A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PROFESSIONAL, WORKING MOTHERS WHO PERSISTED TO DOCTORAL DEGREE COMPLETION

by

Brianne Kay Bruscino

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of professional, full-time working mothers who successfully persisted to complete a doctorate degree in an education field through any program type: online, blended, or traditional. Clark's work/family border theory and Tinto's student retention theory guided this study, as they connect to the full-time working mothers' persistence to complete their doctoral degree while holding multiple roles in their lives. Data collection comprised questionnaires, a life map, a Division of Household Roles Survey, and a semi-structured interview to provide rich individual and composite descriptions. The researcher used Moustakas' modification of Van Kaam's method of analysis of phenomenological data to arrive at the essence of the participants' experiences through a seven-step data analysis and triangulation. The findings indicated women felt their abilities, personal ambition, and the potential professional opportunities provided with a doctoral degree outweighed the negative stigma of returning to school as a full-time working mother. Doctoral mothers faced personal, academic, and professional obstacles during their programs, but persisted to completion with tenacity, well-rounded support systems, and self-regulation. Applications of the research can potentially lead to more academic and social support for doctoral moms, realistic views of obstacles, and strategies in place for mothers to self-regulate and compartmentalize their time during the doctoral journey to help manage a semblance of balance.

Keywords: motherhood, attrition, persistence, doctoral degree, multiple roles, role balance

Copyright

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all full-time working mothers who strive toward new goals, meet multiple life demands, and succeed in all aspects of their lives. The below statements provide you with real metaphors and sayings from successful doctoral moms who completed their journey!

1. Unless you have done it, you have no clue.
2. I birthed a kid and I birthed a dissertation.
3. Finishing a dissertation is like pregnancy and birth: Unless you've experienced it, you don't get it.
4. Everyone will get a piece of the pie; save yourself a slice.
5. The dissertation is training and finishing a marathon.
6. Do it in your own way, in your own time.
7. Just remember to believe in yourself; we're pretty freaking awesome people, you know!
8. It's chaos you have to embrace.
9. Show up and be present.
10. It may have taken me almost 6 years, but I sure lived life along the way. I have the memories, scars, and love to prove it. I did it my way.

Acknowledgments

The doctoral journey is a long, bumpy, and winding path requiring strength, perseverance, and a durable support system. I first want to acknowledge and thank my husband for supporting me when I made the decision to begin this journey, not giving up on me throughout the journey, and continuously to encouraging me to meet and exceed my goals, all while supporting our family. To my children, Isaac and Kayleigh, thank you for understanding and accepting that "Mommy has homework tonight" and making me smile when mommy guilt set it. Someday you will understand I started this degree for myself, but finished it to show you anything can be achieved with persistence, determination, and love.

Second, I want to acknowledge my parents who supported me since the beginning, through both my bachelor and Master's programs, and believed in my ability to complete my doctoral journey when I doubted myself. Thank you for reading, editing, and helping me keep it together. Without your support and help with our family, I could not attend the weeklong intensives and complete the doctorate.

To my Aunt Linda, who is not here to see this degree completed but who showed me what true strength is, your love and light continues to shine through us all each and every day.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my chair, Dr. Lisa Foster, who accepted my qualitative mind and helped guide this dissertation to completion. I want to thank Dr. Lucinda Spaulding, who encouraged my topic thought process and me to continue and find the answer. A thank you to Dr. Laura Hussein, who helped fill a spot on my committee and take time to check on the progress through the last year of this journey.

This degree has not been an easy one, or a short one, but it has been a successful one!

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List of Abbreviations

All But Dissertation (ABD)

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

Educational Doctorate Degree (Ed.D.)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)

Masters of Business Administration (MBA)

Work/Family Border Theory (WFBT)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Throughout history, women receive guidance from messages passed to them by families, educators, and other similar leaders to improve their lives and make different choices than the women whom came before them (Tajlili, 2014). These ideas have influenced more women to persist beyond their current career aspirations and in their educational persistence, despite a possible work-life imbalance (Philipsen, 2010). Therefore, this study was an examination of full-time working mothers in these distinct situations—specifically, their ability to persist to doctoral degree completion while balancing multiple roles in their lives. Even though women attain and persist to completion at a higher rate than men, overall attrition rates in the United States in doctoral programs are as high as 70% (Byers et al., 2014; Lovitts, 2001; Santicola, 2013). Women balance multiple roles and identities in their lives in looking to further their education and professional opportunities. Chapter One focuses on creating a foundation by covering the background, situation to self, problem statement, purpose statement, significance, research questions, and definitions for the subgroup of women who are full-time working mothers who persisted to successful doctoral completion.

Background

The field of persistence and attrition in higher education, researched by both Tinto (1987) and Lovitts (2001), has identifiable gaps in current research. Researchers started exploring the gender factors in doctoral persistence, specifically in the area of women (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Lunde, 2017). Philipsen (2010), however, stated no investigation existed on the relationship between how women's professional and personal lives directly impact the gender gap in higher education. Therefore, the intended purpose of this research was to increase the

body of knowledge about a specific subgroup of women who were full-time working mothers and persisted to successful doctoral completion.

Doctoral education throughout the world is multifaceted and found in a multitude of disciplines. In the education field, two doctoral degree tracks exist for students; Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) or Doctor of Education (Ed.D.). Wergin (2011) described the Ph.D. as the degree for individuals wishing to focus their career on research, whereas the Ed.D. is for those focusing on a practitioner career. Persisting to completion of either degree is an academic accomplishment and one of personal pride. Tinto (1993) found students' individual successes and likelihood of completion were predictable based on their intentions toward higher education, the type of program, and the institution. In addition, attrition most likely to occurs within the first year of study in either undergraduate or graduate work (Tinto, 2012). With access to undergraduate and graduate programs more than doubling since 1980, completion rates for both men and women have increased only slightly, whereas women in general have improved their doctoral completion rates from 12% in 1966 to 49% in 2000 (Castello, Pardo, Sala-Bubare, Sune-Solar, 2017; Mason, Wolfinger, & Goulden, 2013; Tinto, 2012).

Women held approximately 53% of conferred doctoral degrees across all disciplines as of 2010 (Holm, Prosek, & Weisberger, 2015). Among that group, approximately 43% of those students had their degree conferred within a 7-year period and 57% within a 10-year period (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008). Gibbard-Cook (2013) interviewed and surveyed women who had recently earned doctoral degrees and create a list of tips based on their responses. One respondent noted women graduate students never have the right timing, meaning each person has her own internal timer and it differs between individuals, particular those with multiple roles in their lives, including children, work, and partners. Gibbard-Cook concluded that women struggle

and face more challenges, but waiting for the right moment to start only led to never earning the degree. Mason, Wolfinger, and Goulden (2013) observed women more likely focused on their family concerns first, and that more often than their male counterparts, women perceived parenthood and graduate school as incompatible. Castello, Pardo, Sala-Bubare, and Sune-Soler (2017) discovered an obstacle for noncompleters was the difficulties in achieving a balance between personal life, academic life, and professional demands. Women who shared these concerns also noted the ages of 28 to 34 years in women as considered the fertile and most optimal time to have children (Mason et al., 2013), which led to an increase in women pursing their doctoral degrees as full-time working mothers (Araujo, Tureta, & Araujo, 2015).

Jairam and Kahl (2012) found an individual experiences a greater level of stress when multiple and persistent events/stressors are present, rather than only a single event/stressor. Multiple and persistent events/stressors typically relate to the multiple identities of women (Jones & McEwen, 2000). In their model of multiple dimensions of identity, Jones and McEwen (2000) defined multiple identities as an individual—in their study, a female—who had both a core identity and an outside identity. Others could easily recognize the identities at the outside level, often considered less important to the individual than the core identity. The core identity, or a woman's inner self, was more difficult to interpret and explain because it was more complex and had a personal relevancy.

Experts have questioned whether a significant difference exists between male and female persistence and attrition. Although there is no significant degree-completion time difference between the genders, women are 16% less likely to finish their degrees compared to men (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012). Overall, a lack of both quantitative and qualitative research is

available regarding the persistence and attrition of female doctoral students related to their classwork, professional identity, and degree completion.

Academic research, combined with counseling service records, indicated gender roles cause stress to the female subgroup, as the expectations of maintaining and continuing domestic and family/childcare duties continued simultaneously with academic tasks (Carter, Blumenstein, & Cook, 2013). Ampaw and Jaeger (2012) noted reasons might be the field of study, the finances provided through aid or assistantships, and the ability to balance multiple roles. Another factor pertained to the part-time student status and lower rates of financial aid for female students. Part-time status does not allow as much financial aid for the student, which for a woman stands in opposition to the situations of their male counterparts, who will more likely persist at full-time status with more financial aid support (Moyer, Salovey, & Casey-Cannon, 1999). Overall, the inability to complete likely causes financial, emotional, and social stresses, leading to the disruption of (personal) identity at the ground level (Carter et al., 2013). Onwuegbuzie, Rosli, Ingram, and Frels (2014) stated women have increased the length of time from start to completion over previously studied years, with several ramifications with delayed graduation. These included less motivation by women to continue pursuing the degree, delays in their ability to achieve their full potential in their career, less time contributed to a professional role, and creation of a shortage of women needed in specific professional positions requiring terminal degrees (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2014).

According to the student retention theory (Tinto, 1987) focused on persistence, both internal (individual) and external (finances, institutional, etc.) factors influence the persistence of any doctoral student. Lovitts (2001) also concentrated on persistence, employing the terms *completers* and *noncompleters* instead of *attrition* and *retention* based on a view of persistence as

completers and inconsistent persistence as noncompleters. Lovitts' main theoretical framework involved the social structure resulting in noncompleters. Noncompleters were part of structural or institutional social concerns that needed addressing through social and academic integration of graduate students. To date, researchers have applied neither Tinto's nor Lovitts' theoretical frameworks for persistence to rich descriptive narratives of professional, full-time working mothers who have earned their Ph.D. or Ed.D. in any type of program choice, whether online, blended, or traditional. With this current study, operationalization of persistence was through the participants who completed their doctoral degrees. The central and sub-questions, the data collection process, and data analysis and triangulation enabled detailed descriptions of how full-time working mothers persisted to attain their degrees.

Clark's (2000) work/family border theory (WFBT) frames the balance between the multiple identities within one's life, particularly those of full-time working mothers who have completed their doctoral degree. The WFBT is a foundational conceptual framework for work-life balance. Most work-life balance theories look at only two domains in a person's life, whereas Clark focused on the intersection of three domains: professional, motherhood, and academic. Jones and McEwen (2000) researched the development of multiple identities or domains in one's life in college students, specifically females, findings that led to the model of multiple dimensions of identity. Jones and McEwen found women have multiple identities through which they transition, with understanding identity occurs not alone, but only in relation to another. Transitional women are those who have the ability to balance or shift roles/identities throughout the day and identify with the blending of these roles/identities (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Jones & McEwen, 2000). Women who consider themselves transitional want to connect and identify with their roles as necessary and when needed (Hochschild & Machung,

2012). In accordance with prior research, this study was a means to provide a descriptive telling of the experiences of professional, full-time working mothers who persisted to completion of their educational Ph.D. or Ed.D. through any program type (i.e., online, blended, or traditional).

Situation to Self

My personal motivation for conducting research on this topic connects to my everyday life as a full-time working mother pursuing my Ed.D. in a distance education program. I was not a motivated student in middle and high school; the ability to persist to completion of my high school diploma was a daily struggle between my parents and me. I continued my education to complete a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and began seeing that I truly enjoyed learning and challenging myself to achieve the next level, which led to earning my Master's degree in Reading K-12. Shortly before and after graduation from my Master's program, I had several life changes, including meeting my husband, moving to a new state for a job opportunity, and taking a break from persisting beyond my Master's as originally planned. During the break, I married, had our son, and continued to work full-time as a teacher, but I realized I was still not where I wanted to be professionally. I knew going back to school was necessary to get there, but so was continuing to work and raise a family. Because of the challenges that arose during the process of attaining my doctoral degree and through a discussion with a district superintendent, I realized I had only met a handful of women in the same position. Our conversation led to a discussion about the few women who were successful, whom she viewed as distinctive and persistent.

With my personal investment in the research, I also brought in a personal bias; therefore, my philosophical beliefs are axiological. As Creswell (2013) noted, qualitative researchers acknowledge and actively report on their biases in their findings. As a full-time working mother

pursuing her doctorate, I faced some adversities in my doctoral program. Some questioned why I put my personal professional goals above being a more involved mother. Family and friends have asked why I felt the need to pursue a higher degree and why I could not be happy with what I had. The balancing of my roles as a mom, a full-time teacher, and doctoral student tested the strengths of my marriage, family relationships, and friendships. All of these experiences created in me a bias toward the study as to how and why women persist to meet the demand to completion. The values I brought to the study were my right to earn a higher education, my ability to have several roles in my life for both professional and personal satisfaction, and my choice to raise my children as needed to accomplish the aforementioned. Based on these values, my rhetorical assumptions are that women in similar situations have had similar experiences to my own; however, their personal stories hold specific value in the way they describe their experiences. Therefore, my epistemological philosophical assumptions lean toward investigating the individual varied lived experiences behind how other full-time working mothers persisted to completion of their doctoral degrees. My presence in the research is apparent as my connection is close to the topic, but the words and interpretations focused on the rhetorical values the participants placed on their descriptive experiences.

