bitterman et al., 2013; Glass & Franceschini, 2006; Servage, 2009). While the research is based primarily on public school positions, only five of the 13 participants in this study were public school leaders. However, those five public school administrators did not believe that having a doctorate was the reason they were able to climb to their position of school leadership. Although, all the participants did state that the doctoral degree gave them greater influence and more credibility in their school communities. For the five public school participants in the study and the eight private Christian school leaders in the study, the doctorate was certainly something that gave them more credibility and influence, but none of them felt like it was a requirement for them to prosper and climb in the profession of educational leadership. Findings from this study suggest that having a doctoral degree is extremely helpful in promotion in the field but not necessary for advancement.
**Spousal Support**

This study is consistent with the literature on many key aspects of familial relationships. In this study, spousal support allowed the male school and family leader to conserve resources which offered him the opportunity to be successful in his LRDP. Practically, the conservation of resources (Hobfoll, 1987) was displayed in terms of time for the LRDP student to finish his LRDP. Additionally, it was the spouse who accepted many of the responsibilities of the husband both inside and outside the home. Consequently, the support of the spouse led to an unquenchable grit in the spirit of these men who pushed to complete their LRDP. The factor of spousal support, granting space to their husband, is a primary aspect of Hobfoll’s (1987) COR. In the end, it was the internal characteristic of grit that sustained the participants to completion in of their doctorate. These men were leaders who were supported by their spouse and simply refused to give into the pressures of life while working on their LRDP.

Like this study, familial support, familial integration, and spousal support were common themes in the literature (Kirby et al., 2004; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Bade, 2014). The primary difference is that previous literature has a primary focus on the family while the conclusions of this study pointed to the spouse specifically. As posited by others (Hyun, 2009; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; West, 2014), marital satisfaction and partner support influence doctoral completion. Lovitts (2001) attributed doctoral attrition with a lack of family support. Powers and Swick (2012) and others mentioned that doctoral programs are rigorous and require the support of the family as a whole. Smith et al. (2006) posited that doctoral students who do not feel supported by the family are much less likely to complete their program. While the literature is rich regarding the relationship between family support and doctoral persistence, this study aligned with a primary focus on the support of the spouse. In this study, the candidates
rarely mentioned needing support from their children or other members in their family, but primarily focused on the significance of their spouse’s support. This spousal support was specific and targeted. The literature mentions marriage fatigue and ultimately divorce when examining the doctoral process (Baird, 1997; Burnett, 1999), and the effects of school leadership on the marriage covenant (Hawley et al., 2006; Kirby et al., 2004).

While being married was a criterion for participation, references to marriage fatigue or divorce did not surface in this study. All the men shared strong, long-term, committed marriages, and all men reiterated that without the support of their wife, they would not have persisted to completion. Further, many of the participants clearly explained that they did not neglect their marriage during the LRDP, and that they made it a focus. Many of the participants stated how they continued their date night each week. The men resolved to put their marriages first by displaying the action of taking time off from their LRDP when their wives needed them or had health issues. In the case of Jimmy, while he and his wife had a strong marriage, they invested in marriage counseling to maintain their healthy marriage. While the LDPD was extremely important to the men of this study, their actions spoke to the priority of their marriage.

Lastly, the challenges associated with balancing work and family are well established in the research (Greenhaus et al., 1997; Watkins & Subich, 1995). This study used the COR (Hobfoll, 1989) model as a lens to examine persistence in the life of the man who is a school leader, doctoral student, husband, and father. As posited by Hobfoll (1989),

Current conceptualizations of stress are challenged as being too phenomenological and ambiguous and consequently, not given to direct empirical testing. Researchers have tended to avoid the problem of defining stress, choosing to study stress without reference
to a clear framework. This resource-oriented model [COR] is based on the supposition that people strive to retain, protect, and build resources. (p. 513)

Accordingly, in this study, COR (1987) was a perfect fit when contrasting the role of the spouse with the LRDP goal of the husband. The COR (1987) model goes beyond other models by inherently stating what individuals do when confronted with stress. Ultimately, individuals attempt to store the energies of time, money, and knowledge when confronted with situations that overcome their available resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Using Hobfoll’s (COR) 1989, this was exactly the reaction of the participants in this study when faced with the stress caused by the lack of available time they could give to their work, family, and LRDP. Ultimately, it was the spouse who conserved resources for the participants in the area of family life so the participant could give the needed attention to the finish their LRDP. These conserved resources consisted of practical actions such as emotional support that allowed the participant to focus on their LRDP without guilt, taking care of all household chores, attending to the children in their events and schoolwork, protection of study time, and editing and offering feedback on assignments.

When linking persistence to family support, the literature is rich. Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) cited the primary role the spouse, parent, or friend played into the emotional strength of the doctoral candidate. This spousal support led to the empowering feeling of grit for the male LRDP participants. Like family support, the concept of determination or grit is a key element in the persistence of a doctoral student (Cross, 2014; Duckworth et al., 2007). As posited by Cross (2014), “Doctoral students appeared to be a largely gritty group” (p. 22).

Grit

Previous literature and this study reveal the importance of grit or internal motivation in doctoral persistence. Cross (2014) conducted the most recent study on LRDP students and self-
motivation. Cross’s (2014) mixed methods study was instrumental in linking grit with the LRDP student. One’s personal motivation, grit, and self-determination was something that was also mentioned by Kelley and Salisbury-Glennon (2015), Grover (2007), and Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012). As mentioned by Duckworth et al. (2007), there are some characteristics that are common among all successful people and one of these characteristics is grit. Duckworth et al. (2007) provided the argument that non-cognitive factors like grit are more important to persistence than even a person’s IQ. Coupled with the support of the spouse, grit was a primary theme throughout this study. Many hours were spent with the participants of this study discussing the tenacity that they displayed in finishing their terminal degree. Yet, the participants stated that the only thing that could undermine the grit they possessed was a lack of support from their spouse.

**Relationship with Chair**

The importance of the relationship with the chair of the dissertation might be the most discussed topic when referencing the previous literature. The importance of the student-chair relationship aligns with Tinto’s (1975, 1993, 2006) student integration theory. The research is clear, using Tinto’s (1975) SIT, that institutional relationships a doctoral student develops are specifically linked to persistence. The encouragement, compassion, and tough love of the chair supported the persistence of the LRDP student. Primarily because of the independent nature of the LRDP and specifically the dissertation, the chair was the common connection the LRDP student had to their academic institution. The power of the words spoken by the chair were crucial to the participant persisting to completion. With the difficulty and scope of conducting a dissertation, it was easy to understand the importance and influence of the chair on the LRDP student. Collectively, the positive reinforcement and honesty offered by the chair and the
unwavering support of the spouse worked together to make a major impact on the self-esteem and ultimately, the persistence of the LRDP students. The literature repeatedly states that the relationship with the program faculty is of utmost importance to the participant due to the independent nature of the LRDP (Bair, 1999; Croxton, 2009; Denecke, et al., 2004; Dupont, et al., 2012; Gardner, 2009; Golde, 2000; Golde, 2005; Kelley & Salisbury-Glennon, 2016; Lovitts, 2001; Rochester & Pradel, 2008; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Terrell et al., 2012; West et al., 2011). These non-traditional students are typically older, working full-time in professional occupations, and have families that they are balancing with their doctoral work (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Namely, the relationship the doctoral student develops with the dissertation chair is directly linked to persistence (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; West et al., 2011). As posited by Earl-Novell (2006), students are more likely to persist when they have a healthy relationship with the chair of their dissertation.

The literature also evidences the importance of having a relationship with peers and cohort programs are a factor when discussing LRDP persistence (Santicola, 2013; Brill, 2014; West, et al., 2011). While a few of the men in this study found value in a cohort program, the men generally had little interest in developing relationships with peers unless the program was designed as a cohort system. The participants had no time for additional relationships and most preferred to work alone. However, both the literature (Croxton, 2014; Di Pierro, 2007; Gardner, 2009; Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006; O’Meara et al., 2013) and this study were clear on the importance of the relationship with the dissertation chair. For these participants, the dissertation was the most challenging portion of the program, and the relationship with the chair granted them the feedback and verbal affirmation they needed to persist. This student-chair relationship
is something clearly articulated throughout persistence literature and identified as a significant theme in this study.

**Prestige / Career Advancement**

Career opportunities are mentioned in the literature on doctoral persistence and include career advancement, increased salary, and the title of doctor (Grover, 2007). However, while findings from previous studies seemed to focus more on the financial gain as a result of the achieved doctorate (Lovitts, 2001; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2015; Terrell et al., 2012; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011), the participants in this study were grateful for the financial increases but more engaged with the leadership opportunities and the career advancement that resulted from a doctorate degree. Specifically, the LRDP promoted their opportunities to lead, serve, and become a more influential and credible person in their current school and church communities. The prestige associated with the doctoral degree and desire for advancement in the education profession played a large role in the participants persisting to completion in their LRDP. All the men greatly valued the title of doctor. The 13 men who participated in this study were high achievers who had tasted success and risen to high levels of school leadership. However, these gritty leaders all had higher aspirations whether it being earning a greater leadership position, becoming a head of a school, or even becoming a college professor. The title mattered to them because of the doors they believed it would open and the respect the title garnered. The literature and this study differed on the relationships and importance of the LRDP on job advancement. While the literature focused on advancement by means of financial gain (Croxton, 2014; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000; Nwenyi & Baghurst, 2013; Terrell et al., 2012), this was not something that resonated in this study. The primary focus of the participants of this study specifically focused on the expanded opportunities of school leadership and college teaching.
Flexibility of the LRDP

The concept of program flexibility is common in the literature (Allan & Seaman, 2013; Terrell et al., 2012; Zahl, 2015) and one of the primary themes in this study. The flexibility of the LRDP program allowed the participants to conserve resources which allowed them to persist and gave them a system by which they had a chance to attain their terminal degree. This conservation practically played out in the conservation and flexibility with one’s time. The flexibility of the LRDP allowed the participants to conserve resources at ample times within the family unit to fulfill duties as a husbands and fathers, yet complete the LRDP and maintain professional duties as a school leader. None of the participants had the ability to travel to a local college or university and complete their doctoral degree as a residential student due to the responsibilities as a school leader and their commitment as a husband and father. The mere fact that these men had the opportunity to perform their academic responsibilities on their time (e.g., late at night, early in the morning) allowed them to persist. All the men attributed the flexibility of the program to the completion of their LRDP.