Working full time as a reading teacher, being a mother, and pursuing a doctoral degree, I have a methodological belief founded in the need for order and procedures that allow me to collect and analyze data based on inductive, emerging, and personal researcher experiences. Many people disapproved of me for continuing my education to achieve my doctoral degree. Those individuals placed constraints on the fact that I am a woman and, therefore, I should be focused on family and home first, and career and education last. The program with Liberty University required intensives on campus and in-person classes. Due to my husband's job and

having young children at home, we needed to make arrangements for childcare. Some family members refused to help, with their reasoning being I should not put my education and myself ahead of my children. Therefore, I had to schedule the intensives far in advance because only a few family members were willing to help. Based upon my personal viewpoints and situation, I aimed to shift my research beyond the normal constraints placed on women in this subgroup so their voices and stories were told.

Problem Statement

This transcendental phenomenological study entailed an investigation of the persistence of full-time working mothers who earned their doctoral degree in the field of education through any program type: online, blended, or traditional. The attrition rate of doctoral students in the United States, as reported by several researchers, is between 40% to 60% depending on location, program of study, type of program (online, residential, or blended), finances, and other associated factors (Byers et al., 2014; Gearity & Mertz, 2012; Kelley & Salisbury-Glennon, 2016; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Knight, 2015; Santicola, 2013). Although the representation of women in doctoral programs improved from 1970 to 2000 in relation to degree earned, a disparity still exists in how many of those women successfully completed their doctoral degree, including the dissertation process (Hopkins, Jawitz, McCarty, Goldman, & Basu, 2013). Jairam and Kahl (2012) deemed doctoral attrition rates in the United States as forming a silent epidemic from which universities are trying to recover and rebuild. Even though women now access higher education and earn doctoral degrees at higher rates than ever in history, they are 16% less likely to persist to completion compared to men (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012). Therefore, understanding reasons for the deficiency within a specific gender could provide more insight into female doctoral student attrition.

Research studies conducted previously on female doctoral students included topics of motherhood and student life (Brown & Watson, 2010; Pierce & Herlihy, 2013; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017); however, scholars did not specifically examine the professional working role some women have. Mason, Wolfinger, and Goulden (2013) observed women with children under the age of 6 years are 21% less likely to persist in their educational advancement or gain employment following completion.

Explanations for female attrition from higher education and doctoral studies specifically include discrimination or marginalization, difficulty creating work-life-family balance, motherhood, and difficulty gaining mutual support and respect from relevant support systems (Eisenbach, 2013; Sudha & Karthikeyan, 2014). Despite examining work-life-family balance in many ways, no researchers have included being a full-time working mother and a doctoral student (Araujo, Tureta, & Araujo, 2015; Tajlili, 2014). Although researchers have examined persistence in female doctoral students in counseling programs, doctoral completion and persistence of women of color (Prosek et al., 2015; Zeligman, Prescod, & Greene, 2015), and female doctoral students in groups, no researchers specifically investigated the experiences of female doctoral students who were mothers, professionally employed full-time, and working on a doctoral degree.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was describing the experiences of professional, full-time working mothers who persisted in earning a doctorate degree in an education field in the United States through any program type (i.e., online, blended, or traditional). For this study, a professional, full-time working mother was a woman working at least 40 hours a week at a job in the field of education (or therein part of, equaling full-time

status), with at least one child in the immediate household under the age of 6 years for whom the mother is the primary caregiver. Doctoral persistence was operationally defined as doctoral degree completion (Araujo et al., 2015). The theories guiding the study included Tinto's (1987) student retention theory and the WFBT (Clark, 2004; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), as they provided a framework to investigate how professional, full-time working mothers persisted to doctoral degree completion.

Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study addressed a component of Tinto's (1987) student retention theory, building upon and extending the knowledge to doctoral graduate work. Tinto's student retention theory did not have specific use with the subgroup of women in this study, which allowed for its extension on a more integral level, as women currently earn more doctoral degrees than men (Holm et al., 2015). The addition of the specific subgroup of professional, full-time working mothers who earned their doctoral degree extended the working knowledge of the WFBT as presented by Clark (2000). The WFBT (Clark, 2000) only centers on two domains in a person's life; in comparison, this study entailed three domains: professional, motherhood, and student.

Empirically, the study contributed to the body of knowledge in educational research a rich descriptive narrative of the experiences of professional, working mothers who earned their doctoral degree in education. Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2017) included full-time working mothers in their study but did not delimit to the full-time working mother in a doctoral program, as in this study. Holm et al. (2015) found limited research on mothers who have completed their doctoral degrees and the pressures they faced. Women experience increased feelings of guilt and dissatisfaction with their inability to create work-life balance, which impacts their confidence in

family and academia (Holm et al., 2015). Therefore, by focusing on this specific subgroup, this research added to the foundational literature for women persisting to doctoral degree completion.

The practical significance of this study involved addressing a specific subgroup of professional, working mothers earning their doctoral degree in education. Findings from this study provide an opportunity for women in similar situations to be more prepared when entering a doctoral program. Such information will allow women to better understand the processes, time, and commitment needed to successfully finish and not become all but dissertation (ABD), a status meaning one has completed the coursework but not defended the dissertation. A 2014 study of female Swedish doctoral students noted the benefits to female students in understanding the experiences they foresaw or were having during the doctoral education process (Schmidt & Umans, 2014).

Additionally, institutions of higher learning can benefit from this study's descriptive experiences of these women. These findings offer insight into the structural makeup of the institution, the curriculum, and/or other learning environments or institutional supports that influence persistence through descriptive themes accumulated from the data collection. From the study, families, faculty, and program directors can gain information about which specific areas they can socially and emotionally support their doctoral students throughout the duration of their programs (Haynes et al., 2012; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2015).

Research Questions

Professional, full-time working mothers are a distinct subgroup of education doctoral students who had not received close study for themes related to persistence. Following are the central and sub-questions for this study.

Central Question

What are the experiences of professional, full-time working mothers who persisted to completion of their doctoral degree in education?

Tinto's (1987) work on persistence served as the key theoretical background supporting the use of the student retention theory in this transcendental phenomenological study. With this model, Tinto focused on the variables produced from the institution as well as psychological, economic, interaction, organizational, and societal factors (Metz, 2004). Thus, the central focus of the research involved exploring how professional, full-time working mothers persisted to completion.

Sub-questions

1. What factors do professional, full-time working mothers attribute to their persistence to completion of a doctoral degree program in education?

As phenomenology is a qualitative research design for researchers looking to articulate the experiences of the participant instead of collecting numerical data, the ability to examine specific factors supported the use of the phenomenological design. Van Manen (2007) implied the ability of a researcher to look toward where meaning originates defines use of the phenomenological design and allows the use of specific research questions focused on the lived experiences of the participants. Research gathered under sub-question 1 will help inform future doctoral students who are also professional, full-time working mothers.

2. What challenges do professional, full-time working mothers experience while completing a doctoral degree program in education?

Women in the study have experienced specific challenges during their doctoral program, which aligned with the study's theoretical focus on the student retention theory (Tinto, 1987). It

was not certain if participants experienced a minor or major adversity that threatened their ability to complete their doctoral program (Martin, 2013). Thus, sub-question 2 explored the experiences of professional, full-time working mothers who did not note minor or major adversities before participating in this study.

3. How do professional, full-time working mothers experience work-life-school balance?

In the retellings of their experiences, many women discussed the feelings of inadequacy that arose when their professional and personal lives intersected (Tajlili, 2014). Work-life balance is a possible reason for doctoral students not to persist to completion of their degrees; however, it was not one specifically addressed in the literature with the specific population used in this study. Thus, sub-question 3 extended the research knowledge in relation to Clark's (2000) WFBT.

4. How do professional, full-time working mothers describe the support systems influencing their persistence through their doctoral degree program in education?

Support systems (family, faculty, peers, coworkers, etc.) are well documented throughout the literature on doctoral persistence, Therefore including support systems as a research sub-question was essential in validating previous works with this specific subgroup of professional, full-time working mothers (Prosek et al., 2015). Brown and Nichols (2012) noted the need to understand who female doctoral students are so universities could develop better programs and policies for them.

Definitions

The following definitions help to clarify terms used in this research study.

1. *Attrition* – The rate at which students withdraw or terminate their college pursuit without completing a degree or certificate (Tinto, 2012).
2. *Balance* – A description of the global evaluation of the interplay between work and family (Wayne, Butts, Casper, & Allen, 2016). However, experts have stated an equal balance at the present point in the 21st century is unattainable (Clark, 2000).
3. *Border* – A clear transition line between domains, such as work and family (Clark, 2000).
4. *Boundary* – The transitioning between roles with or without the clear tangible associations (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), such as moving from the location of a job to home.
5. *Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)* – A degree focused on a professional career based upon enriching one's focused knowledge base (Wergin, 2011).
6. *Dual demands* – Multiple demands and responsibilities an individual upholds outside the home and as a doctoral student while being a good parent (Holm et al., 2015).
7. *Doctor of Education (Ed.D)* – A terminal practice degree, similar to a Doctor of Medicine (MD; Wergin, 2011) and the practitioner degree for educators (Perry, 2015).
8. *Formal support systems* – Specific roles in one's life that people, other than the doctoral student, fill in a supportive role, for example, childcare, editors, statisticians, and chair/committee members (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).
9. *Informal support systems* – Individuals helping in this capacity complete less-demanding jobs for the doctoral student, for example, household chores (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

10. *Integration* – Integration is the blurring of the borders and boundaries between domains or roles in one's life (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004).
11. *Multiple identities* – Multiple identities as defined through the model of multiple dimensions of identity and descriptors are commonly connected with females, such as mother, caregiver, wife, daughter, and nurturer (Jones & McEwen, 2000).
12. *Persistence* – A measure of success for an individual or student (Hagedorn, 2005), and specific to this study, the continuation to completion of a doctoral program (Lovitts, 2001).
13. *Professional, working mother* – Women who continue to develop and invest in their careers outside the home while rearing their family (Grady & McCarthy, 2008).
14. *Role* – A role is the psychological importance that a particular part plays in one's life; the relevance contributes to the identity of an individual. Multiple roles for a woman can consist of wife, mother, employee, and/or parent caregiver (Wolfram & Gratton, 2014). Role is interchangeable with identity when discussing a specific role area.
15. *Segmentation* – Segmentation is the complete separation of domains or roles in one's life (Clark, 2000).
16. *Visual research* – A specific method that may use visual materials and options as tools for generating evidence to support narrative research and explore research questions (Rose, 2014).
17. *Work/family border theory (WFBT)* – A theory allowing the two parts of a person's life to blend and provide a chance at goal attainment/achievement (Clark, 2000).

Summary

Chapter One provided introductory background information on the high attrition rates for female doctoral students in the United States. The chapter also presented the growing trend of women earning more doctoral degrees as compared to men; however, women take longer to complete and experience higher dropout rates than their male counterparts. This transcendental phenomenological study was a means to investigate the experiences of full-time working mothers who persisted to doctoral degree completion. Student retention theory (Tinto, 1987) and WFBT (Clark, 2000) framed the study The practical, empirical, and theoretical significances of the study add to the research base of persistence in terms of WFBT and doctoral students in general, and also allow for a deeper description of the full-time working mother subgroup. Other students, institutions, and professors can use the study to build better social, educational, and support systems within the institutions for this subgroup.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The literature includes research on the attrition and persistence of doctoral students in the United States as a whole and in subgroups (Lovitts, 2001; Tinto, 1987). Researchers have also noted differences between men and women in doctoral studies (Nettles & Millet, 2006), the time-to-degree completion, and persistence to complete in general groups (Gearity & Mertz, 2012). A lack of literature existed related to the experiences of female doctoral students, even though women hold the majority, 53% as of 2012, of higher education degrees (Aud et al., 2012; Thomas, Drake-Clark, & Grasso Banta, 2014). This review of literature centered on the different areas interrelated to professional, full-time working mothers who completed their doctoral degree and included connections between Tinto's (1987) student retention theory and Clark's (2000) WFBT, persistence and attrition, and the multiple identities women take on as mothers, professionals, and doctoral students.

Conceptual Framework

Moustakas (1994) described the conceptual framework as the basis and building blocks from which all human science and knowledge comes. The conceptual framework for this study was an integration of Tinto's (1987) student retention theory and Clark's (2000) WFBT. The use of these theories enabled a foundation to investigate and analyze the experiences of full-time working mothers who persisted to completion of a doctorate. Tinto established the connection between persistence and integration for college students, both undergraduate and graduate. With the WFBT, Clark addressed balance in one's life that needs to occur for a full-time working mother to persist to completion.