This conservation displayed by the spouse for her husband lines up with Hobfoll’s (1987) COR theory which drove this study. It must be noted that success would be unlikely for this group of professional educational leaders without the flexibility of the LRDP. The research clearly specifies the stages that a doctoral student must navigate (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Bade, 2014) and specifies that the doctoral process is one characterized by independence and loneliness (Denceke et al., 2004). Like the literature, the men of this study spoke of the independence and in some cases, loneliness, of the LRDP. However, this independence and flexibility were a primary reason the men were able to persist. Program flexibility, whether synchronous or asynchronous, was also a factor of persistence in the
literature (Baker, 2014). Both the present study and the research align on the issue of LRDP flexibility which ultimately gave the participants a chance to participate in a doctoral program while remaining present in the life of their family and to meeting the expectations of their position as a school leader. The flexibility of the program allowed them to work at their own pace and time, which they needed and appreciated.

**Faith**

Lastly, the individual faith of an individual with regards to persistence was a key factor in this study. In fact, every one of the participants in this study pointed to their Christian faith as a primary reason they were able to persist to completion. When times became difficult, these men leaned on their faith to get them through the obstacle. The term “God thing” was mentioned by many of the participants. Many times, the support of the spouse and their Christian faith were mentioned together. However, faith was not a common theme experienced in the literature. Besides Koenig (2011) and Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, and Bade (2014) positing that prayer and faith may act as a stress reliever, the literature on faith and LRDP persistence is limited.

**Implications and Recommendations**

In the following section, implications are reviewed and recommendations offered to further develop the topic of LRDP persistence for male school leaders who are husbands and fathers. The purpose of this study is to provide a blueprint for family men who are serving as school leaders with aspirations of doctoral attainment. Moreover, this study may be used as a model to offer the right questions to ask and elements to be aware of before beginning the LRDP to offer a better chance of LRDP success. Furthermore, the study findings may be transferable to all professional family men seeking a doctoral degree. This study may serve as a blueprint for LRDP students and their families to achieve family balance and ultimately, a better chance of
success for the LRDP candidate. In the long run, this study may improve the family balance and family relationships during the LRDP journey. While this study has great benefits to the LRDP candidate and family, it may also have the most benefit to university administrators and admission offices.

**Implications and Recommendations for Students**

The main implications for the study revolve around the participants and their families. The implications and recommendations include a focus on spousal support, grit, and program fit.

**Spousal support.** The main implication of this study related to the support of the wife in her husband’s LRDP journey. For the 13 men of this study, spousal support was found to be the only theme that could derail their school leader husband to walk out on his LRDP. The findings were clear in that the LRDP required a sacrifice on the part of the spouse with regard to taking care of some of the areas that were normally the responsibility of the husband.

With the understanding that the support of the spouse can make or break LRDP persistence, the first recommendation is to ensure that the spouse clearly understands the expectations and requirements that the LRDP is going to place on the life of the spouse and family before beginning the program. The problem lies with the potential LRDP student and his family not understanding the expectations, work load, and responsibilities of working through the LRDP. The fact is that the LRDP candidate does not know, and the LRDP institution generally offers little guidance to aspiring doctoral candidates on the time requirements and how this might affect their family and professional lives if they do not have a plan. The question becomes, “how can the LRDP student best prepare his family to understand the obligations and changes that might need to be made within the family structure in order for success to be
achieved?” If the expectations are made clearer prior to the program beginning, it is likely that the spouse and family can be more supportive thus helping their husband complete their LRDP.

The experience of the participants in this study offers a clear explanation of the challenges ahead of the LRDP candidate who is also a school leader, husband, and father. First, based on Hobfoll’s COR (1989) model, sacrifices are going to have to be made by the candidate and the family. The candidate will have to make the decision to give up time with his family and time doing things he enjoys in order to meet the expectations of the LRDP. Consequently, the family must understand their dad and husband are not going to be as available especially on the weekends to spend time with them. The family must understand that they may be alone in their household chore efforts. Duties like laundry, cleaning of the home, and mowing the grass may be reallocated to other family members. Second, finances may be reallocated to pay for the LRDP. The family may expect limited vacation time, or vacations where the LRDP candidate is working on his doctoral program. Ultimately, the family will experience a father and husband that is simply less accessible and less involved with the family. This is specifically true during the dissertation phase of the program.

Last, it was emphasized by most of the participants that time with their spouse and a focus on their marriage was something that a person should never give up while working on the LRDP. Most of the participants instituted a “date night” and were intentional about putting this time before the LRDP. While the LRDP is an important venture, it must be understood that it should never come before the welfare of the family. This was displayed by the men of this study who took time off to care for their sick family members and another who decided to lead his wife to marriage counseling to make sure they remained fully committed to their relationship. With
the essence of this study being the support of the spouse, it is realized that the support of the spouse is vital to LRDP completion.

At all stages of the LRDP, the marriage must be the highest priority. Date nights should be protected and prioritized, and counseling may be a wise investment regardless of the strength of the relationship. Spouses must regularly and clearly communicate their needs, and the two together must strive to meet one another’s needs in the varied stages of the LRDP. The LRDP student must celebrate, recognize and show appreciation to his spouse for her sacrifice, in some cases acknowledging her efforts of acting as a single parent and her central role in his persistence. Findings from this study should cause the LRDP candidate to think about how they might honor and demonstrate appreciation for their spouse through the journey. The adversity of the LRDP has the power to strengthen the marriage relationship if clear expectations are discussed and an understanding of the sacrifice that must be made by the spouse is honored. The spouse must discuss the goals of the LRDP student and discuss how her personal, professional, and academic goals might be put on hold and prioritized for a later time upon completion of the doctorate for her husband. The LRDP student must include his family and specifically his spouse in celebrating the victory of earning the title of doctor. The spouse should receive public praise for her sacrifice and those closest to the family must understand that the doctorate is a shared degree.

**Grit.** In this study, the support of the spouse led to a LRDP student who was gritty and refused to quit. Grit may be defined as someone who is self-discipline, goal oriented, committed to finishing what they started at all cost, and the attitude to work through adverse situations (Cross, 2014). With the spouse acting as the constant encourager, these men refused to give into the pressures of life. While many took a break from their LRDP journey due to life trials, all of
them returned and completed their LRDP work. Because all of them proved to be self-disciplined, goal oriented, and committed to finish what they begin, the recommendation in this area is for a person to make sure they have the characteristic of grit before they begin their LRDP. The LRDP candidate must do some internal evaluation of whether they are a person who has a pattern of grit and is truly willing to make the sacrifice to finish what may be the most difficult mountain of their professional career. These sacrifices may include time away from family, working or no vacation, lack of sleep, anxiety, limited social time or time for hobbies, potential health issues, potential marriage tension, and a general feeling of pressure. Otherwise, the candidate may be wasting their time and financial resources of their family.

**Ensure program fit.** The implication that the LRDP needs to be flexible for the LRDP student is unquestioned. Allen and Seaman (2013) defined a LRDP as a program where at least 80% of the content is delivered limited residency. With the professional responsibility of leading a school and family, it was impossible for the 13 men of this study to become residential students. The flexibility of the LRDP was what gave them the opportunity to attain their doctoral degree. Thus, individuals contemplating earning a doctoral degree must determine program fit, that the program offers the right flexibility, the right design, and whether a synchronous or asynchronous schedule is best suited for their lifestyle. An asynchronous offers the greatest flexibility for a potential doctoral candidate with regards to balance at home, work, and within the family. If on campus residencies are required, the student needs to know when those are in advance and see if they are offered in an intensive format in order to limit the days away from the family and work.
University and College Administrations and Professors

By understanding how male school leaders persist in their LRDP and what challenges they must overcome, university and college administrators may be better able to set up LRDP students for success. This understanding may improve their persistence rates which are important for marketing and enrollment and also affect the associated revenue which is important to the financial health of the institution. The LRDP institution must be more intentional to socialize incoming students and their families to the challenges that lie ahead. The LRDP institution should employ a mandatory class or meeting to train and offer clear expectations and guidelines to the LRDP candidate and the spouse. This training might involve the university or college’s sociology and counseling departments to orient the LRDP student and their spouse prior to beginning their doctoral program to educate them on how this process might affect them as individuals and partners. It is also possible for this mandatory class to be offered in an online setting as a pre-requisite for beginning the program. This training will encourage conversations between the LRDP candidate and the spouse regarding the goal of LRDP attainment and how this goal relates to the family as a unit, their shared values, their family responsibilities, and their marriage covenant. This training also may identify those areas in the life of the family that may be difficult as a result of the LRDP journey. Ultimately, it will give the spouse a voice to ask questions and understand what she is getting into as she is certain to be affected by the work load of the LRDP on her husband. This training will simply drive the discussion so the spouse and family can clearly understand what the next three to five years looks like for her husband and her family with regards to family responsibilities. Finally, this conversation and review will ensure both partners are working together towards the shared goal of family expectations and LRDP persistence.
Furthermore, if the LRDP institutions were able to measure the determination of a candidate prior to accepting them to the program, they may be able to better support them in their efforts to persist or even re-evaluate their application. It may be presumed that men who have a history of quitting have less of a chance of persisting to completion in something as difficult and isolated as the LRDP. As an effort to define grit quantitatively, the LRDP institution may incorporate some type of grit test that is part of the admissions process that measures the internal determination of their candidates. Recently, Duckworth (2016) developed a grit test that includes ten questions and rates each individual on a one to five Likert scale. The test, which can be taken online, rates grit compared to all others who take the test. A test, such as Duckworth’s (2016) grit test, would be a good quantitative estimator on where a candidate rates with regards to their determination to fight through adversity. This type of formative assessment would give both the candidate a benchmark on himself and the university or college a point of reference on each candidate. The grit assessment might lead the academic institution to determine what level of support the student may need from the beginning or at least allow them to ask some difficult questions of the candidate in the admissions process, prompting reflection and identifications of supports or strategies that need to be implemented to foster persistence.