Student Retention Theory

Tinto's (1975) student retention theory is based around attrition being a longitudinal process occurring through the interactions of the student and their institutional setting. Therefore, the core of Tinto's theory involves integration and the student's ability to integrate socially and academically to find a balance to maintain forward momentum through a program. Tinto's original model centered on five categories: the student's family background, individual attributes, precollege schooling, academic integration, and institutional integration. Also affected are external factors, such as family members, community, or immediate circle of friends/colleagues (Tinto, 1987). The student retention theory emerged over time as a constant in relation to attrition rates for college students. Although criticism exists in relation to Tinto's earlier and more recent theories/models, student retention theory remains the best-established theoretical framework in current educational research (Connolly, 2016; Kember, 1995).

Student retention theory began with a collaboration between Tinto (1987) and Cullen (1973), who constructed a theoretical standard of attrition and persistence that included the following factors: (a) pre-entry attributes, (b) goals/commitment, (c) institutional experiences, (d) integration, (e) goals/commitment, and (f) outcome. Durkheim's (1953) egotistical suicide theory pertains to what happens to a student not integrated into the societal culture of the institution on a macro or micro level. Durkheim believed social forces, rather than individual forces, caused student departure from universities. Tinto integrated Durkheim's belief into student retention theory through the rites of passage a student must take within their educational environment and their possible departure from the system. Tinto used Van Gennep's (1960) passage theory, characterized by the necessary components of rites and ceremonies to integrate into a new environment, to continue his theoretical model, connecting to Van Gennep's theory

with environmental factors. Tinto's initial theory continued to evolve to include the expectations, aspirations, and integration of students as they begin college (undergraduate or graduate; Metz, 2004). Students have specific expectations of how their educational goals will form and progress without fully understanding the influences of institutional variables. These variables range from student-faculty interactions, peer interactions, and involvement in extracurricular activities, all of which affect a student's progression and persistence to completion of the degree.

Bean's (1981) persistence theory also connected to a theoretical model in the early 1970s by the researchers Spady (1970), Astin (1984), and Tinto (1973). Bean connected factors influencing a nonpersister's similarities in work and leaving a college degree program. Bean found student attrition affected by five variables: (a) background of the student, (b) a student's interaction within the institution, (c) environmental variables and their influences, (d) attitudinal variables, and (e) the intention of the student.

Metzner (1987) collaborated with Bean (1981) to further their theoretical models of student persistence in higher education. With this collaboration came the inclusion of the nontraditional student and the environmental factors associated with a student's departure and attrition from a degree program. The collaboration also added academic factors to their 1985 model, including grade point average and psychological variables (satisfaction, stress, familial support/acceptance).

Bean (1981) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) criticized Tinto's (1973) theory, stating it was too broad in relation to social integration, nontraditional elements, and ethnographic/ background information. Based upon these criticisms, Tinto revised student retention theory to include the psychological, economic, interaction, organizational, and societal factors. All of these factors are now connected to research related to women in general who pursue graduate

education, as well as the internal and external factors related to the institution and/or their personal lives. The internal and external factors of student retention concentrated on female doctoral students' ability to maintain their social and academic integration while pursuing their degree. Personal factors included the psychological, societal, and economic factors influencing a female doctoral student's ability to maintain a balance between the academic, professional, and personal identities (Castello et. al, 2017). Tinto's (1993) final model of student retention is the most widely used in connection to student attrition/departure from undergraduate and graduate programs. The theory is most notably based on more than 20 years of study that contributed to this specific body of research; as such, it served as the theoretical foundation of this study (Connolly, 2017).

Work/Family Border Theory

Clark (2000) defined balance as finding satisfaction and functioning at an acceptable level amid work and family roles with minimal role conflict. Wayne et al. (2016), however, defined balance as the global view of how the interplay between work and family occurs. Balance satisfaction is dependent solely on the individual's thoughts and feelings (Wayne et al. 2016). The balance individuals perceive is strictly a psychological construct based around internal subjective evaluations on their attitudes toward certain aspects of their lives. Clark suggested the WFBT closes a gap in previous theories of balance related directly to work and family. The theory describes how work and family spheres are manageable and negotiated by an individual to attain balance, even though borders exist between them (Clark, 2000).

A set of propositions established by Clark (2000) provides a better framework for work and family balance at the border level. Specifically, balance addresses: (a) the ability to give equal time to both work and family, (b) the assessment of time that looks at the ability to provide

resources to meet both work and family needs, (c) the satisfaction between work and family based on fit and allocation of time, (d) the accomplishment of negotiated time that allows for effectiveness in work and family relationships, and (e) meeting a goal with satisfaction of family and work that allows priorities to align (Wayne et al., 2016).

Many women feel they must make difficult decisions that can or will sacrifice their career or family, and they are not aware of the effects those decisions may have on their future endeavors. Over the last several decades, the minimal number of women in the workplace expanded to a larger presence, including high-profile positions as chief executive officers, business owners, managers, and other high-demand positions (Araujo et al., 2015). Ruderman (2002) found female managers were more productive, with their ability to multitask enhanced when they had responsibilities outside of work relating to their personal lives. By increasing their interpersonal skills, the women developed the ability to respect individual differences from employees, and their need to expect and achieve high standards in their administrative role helped form their strong presence in their workplaces (Ruderman, 2002). This transition in society has significantly increased home and work responsibilities, leading to more inquiries into the interdependencies between the family/work relationships (Ruderman, 2002).

The increasing and intense demands at the workplace and the interface with personal life outside the office affect women's health both physiologically and psychologically (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Marks and MacDermid (1996) found less balance between roles was directly associated with greater depression, self-esteem issues, lack of confidence, and less-productive function at both work and school. Stress is the essence of imbalance, which leads to the struggle to maintain a balance between work and life. The result of stress may lead to marital struggles,

divorce, and the lack of desire to start and raise a family while at the same time having a career (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004).

The three major indicators of successful career attainment positively correlating to marriage and children are income, advancement/promotion, and satisfaction; however, these findings primarily pertained to men and not women (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). A balance between roles can improve and increase positive attitudes and behaviors, resulting in more engagement in roles, more integrated perception of self, higher-quality role responses, and overall performance with less strain emotionally and psychologically (Wayne et al., 2016). The positive effect results from the fact that family and work are most times physically and temporally separated. In addition, men have traditionally taken the role of breadwinner in the household with women considered the homemakers, leaving the majority of the research on this area largely related to men (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Many theories account for the phenomenon that happens with women and their work-life balance abilities as the connection between family and work are not just emotional, but also human. The border theory (Clark, 2000; Gatrell, 2013), the boundary theory (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), and the WFBT (Clark, 2000) have historically grown in nature to account for the ever-changing system that connects them. The border and boundary theories approaches are different, but part of the main components of the WFBT (Clark, 2000). Clark's (2000) WFBT is the foundational theoretical framework for work/family balance. The WFBT is a change, as it states an equal balance at the present point in the 21st century is unattainable. Although integration has an appeal to those experiencing conflict between their work and family roles, no desirable state of mind exists that provides a balance between integration and segmentation (Clark, 2000). Integration is the blending of the borders and boundaries between domains or

roles in one's life (Clark, 2000; Desrochers & Sargent, 2004); segmentation is the separation of domains or roles in one's life (Clark, 2000).

Integration versus segmentation. Integration is defined as the blurring of the borders/boundaries or roles based on Desrochers and Sargent's (2004) boundary/border theory and work-family integration. The integration can possibly lead to negative consequences for both the individual and the family to include conflict, stress, depression, and/or dissatisfaction with both the family and work aspects of their life. A role is the psychological importance a particular aspect plays in one's life; the relevance contributes to the identity of an individual (Wolfram & Gratton, 2014) and, when integrated into one's life, can lead to the aforementioned consequences. However, many scholars supported the idea that experiences in one domain can produce positive outcomes and experiences in another domain (Clark, 2000; Gatrell, 2013; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Specifically, Greenhaus and Powell's (2006) work-family enrichment theory focused on the improvement of work and family experiences when the two are integrated. For example, a promotion at work provides a positive outcome financially for the family/home life. Even though these work/family roles may vastly differ in a person's life, they become integrated through everyday tasks and interactions (Clark, 2000). Work/family integration is directly correlated to a social context, meaning that if an individual is in a committed relationship, the attainment of high balance is only possible if both partners negotiated and achieved balance together (Wayne et al., 2016).

Clark (2000) discussed segmentation as the separation of domains or roles occurring in a person's everyday life, such as mother, professional, and student. Maintaining segmented roles requires more effort and transitioning between the roles, which can becomes difficult to maintain (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004). Segmentation, however, can bring about positive effects if the

person maintains borders and separation between domains or roles (Clark, 2000). When permeability and flexibility occur between these borders, segmentation then transitions back to integration, as the domains or roles are no longer separated.

Gatrell (2013) found mothers often sought to segment with borders in an attempt to maintain their professional identity and not have others consider them weak, thus allowing for maternal leakage into their professional lives. Gatrell also noted women focused on hard borders to keep reproduction and their workplace separate, thus avoiding opinions on their ability to intellectuality contribute to their professional work. Although "border-crossers" exist (Clark, 2000), they occur where necessary and when the demands of one side are greater than the other. Integration and segmentation are only a portion of the WFBT (Clark, 2000). The WFBT is the more modern and used theory for multiple roles in a females' life, such as mother, student, professional, etc. (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004; Eddleston & Powell, 2012; Greenhaus, Ziegert**,** & Allen, 2012).

Border theory. Border theory focuses on the psychological boundaries and tangible boundaries, such as people and places associated with work versus those associated with family (Clark, 2000). The border is the clear transition from one domain to another, such as between work and family (Clark, 2000). As the initial theory, border theory found primary connection between work and life with the understanding that it is not an emotional system, but a human one (Clark, 2000). As society changes and the number of individuals working outside the home increases, along with expectations of women continuing to maintain their responsibilities in the home, the more research is needed in relation to border theory.

Borders are lines between domains—such as mother, student, and professional—which define a point between different domains (Clark, 2000). The three types of borders are physical,

temporal, and psychological. The physical border is a tangible line between the walls of a workplace and the walls of the home. Temporal borders are on the plane of time, which separate different periods' time or activities (Clark, 2000). An example involves looking at the change between work hours and home hours. Psychological borders occur when an individual creates thinking patterns to help separate the domains, and then decides which pattern is appropriate for which domain (Clark, 2000). A combination of all three types of borders manifests through permeability, flexibility, and blending. Permeability allows some of another domain in; for example, a doctoral student has an office space in the house, but family members also frequent the space, as needed, while the doctoral student is working. Flexibility is the allowance of one domain to expand or contract depending on the specific needs of one domain or another—for example, taking papers home to grade since home hours dictate the need to be with the family, but the work still is still required. Finally, blending occurs when a large amount of permeability and flexibility exists between domains and the borders become merged (Clark, 2000). The ability to blend successfully can lead to a border balance or integration of domains; however, blending can also lead to work/family conflict.

Although integration has an appeal to those experiencing conflict between their work/family roles, no desirable state of mind exists that provides a balance between integration and segmentation (Clark, 2000). Integration is the blending and blurring of the borders and boundaries between domains or roles in one's life (Clark, 2000; Desrochers & Sargent, 2004). Segmentation is the separation of domains or roles (Clark, 2000).

Integration of the Conceptual Framework

The integration of Tinto's (1987) and Clark's (2000) theories provided a solid foundation for this study. Tinto's student retention theory was a framework by which to examine reasons for

student attrition at internal and external levels. Clark's WFBT involves how women successfully achieve balance in their lives with multiple daily roles. By focusing on the student retention theory (Tinto, 1987) and WFBT (Clark, 2000), this study included a richer description of how both theories connected to the problem of attrition and persistence in female doctoral students who are also mothers and working professionals. In the majority of studies conducted over the last decade in relation to persistence or attrition, either or both of Tinto's and Clark's works gain prominence as leading theories (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012; Kennedy, Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding & Spaulding, 2017; Terrel, & Lohle, 2015; Vaquera, 2008; Willis & Carmichael, 2011). Although women are accessing higher education and earning doctoral degrees at greater rates than ever, they are 16% less likely than men to persist to completion (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012). Explanations for female attrition from higher education, and doctoral studies specifically, include discrimination or marginalization, challenges with work-life-family balance, motherhood, and difficulty gaining support and respect from relevant support systems (Eisenbach, 2013; Lovitts, 2001; Sudha & Karthikeyan, 2014).

Many women refrain from or postpone having children while working toward career attainment due to the repeatedly negative outcomes accompanying career advancement and progression once children and a family become part of a woman's life (Mason et al., 2013). Time is a main challenge in the ability to experience work-life balance. Societal expectations strongly emphasize giving more time to each area of a person's life, no matter the consequences or imbalance. The WFBT (Clark, 2000; Gatrell, 2013; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006) provided a conceptual framework for the research to explore work-family-doctoral persistence balance for the subgroup of full-time working mothers who persisted to completion.