In addition, attrition from LRDPs are a financial burden for the university. A LRDP student who drops out is lost revenue and hurts the degree completion rates of the school. Notre Dame determined it could save one million dollars if it were able to improve doctoral attrition by just 10% (Smallwood, 2016). By identifying and supporting students at risk prior to beginning their program, universities and colleges with LRDPs may increase their doctoral persistence rates and support their bottom line.
Doctoral professors and dissertation chairs should also be educated on the effect the LRDP can have on their students and their families so they can better support their students during academic or personal challenges. This education will better help the LRDP candidates and professors to understand how to react in stressful moments so that LRDP students have the best chance to persist. This training of the dissertation chairs may allow them to use the right strategies to support candidates through difficult times which may support an increase in LRDP persistence. First, committee chairs must be great listeners. With all candidates in different stages of life, the candidates consistently mentioned the trait of listening as what they most respected about their chairs. Secondly, committee chairs must be compassionate. Chairs must listen and attempt to empathize with the position of the candidate. Specifically, the chair must emphasize that the marriage and family of the LRDP student always comes first. Thirdly, the committee chair must be timely with their responses. While most of the candidates in this study expressed an incredible relationship with their chair, it was chairs who did not respond in a timely matter that caused the most conflict. Lastly, the committee chair must be honest. LRDP students need to hear the truth in love and need clear expectations from their chair. These clear expectations may be the most important element to the relationship and to LRDP persistence.

**Summary**

By better understanding the experience of those who completed their LRDP journey, this study may provide a blueprint for persistence. However, this study may provide a blueprint for not only men serving in school leadership positions who are also leading their families, but for all married men who decide to embark on the doctoral journey. Ultimately, if more men put into place and think about the findings from this study, they will be more likely to keep their family-work life in balance, and ultimately persist in their LRDP
The potential LRDP student should consider his level of commitment and why he is beginning. Ultimately, a male school leader who is able to persist to completion may become an example for those he works with and his children. Inevitably, the man who persists in his LRDP may become more efficient in all areas of his life due to the confidence a doctoral degree provides. Additionally, the educational system is better equipped with leaders who are more critical in their thinking and more confident and competent in their leadership. With the findings of this study as a blueprint for success, the family work balance may be improved. This study sets firm expectations of what breeds success. By understanding the importance of family support with regards to LRDP persistence, the family can enter the program with a clear understanding of what they need to do. This study simply lends to the concept of building better husbands, fathers, and school leaders and improving the persistence rate of 30% in the educational leadership community.

Limitations

This study was delimited to include only male school leaders who persisted in their LRDP while being a husband and a father. Therefore, this study has some limitations that must be mentioned. First, as I could not find a survey that examined work-life-academic balance, I modified the Industrial Society’s Work Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000), meaning it was not necessarily a valid measure of this emerging construct. Further, it is impossible to know if participants answered honestly, though honest self-reporting is an assumption that must be made in social science research.

Second, the lack of diversity of the participants and lack of variety in the institutions where each participant received their LRDP is a limitation. All the men in the survey attended private universities or colleges, limiting the transferability of findings to participants who are
likely to attend public institutions. While one of the participants was of American Indian descent and one of the participants was Hawaiian, the other eleven participants were Caucasian. This lack of diversity limits the potential transferability of the study findings to populations not included in the sample.

The faith of the participants was a very important theme in the study. However, because each participant claimed to be a dedicated follower of Jesus Christ, findings from this study may not be applicable to men who are agnostic or of a different religious faith.

The type of school the participants served in also acted as a limitation. The participants in this study served in a public ($n=5$) or private Christian ($n=8$) leadership position during their LRDP. The study was missing representation from men leading charter schools or private (non-religious) schools. Additionally, the study was limited to men. Therefore, the findings may not be transferable to female school leaders who are wives and mothers. Lastly, it may also be argued that this study is only transferable to other men who were superintendents, heads of school, or building principals who have children and are in a committed marriage.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Reflecting on the findings and limitations of this study, suggestions for future study must be recognized. First, in contrast of this study, research should be conducted with men who did not have a supportive wife or had no wife (e.g., widowed or divorced) yet persisted in their LRDP. Second, a similar persistence study might be conducted on men who do not practice any religious faith. Third, future research might expand to study LRDP students at public institutions. Perhaps, if a study could incorporate the three facets of increased diversity in the sample, no or different religious faiths, and earning their LRDP from a public institution, this would deepen the findings to this study. Certainly, a study as mentioned would be a great
comparison. Fourth, with the underrepresentation of women in higher education, principalships, and superintendencies across the U.S. and the desire to see a greater representation of women in leadership, it is important to investigate the experiences of women who are school leaders, wives, and mothers while pursuing their LRDP and how they persisted. Fifth, with no valid or reliable instrument for measuring work, life, academic balance, a quantitative study may be conducted to validate the instrument. Lastly, the participants of this study often posited, “that is one you should ask my wife” or “that is one you should ask my kids.” There is a need for a phenomenological study on the effect that the LRDP has on spouses and children.

Summary

This transcendental phenomenological study sought to understand the experiences of male school leaders who completed their LRDP while honoring their families. Through these experiences, it is understood how these men persisted. First, it was clearly evident that while these were leaders who were at the top of their educational field, they were not immune to the struggles of life. Although all 13 of the men persisted to LRDP completion, they were faced with issues like the death of a family member, disease, personal stress, job changes, births, and financial challenges. In response to these challenges, the men in this study leaned on the faithful support of their wives in a multitude of ways. The wife was backbone of the family and to the male persisting to doctoral completion. As stated in the COR model (1989), the wife was instrumental in conserving resources for the male LRDP student by shouldering many of the family responsibilities usually performed by her husband. This space she created allowed him to use the grit within him to finish his LRDP work and ultimately to persist in his LRDP.

With the support of the spouse, which created freedom for the candidate to release his grit on the LRDP, the candidates also expressed some other collective findings. The flexibility of the
LRDP program was the instrument by which each candidate could even begin to pursue a doctoral degree. The men were able to perform the LRDP on their time, with a few scheduled campus visits, and still be present at home and work. The prestige and career advancement from earning the doctorate degree also played into their persistence. All the men in the study seemed to be able to keep their eye on the prize such that it was a factor into them persisting.

Additionally, the relationship the candidates had with the chairperson of their dissertation played a role in their persistence. Similar to the affirmation provided by the spouse, it was the support and direction offered by the chair of the dissertation that was influential during the toughest parts of the program. Lastly, each of the men spoke of their faith as life support for them through the good times and the bad. These men all had a faith that allowed them to know they would complete the LRDP task. All of these elements working together, support of the spouse, their personal grit, the flexibility of the LRDP, the prestige and expectations of career advancement that comes with the doctoral degree, the support of the chair, and their own personal faith, allowed these 13 men to persist to completion.

Yet, the facts remain: only 50% of people who begin their doctoral program actually persist (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008, 2010; Hawley, 2010; Leeds et al., 2013), and approximately 30% of people in the field of education and in LRDPs persist to completion (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Nettles & Millet, 2006; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2011; Terrell, 2005). Based on these statistics, this study offers some ideas which may allow school leaders who are acting as full-time family men a better chance to complete their LRDP. Ultimately, if this study offers a few strategies that may make doctoral completion more likely, I have done my job as a researcher. First, the candidate must ask the person that is closest to him to encourage, push, and support him unconditionally. This person will be most needed during adverse times of the
program. Second, the candidate must perform an honest self-evaluation of his grit and decide if he truly has the internal drive to complete what is likely to be the most difficult academic challenge of his life. Finally, institutions must consider some training that allows the candidate to self-assess and establishes training that includes both the spouse and the husband so that clear family expectations can be discussed and the voice of the spouse may be heard. These steps will support more men fulfilling their doctoral dream and support the advancement of school leaders with doctorates in the educational community whose families have not been fractured in the process. To further the educational system in the United States, there is a significant need for school leaders who possess a doctoral degree and the skills and knowledge gained through the process (Bitterman et al., 2013; Servage, 2009).

The educational community cannot be satisfied with 30%. Weidman et al. (2000) mentioned that there is a perilous rights to passage regarding the LRDP process while Jack posited in his interview, “It’s almost like a hazing ritual that you have to go through to join the club.” The doctoral process, as a whole, must be questioned. Higher education institutions must begin to discuss more efficient procedures and programs to support LRDP students and their families. Institutions are losing revenue while professional people with a history of success are failing. Stupidity may be defined as doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. The time is now to determine how doctoral persistence can be improved.

To end, Michael S. Teitelbaum, a program director at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation offered the educational community a thought that needs the greatest attention. He posited, “If the actual attrition rate is really around 50%, then this is a scandal. It’s a serious waste of resources and a terrible waste of time and energy on the part of the students” (as cited in Smallwood, 2016, p.1). Contrary to the statistics, there is hope. This study fills a gap in the ever
pressing topic of doctoral persistence. Joined with other studies like it, there is a blueprint for successfully completing the LRDP. Now, it is up to the LRDP institutions to provide the training which will enable potential candidates to understand and navigate the potential land mines before they explode, and for the LRDP candidate to prepare his heart and the heart of his family for the arduous journey ahead. Together, more male school leaders can achieve their goal of earning the title of *doctor* while remaining devoted fathers and husbands.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval

Liberty University
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 11, 2017

John Patterson

Dear John Patterson,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Liberty University
Training Champions for Christ since 1971
Appendix B: Email Invitation to Study

Dear Faculty Member:

I am conducting a study titled:

IDENTIFYING AS HUSBANDS, FATHERS, AND SCHOOL LEADERS: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF DOCTORAL PERSISTENCE AMONG LIMITED RESIDENCY STUDENTS

I am writing you to ask your support in sending this email out to all of the men that you have led through completion of their limited residency doctoral program.