Looking at a woman's ability to persist to completion while balancing multiple roles and identities in their life connects these two theories. Using Tinto's (1987) student retention theory and Clark's (2000) WFBT together helped build the framework for investigating the experiences of full-time working mothers who have successfully completed their doctoral degree.

Related Literature

The following review of literature examines specific areas related to the participants in the study: full-time working mothers who have completed their doctoral degree. Each section has a focus on challenges and factors specific to the domains related to attrition and persistence encountered by the participants in this study during their doctoral degree process.

Doctoral Attrition

Many experts have identified doctoral attrition rates in the United States alone as a silent epidemic, causing universities to try and improve and rebuild programs (Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Millett & Nettles, 2006). Several researchers reported the attrition rate of doctoral students from 33% to 70%, depending on location, discipline, type of program (distance or residential), finances, and other factors (Byers et al., 2014; Gearity & Mertz, 2012; Kelley & Salisbury-Glennon, 2016; Santicola, 2013). Students who finished their coursework but failed to complete their doctorate degree are labeled as ABD, as they do not finish the independent dissertation phase of the doctoral degree.

Internal and External Factors Contributing to Attrition

Completing a doctoral degree has major contributions to both society and professional fields/careers (Ritt, 2008; Tinto, 2012). As stated, doctoral student attrition rates throughout the literature range between 33% to 70%, depending on several factors. Even though women are the top earners of doctoral degrees, 53% as of 2012, they are also the most likely to be ABD (Aud et

al., 2012). The trend reverses from undergraduate programs, where 21% of women versus 19% of men complete their degrees. Peripheral factors outside of educational borders have vastly impacted doctoral students and their success or failure to obtain the degree (Byers et al., 2014). The majority of researchers have focused on attrition factors and those related to persistence in areas of individual characteristics, the environment (e.g., university, distance or residence program, personnel, and/or department), and the interaction occurring between the two factors (Byers et al., 2014; Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Lovitts, 2001). Other reasons students depart programs include the following: dissertation difficulty, size of a student cohort or classes, negative social interaction and support from peers, incompatibility with advisers/faculty, financial constraints, overwhelming stress, and the culture of the university and department (Martinez, Ordu, Sala, & McFarlane, 2013). Three specific factors influence doctoral attrition and persistence: institutional, internal (personal), and external (Clark, 2000; Lovitts, 2001; Tinto, 2012).

Institutional factors. Institutional factors are ones produced, influenced, or determined by the institution the student attends (Lovitts, 2001; Tinto, 2012). Currently, three main forms of doctoral programs are available: residential, online, or a blended program (online with some residential intensives, cohorts, and/or all online with internships). A residential program, also known as a traditional program, offers none of the course content online (Mu, Coppard, Bracciano, & Bradberry, 2014). An online program offers 80% or more of the coursework through an online program and most do not offer any face-to-face class sessions (Mu et al., 2014). A blended program, sometimes also known as a hybrid program, combines 30% to 79% of the coursework with components of face-to-face instruction (Mu et al., 2014). The variety in doctoral programs has increased and provided doctoral students differentiated options to obtaining their degree.

Many academic institutions maintain that neither the rigor of a doctoral program nor the difficulties of the coursework are the only factors impacting doctoral attrition rates in the United States. Lovitts (2001) supported this implication, noting a lack of academic ability or academic failure resulted in only a minimal amount of student attrition. Institutions previously provided a list of actions taken to invest in student retention; however, most of these actions were disconnected not only from one another, but also from the needs of the students and graduate programs (Tinto, 2012). Institutions have established expectations that students must meet quality and performance standards, which consequently influences student retention. As institutions have expectations of the students, students have self-expectations of the institution when they begin their coursework; whether or not the institution meets these expectations may have possible consequences on the performance expected of students from the institution. Less than 2% of students seeking a Ph.D. who did not complete the program failed to do so by not maintaining a satisfactory grade point average or to complete required coursework (Lovitts, 2001). Ampaw and Jaeger (2012) also found students' academic preparedness did not affect their ability to complete a degree, but higher student-to-faculty ratios did negatively affect students completing coursework. The researchers' insight indicated that students, whether completers or noncompleters, were academically capable of graduating successfully, but that institutional factors may have kept them from reaching their full potential. Therefore, the institution's statement of academic ability as a reason for student attrition is false, as the majority of students are academically capable and/or successful.

Tinto (2012) found students noted institutions that provided frequent feedback in assessing their performance made them feel more successful and able to adjust their academic behaviors to meet faculty expectations of performance. A vital aspect to promoting student

connectedness to the institution comes through the ability of the student to connect to a faculty member or advisor. The frequent feedback from faculty and connectedness also promoted more academically engaged conversations with the students, creating a healthier overall climate and making it more likely for the institution, students, and faculty to succeed in student retention (Lovitts, 2001).

The campus climate is often an indicator of integration for students into specific colleges and provides an expectation context for individual actions (Lovitts, 2001; Tinto, 2012). A cooler climate, an unwelcoming and unfriendly environment, results in students having less chance to integrate into their programs, causing them to become noncompleters. A number of the students who have experience with the cooler climate within their department still want to complete their degrees; however, they are not encouraged, receive little counseling, and, due to no longer having an interest in an academic/research career, lose faculty interest. Faculty in graduate departments often do not feel the need to present themselves as advisors before students reach the dissertation proposal stage (Lovitts, 2001).

Internal attrition factors. Internal factors are individual reasons for persisting or departing (Lovitts, 2001). Students who expect more of themselves and acknowledge the steps necessary for success determine how or what they will do in their graduate program. Having a roadmap to success and knowing the regulations and requirements are central in the ability of the student to effectively manage a timely completion (Tinto, 2012). Lovitts (2001) indicated students (noncompleters) consider themselves to blame and place a stronger emphasis on their lack of ability in not completing the norm expectation. At the point of dissertation research, many of these students believe they are inadequately prepared to meet the demands and to write at the level needed to succeed (Lovitts, 2001; Mason et al., 2013; Tinto, 2012). Consequently,

the competitive nature of doctoral studies and self-esteem in abilities starts to dwindle and inadequacies, rather than the situation in which they find themselves, lead them to believe they cannot accomplish the task that has seemed so easy for their peers. These unrealistic expectations students take in assuming other students are progressing successfully does not encourage them to own up to their struggles; therefore, these students many times fall victim to attrition (Lovitts, 2001).

Doctoral Persistence

The ability for an individual to succeed is sometimes based solely on sheer willpower, perseverance, and skill, even when the conditions seem to work against the individual's success (Tinto, 2012). Data from a 2011 study showed students who persisted do so at a rate of 41% in 7 years, with 57% taking up to 10 years to complete their degree (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012). If information exists as to why a student leaves, then more research may help determine how a student can succeed. Tinto (2012) stated student departure and attrition may not be necessarily related; therefore, looking at why a student became an attrition statistic may not translate into why a student is not persisting. Phenomenological researchers have focused specifically on the experiences of doctoral students' persistence and self-efficacy, providing an immense number of factors or themes attributing to the success or failure of a student in a doctoral program (Carter et al., 2013; Castro, Garcia, Cavazos, & Castro, 2011; Holm et al., 2015; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Lovitts (2001) stated, "What emerges clearly from the interviews is that persistence is related to students' achieving their conscious, and sometimes unconscious, needs and goals for intellectual and professional growth and development" (p. 129). These findings are in line with Vaquera (2008), who stated the characteristics of specific departments and the ability

of those departments to provide experiences to students to integrate socially and academically to meet students' personal needs could contribute to student persistence.

Factors Contributing to Persistence

Institutional factors are the first of many steps noted to either promote or discourage a graduate student from persisting to completion of a doctoral degree. Lovitts (2001) observed most noncompleters were less satisfied with their program of study and their intellectual growth through their graduate program, whereas the more satisfied completers enjoyed their intellectual growth and continued on. Many noncompleters also struggled with internal factors, which left them applying a higher degree of self-blame and not considering other areas of potential fault (Lovitts, 2001). Social supports and external factors outside the graduate students' direct influence also contributed to persistence, attrition, or dissertation-stage ABD.

Institutional supports. Although institutions can seem at fault, they are now more aware of student needs and provide academic and student support in a variety of ways (Lovitts, 2001). Institutions have become more practical and began providing cognitive maps for programs of study to give students a larger picture of the path they will take to graduation; this is also supported by college and class syllabi (Lovitts, 2001). Departments within universities also noted the more opportunities provided for students to integrate into their academic program, the lower their attrition rates (Lovitts, 2001). Female faculty support, specifically to female doctoral students, emerged as a motivator and a way to promote confidence in academic research abilities (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017). Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2017) also observed the institutional supports of online-blended programs, such as support services such as online library, writing center, advising, and others. Institutions have the ability to provide supports as noted in

the literature; however, the creation and proper management of the supports is essential to doctoral student success (Tinto, 1987).

Internal persistence factors. Time management is a major point of contention for many doctoral students and an internal struggle, due either to setting a self-motivated schedule or balancing other obligations or family responsibilities (Brill, Balcanoff, Land, Gogarty, & Turner 2014). West, Gokalp, Edlyn, Fischer, and Gupton (2011) concluded 60% of doctoral students found balancing life's obligations and time management challenging. When looking at the ability to find balance effectiveness, meeting a family expectation weighed more heavily than meeting a work expectation the majority of the time (Wayne et al., 2016). Most professionals will choose to give up daily exercise, an extra hour at home with the family, or home-cooked meals and to cope daily with back and neck pain before allowing the demands of work-life balance to suffer (Wayne et al., 2016).

Based upon the self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan (2008), self-regulation connects to most higher education academia literature. Self-regulation provides a background for students, some of whom are first time self-learners outside their parents' home, to return to education as adult learners to obtain a higher degree, learn processes for enhancing their academic learning in and out of classroom performance, and have a level of achievement (Kelley & Salisbury-Glennon, 2016). The regulation of self is an active process that allows an individual to analyze tasks, set personal goals, and then attempt to monitor and regulate based on cognition, motivation, and behavioral supports (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Continuously monitoring self-regulation allows doctoral students to gain personal rewards that counterbalance the sacrifices made over the period of processing the doctoral degree. Improved personal meaning, academic learning, emotional and physical stability/flexibility, self-acceptance, and motivation all

positively correlate with the use of self-regulation with rigor and validity (Deci & Ryan, 2008). An internal force through self-regulation powers individuals to move toward the direction of the goal with the intention of achieving the end product based on their own personal needs. The pressures of coping with the time management challenges leads many doctoral students to require a social support network for help (Brill et al., 2014).

Social support systems. Social support systems are imperative to female doctoral students, as the norm expectations for doctoral students developed originally for males who faced less stress and more support from family and social contexts (Greenhaus et al., 2012). Broghammer (2016) found when a female doctoral student's family, community, and/or other support systems did not value the student mother's push for educational advancement in the same capacity, the doctoral student often struggled to defend her decision and was susceptible to failing under pressure due to futile and tiresome struggles. Lack of social support creates stress for women doctoral students, resulting in feeling overwhelmed with responsibilities from multiple domains and roles (Jairam & Kahl, 2012). A continuance in the lack of support forces female doctoral students to develop effective coping strategies, self-regulated goal setting, and realistic expectations for multiple role responsibilities. If female doctoral students have the capabilities to develop those strategies and make the needed changes, they create a self-support system to help reduce their stress (Jairam & Kahl, 2012). Experts across the literature identified the need for a substantial number of quality support systems in the doctoral student's life to ease the emotional effects of social isolation and the mental effects of academic burdens (Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Offerman, 2011; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2014; Trepal, Stinchfield, & Haiyasoso, 2014). Many women doctoral students noted that lack of support kept them from meeting the demands of study and home responsibilities (Trepal et al., 2014). Lack of time and discordant time created

an internal struggle for women who balanced careers, families, and student responsibilities with the sacrifices inherent in the student domain. These internal struggles, lack of time and discordant time, and the ability to balance responsibilities lead many women to develop self-regulation strategies to improve their academic skills and successfully complete a dissertation.

Researchers found risk factors, support systems, psychological impacts, and overall physical health of doctoral students were imperative to successful completion (Carter, 2012; Castro et al., 2011; Lovitts, 2001; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2014). Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2017) did not delineate to professional, full-time working mothers. The gap in literature for the subgroup of women doctoral students has changed over the last decade; therefore, more specific research was needed to describe their successful persistence.

External factors. According to Lovitts (2001), external factors contributing to a lack of persistence include emotional entanglements, relationships, ability to hold a job in the current market, personal finances, and parental status (children or no children). Financial stress was among one of the top reasons for students to struggle with persistence, due to attempting to maintain multiple obligations while attending and completing classwork (Tinto, 2012). Lovitts (2011) identified financial stress in 20% of doctoral students, finding it a major contributing factor in the inability to persist. Students who received internships, assistantships, and/or other financial help from the institution were likely to persist. The ability to attend due to multiple obligations impacted the graduate student's ability to mentally connect to the content they were studying as to other obligations in conjunction with their studies. Most students noted the desire to find a balance between their careers, home, and other goals (school) was essential in completing their degree (Mason et al., 2013). Many students choose to leave their programs due to these reasons (Lovitts, 2001).

Some researchers focused on risk factors, support systems, psychological impacts, and overall physical health of students while completing a doctoral program (Carter, 2012; Castro et al., 2011; Lovitts, 2001; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2014). Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2017) also studied persistence factors for student mothers in a distance doctoral program; however, they did not delimit to professional, full-time working mothers. The gap in literature for the subgroup of women doctoral students has changed over the last decade; therefore, more specific research was needed to describe their persistence experiences.

Multiple Female Identities

The model of multiple dimensions of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000) relates to an individual's core identity, which is surrounded by intersecting outside identities. The core identity is the "valued personal attributes and characteristics" (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 408), whereas the outside identities are known facts easily named by others. The core identity involves the personal identity that only the individual can truly understand (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Individuals identify and translate the outside identities or multiple identities through characteristics, which involve simple concepts such as gender, class, or race along with more complex religion, culture, sexual orientation, family, and career choices. In a reconceptualization of their original work on multiple dimensions of identity, Jones and McEwen (2007) examined identity as a social construct. Feminists supported the idea of identity as a social construct, as they found no singular meaning associated with the experiences of a woman (Jones & McEwen, 2007). Therefore, no singular identity is understandable without intersecting another dimension (identity) within the woman's life. Jones and McEwen (2000, 2007) related this specifically to female students. The researchers' work directly correlated to this study on full-time working

mothers who persisted to doctoral degree completion by describing lived experiences of multiple identities in their lives during their doctoral journey.

Moradi (2005) described a woman's identity to include her strengths and experiences, interconnections of race/ethnicity, gender, class, and other dimensions of her diversity as womanism, which is a more worldview of multiple female identities. All doctoral students occupy several roles that interact on a constant basis. Defining multiple female identities is possible by descriptors commonly connected with females: mother, caregiver, wife, daughter, and nurturer (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017). Murakami and Tornsen (2017) found female identities, although assumed to develop similar to men's, actually grow differently across all cultures. Although multiple roles exist for both men and women, society still frequently holds women to expectation of maintaining the household and performing a majority of housekeeping responsibilities (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Holm et al., 2015). The identities women hold are considered fluid and easily shifting throughout the course of a day (Jones, 2016). These roles impact a woman's daily life and her ability or inability to balance them accordingly in order to successfully complete a doctoral degree.

Hochschild and Machung (2012) described the fluidity in role changes as the second shift women take on before and after their professional one. The term "second shift" came from the industrial time period of life when women worked in the factories and then they returned home (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Hochschild and Machung identified three types of women in their study: traditional, "pure" egalitarian, and transitional. The traditional woman wanted to only identify with her work at home as a wife, mother, and similar roles, and for her husband to base his identity on his work. The "pure" egalitarian woman wanted to identify in the same areas as her husband and have an equal amount of work at home. Finally, a transitional woman wanted

to have a variety in the blending of the two, which could take form in several ways as long as she identified with her separate roles at work and home. In their study, Hochschild and Machung (2012) found most participants related completing both professional work and a mother's/wife's work, which placed them in the transitional role. This combination of work is important, because throughout the research, many doctoral student mothers stated they were still expected to, had to, or had no partner support to address the second shift while working toward their degrees (Anderson & Herlihy, 2013; Broghammer, 2016; Brown & Watson, 2010; Byers et al., 2014; Carter et al., 2013).

Based upon the idea of the second shift, many women have learned to manage their lives with multiple demands on their time. Women found that dual demands helped increased their chance of achieving their doctorate, something Holm et al. (2015) found in a study on doctoral students in the counselor degree program becoming pregnant. Managing dual demands means upholding multiple demands and responsibilities as a doctoral student while being a good parent (Holm et al., 2015). Women create and maintain multiple identities daily in their lives, such as a professional identity (work related), a mother identity, and an academic identity (those in some form of schooling beyond their job). Incompatibility can exist between the simultaneous identities of student and mother, as the demands of one diminishes the effectiveness of the other (Carter et al., 2013).

Professional identity. Over the last couple of decades, the number of women in the workplace has increased, creating a new frontier for women with the necessity and/or willingness to provide, support, and maintain their own lives independently or contribute to their family. Women's professional identities usually build upon their personal lives, their upbringing, and their career aspirations (Murakami & Tornsen, 2017). Unfortunately, women have encountered

glass ceilings along the way to achieving higher positions in their chosen career fields (DeFrank-Cole, Latimer, Reed & Wheatly, 2014). DeFrank-Cole et al. (2014) claimed women struggle in achieving their professional identity goals because of stereotypes of female gender roles, lack of open leadership positions for women (or unwillingness to open them for a woman), lack of female role models, child care responsibilities, home and domestic responsibilities, prejudice, and a lack of support in policies that provide a work-life balance. Kahn, Garcia-Manglano, and Bianchi (2014) found the number of children and their ages to be negatively correlated with a woman's labor force participation and career goals.

The pressures faced by working women have grown over the years (Gatrell, 2013). Women in a professional capacity outside of the home have struggled to perceive and create a positive professional identity for themselves, especially when the role of mother is a component in their identity (Tajlili, 2014). Some have described this struggle as the motherhood penalty (Kahn et al., 2014). Kahn et al. (2014) found women who became mothers at a younger age and who had more children were more likely to make accommodations for those choices, in turn facing greater career penalties. In addition, some mothers encounter workplace discrimination based on the fact that they have children, and are considered to be less competent or committed to their careers (Kahn et al., 2014). According to Lynch (2008), the underlying assumption is that mothers are better at providing consistent nurture than a father, grandparent, babysitter, or daycare.

Grady and McCarthy (2008) defined professional working mothers as those who remain working, developing, and investing in a career while rearing a family with or without support. Women's ways of life and identity are changing due to greater entry into the workforce over the last 40 years, which is sometimes necessitated by divorce or other factors (Hochschild &

Machung, 2012). Statistics show the vast change for working mothers in the workforce. In 1975, 39% of women with children under the age of 6 years worked in the civilian workforce versus 64% in 2009. Similarly, 34% of women with children under the age of 3 years worked in 1975, with 61% of them employed in 2009. Finally, a mother with children under the age of 1 year and in the civilian workforce in 1975 was 31% versus 50% in 2009 (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). These statistics show the status of working mothers and the multiple identities they take on inside and outside the home to manage their challenging tasks of motherhood while creating an individual identity (Gatrell, 2013).

Many mothers struggle with perceptions of being less-desirable hires, a lack of consideration for promotions, and the general feelings of being underrated in the workplace as compared to their male counterparts and childless employees (Trepal, Stinchfield, & Haiyasoso, 2014). Many professional working mothers outside the home have found employers unethically "mommy tracking" (keeping unofficial records of women who have or were planning to have children while continuing to work; Mason et al., 2013), which led to a decrease in their chances of career progression (Trepal et al., 2014). Instances of the motherhood penalty (Kahn et al., 2014) and mommy tracking (Mason et al., 2013) are hard to prove; however, many times, if employers offer a mother a job and she has small children, the academia or other professional position will come with stipulations (Kahn et al., 2014; Mason et al., 2013).

Mothers who work a first shift at a professional job often find their second shift comes at a time of career demands; as such, they may lose heart as they learn the occupational playing field is for family-free people (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). In today's society, a sign of success for professional, working mothers is in their ability to equally balance both domains in their lives: professional and personal. Women lose their confidence due to the lack of integration,

because they are already hindered by feelings of guilt. Leaving their child in someone else's care and effectively meeting the demands of their professional life to a standard higher than nonworking mothers is difficult (Trepal et al. 2014). The women facing these circumstances of guilt and feelings of being tracked struggle to see themselves as influential in their career fields. Therefore, many women settle for the minimum of what they can achieve in their professional or personal lives (Trepal et al., 2014). They take resources such as time, energy, and attention for granted, which severely decreases the completion of functions within either domain (Gatrell, 2013).

Women seek more flexible careers with lower demands on time and expectations, better allowing them to balance domains, cope with psychological factors, and lessen guilt during the child-rearing years (Araujo et al., 2015). Work-life balance is important to both individual and society; in turn, the ability enjoy that work-life balance is crucial to societal and individual human prosperity (Grady & McCarthy, 2008). A consistent stream of conflict between work and life balance leads to emotional and physical burnout and, ultimately, a lack of personal accomplishment and/or the possibility of diminished psychological health (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Society views working mothers who balance work-family-life as auspicious actors presiding over consecutive events in their lives to create a semblance of balance to all observers (Vancour, 2011). Some of these women achieve the semblance of balance; however, factors and modifications made to their daily lives are necessary for it to occur (Araujo et al., 2015). The transitioning between roles may upset the norm within a household, causing stress on relationships that was not present before (Carter et al., 2013). For example, women often set work-home boundaries with explanations in both domains, communicate expectations with

support systems, and help select appropriate childcare providers (outside of school-aged children) who understand the needs of a professional. As a result, the working mother sets clear guidelines and routine expectations within the home for all family members.

The Kaleidoscope Career Model (Manniero & Sullivan, 2000) encompasses working mothers, representing the ability of the mirrors within a kaleidoscope to shift patterns with only a slight adjustment, much like working mothers must do between their professional and personal lives. While shifting, some of the shapes and colors appear in the forefront while others stay the background but still visible or within reach. The kaleidoscope is similar to a woman's career path, incorporated into life such as family, schooling, and other responsibilities outside of the workplace. These women shift from one domain to another, with some domains remaining as shadows in the background that can quickly come back into focus, although possibly not in the same pattern as previously evidenced (Manniero & Sullivan, 2000). Due to the differences between men and women in the work-life interface, more research is necessary across the literature to better understand the implications and applications to real-world experiences of shifting domains.

Motherhood identity. Motherhood includes defining factors set by socioeconomic status, ethnicity, age, and marital status. The state of being a mother, or of having children one cares for, is the most simplistic term of motherhood (Key-Roberts, 2009; Newman & Henderson, 2014). Motherhood is also the expected route a woman takes in order to meet the emotional and physical identity as a female (Broghammer, 2016). Motherhood can be as complex or simple as one makes it, but the effect is everlasting for the majority of women who spend their lives nurturing, enduring emotional tolls, facilitating life choices, and rearing the child to be a part of society (Key-Roberts, 2009). A mother faces the challenges of becoming an ideal mother, and

when she includes being a doctoral student, she may feel she does not meet the societal expectations (Lynch, 2008; Mason et al., 2013). Broghammer (2016) depicted motherhood as becoming increasingly complex based on 21st century societal expectations. Individuals can assess these expectations by viewing any news program in real-time and seeing examples of these expectations through the actions of others (Trepal et al., 2014). Mothers in general, according to societal expectations, can manage time, identities, and responsibilities with little struggle.

The ideas behind motherhood as a single entity change when more identities emerge, requiring mothers to become adept at facing the challenge of balancing multiple domains and identities in their daily lives. As an example, Gatrell (2013) noted women's desire to keep maternity a secret within the workplace to avoid an unfavorable impact on their professional positions. A mother's ability to work through tiredness and sickness was an impact described as an ability only a mother could completely comprehend (Gatrell, 2013). However, according to Gatrell's (2013) study, working also imposed certain pressures to be the perfect mother, perfect career woman, and perfect wife. Women felt this undue strain and it made them question their choices and create an internalized guilt, which sometimes had detrimental effects on their psyche and overall well-being (Broghammer, 2016). Hochschild and Machung (2012) reported mothers who worked tended to have higher self-esteem and less depression than their housewife counterpart; however, when compared to their husbands or men in general, women were sick more often and suffered more exhaustion-related issues. The ability to put aside personal health to maintain the well-being of their family and the job was necessary to avoid marginalization.

Academic identity. The 21st century doctoral student is now highly nontraditional, which includes the majority being females who are over 30 years of age, are married, and/or

have had children while completing their studies (Offerman, 2011) in any program type, whether residential, online, or blended. The traditional viewpoint of those in academia indicates women who wish to have a serious career should maintain a career until such a point that having children will have little to no effect, or should forego children all together (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012). The nontraditional group of female doctoral students has increasingly lengthened the time it takes to earn their doctoral degrees over previous years. The change comes from academic changes, work/life integration changes, facing females in career positions, and women who strive to attain it all with career, motherhood, and doctoral student aspirations. Onwuegbuzie, Rosli, Ingram, and Frels, (2014) stated specific obstacles women have faced in seeking a doctoral degree. For instance, mothers face the inability to enroll in a doctoral program in a timely manner due to the timing pieces a mother must make work with before and after pregnancies. The responsibility for child rearing and care, and the rising cost of quality daycare impact the everyday lives of working doctoral student mothers (Carter et al., 2013; Lynch, 2008). Everyday familial obligations and struggles within a marriage, possibly resulting in divorces, pull at the female's academic identity, making them question where their priorities should focus (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Mason et al., 2013). A woman seeking a doctoral degree who is also a working mother most times can only to commit to part-time studying versus full-time studying (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2014). Financial struggles lead to not monetarily keeping up with tuition and home life (Holm et al., 2015). Finally, the feelings of being marginalized, ignored, or excluded from certain aspects of the institution and struggling with extreme amounts of stress throughout the entirety of the doctoral process leads female doctoral students to forgo or leave their doctoral studies (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2014).