Are you a husband and a father who completed their limited residency doctoral program while serving as a superintendent of a school district, head of a school, or elementary/middle/ high school principal? If so, I am asking you to consider taking part in my study on your experience to success! This first seventeen questions will be used to determine whether you meet the study criteria to be a participant. The last eleven multiple choice questions will generate a general understanding of your work-family balance during your limited residency doctoral program. Following the return of this questionnaire, I will determine whether you are a match and will contact you to see if you are willing to meet with me for further discussion. By clicking [yes], you agree to participate in this study. Thank you.

John Patterson
Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University
Appendix C: Informed Consent Form (Questionnaire)

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (QUESTIONNAIRE)

IDENTIFYING AS HUSBANDS, FATHERS, AND SCHOOL LEADERS: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF DOCTORAL PERSISTENCE AMONG LIMITED RESIDENCY STUDENTS

John Patterson
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of male school leaders who, while acting in the roles of husband and father, completed their limited residency doctoral program. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a male and you completed your doctoral program while acting as a school leader, husband, and father. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

John Patterson, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

The purpose of this study is understand the experiences of males who persisted to completion in their limited residency doctoral programs, while serving as husbands, fathers, and lead administrators of a K-12 school or district. Secondly, I want to determine how males who are husbands, fathers and lead administrators in a K-12 school district persist to doctoral completion.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Fill out a 10 min questionnaire and survey.

**Risks and Benefits of Participation:** The risks involved in this study are minimal. Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include the study acting as a blueprint for other male school leaders acting as husbands and fathers who desire to complete their limited residency doctoral program

**Compensation:** Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.
• All documents and recordings will be stored in a secure filing cabinet. I will be the only person who has access to the secure filing cabinet.
• I will conduct the interviews in a location that is convenient for you and where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
• Information will not be shared outside the interview period with anyone other than the participant.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is John Patterson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at 434-942-1438 or at jpatterson@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty advisor, Dr. Lucinda Spaulding at lsspaulding@liberty.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

**Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.**

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(Note: Do not agree to participate unless IRB approval information with current dates has been added to this document.)

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record or video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Signature of Participant</th>
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<th>Signature of Investigator</th>
<th>Date</th>
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Questionnaire

Demographic Questions: Please read the questions carefully and answer accordingly.

1. Please indicate your gender.
   a. Male
   b. Female (if female is selected, the questionnaire closes and participant receives the following message – “Thank you for your participation”)

2. Has your doctorate degree been conferred?
   a. Yes
   b. No

3. Were at least 80% of your classes via an online format?
   a. Yes
   b. No

4. During the duration of your limited residency doctoral program (concluding with the completion of the dissertation), did you function as a husband with your wife living in the same home?
   a. Yes
   b. No

5. During the duration of your limited residency doctoral program (concluding with the completion of the dissertation), did you function as a father of at least one (full-time) child (K-12) living in the same home?
   a. Yes
   b. No

6. During the duration of your limited residency doctoral program (concluding with the completion of the dissertation), did you work as a school superintendent, head of school, or elementary/middle/high school principal?
   a. Yes
   b. No

(If NO is selected for question 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 the questionnaire closes and the participant receives the following message, “Thank you for your participation.”)

7. Please indicate your ethnicity.
   a. African-American
   b. Asian
   c. Caucasian
   d. Hispanic
   e. American Indian
   f. Other (please specify)
8. Please indicate your religious preference:
   a. Christianity
   b. Catholicism
   c. Islam
   d. Buddhism
   e. Hinduism
   f. Judaism
   g. Mormonism
   h. Other____________________

9. Please indicate your age:

10. Please indicate what type of school you are currently employed:
    a. Public
    b. Public Charter
    c. Private
    d. Private Christian
    e. Public Alternative
    f. Private Alternative
    g. Other____________________

11. How many years have you served in the field of education?

12. How long have you served in your current school leadership position?

13. Indicate the number of years you have been married:

14. What was the occupation of your spouse during your limited residency doctoral program?

15. How many children did you have in your home when you completed your limited residency doctoral dissertation?

16. What were the school grades of your children in your home when you completed your limited residency doctoral dissertation?

17. What was your approximate start date of you doctoral program and the date your Ph.D. or Ed.D was conferred?

18. What type of degree did you earn? Ph.D / Ed.D?

19. Please indicate the college or university where you earned your limited residency doctorate degree:
Survey: The following questions are modified from the Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000) to assess whether a person’s work-life was balanced during the limited residency doctoral process.

Please read the following statements and select the choice that best fits your overall experiences while you completed your limited residency doctoral program.

20. During the limited residency doctoral program, because your job demanded it, you usually worked long hours.
   A: Agree  
   B: Sometimes  
   C: Disagree

21. During the limited residency doctoral program, there was not much time to socialize/relax with your spouse/see family during the week or weekend.
   A: Agree  
   B: Sometimes  
   C: Disagree

22. During the limited residency doctoral program, relaxing and forgetting about work issues was hard to do.
   A: Agree  
   B: Sometimes  
   C: Disagree

23. During the limited residency doctoral program, relaxing and forgetting about your doctoral work was hard to do.
   A: Agree  
   B: Sometimes  
   C: Disagree

24. During the limited residency doctoral program, you worried about the effect of work stress, the stress caused from the limited residency doctoral program, and the stress of fulfilling your family roles, on your health.
   A: Agree  
   B: Sometimes  
   C: Disagree
25. During the limited residency doctoral program, your relationship with your partner suffered because of the pressure/time commitment/responsibilities of your work and your commitment to completing your limited residency doctoral program.

A: Agree  
B: Sometimes  
C: Disagree

26. During your limited residency doctoral program, your family missed out on your input, either because you did not see them enough or because you were too tired.

A: Agree  
B: Sometimes  
C: Disagree

27. During your limited residency doctoral program, you found it difficult to find time for hobbies, leisure activity, or to maintain friendships and extended family relationships were difficult.

A: Agree  
B: Sometimes  
C: Disagree

28. During your limited residency doctoral program, you would have liked to reduce your working hours and stress levels, but you felt like you had no control over the current situation.

A: Agree  
B: Sometimes  
C: Disagree

29. During the limited residency doctoral program, you felt like you neglected your partner and/or your children because of your limited residency doctoral work.

A: Agree  
B: Sometimes  
C: Disagree

30. During your limited residency doctoral program, you felt like you neglected your responsibilities at work.

A: Agree  
B: Sometimes  
C: Disagree
Thank you for participating in Phase I of this research study. Phase II of this study involves participating in an individual interview with the researcher and completing a letter of advice (written or dictated). If you are willing to participate in the next phases in this study, please provide the following:

1. Name (First, Last):
2. Email address:
3. Phone number:
4. Skype name (if you have an account):
5. Best days/times to schedule a 45-75 minute interview

Should you have questions, please contact John Patterson at jpatterson@liberty.edu
Appendix D: Consent Form (Interview and Letter)

CONSENT FORM (INTERVIEW AND LETTER OF ADVICE)

IDENTIFYING AS HUSBANDS, FATHERS, AND SCHOOL LEADERS: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF DOCTORAL PERSISTENCE AMONG LIMITED RESIDENCY STUDENTS

John Patterson
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of male school leaders who, while acting in the roles of husband and father, completed their limited residency doctoral program. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a male and you completed your doctoral program while acting as a school leader, husband, and father. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

John Patterson, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

The purpose of this study is understand the experiences of males who persisted to completion in their limited residency doctoral programs, while serving as husbands, fathers, and lead administrators of a K-12 school or district. Secondly, I want to determine how males who are husbands, fathers and lead administrators in a K-12 school district persist to doctoral completion.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Meet with me for a face to face, Skype, or phone interview. This will take 45-75 minutes.
2. Dictate or write a letter of advice to another male, K-12 lead administrator, husband and father who is contemplating beginning a similar doctoral experience that they completed. The request, with directions and the choice for prompts, will be sent to each participant via email. The participant may reply via email. The following prompts will give the participant some direction on what to advice.
3. Once I have summarized the interview, I will ask each participant to check the interview for correctness.

Risks and Benefits of Participation: The risks involved in this study are minimal.

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include the study acting as a blueprint for other male school leaders acting as husbands and fathers who desire to complete their limited residency doctoral program

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.
Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- All documents and recordings will be stored in a secure filing cabinet. I will be the only person who has access to the secure filing cabinet.
- I will conduct the interviews in a location that is convenient for you and where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Information will not be shared outside the interview period with anyone other than the participant.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is John Patterson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at 434-942-1438 or at jpatterson@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty advisor, Dr. Lucinda Spaulding at lsspaulding@liberty.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(Note: Do not agree to participate unless IRB approval information with current dates has been added to this document.)

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record or video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant: __________________________ Date: ____________

Signature of Investigator: __________________________ Date: ____________
Appendix E: Sample Interview

Speaker 1: Just tell me a little bit about yourself, Lou if you would.

Lou: Sure. My family is originally from Hawaii, but I grew up as an Air Force child, so we moved around quite a lot. [inaudible 00:01:32] the mainland. I graduated high school, went to my Bachelors and Masters on the mainland, got married, had a job on the mainland. I told my wife that someday I wanted to retire in Hawaii and God opened the door for an actual teaching position at a Christian school. I applied and got it. I ended up teaching for eight years at the Christian school I’m at now. An administrative position opened up this year and God just opened the door and said become an administrator.

Speaker 1: Wow, so your current position is principal?

Lou: Associate vice principal.

Speaker 1: Okay. Tell me about your family and your role in your family.

Lou: Husband, father, to my beautiful wife. She’s also employed, not here. She works for GEICO Insurance. We have three children. Two of them go to school here. My daughter is 8 years old, she’ll be in 4th grade next year. My son is 6 years old, he’ll be in 2nd grade. Then we have a 1-year-old that spends time at the daycare.

Speaker 1: Very good. Tell me about your role and your spouse’s role in your family. Who does what?