Many women doctoral students face guilt, worry, and rejection within themselves and from others in their support system, which creates a conflict between their personal identity and their academic identity when motherhood also defines them (Holm et al., 2015; Jairam & Kahl, 2012). Some view women returning to graduate school as making their personal goals a selfish priority; in addition, women often lose some of their support system for making such a choice (Broghammer, 2016). Many of the women timed their entrance to the doctoral program based on their demands and responsibilities at home, which ultimately continued to dictate timing for studying and attending classes (Kahn et al., 2014). Adjusting to the new time demands and creating new work schedules to include socialization expectations, studying, writing, reading, and other coursework pulled doctoral mothers away from other responsibilities (Seligman, 2012). Even though role juggling is not uncommon for both males and females, Nettles and Millett (2006) found minimal literature existed on the experiences of women doctoral students and even less on doctoral student mothers. However, the gender role expectations perpetrated by society have established a tradition whereby women hold the majority of the responsibility for childcare and household tasks in a great number of cultures (Pierce & Herlihy, 2013). Women also become torn between their academic needs, the needs of their families, family loyalty and obligations, and gender expectations which they feel obligated to bear (Carter et al., 2013). Personal changes in life circumstances such as a child leaving the home to enter full-day school, separation/divorce, and/or death also had an effect on when U.K. doctoral student mothers entered their programs of study (Gatrell, 2013). According to Gibbard-Cook (2013), one respondent said the timing would never be right for women graduate students, nor would one ever finish the doctorate if she was waiting for the perfect moment, because it does not exist.

Integration of Identities in the Doctoral Process

Many women have discovered maintaining multiple identities directly influences their ability to create or connect to other aspects of their lives (Broghammer, 2016; Carter et al., 2013; Clark, 2000). An example is the ability of having full-time employment while working toward completing a doctoral degree. Willis and Carmichael (2011) found employment is a significant distractor from doctoral studies and led to a higher attrition rate. The motherhood identity intersects with both academic identity and professional identity when women consider beginning their doctoral degree. Greenhaus and Powell (2012) and Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2017) observed many women's decisions primarily centered on meeting the needs of their children before their own needs. Kahn, Garica-Manglano, and Bianchi (2014) also showed mothers could face workplace discrimination based strictly on having children. They found when women chose to have children, it could benefit their careers more negatively or more positively. Women then had to choose when or when not to pursue higher education to further their career aspirations. However, over the long term, women had the ability to gain more experiences in their careers and to better balance family and work, allowing for the possibilities of greater career gains (Kahn et al., 2014). Many respondents have stated the aforementioned intersecting identities (female, professional, academic, and motherhood) created struggles that became difficult, if not impossible to overcome at times while working on their doctoral degrees (Broghammer, 2016).

Individuals in female doctoral students' social support systems often misunderstand the time factor associated with attaining a doctorate degree, which leads to struggles with responsibilities in the household related to childrearing, chores, finances, and other everyday tasks (Greenhaus & Powell, 2012). Adults in general shortchanged themselves with time in order to accomplish more tasks within a day (Vancour, 2011). Adults regularly make decisions about

everyday activities and health to support their need for more time for work, family, and/or school. For example, an adult may trade an hour at the gym for completing a work deadline early, which over time can lead to health complications (Vancour, 2011). According to Vancour (2011), doctoral students working toward work-life balance must make a conscious effort and choice to promote a healthier lifestyle to include planning meals ahead, setting goals, and placing restriction on their work life. Lynch (2008) discussed findings of childcare in reference to the support systems available to student mothers. In the study, 75% of respondents relied upon private daycare, leaving the other 25% using family or in-home nannies, and/or having children old enough to be in the public school system. Jairam and Kahl (2012) showed that motherhood identity many times overlapping with academic identity could create feelings of despair, loneliness, and discouragement in the doctoral student, sometimes leading to divorce. Without taking the time to find a network or a social support system within their lives, women navigating the doctoral process felt lost and incomplete in their quest for educational advancement (Broghammer, 2016).

Summary

Only limited research exists on the persistence to doctoral completion for women who have multiple roles in life (Holm et al., 2015). The rates of motherhood in postgraduate school have increased and motherhood is common among the general population of graduate students (Kuperberg, 2009). Doctoral student attrition rates continue to hold steady while women have the majority of conferred degrees at 53% over their male counterparts across all fields (Aud et al., 2012). Women also experience a higher percentage of attrition in doctoral degrees in the field of education. For women, creating a work-life-school balance is essential for progressing in their careers, maintaining a healthy family, and continuing to pursue higher education. A woman

working toward her career aspirations while piling on additional challenges can inspire the most noted indicators for attrition in women during their doctoral studies. Some of these indicators are providing for themselves and their families, finding appropriate childcare/support, addressing family obligations outside of self, and overcoming the liability of spousal struggle that could end in separation or divorce (Holm et al., 2015; Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Kelley & Salisbury-Glennon, 2016; Pierce & Herlihy, 2013).

Connecting the attrition rate of female doctoral students with factors such as child rearing, doctoral assignments, and work obligations to professional, full-time, working doctoral student mothers, White (2004) found a leaking pipeline of women in general. The researcher specifically identified women with children as they leaked out of the system to fulfill demands that men in similar situations did not necessarily experience. The leaking pipeline in doctoral attrition necessitates research exploring how women who are succeeding, and not part of the leak, can persist to successful completion of the dissertation. Researchers have examined persistence in female doctoral students in counseling programs (Holm et al., 2015), in education programs (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017), in women of color (Zeligman et al., 2015), and in women doctoral students in groups (Santicola, 2013). Researchers have not looked specifically at the experiences of female doctoral students who are mothers with at least one child under the age of 6 years, professionally employed full-time, and working on a doctoral degree. Integrated in this study were Tinto's (1987) student retention theory and Clark's (2000) WFBT with the literature foundation of attrition and persistence in doctoral education. The study also entailed combining multiple identities of women, thus forming a unique subgroup previously studied in independent roles. However, no examination at present existed on the dynamic viewpoint of women who balance multiple roles, to include professional and motherhood, while successfully

persisting to doctoral degree completion. Thus, the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to address this gap in literature by investigating the experiences of professional, full-time working mothers who persisted to earn a doctoral degree in an education field in the United States through any program type: online, blended, or traditional.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Although the number of women with conferred doctoral degrees has increased, females are 16% less likely to finish their degrees compared to men (Ampaw & Jaeger, 2012; Pierce & Herlihy, 2013). One of the reasons many women withdraw is competing demands on their time and resources. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of professional, full-time working mothers who persisted to earn a doctorate in an education field through any program type (online, blended, or traditional) in the Southeastern United States. Chapter Three provides the rationale for the study's design, a restatement of the central research and sub-question, descriptions of the participants, setting, and role of the researcher. The chapter also includes clarification of steps taken for data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations as they pertained to this transcendental phenomenological study.

Design

This phenomenological study focused on addressing the absence of literature on the persistence of professional, full-time working mothers who earned their doctoral degrees in an educational field. Phenomenology gives the researcher a chance to investigate the experiences of a distinct group of participants with a specific phenomenon (Anderson & Herlihy, 2013). Creswell (2013) defined phenomenology as taking individual experiences and reducing them into a universal essence of the phenomenon. The common perspective seen across phenomenology includes the ability to study the lived experiences and develop descriptions of the experiences, not explanations or analyses (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). The phenomenological approach allowed a description of a common experience for

several individuals who persisted to doctoral degree completion while also managing motherhood and a professional career. The focus was on the need for the practice of phenomenology based around a more philosophical foundation in the ability to create formative relationships between who people are and how they present their actions, as well as between contemplation and sensitivity (Van Manen, 2007). Collecting information from a demographic questionnaire, life maps, a Division of Household Roles Survey, and semi-structured interviews led to integration of a description of the lived experiences of each participant to describe the essence of the experience.

The transcendental approach to phenomenology involves the researcher transcending, or looking upon a phenomenon with fresh eyes as if for the first time (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology focuses not on the interpretations of the researcher, but on the descriptions of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Interpretations function as a main part of phenomenology, and in transcendental phenomenology, the researcher must make sure to analyze the data from the participants' viewpoints until reaching data saturation. Due to the researcher's personal interest in the study, the phenomenological approach also allowed a focus on what participants had in common with their individual descriptions of their experiences while making sure to bracket out and set aside personal thoughts and presumptions on the topic.

The need for a systematic approach allowed the researcher, a person currently experiencing the phenomenon, to set aside all prejudgments, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon through a disciplined unbiased manner, which is why the transcendental approach was appropriate for the design (Moustakas, 1994). The use of phenomenology and the transcendental approach supported the research questions as they built upon a foundation to gain a clearer description of participants' lived experiences.

Research Questions

Central Question

What are the experiences of professional, full-time working mothers who persisted to completion of their doctoral degree in education?

Sub-questions

1. What factors do professional, full-time working mothers attribute to their successful persistence to completion of a doctoral degree program in education?
2. What challenges do professional, full-time working mothers experience while completing a doctoral degree program in education?
3. How do professional, full-time working mothers experience work-life-school balance?
4. How do professional, full-time working mothers describe the support systems influencing their persistence through their doctoral degree program in education?

Setting

The general setting for this phenomenological study was universities throughout the United States. For convenience, the primary area for participant sampling was near the researcher's home in North Carolina; however, individuals who attended a university outside this specific region were still eligible to meet data saturation. Three large, well-known public universities and two large private universities exist locally. Each of the universities offered online and residential programs for the Ph.D. and Ed.D. in education. Due to the growing need of personal convenience, many doctoral students continue their education using a blended or online program, often with an organization of higher education not local to them. Participant parameters

did not define which specific programs the participants must have attended; therefore, no participant was ineligible based on her program choice of online, blended, or traditional.

Participants

The study's participants consisted of 17 professional, full-time working mothers who completed their Ph.D. or Ed.D. within the last 5 years. This sample size was within the accepted range for phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013). The initial sampling of participants was planned for using the local school district with the intention of snowball sampling; however, the school board denied permission. The researcher then used social media through various forums in place with permission from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participant ages ranged between 25 and 35 years, based on Mason, Wolfinger, and Goulden (2013), noting the majority of women completing their doctoral degrees are between the ages of 28 to 35 years; however, the study did not delineate based on these ages. Each participant had at least one child under the age of 6 years in the home at any time the mother was working toward attainment of the doctoral degree. The specific age range was based on the Survey of Doctorate Recipients that stated women with children under the age of 6 years are 21% less likely to persist in their educational advancement or gain employment (Mason et al., 2013). This unique subgroup of women was the specific target population for this study. Information about this group is in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Participant Background Information

Participant	Current age	Ethnicity	Marital status	Number of children	Ages of children (years)	Number of degrees	Years to complete Ed.D. or Ph.D.
Ann	35	White	Married	3	1	3	6
Audrey	29	White	Married	4	1, 5, 14, 16	2	3
Becky	36	White	Married	2	1	2	5
Beverly	35	White	Married	2	1	3	5
Cassandra	44	White	Married	2	2, 5	4	4
Emily	44	White	Married	2	10	5	5
Jane	31	White	Married	2	1 (twins)	3	4
Judy	34	Black/Caribbean American	Married	1	2	3	3
Kiera	34	White/Asian	Widowed	3	4, 2, 1	3	5
Lisa	35	White	Married	2	6, 3	3	3
Lois	49	White	Married	1	4	3	3
Marie	35	White	Married	2	1, 2	3	4
Meg	36	Black	Separated	1	2	3	6
Stephanie	32	Black	Married	1	1	4	5
Suzanne	39	Black	Married	3	8, 6, 2	4	4
Veronica	34	White	Married	2	5, 2	5	8+
Victoria	33	White	Married	1	1	3	4

Purposeful sampling began with an informative e-mail to all district personnel requesting any individual who met the criteria and was willing to participate to complete an online informed consent form and a demographic survey (see Appendix A). However, as stated, the district denied permission and social media forums became the initial participant sampling method. Palinkas et al. (2015) defined purposeful sampling as identifying and selecting an individual or

group of individuals based on members' specific knowledge or experiences based around a phenomenon of interest. Purposeful sampling allows for available and willing participants with the ability to widely discuss their experiences and opinions in an eloquent, animated, and thoughtful manner (Palinkas et al., 2015). Following this process, the researcher strived for maximum variation from respondents to obtain a representative sample of participants. Maximum variation for this study included women from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, multiple age groups, number of children living at home during the doctoral process, and earning their doctoral degrees from one of at least three different universities. From the initial responses, the researcher employed a snowball procedure to obtain more participants until data saturation occurred and no new themes emerged. Women who completed doctoral degree programs had done so with other students working toward the same goal. Therefore, a participant may know of at least one individual from her program or her current position who would meet the criteria for the study, creating a snowball procedure for gaining more participants.