Lou: When it comes to homework, academic issues that’s mostly my area. Not because I’m in the academic setting, but I think it’s more because my wife doesn’t have the patience to help my children with homework and items like that. Not that I have the patience, I really want them to succeed academically. The extracurricular activities, things like that, usually my wife takes care of things like that. Budgetary items we usually work on those things together. Scheduling parties, events, social gatherings, that’s my wife’s thing. She’s all about that.

Speaker 1: What are the things your family values and chooses to spend time doing together?

Lou: Church is probably the biggest thing. For my wife and I, we both serve on the [inaudible 00:03:51] team at our church. My daughter serves, volunteers more or less, in the nursing helping watch little kids. My son not so much. He’s just having fun playing in the children’s church, but we’re always at church together and that’s a big priority. After that it would probably be spending time together at the beach, that’s our number one thing to do for fun. We were just there Sunday. We finished church, we finished running some errands and we just on a whim decided we were going to go to the beach. We always keep swim clothes in the car in case someone decides let’s go to the beach. We went, we changed at the beach, we let the kids play for an hour and a half until my son got sunburned and we decided to go home.
Lou: Sure. My daughter is very similar to me. She takes more after me than my wife. We have a lot of the same interests. She dances hula, that’s kind of her biggest extracurricular activity right now. She’s going to be starting volleyball in the fall. She thinks a lot like me. My son, who is 6 years old, he and I are very different in a lot of ways that we think. He’s very matter of fact. He wants very specific instructions. He doesn’t like it when you give him multiple tasks at the same time. He wants exact things and a list and he wants to know exactly when all of his chores will be done. He doesn’t want ambiguous directions. He wants to know exactly what he has to do, so that he knows exactly when he’ll done so when he can go on and play with his own toys and do his own thing.

My daughter, she’s thinking ahead of what the next thing might be. She can anticipate a lot of the things that I might be doing. She’s always a great help for me because she can always anticipate what I’m thinking. My son on the other hand he kind of just needs to be told what to do. The small school that I’m a vice principal at, and where they also attend, it works really well for my son because he needs that small one-on-one setting with his teacher. My daughter she absolutely loves school. I think she could thrive anywhere, any teacher. She wants to learn, she wants to do well in school, she wants to please the teacher. My son he could care less. It takes much more motivation for him to do well in school.

Then for our 1-year-old, it’s odd, he gets along well with anybody. It doesn’t matter who we leave him with at church. It could be someone we just met or someone that we know really well, but he’s never met before, he’ll go with them and he doesn’t cry. He doesn’t care who it is, he’ll hang out with them.

Lou: I was a musician throughout high school. As a musician in high school you always have these dreams and aspirations that you’re going to be a professional musician. I wanted to be a professional jazz musician and play my saxophone the rest of my life and that was my goal. I was told ‘be a teacher you always have something to fall back on’. I hate to use that because I don’t want any teacher to think of teaching as a fall back job. When I was in high school the Ed. degree was just a failsafe in case playing professionally as a musician didn’t work out. I finished all my courses, I got ready to do my student teaching, still didn’t think I wanted to be a teacher, but it was the degree I was in and the way I was headed. I ended up doing my student teaching and the gentleman that I student taught with opened my eyes to what was possible as a teacher.

He had the students eating out of his hands. He had them engaged. He had such a relationship with them, whether it came to praising them or disciplining them they all knew that he absolutely loved them and that he cared about them. They came into his
class and their eyes lit up, their behavior is completely switched to wanting to be there. It motivated me and showed me what was possible as a teacher. When I finished that, my student teaching, for some reason I felt like I need to go ahead and get my Masters Degree right now, otherwise I’m going to go teaching and I’m never going to get my Masters, it’ll be so hard to come back.

After finishing my Bachelors I went straight ahead at the same school. I did my Bachelors at the University of Kentucky and I went straight ahead and got my Masters at the University of Kentucky also. Then when I finished the Masters Degree program I had a couple options. I was looking at possibly going to Music Ministry or possibly teaching elementary music or middle school music, but I had really thought about teaching at the college level. I ended up sending applications all across the mainland, from Florida to California to North Dakota. I actually got a job at a college in North Dakota. I taught there, I taught music ed and musicology courses for four years. My wife was on staff there in Enrollment and Admissions Department.

We got married. There was low enrollment numbers, so they were talking about disbanding the music program just because there wasn’t enough students at the college. About that time, I was also thinking about pursuing a doctorate. It just so happened that ACSI was posting a job for the school I’m at now, XXXX Christian School. My wife and I prayed about it and we thought if God opens the door then maybe we’ll end up moving to Hawaii sooner than when we thought. We thought it would be retirement, but it ended up being a lot sooner. I applied, when through the application process and interview process, and got hired here. I taught music for eight years. Then this year was kind of a transition year. Our current principal who’s been here for 19 years, he went to half time this year. He’s looking to retire.

We have another vice principal who’s been here for 11 years, her family they’re moving to Oregon, so they brought me on this year as an associate vice principal to fill some of their gaps and eventually becoming vice principal next year. One of the other current vice principals she’ll move up and be the lead principal.

Speaker 1: If I ask to go back to that why question, is the why because of that mentor you talked about?

Lou: My mentor for student teaching, he’s the reason I’m a teacher now.

Speaker 1: What’s his name?

Lou: His nickname by the teachers was MR. D. His full name was XXXXXXXX. I’ve kind of taken on that persona. My students always call me XXXX, they don’t call me by my full last name. Even now some of them will call me Dr. K instead of Mr. K.

Speaker 1: To be clear, the reason you’re remaining in the field is it because of the advancement to these higher positions?
Lou: Throughout the last eight years when I was teaching music, I had been applying to other private schools here in Hawaii that had vice principal positions or administrative positions opening and just kind of a progression of my own life. I really feel like Christian education is where I want to be, whether that’s at the K-12 level or maybe even some day teaching at college or university level. I know Christian education is where God has called me and I see a need there for quality teachers.

Speaker 1: Tell me again how long you were a teacher for?

Lou: Four years at the college level, eight years K-12.

Speaker 1: Then how long have you been an administrator total?

Lou: One year.

Speaker 1: How long have you been that particular school?

Lou: Nine years.

Speaker 1: Okay. Was the position that you took as vice principal, what you mentioned, dependent upon you earning your doctorate or was that not a qualification for any of these positions you’re currently holding?

Lou: It wasn’t a qualification for this position. The administrative staff here they knew that I was pursuing a doctorate, they knew that I was almost done with it. I don’t want to say it was a qualification, but it definitely sweetened the deal.

Speaker 1: Sure. How would you describe your leadership style today?

Lou: I think my leadership style with a lot of the teachers it helps that I was in the classroom with them for the last eight years. I’m not going in as an outside administrator with limited teaching experience, so they know that I’ve dealt with behavior issues, that I’ve dealt with writing lesson plans and grading. I think my leadership style it’s more of I’ve given them an example for the last eight years, I’ve walked alongside them, so when I give them instructions I’m giving them instructions from a teacher’s side understanding where they’re at.

Speaker 1: Why did you choose to begin your doctoral degree, Lindon?

Lou: For me, as soon as I finished my Masters Degree I knew that it was something I wanted to do. That was 12, 14, long time ago. Even since then, I took doctoral classes all along the way, thinking that I was going to get a doctorate in music or a doctorate in ethnomusicology or various things. It just so happened that the course of those never worked out. It wasn’t until at this point in my life I said I need to get it done now before my kids get older. I knew that it was something that I wanted to do and I really believe that it was God’s provision that allowed me to finish it, especially with Liberty’s online program.
Speaker 1: Why did you feel like you had to start it? Was there something underwriting in your heart that made you say I’m going to take the first step and begin my program? Was there an incident or . . . .

Lou: Two things. One, I see myself in the future teaching at the college at the university level. I knew that a [inaudible 00:15:26] degree would be a great benefit to that. The other step was our current principal who’s retiring about four years ago he put out to all the teachers a set of goals that he wanted them to do that year. He listed I think two or three books, “I want you to read these books. That’s one goal you could have. Another goal is that I want you to take one professional development course. Another one is I want you to pursue another degree.” He had a list of options and he said to check mark which one you were going to do. I knew the guy to call to get that degree and I said that’s what I’m going to do. I’m not going to take another class just for the sake of taking a class, if I’m going to take a class I want it to lead to something. That was what it led to.

Speaker 1: Would you say that you beginning your doctoral degree was a personal goal or some kind of external expectation place on you?

Lou: Personal goal.

Speaker 1: Tell me the factors that influenced where you chose to study and when you chose to begin? Why did you chose Liberty University and then the when part, when you chose to do it, why was that the right time for you?

Lou: I’ll start with the when first. I’d been teaching here for four years and I felt like my lesson plans were at a point where they could write themselves. I knew the material enough. I knew the curriculum maps for the whole year. I felt like I’m at a point where not that I can coast, but I knew the lesson plans well enough that I think I can add on working on these courses and the occupation is not going to drag me down. I felt like I was at a time where I could get started on it. I also wanted to get it done before my kids got too old and they got tons of afterschool activities and I’m having to help them a lot with their homework.

My daughter, she remembers like before the doctorate when daddy had a lot more time. My middle son, all he’s ever known is daddy downstairs at his desk reading or writing, so when I finally finished for him it was like, wow, dad has a lot more time. You were asking why Liberty? I read a bunch of reviews. I talked to a lot of people who had studied at a number of Christian universities. Liberty’s reputation is just far and above, greater than anything I would’ve expected, especially when I took the on-campus classes and just getting to meet the people there. It just confirmed to me that this is where God wanted me to be, the online option worked great for me. I was able to continue working full time and then go home and do my homework at night and on the weekends.

My wife, she also has some distant relatives that live in Lynchburg, so I was able to go out there and stay with them, borrow a car when I had to take classes.
Speaker 1: You mentioned this just a second ago, but why did you choose limited-residency doctoral program? We’re going to refer to it as LRD. Looking back, do you feel that LRD was the best choice for your lifestyle?