Procedures

Initially, the researcher requested preliminary approval to use the district's mass e-mail notification from the principal of the school in which she was employed to submit the IRB application (see Appendix A). The IRB gave conditional approval to make a formal approval request from the district superintendent and Department of Defense Education Activity headquarters (see Appendix B). The researcher secured final approval from the IRB before collecting any data (see Appendix C). Also requested was second approval from the superintendent of the school district to allow for use of the mass e-mail notification system of the district in order to send information about the study to help locate participants, following IRB

conditional approval (see Appendix D). The e-mail consent to the superintendent is in Appendix D and the mass e-mail to prospective participants is in Appendix E.

The district denied use of the district's mass e-mail notification system, so the researcher used social media as a network for locating participants (see Appendix F for a snapshot of the initial Facebook post). Posts included a link for potential participants to follow if they wanted to join in the study. The link led the interested party to log into a Google account for security purposes and recordkeeping of each participant's responses. The Google Form link is in Appendix G, with screenshots of the screener survey form participants answered to determine eligibility prior to completing the demographic questionnaire. After participants completed the screener survey to confirm eligibility, they received the consent form (see Appendix H) and a link to the Next Steps instructions (see Appendix I). These instructions informed participants as to how to complete the majority of the data collection items digitally, with the exception of the life map, which they could complete via paper and pencil and then take a photo and e-mail to the researcher.

The first link took the participants to the contact information form, where they checked yes or no to provide consent. Based on the continuance consent, the participant then completed the contact information form (see Appendix J). Upon completion, participants then completed the demographic survey (see Appendix K) and their life map (see Appendix L). The final step before scheduling an interview was completing the Google form for the Division of Household Roles Survey (see Appendixes M and N). If any participants preferred a hard copy rather than an online format, they could request such forms and/or data collection tools; however, no participants requested a hard copy. Following the completion of these items, the researcher contacted the participant to schedule an interview. At the time of the face-to-face or video

conference interview, the researcher reminded the participant about the informed consent, obtaining their approval to participate and allowing for audio and video recording during the interview. The semi-structured interviews started in April 2019 and continued into July 2019, using a standard researcher-created interview protocol that had received approval by a content expert in the field to support and answer the research questions asked in this study (see Appendix O). The comfort of the participants dictated the time and location of the interview; travel and time requirements forced some telephone or video chat interviews. The researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews and digitally stored them on a password-protected Google Drive. Each participant received a copy of her transcribed interview for member-checking. Upon approval or disapproval with edits, the interviews underwent coding following data analysis procedures.

The Researcher's Role

I am the researcher and also a current full-time middle school enrichment and intervention-reading teacher for the Department of Defense Education Activity. I am a White female who has been married for 6 years with two children, ages 5 and 3 years. I have 10 years of experience in grades K-8 in various teacher roles, which breaks down to 3 years of experience in the public schools and 7 years of experience in Department of Defense Education Activity schools. I am currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction. I previously earned a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education, a Master's degree in Reading Education, and an Educational Specialist degree (Ed.S.) in Educational Leadership. As a professional, full-time working mother pursuing a doctoral degree, I had a vested interest in the theories and information produced from this study, as they also applied to my own life experiences. Family members, coworkers, and higher-level administration within my job have commented on my ability and/or reasoning to complete the doctorate degree. I have struggled with similar gender

norms and societal expectations currently found in society that influenced my decisions and timing in starting my degree program, such as putting my own personal goals in front of my husband and children. Due to my personal connection to the phenomenon, I bracketed my feelings throughout the process by writing personal notes after reviewing each questionnaire, and life map, Division of Household Roles Survey, and while conducting interviews. I reflected upon these notes when completing data analysis to make sure my personal views did not factor into the findings. My goal for this study was to help other women in similar situations understand the risk factors, support, and strategies needed to be successful in degree completion.

Data Collection

The researcher used a variety of data collection instruments to provide descriptive information and triangulation pertaining to the individual participants and the group of participants. The participants received a general questionnaire to provide biographical and demographic information before the interview took place. In addition, they completed a life map and Division of Household Roles Survey based on their own experiences. All of the aforementioned data collection tools used previously had their validity confirmed via their independent uses. Finally, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant, with the conversation recorded, transcribed, and sent to participants for member checking.

Demographic Questionnaire

The demographic questionnaire for this study noted participant criteria of being full-time working mothers who have completed their Ph.D. or Ed.D. program within the last 5 years (see Appendix G). Approximate ages for these participants were between 28 to 35 years, with at least one child under the age of 6 years in the home at any time the mother was working toward

attainment of the doctoral degree. The researcher conducted a small pilot of the demographic questionnaire with participants not considered for the study. Content experts, the dissertation chair, and the committee assessed the validity and ease of reading of the questionnaire before receipt by the initial participant sample.

Life Map

The participants made a life map to create a visual research representation of their lives. The life map included important timeline pieces from their early years until the present. Rose (2014) defined visual research as a method that may incorporate visual materials and options as a tool for generating evidence to support narrative research and explore research questions from the participants' viewpoint. Worth (2011) used life maps successfully in research to increase interview detail, participants a working map to refresh their memories of important events, and to facilitate possible correlations between participants when analyzing data. The life map was a form of creative graphic research the participants created within their own timeframe before the interview occurred. The participants received directions (see Appendix J); however, a pilot of this data collection method was not needed, as it is a participant-directed research item.

Division of Household Roles Survey

The Division of Household Roles Survey provided information on how individual participants divided the household roles within their lives during their doctoral degree attainment time period (see Appendixes K and L). The Division of Household Roles Survey evolved based on a combination of three sources: Hochschild and Machung (2012), International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) Research Group (2016), and Staggs (2007). All sources provided a well-rounded questionnaire or survey, relevant topics, and an easy template to follow. Staggs used a questionnaire with dual-earner couples with children 15 years of age and younger due to that age

range requiring more parent responsibility for childcare duties. Staggs tested the survey with a small group within the university where developed, with approval by Stagg's chair and committee as a valid instrument for the research questions. The ISSP Research Group provided the questionnaire, a more in-depth instrument to gather specific information, to families in Ireland with no specific age range for children. The group developed the survey over a period of 4 years before administration. The ISSP Research Group continuously revamps and reissues the surveys. Developed in 2009 was the 2012 survey, which provided data for the 2016 report. ISSP had previously fielded it in 1988, 1994, and 2002, with slight changes in each to meet the current trends in society. Hochschild and Machung used Hochschild's original longitudinal study to discover that, although many women worked outside the home in today's society, they still completed more of the household duties than did the men in their lives. Hochschild and Machung validated their combined survey through test groups before administration as their final survey. The combined survey went to married or unmarried women who participated in the study, which included questions asking about family, friends, and supplemental support from outside the home.

Semi-structured Interviews

The researcher used the semi-structured interviews as a general interview guide (Patton, 2015) and gained an in-depth understanding of the experiences with description and specific themes (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) described the phenomenological interview as an interactive process that is informal in nature and uses open-ended questions to guide the participant. The set of questions used in the semi-structured interview was a guide, selected to elicit information about the participant's individual experience of the phenomenon, which allowed for skipping some of the prewritten questions (Moustakas, 1994). Probing questions are

a means to follow up on a particular question to deepen the response the participants have given. Probes fall into one of three areas: (a) detail-oriented (who, what, when, etc.); (b) elaboration (using strategic nonverbal cues); and/or (c) clarification (asking to add detail to a specific point in the answer; Patton, 2015). The individual interviews provided insight into the experiences the women encountered during their doctoral process, while establishing emerging themes between the participants (see Appendix F).

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself, giving general information about your life.
2. Describe your decision to pursue a doctoral degree.
3. Describe your general overall experience as a doctoral student.
4. How did your immediate family initially respond to your decision to pursue the doctoral degree?
    a. How did your extended family, in-laws, parents, and siblings, and other close family members respond?
    b. How did friends or colleagues respond?
5. What was your professional work life like during the doctoral process?
    a. Were there differences between the coursework stage and the dissertation stage?
    b. Did you stay in the same job or have multiple positions?
6. Describe a normal week during your doctoral process to include work, home, and school obligations.
    a. Was your Monday through Friday week different from your weekend?
7. Did you have a balanced work-life-school environment? Please explain.

8. Were you satisfied with your work-life-school balance?
9. Describe why and how you accomplished this.
10. Can you please describe a time in which you felt unbalanced or less balanced than you desired at that time?
11. What challenges did you face while pursuing your doctoral degree?
12. How did you face challenges while pursuing your doctoral degree, if you had any?
    a. If you did not have any specific challenges, what were some strategies you used to help avoid challenges?
13. What emotions did you feel when successfully meeting coursework requirements, defending your proposal, and your final defense of your dissertation?
14. What drove you to persist to completion and what supports were you able to rely upon?
15. What support systems did you have? How did they support you?
    a. Were there specific support systems that were stronger than others?
    b. Why?
16. Can you describe any experiences where you felt unsupported in relation to your doctoral work (e.g., by family, friends, community, peers, non-school peers)? Please explain with specific examples.
    a. What can a doctoral candidate's support systems do to better provide a stronger support base?
17. What factors do you attribute your successful completion of the doctoral degree to the most?

18. What do you feel institutions, including faculty and administrators, can do to better support women who are mothers and who work full-time?
    a. What can employers who value continuing education do to support doctoral students?
19. Is there anything else you would like to share about your doctoral degree experience that would benefit future women working toward the same goal?

Question 1 was a background/demographic question included as open-ended query to encourage participants to open up about their lives and nonessential terms. The question served as a starting point and allowed participants to describe their lives in their own worldview (Patton, 2015).

Sequencing questions are dependent on the type of interview conducted. In this semi-structured interview, the researcher asked standardized open-ended questions, which allowed for a freedom of the sequence of the questions. Patton (2015) noted noncontroversial questions are strong questions to begin with to keep the participant open and willing to talk descriptively. Questions 2 and 3 were preliminary questions about the participant's doctoral journey and overall feelings during that journey. The researcher revisited that information later in the questioning sequence. The questions provided information to support the central research question: What are the experiences of professional, full-time working mothers who persisted to completion of their doctoral degree in education?

Interview Question 4 was an introductory question about the support systems the participant may or may not have had during their doctoral journey. The question appeared near the beginning to allow the researcher to gauge initial reactions about participants' feelings

toward how their family responded to their decision to pursue a doctoral degree. Question 4 supported sub-question 4 as related to support systems.

The focus of Interview Questions 5 through 9 was Clark's (2000) theoretical perspective of work-family balance. WFBT is linked to a possible reasoning for doctoral students not persisting to successful completion of their degree. Questions 5 and 6 were general questions to get a descriptive accounting of the participants' daily life during the doctoral process. This type of question allowed participants to reflect on the time after they became more comfortable in the interview (Patton, 2015). Question 7 was an opinion question, asking the participant to reflect back on her ability to handle an average day during the doctoral process. Questions 8 and 9 were follow-ups to Question 7 to have participants describe in more detail their satisfaction with their balance, whether they achieved it or not, and if so, how.

Interview Questions 5 through 9 might have provoked feelings related to the experience, positive or negative, which led into Question 10. The tenth question was a follow-up to Questions 5 to 9, asking for specific feelings the participant felt during the doctoral process. The question helped answer the central research question, with emotions related to specific points in the process counted as variables that affected the outcome of participants' persistence (Metz, 2004).

Noted across the literature were challenges that affected doctoral students on their journey to completion (Carter et al., 2013; Castro et al., 2011; Gearity & Mertz, 2012; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2014). Questions 11 to 13 asked participants about challenges they may have faced and what persisted them to completion in spite of these challenges. Responses supported sub-question 2, which pertained to challenges full-time working mothers experienced during their doctoral degree program. However, participants may or may not have experienced a

minor or major adversity, which threatened their ability to complete their educational development (Martin, 2013). Thus, this sub-question 2 was a means to explore the experiences professional, full-time working mothers may not have noted before participating in this study.

Broghammer (2016) found when a female doctoral student's family, community, and/or other support systems did not value the student mothers' pursuit of educational advancement in the same capacity, the doctoral student often struggled to defend her decision and failed under pressure due to futile and tiresome struggles. Questions 14 to 17 returned to sub-question 4, pertaining to participants' support systems during the doctoral journey. These questions incorporated the specific terminology of support systems, which was not a component of sub-question 4. Question 15 directly applied to sub-question Question 1 with a focus on specific factors participants attributed to the successful completion of their doctoral degree. Placing this question near the end of the interview was intentional, as the participant had already conducted multiple reflections on her doctoral journey, with the assumption that her ability to recall information had become clearer throughout the interview.