Lou: Yeah, I do. I felt like it was the best. There’s no way that I could’ve done an on-campus class. I could’ve gotten a doctorate here in Hawaii from the university, but it would’ve just been a number of night classes and probably would’ve had to take off a number of times to finish classes. It just wouldn’t have worked in my schedule. It probably would’ve put the doctorate another four years down the road before I actually finished it. Doing the online through Liberty I was able to take at least two classes every quarter and knock them out as quickly as possible. It worked well for me to get done as quickly as possible.

Speaker 1: Tell me about adjustments you made. Let’s start with your role as a father when you began the degree. We’re going to talk about your role as a husband and your role as an administrator. I notice on your sheet you filled out for me, the preliminary questionnaire, you thought that there was some give and take as a father, as a husband, but maybe not as an administrator. Your work life kind of stayed the same. Can we talk about those three things for a second? Adjustments you made in your role as a father?

Lou: Like I said, my daughter remembers life before the doctorate when I had lots of time. I would come home and I didn’t have to read, I didn’t have to do homework, I only had to spend time with her. As soon as the doctorate started it would be come home and my wife she would be the one cooking dinner. I didn’t help much with the meals for the last four years. My kids, I would try to spend time with them after school and after work and we’d try to eat dinner. Then as soon as they went to bed I’d stay up another three hours doing work. The weekends were probably the biggest factor, whether it was go to the beach or go to a party or go do fun things, daddy could never go because he had homework to do.

The weekends is when I found I was able to get most of my work done. During the weekdays I was just exhausted by the time we got the kids to bed. It was hard to get any work done during the week. It was on Saturdays and after church on Sundays that I would put in 8, 10 hours. That was a lot of time away from my kids. My wife had to take them to a lot of birthday parties by herself. She took them to the beach a lot of times by herself. I know it was probably a strain on her for a lot of that. She had to sacrifice quite a bit.

Speaker 1: How about your job as an administrator in the school as you were going through this, did you have to sacrifice your work?

Lou: I don’t think I had to sacrifice anything for work. If anything, it would’ve been just to conduct the interviews. I took some time off work to drive over to some area schools and interview some students, but there wasn’t really any lower of the productivity of the work, I just had to take off some hours.
Speaker 1: Tell me about your experiences during course work. Any specific challenges in this stage of the degree and how you addressed them? This would be prior to dissertation. Any specific challenges in this stage of your degree and how you worked through that?

Lou: Ironically, my two courses that I struggled with the most were qualitative methods and writing for publication, and ironically that’s what I did for my dissertation was basically those two courses. I think because I had to work harder in those two specific classes it helped my dissertation along the way. The other classes I think I really enjoyed, I wouldn’t say I enjoyed philosophy of education, that one was not as interesting to me. I enjoyed statistics. I enjoyed quantitative methods.

Speaker 1: Did you have any personal challenges during this phase?

Lou: In the course work, I wouldn’t say I had any personal challenges. During the course work it never felt like this is insurmountable, that I’m not going to get it done. Everything just kept lining up on place. God just let all the courses . . . It seemed really easy, maybe too easy when it came to the doctorate. The doctorate took everything to a whole other level.

Speaker 1: Tell me about the relationship with your peers in your LRD program and if these relationships helped you persist to success looking back. The question is you had peers who really helped you or they were nonexistent in your success?

Lou: In my program, maybe once I emailed peers in my program and that was because I had a question about a class. All of the discussion boards I never felt like there was a real connection with the other people. I did the required discussion boards, I did the required responses. I know Liberty wants to try to make everything a community with all the online classes, but I never really felt like there was. I didn’t really feel like I had to have that community of other students going through the same process as me. It may have been nice to have that, I don’t know. I never felt like I needed that.

Speaker 1: Why didn’t you feel like you needed that?

Lou: I don’t know, I guess maybe because I was very removed already from Liberty just given location. I don’t know.

Speaker 1: How about relationships with your instructors during your course work, did those relationships at all play into your success persisting to completion with your doctoral work?

Lou: Not really. I would say there was two professors that were the biggest motivators, Dr. Black I went out there and took a course from her. I forgot the name of the course now. She had been to Hawaii a lot and she had that connection. We were able to talk a lot of things about Hawaii. Just getting to know her a little bit and just hearing the number of stories of other students she had motivated, hearing her and her passion, just her heart for God and her heart for Christian education. I haven’t talked with her much since her class, but I always wanted to do well and especially do well on my dissertation because I knew she was probably going to read it or hear about it. The other one was Dr. Sweezy
00:25:53], who ended up being my chair. His passion for Christian education and following God’s will, he was another one that made a big difference for me.

Speaker 1: Okay. Let’s talk about your dissertation phase, so this is a whole other phase. Challenges specific to this phase and how you addressed these challenges to persist to doctoral completion?

Lou: Early on I thought I was going to write a dissertation on teacher attrition, almost all the way up until the writing portion. It was kind of a thing that was on my heart. I’d seen a number of teachers that I had worked with that were really good teachers and then our school didn’t hold on to them. They left for other schools. I felt like we’re doing a disservice because we’re losing some really great teachers and I thought that was what I was going to write about. There came a point in time where I assigned an essay to some students. I gave them some parameters, but I wanted to leave it up to them. I wasn’t going to grade them on what they wrote about morally, I was just going to grade them on the number of words that they wrote and whether they were documenting stuff.

The answers that I got back scared me because I thought that the students were at a better place morally and spiritually than what they actually were. From that, that is what spurred studying spiritual formation of Christian students. I scrambled in 917 and those first dissertation courses because I didn’t really have any research prior to that because all of my research and my course work was all led towards teacher attrition. I had to scramble early on and find some stuff. The early portions of the dissertation, writing the proposal perspectives those were lackluster. They probably weren’t as good as I would’ve liked to have made them because I was getting started on the back end of things.

Went through like a crisis during the proposal phase. I didn’t feel like I would every finish, but I wondered maybe it would be best if I just stopped here because I don’t know if this is ever going to get done. Really went through some panic times, really praying and seeking God. A lot of afternoons just getting real angry with myself that I wasn’t writing as much. I saw deadlines coming and going and felt like I missed one semester and now I was going to have to pay for another semester. After really praying and seeking God, I felt like God told me I want you to read 15 pages whether it’s research or a book and I want you to write 1 page a day. From that, that was my method just read 15 pages and write 1 page a day. I did that for about a month and it got progressively easier and easier to where I was able to write multiple pages a day.

In the dissertation process there was a lot of days I was just angry, I was mad, and I just poured my heart out to God and how angry I was that the process wasn’t as easy as it was during the course work.

Speaker 1: Yeah, I totally understand that. That’s the way I felt too. It’s a great answer. To make sure I understand that, it was that late switch that really was the challenge for you?

Lou: Yeah.
Speaker 1: Okay. How about the uncertainty of completion date, did that serve as a stressor for you? Like you said, you were worried about am I ever going to finish this thing, talk about this idea of this completion date. Did you have a plan? Did you not have a plan? You were paying money to go to school, how did that completion date serve as a stressor, a motivator, so on, so forth?

Lou: It was a really big stressor. My wife and I invested four years to complete the degree. I ended up taking out loans for the first two years, but then we budgeted and we felt like we could pay for the final two years. I knew that I wanted to finish a semester or two semesters ahead of time. I just saw the days clicking by. When you’ve got to submit your proposal by a certain time, you’ve got to get IRB approval, I just saw the weeks adding up and there’s no way that I’m going to finish this. It’s really hard to tell your wife that we’re going to have to spend another $2,000. She was really understanding. It was just a testament to her, kind of embarrassing to me.

When you’re going through a doctorate a lot of my colleagues they’re always asking “When you gonna be done?” It’s either “When are you gonna be done” or “What are you writing your dissertation on?” I would tell them the dissertation part. They would ask, “When you gonna be done”, and I’d say, “I think I’ll be done in the spring semester. I think I’ll be done in the fall semester. I think I’ll be done in the spring.” Looking back on it now, I think I have a better idea of all the hoops you have to jump through to get the dissertation done, with the IRB approval and then waiting for a review, and all the other steps, getting all the consent forms signed and everything. I think I could’ve planned it a little bit better now if I was to get another doctorate.

I think not meeting the deadlines that I wanted to meet and having to pay out more money was a big stress in my life. Thankfully, my wife was more supportive. She could’ve been pretty upset.

Speaker 1: Let’s talk about the adjustments you made during the dissertation phase, we talked a little bit about the adjustments you made during the course work. Maybe the same as the course work, what were the adjustments you made as a husband, father, and school during your dissertation phase of the program?

Lou: I would say that I probably had less time with my family during the dissertation. Give and take, I feel like there were some points when I just didn’t have anything to write. I didn’t feel like there was anything spurring me on to write about, so I had more time, per se, to spend with my kids on a weekend. They would go maybe two or three weeks where I felt like God was just giving me stuff to write about or giving me different insights when I would look at the data and I would just go two or three weeks straight just writing, writing, writing. Getting home from work I would just write, write, write kind of nonstop, but then I’d be off for two weeks.

I would always be thinking about the data, but not writing. I would go to birthday parties with my kids or we’d go to the park or go to the beach, I’d always be thinking about the data during the dissertation phase, even though I wasn’t at a table writing.
Speaker 1: Well said. Let’s talk about your chair, the relationship you had with your chair, Dr. [XXXX 00:33:58], what role he played in you persisting or he didn’t play a role at all?

Lou: Dr. [XXXX 00:34:06] is great. He doesn’t pull any punches. I felt like early on in the course, I forget what course I had to take with him, 970 or something like that, I had to take that course and I felt like he was really honest. He would tell all of us in that class exactly what was good about our research, what was bad, his experience and the number of dissertations that he’s chaired before he knew a lot of the issues that might come up. He approached me when I presented in class that he would like to either be on my committee or even possibly chair my committee. When I had gone from that class it seemed like everyone else in my cohort they had already gotten all the members that they need for the committee. I felt a little bit behind the ball, but I just prayed and asked God to show me who was on the committee and when Dr. [XXXXX00:35:00] approached me I felt like well this is God’s appointment, so I was happy to let him chair.

Since then, if you approach him he’ll help you as much as possible. He’ll also stand off and let you work through the data on your own, work through the process on your own. I feel like if you can meet Dr. [XXXXXX00:35:30] expectations you can meet a lot of people’s expectations.

Speaker 1: You talked a little bit earlier about you questioning completing your degree, can you identify that one thing that pushed you past those times of questioning am I ever going to finish this thing looking back?

Lou: I think it was I had a breakdown in writing the proposal and then the proposal got passed. It was nice, but there was another breakdown when it came to analyzing all the data. There was a point where just thinking about all the data I felt like now it makes sense. Now I have something that I can get to the body of scholarly work that’s been done on faith formation, now I have something to offer. When I was just thinking about it I was like this has never been said before. I feel like now I have something to offer, now I have my niche, and if I can write about this I felt like it’ll be done. It took me another three months to completely flesh out all that, but in thinking about the data and finding something to write about that’s never been written about before.

Speaker 1: I have a hypothetical for you, we’ve got a line of 20 men all of whom are full-time administrators with families just like you who are working on their LRD, just like you were. Ten of the men pursued their LRD and they finish just like you do. Ten men pursued their LRD and did not finish. What would be the one primary difference between these two groups of people?

Lou: This is my daughter.

Speaker 3: Hi.

Speaker 1: Hi, nice to meet you.

Speaker 3: One question.
Lou: Hurry up.

Speaker 3: XXXX is in her dad’s classroom . . . .

Lou: Yes, you can go.

Speaker 3: Yes, thank you.

Lou: The 10 men who finished and the 10 men who did not finish, what would what?

Speaker 1: What would be the differences between the two groups of people? If you could identify one thing, what would be the difference between those two groups of people?

Lou: Those are the usual statistics, right, 50% actually finish.

Speaker 1: Guys like you, 30% of you guys are finishing, 30% in education. Everybody else is 50%, education is 30%. I’m trying to figure out why that is. Why did Lou succeed, that’s what I’m trying to figure out. I want to know what you think is the reason if we lined up those 20 people, those 10 didn’t and those 10 did, what do you think the primary reason is that those 10 were able to persist?

Lou: I feel like if anyone was to ask me now, “Lou should I get a doctorate for my career”, I would tell them, “If God wants you to get it done then you should get it done.” Me, as myself, I’m not a scholarly person. Throughout high school, Bachelors Degrees, Master Degree I didn’t do well at all. I really feel like God was the one that wanted me to get this doctorate for my own professional career to further Christian education and to benefit Christian education. The times when I tried to do it on my own seems like when I struggled the most. If I have those 20 men, and 10 finish and 10 don’t, for me it would really be if God wants you to get it done you’ll get it done. I’m sure there’s some people who can finish a doctorate without God’s help, but I think God has got to be in the mix because if my wife wasn’t also pursuing God she probably would’ve gotten really frustrated with me, financially, time wise, and not being available as a husband and as a father. She really had to trust in God during this whole process as well. It’s really a God thing.

Speaker 1: It’s a God thing. You mentioned your wife. Is it a wife thing also for you? Was your wife . . . .

Lou: Definitely.

Speaker 1: Without her support would you have made it?

Lou: Same wavelength spiritually with God. I think she’s got a trust in God and that trust in God for her allowed her to be supportive of me. I’m sure there’s a lot of wives out there that don’t have relationships with God that are just as supportive to their husbands. For her it was probably trusting in God and knowing that God’s going to help me finish and God’s going to bless our family in the future for this.
Speaker 1: I’ve just got a couple more for you. Was it worth it? Looking back now you persisted, was it worth it and why would you say it was worth it?

Lou: I would say it was definitely worth it, not because to the occupation that it’s opened up for me now, but I feel like it’s going to open up doors for me in the future. I feel like it’s going to . . .

Speaker 1: Can you still hear me?

Lou: I can hear you.

Speaker 1: That’s okay, I can hear you good. Go ahead. You ended with yes it was worth it.

Lou: Yeah, the doctorate was definitely worth it for me career wise. [inaudible 00:41:42] occupation that I’m at now. I feel like being a vice principal at a K-12 school is not my end goal. I know I want to be at the college university level someday. My end goal, God willing, is I could teach online classes and sit on the beach as retirement. That’d be my end goal. I think getting the doctorate was definitely worth it. For one, it taught me how to become a better writer and to be a better researcher. It also showed an example to my wife and my kids just what’s possibly by trusting in God and by working hard.

Speaker 1: Did your doctorate degree influence the way you lead? You talked about your leadership style a little bit earlier, about how your teachers see you as an example. Did it change your leadership style when you became Dr. Lindon?

Lou: I don’t know that it changed my leadership style, probably made me just a little more thorough in reading teacher’s lesson plans and in reading over their rubrics. It gave me a better idea to see what types of writing mistakes that they’re going to make. Proofing the newsletters they send out to parents. It made me a little bit better to be more thorough in checking a lot of the stuff that teachers send out.

Speaker 1: I think I know how you’re going to answer this, but how did your wife negotiate all the challenges associated with your doctoral studies? You mentioned your wife is a prayer warrior. How did she negotiate all of this?

Lou: She works full time and for her there was lots of days where we would come home and in order for me to write, or to read, or to analyze data she would get started on homework with the kids and get started on dinner at the same time. When we would finish that she’d make sure the kids took showers and she’d give me a heads up the kids are going to bed and make sure you kiss them goodnight . . . It was stressful on her. She felt like at times she never got a break. She’d go to work, she’d come home, and she’d do the laundry, do dishes, and do dinner, help the kids with their homework, and then she would go to bed and I would stay up working for another couple of hours. It seems like we’d get up the next day and do the whole thing again. I tried to periodically if I knew that she was stressed or if I knew that the kids needed time with me I would take the kids out and spend a couple hours with them just so she could have some peace and quiet.
There was times when we did hire a babysitter and my wife and I would go out or we’d all go out as a family and do stuff. It was definitely a sacrifice on her part, but it was also times when me as a husband and a father had to understand that my family’s what was more important and the data or the research, the paper I just had to set aside for a day, maybe even a week, and just spend time with my family.

Speaker 1: Did the dissertation and the program, would you say it hurt your relationship with your wife or helped your relationship with your wife or you guys were pretty steady throughout the whole thing?

Lou: I don’t think it hurt my relationship with my wife. If anything, it showed me how strong and faithful as a Christian and as a wife she is.

Speaker 1: That’s a great answer. Did you have to do anything different at work at all? Is there anything you had to sacrifice at work? Did you take a few days off? Did you find yourself thinking about the dissertation when you had interaction with your teachers? Did it affect your daily work at all?

Lou: I don’t think so. I took off to conduct my interviews. I never really had to take off to do course work. I don’t think I had to take off to do any writing. I probably should’ve some days. It might’ve been better for my own health, my own sanity, but I guess I felt like I didn’t really need to.

Speaker 1: Okay. Last question before I turn it back over to you is, to what or to whom do you ultimately attribute your success? To what or to whom do you ultimately attribute your persistence? I think you’ve already answered this for me. You mentioned before that it was God for you, it was your faith. Is there anything else you want to add to that, to what or to whom that you look back and you go this is why I made it?

Lou: Sure. Ultimately, it would be God. I’ve seen him direct my path from the very beginning and just open up doors. Even when I was making mistakes and trying to do things my own way I’ve always seen in hand in my life, from a praying mom early on that just put me on God’s path and just instilled that in me and then just a praying wife who’s been great along the way. Having male mentors that have just been able to speak wisdom into my life along the way.

Speaker 1: Lou what have I not asked you that I need to know about your persistence experience? Is there anything else I haven’t asked you that you would say I need to make sure he knows that this is part of my persistence journey to doing this thing or something else you would like all the men to know who are going through this process before they even started it? Is there anything else?

Lou: I think the biggest thing is make sure it’s something God wants you to do before you get a doctorate. Having those letters behind your name don’t really mean anything unless God wants it to happen. We could all pursue all kinds of endeavors that might open up different career paths for us or give us a higher salary, but I feel like unless God wants
you to do it you’re just adding on more stress and more problems into your life, into your marriage, into your family.

Speaker 1: Great
Appendix F: Sample Letter

Dear Potential Doctoral Student,

As you contemplate beginning a doctoral program, I would like to introduce myself and share some words of advice having previously completed a similar journey. My name is Sam, I am a believer, husband, father of three, and school administrator in Chattanooga, Tennessee. To assist you with your decision making, I would like to offer some advice in regards to what one might expect if you decide to pursue your terminal degree.

First, you should know that the pursuit of a terminal degree, no matter the institution, will be a daunting task. As the old saying goes, “if it were easy, everyone would do it” certainly holds true as “not everyone does it”. In regards to expectations, you can certainly expect to devote lots of time to the work. The actual coursework difficulty and time commitment will vary depending on the student and other factors, but one can certainly count on putting in lots of hours and effort during the dissertation process. Next, you can expect to encounter some tough decision in regards to prioritizing your commitments. As a husband and father, I made the choice to pursue a hybrid program which allowed me to work mostly at night once my children and wife headed to bed. I also made this choice as I did not want my educational pursuits to affect my full-time responsibilities as a school administrator. I think back on the many, many late nights grinding through coursework, research, and writing and wonder how I was able to do it. I know without a doubt, however, that it was certainly the grace and blessings of God and the support of my wonderful wife that allowed me to accomplish this feat. Finally, you can expect road blocks. During my doctoral journey, there were so many obstacles and pitfalls to overcome in order to meet my goal. Writer’s block, slow revision turnarounds, personal commitments, and just life, all tried their hand at derailing my dream of degree completion. As mentioned above, however, I was able to keep the faith and grind on as I was the first in my cohort to successfully defend my dissertation and earn my degree.

In noting the things to expect as mentioned above, I would be remiss if I did not offer some suggestions that may help you overcome some of the challenges you may encounter. First, keep your priorities in order and trust that God will help you see this through. Throughout my journey, I was blessed to have a feeling of calm and even certainty in my completion amidst all of the challenges and difficulties that come with this type of endeavor. I know, without a doubt, that this was THE reason that I was able to meet my goal. Next, always have a plan for utilizing your time and have frequent checks to ensure that you are on pace to achieve your established timelines and benchmarks. As I worked through my program, I always recognized the importance of having well-vetted plans to go along with my determination to remain organized and meet decided benchmarks. Finally, do not be afraid to self-advocate. As a student, you may be tempted to simply accept when a revision is returned late from your chair or when the IRB process takes longer than the program specifies. In those instances, don’t be afraid to reach out professionally to those who are working with you to advocate for the services you are paying for as you pursue your degree. I can tell you firsthand of the importance and benefits of doing so as I would certainly not have been able to complete my degree requirements in the timeline that was set without self-advocacy along the way.
In closing, if you are at the point of reading this letter of advice, you are definitely serious about the prospect of pursuing your terminal degree. If you are ready, and if the time and circumstances are right, you will know it. Pray about it, talk things over with your spouse or family, and then don’t be afraid to go for it if it feels right. I often tell people that pursuing my terminal degree was “the most unintelligent smart thing” I have ever done simply because it was such a daunting task. However, once you come out unscathed on the other side, the benefits and doors that having such a degree may open, certainly outweigh the hard work and sacrifices you will have endured.

All the best in your decision and potential journey!

Sam
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3.1. All Confidential Information will remain the property of Client.

3.2. This Agreement imposes no obligations on either party to purchase, sell, lease, transfer or otherwise transfer in any products, services or technology.

4. Termination

4.1. Upon Client's written request, Rev.com agrees to use good faith efforts to return promptly to Client any Confidential Information that is in writing and in the possession of Rev.com and to certify the return or destruction of all Confidential Information, provided that Rev.com may retain a summary description of Confidential Information for archival purposes.

4.2. The rights and obligations of the parties hereto contained in Sections 2 (Use and Disclosure of Confidential Information), subject to Section 2.1, 3 (Certain Rights and Limitations), 4 (Termination), and 5 (Miscellaneous) will survive the return of any tangible embodiments of Confidential Information and any termination of this Agreement.

5. Miscellaneous

5.1. Client and Rev.com are independent contractors and will so represent themselves in all regards. Nothing in this Agreement will be construed to make either party the agent or legal representative of the other or to make the parties partners or joint venturers, and neither party may bind the other in any way. This Agreement will be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of the State of California governing such agreements without regard to conflict of law principles. The sole and exclusive jurisdiction and venue for any litigation arising out of this Agreement shall be an appropriate federal or state court located in the State of California, and the parties agree not to raise, and waive, any objections or defenses based upon venue or forum non

Page 1
## Appendix H: Participant Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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Industrial Society’s Work-Life Checklist (Daniels & McCarraher, 2000) is applied to assess whether a person’s work-life was balanced during the limited residency doctoral process.

Mostly A: If one checked all or mostly A’s then they perceived themself to be under considerable stress from their lack of work-life balance in their doctoral program/balance. Over time, their productivity may have suffered along with their relationships, health, and long-term employment.

Mostly C: If one checked all or mostly C’s then they perceived themself to be not entirely happy with their work-life balance in their doctoral program/balance, making it work for them.

Mostly B: If one checked all or mostly B’s then they perceived themself to be not entirely happy with their work-life balance in their doctoral program/balance, but they did not let the situation get out of control.

Result Perception
Mostly A 7
Mostly B 3
Mostly C 3

Because you job demanded it, you usually worked long hours.

Participant Questions
1. How would you rate your relationship with your spouse/partner during the Limited Residency Doctoral Program (LRD) and the stress of fulfilling your working hours during the LRD, and the stress caused from your working hours and stress about your doctoral work issues?
2. How would you rate your commitment/responsibilities of your work and your family roles, on your health?
3. You found it difficult to find time for family relationships were difficult. You felt like you neglected your responsibilities at work because of your LRD.
4. You would have liked to reduce your working hours and stress was hard to do. Relaxing and forgetting about work issues was hard to do. You worried about the effect of work stress, the stress caused from your lack of work-life balance in your doctoral program/balance, making it work for them.

Appendix I: Participant Questions

Table: Participant Questions

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Appendix J: Codes

- Accomplishment
- Adding to the literature
- Adjustments (none made)
- Adjustment (better communication)
- Adjustments - what I gave up (yes)
- Adjustments made (as school leader - NO)
- Adjustments made (as school leader - time off)
- Adoption
- Advocating
- Age of children
- Age of children made timing right
- Anger
- APA
- Appreciation for educations
- Balance
- Better in reviewing teachers work
- Boss support
- Called to Christian Education
- Chair / Committee (bad)
- Chair / Committee (Good)
- Chair Frustration
- Challenge (NO)
- Challenge during Program
- Change my thinking (NO)
- Changed the way I think
- Children
- Children (proud)
- Choosing RIGHT PROGRAM
- Chose Liberty University for Doctoral program
- Chose to be a school leader
- Chose university because of familiarity
- Christian Education is greatest influence
- Christian school for kids
- Christian University for doctorate
- Church / faith is a priority
- Coaching a sport
- Cohort
- College Teaching
- Coming to campus
- Cost
- Counseling
- Coursework was easy
- Credibility
- Credibility (actually hurts)
○ Data
○ Deadline (external motivation)
○ Dissertation phase
○ Divorce
○ Doctoral dissertation (enjoyed it!)
○ Doctoral dissertation (knew exactly what I wanted to do)
○ Doctoral Program made it easy to sign up
○ Doctoral Program-good rep, high completion
○ Doctoral title
○ Doctoral title is prestigious
○ Doctorate (Are you stupid?)
○ Doctorate (bored with position)
○ Doctorate (did not like it)
○ Doctorate (EMBRACE THE CHALLENGE)
○ Doctorate (example for my students)
○ Doctorate (external - impact on the world)
○ Doctorate (financial gain)
○ Doctorate (for Advancement)
○ Doctorate (for my parents)
○ Doctorate (Jesus Christ)
○ Doctorate (life long dream -higher ed)
○ Doctorate (NO HELP in advancement)
○ Doctorate (people expect more)
○ Doctorate (Personal Development)
○ Doctorate (planned out)
○ Doctorate (right timing with kids)
○ Doctorate (timeline motivation)
○ Doctorate (what you are finding out)
○ Doctorate -Example for kids and wife
○ Doctorate is stress without God
○ Doctorate ON hold
○ Doctorate required for positions (NO)
○ Early morning work time
○ EASY
○ Education background
○ Education because I hated my career
○ Education Career as Fall Back
○ Elementary Principal
○ Embarrassing
○ Empathy
○ Enjoyment - find Joy
○ excitement
○ External Motivation
○ Faith (weak)
○ Family first at times
○ Family importance / support
○ Father (trying to live up)
○ Father’s Influence
○ Feeling like I always had something to do (anxiety)
○ Finances (no issue)
○ Financial Motivation
○ Financial strain
○ First job in Christian school
○ Flexibility of doctoral program
○ Frustration with program
○ General Story
○ God’s Calling
○ God’s grace
○ Good leadership team around you
○ Graduation
○ GRIT / Internal motivation / work ethic / desire (add self-advocacy)
○ Guilt
○ Had to wait to begin doctorate
○ HARD
○ Hated Current Job
○ Health Issues
○ Home School
○ Humble and Accepting
○ Husband Education
○ Husband role (outside of home)
○ Husband role in the home
○ Husband role outside the home
○ Husband went to Christian school
○ Instructors during coursework
○ Intensives
○ Internal Self-Motivation - Grit
○ Introduction of self as Doctor
○ Know the expectations
○ Knowing why you are doing this
○ Late Night Studying
○ Leader of family
○ Leaders - born or made?
○ Leadership
○ Leadership (D)
○ Leadership (Servant)
○ Leadership (trust)
○ Leadership by example/relevant to teachers
○ Leadership Decisive principled leadership
○ Leadership Relational and coaching leadership style
○ Leadership style (collaborative / TEAM/Transformational
○ Leadership (better at it)
○ Length at current school
- Length of marriage
- Life just happens
- Love for curriculum
- Love for students / Teaching
- Love for Superintendent job
- Masters
- Masters to Doctorate inbreeding
- Mentor (non-peer)
- Mentors for family
- Military
- Mother (praying)
- Mother’s influence
- Music
- Never doubted finishing
- NO Adjustments / what I gave up (NONE)
- Number of kids
- Online learning (not preferred)
- Open Door
- Other than the fact that you have to be
- Parents Unsupportive
- Pastoring
- Peer (YES)
- Peer Relations (NO)
- Ph.D
- PLAN / Organized / Benchmarks
- Prioritizing your commitments
- proximity of program
- Quit (I understand why people would)
- Quit (never entered)
- Reimbursement
- Residential requirement
- Role of a Father
- Sacrifice made as school leader
- Sacrifice of wife
- Sacrificed Family time for doctorate
- Self-Advocacy
- Separate myself to study (NO)
- Separate myself to study (YES)
- Speed of doctorate (taking classes)
- Spiritual and character training of children
- Start in education
- Statistics
- Stress (thinking about it)
- Superintendent
- Support from church
- Support from School (working at)
○ Teacher (started as)
○ Teaching background
○ TIME (it takes TIME)
○ Time Management
○ Timeline Stressor
○ TimeLine was no issue
○ Timing
○ Transcription
○ Travel during dissertation
○ Tuition reimbursement
○ Values of family
○ Weekend studying
○ Why a Doctorate (mentor encouragement)
○ Wife
○ Wife (communication)
○ Wife (praying)
○ Wife (unsupportive)
○ Wife is educator
○ Wife Occupation (outside education)
○ Wife support
○ Wife’s education
○ Wife’s role
○ Worked when my kids worked
○ Worth it (NO)
○ Worth IT?
○ Years in Admin