Final questions 18 and 19 were one-shot questions designed to give the participant final ownership of the interview. A societal outcome of this study involves future doctoral student mothers benefiting from the information provided in this study. Allowing each participant to give in her own words what she would do differently and/or to provide any other information she wanted to share about her experience provided an end to the interview with personal descriptive advice for future women in similar positions.

Data Analysis

The researcher took multiple steps in data analysis to ensure rigor in successful qualitative data analysis and triangulation. Questionnaires provided information for descriptive

analysis (participant/group profile), and probing questions during the semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to deepen the responses related to the particular. For example, detail-oriented probes for the first interview question—"Please introduce yourself, giving general information about yourself"—could be (a) What does an everyday workday look like for you? (b) How many people are in your immediate household? and (c) What is your educational experience?

The life map as a data collection tool does not specifically collect open-ended responses in spoken or written words; therefore, the researcher did not use the formal qualitative data analysis of Van Kaam, as the participants did not include details in the open-ended section of the tool. The analysis of the life map meant creating an individual table of events indicated on the life map for each participant. The researcher used this individual table to create a composite table for all participants, and then for triangulation after independently analyzing information from all data collection methods to generate themes ground in all three methods.

As the Division of Household Roles Survey did not follow the steps for the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data, these data underwent separate analysis. The Division of Household Roles Survey allowed each participant to check who completed each duty in the household, with an open-ended question at the end for participants to add any additional feedback related to the survey topic. The researcher analyzed each participant's Division of Household Roles Survey individually and used it as part of the descriptive analysis of the participant as individuals and a group. The data underwent analysis across all participants to understand lived experiences and themes among the participants' household roles. After completing the formal qualitative data analysis of the semi-structured interviews, the researcher

triangulated the Division of Household Roles Survey with the life maps and semi-structured interviews through individual and composite level tables.

The researcher transcribed all semi-structured interviews manually for accuracy and confidentiality before the formal qualitative data analysis. Upon completion of each transcription, the researcher e-mailed a copy to the participant for member checking for validity before any data analysis occurred.

Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data provided a framework for data analysis of the life map, Division of Household Roles Survey, and semi-structured interviews. The life map and Division of Household Roles Survey only involved the steps of Van Kaam method if the participant included additional details in the open-ended answer section of the data collection tool. The steps of Moustakas' (1994) modification are as follows: (a) listing and preliminary grouping, (b) reduction and elimination, (c) clustering and creating themes, (d) final identification with validation, (e) developing textural descriptions, (f) developing structural descriptions for each participant, and (g) constructing a composite description of the main essences of the experience for the whole group. All analysis took place by hand without any software, and subsequently confirmed with peer debrief and member checking.

Steps 1 and 2

The first step, listing and preliminary grouping, involved making a list of every expression relevant to the experience to develop the essence of the phenomenon. An expression served as the important common meanings and essences seen multiple times through the transcriptions of the participants. Moustakas (1994) stated that essences and common meanings stood out during analysis. While evaluating the responses, the researcher posed questions such as

Does this expression contain a moment of the experience that is necessary and sufficient for understanding the experience? and Can it be abstracted and labeled (i.e., horizontalization)? Memoing and coding occurred with the use of color-coded sticky notes during this stage of analysis. Multiple colors helped with easily identifying commonalities throughout the data and during triangulation. The researcher used the reduction and elimination step to test each of the expressions from Step 1 in two ways: asking if the expression of the experience was relevant to the central question and/or sub-questions and is the expression detailed, not vague or ambiguous. The researcher labeled each expression, if relevant, and/or the underlying constructs of what the expression represents with the research question it answered— e.g., self-efficacy, imbalance, balance, satisfaction, struggle. The first two steps occurred at an individual level for the semi-structured interview transcripts.

Steps 3 and 4

Steps 3 and 4 involved grouping the data as whole to look at specific, consistent expressions. Clustering and creating themes and final identification with validation provided the merged view of the participants and helped with determining core themes. Deleted were any of the expressions lacking explicitness, as they did not represent the group as a whole. While analyzing the data, the researcher considered the following questions, as proposed by Moustakas (1984): Is the expression explicitly stated in at least one place from data collection?; and If the expressions are compatible but explicitly stated in different terms, does it change the overall meaning?

Steps 5 and 6

The researcher generated individual textural and structural descriptions of the experience for each research participant using the validated core themes from Steps 3 and 4. The individual

textural descriptions included verbatim excerpts from interviews to explain a participant's perceptions of the specific phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). These textural descriptions focused on what the participant, as an individual, experienced during her doctoral journey. An example was participants' feelings toward successes and failures during the dissertation phase. Individual structural descriptions deliver a vivid depiction of the experiences a participant encountered during a phenomenon to include the themes and qualities that show how their thoughts and feelings connected to the occurring events (Moustakas, 1994). Structural description examples included how the participant arranged her time to meet the needs of the various roles in their lives. The individual structural descriptions also incorporated verbatim examples from the transcripts and other data collection pieces to formulate validation of the descriptions.

Step 7

From the individual textural and structural descriptions of the experience, the researcher composed a final textural-structural description for each participant. The last step in Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data involved developing a composite description of the meanings and essences of the experiences that represent the participants as a whole. The specific statements and quotes that formed the composite descriptions and themes and represented the participants as a group could therefore answer the central research and sub-questions. Each of the composite descriptions tied back to answer the research questions for this study in relation to what attributes were related to successful persistence, what challenges could emerge during the program as a full-time working mother, the effects on work-life-school balance, and how support systems can affect persistence in a doctoral degree program.

Triangulation of Data

Data analysis encompassed all data collection methods—questionnaire, semi-structured interview, survey, and life map—to triangulate data to create individual, composite, and structural descriptions of the experiences. Each data collection method followed the data analysis steps of Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data to provide a specific and clear triangulation of the data, unless otherwise stated. After creating individual, composite, and structural descriptions of the experiences, the researcher created a table to organize the data analysis at the individual level for each data collection tool. The individual-level tables involved creating a composite-level matrix based on all data collection methods: the demographic questionnaire, the semi-structured interviews, the survey, and the life map. The matrix allowed for a cross-reference across the data collection methods of core themes from Steps 5 and 6. According to Patton (2002), use of triangulation does not yield essentially the same result, but aids in finding consistency among the results and providing possibilities for deeper insight and understanding.

Trustworthiness

Schwandt (2015) described trustworthiness as the ability to provide criteria for judging one's research for goodness and quality. Trustworthiness should also comprise balance, fairness, and conscientiousness when accounting for multiple perspectives that participants provide as well as the researcher's own biased perspective (Patton, 2015). Four areas of criteria help in this judging, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. By providing this section, the researcher is established as a novice intent on providing quality research by adhering to specific trustworthiness criteria.

Credibility

Establishing credibility entails conducting steps to demonstrate the representation of the data met the expectations of the participants' views of stories (Schwandt, 2015). Triangulation is also the basis for strengthening a study by combining multiple data collection methods (Patton, 2002). Initial triangulation occurred through this study's four forms of data collection: questionnaire, life map, Division of Household Roles Survey, and semi-structured interviews. Triangulation allows for diverse ways of examining data to provide the most accurate representation of the data as a whole (Patton, 2015). It also aids in checking the integrity of the assumptions and inferences made by the researcher (Schwandt, 2015). Without the use of triangulation with qualitative research methods, the study would not be validated (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015; Schwandt, 2015).

Support for triangulation transpired through member checks that ensured the researcher stayed close to the actual participant data and all interpretations and analogies remained focused on participant perspectives (Anderson & Herlihy, 2013). Member checks with the individual participants occurred via e-mail after each interview's transcription and again when upon completion of all findings to clarify and confirm the conclusions drawn by the researcher about participants' experiences.

The final aspect of credibility was a peer debrief with a female colleague having experience in doctoral degree attainment while raising children and working full-time. Peer debriefing provided a sounding board throughout the data collection process and with the following discussion. Peer review gives a researcher someone to share dilemmas with as they occurred during the study and provides a support system when for sharing ideas or thoughts (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015; Schwandt, 2015).

Dependability and Confirmability

The basis behind confirmability involved the ability of the researcher to establish interpretations of the data that was not of their imagination and ensuring the process in conducting the research was logical, visible, and documented throughout (Schwandt, 2015). Subsequently, although a personal connection to the research existed based on the researcher's status as a professional, full-time working mother working on a doctoral degree in the field of education, it was necessary to bracket personal experiences related to the phenomenon. Bracketing entails setting aside one's own personal assumptions, descriptions, feelings, and experiences to provide a composite description of the phenomenon from the view of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Bracketing aligns with the basis of phenomenological research, showing that one's own experiences may be similar to the participants' experiences (Van Manen, 1990).

Validation of the study is essential; therefore, the researcher is responsible for linking assertions, findings, and interpretations to the actual data collected from participants (Schwandt, 2015). The researcher created an audit trail throughout the study. The appendixes contain examples of participant demographic spreadsheets, personal memoing, peer debriefing, member checks, questionnaire examples, transcriptions, life map examples, Division of Household Roles Survey examples, and a log of all steps and procedures executed, including a timeline. These methods of confirmability incorporated and allowed for a dependability check. Dependability required accountability from the researcher to make sure the study was logical, traceable and well documented throughout. The external auditor was a content expert to help validate the audit trail. The content expert for this study was a member of the dissertation committee due to having specific knowledge and published works in the field of doctoral student persistence.

Transferability

Transferability of findings from this research study to another depend upon the established methodology in which a case-to-case transfer could occur with readers who judge they are working with similar participants, settings, and/or data collection/analysis (Schwandt, 2015). Discussions of methodology in Chapter 3 were detailed to allow reproduction or transferability due to rich, thick descriptions of the steps taken to conduct this study and arrive at the findings. As stated, in both the participants and the site selection, maximum variation in the sample provided a set of participants who varied in age, ethnicity, professional experience, and number of children. The Chapter 2 literature review is such to guide the discussion in Chapter 5 with consideration of theoretical perspective, multiple female roles, and overall doctoral degree attainment.

Ethical Considerations

All researchers must consider ethical dilemmas that may occur during the study. Ethical consideration is the ability of the researcher to maintain and identify any moral or ethical questions that may impact the participant, the researcher, or the overall findings of the study. At the time of the study, no negative impacts existed, as the researcher employed pseudonyms to preserve participants' anonymity and did not identify any specific university or place of professional employment. The right to withdraw with no consequences or repercussions appears in the informed consent form, as well as the consent for audio and video recording. The researcher secured all collected data through encrypted files, with paper copies stored in locked cabinets. All access to a computer was under password protection. No psychological distress occurred from any area of the study, so a local counselor's information was not needed.

Summary

Chapter 3 contained a descriptive explanation of the procedures and rationales used for this transcendental phenomenological study investigating the experiences of professional, full-time working mothers who have earned their doctorate in a field of education through any program type, whether online, blended, or traditional. Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2017) found the academic, motherhood, and professional identities emerged as significant in their study; however, their focus was on the integration of females' academic and motherhood identities, and did not directly include the professional role and identity. The review of literature indicated a gap for the specific subgroup of women who have earned doctorates while integrating their academic, female, and professional identities during the doctoral program. This chapter provided thorough descriptions related to using the transcendental phenomenological approach to qualitative research.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of professional, full-time working mothers who persisted to earn a doctorate degree in an education field in the United States through any program type: online, blended, or traditional. For this study, the definition of a professional, full-time working mother was a woman working at least 40 hours a week at a job in the field of education (or therein part of, equaling full-time status), with at least one child in the immediate household under the age of 6 years for whom the mother was the primary caregiver. The central research question was: What are the experiences of professional, full-time working mothers who persisted to completion of their doctoral degree in education? The sub-questions were as follows:

1. What factors do professional, full-time working mothers attribute to their persistence to completion of a doctoral degree program in education?
2. What challenges do professional, full-time working mothers experience while completing a doctoral degree program in education?
3. How do professional, full-time working mothers experience work-life-school balance?
4. How do professional, full-time working mothers describe the support systems influencing their persistence through their doctoral degree program in education?

This chapter begins with descriptions of each of the participants. Recruitment of participants initially occurred through social media postings and then snowball sampling. Data from the participants came through screener surveys, a demographic survey, a life map, a

Division of Household Roles Survey, and a semi-structured interview. The remainder of this chapter includes data analysis and significant findings.

Participants

After contact through initial purposeful sampling and the snowball procedures, 48 individuals responded to the screening survey. Of these, 17 doctoral mothers met the criteria and completed all data collection steps. After returning the consent forms, participants received and completed the contact information form, the demographic survey, the life map, and the Division of Household Roles Survey. Using the contact information for each participant, the researcher corresponded with each woman individually to stay in touch and secure an interview time. The use of pseudonyms instead of names ensured confidentiality among the participants. The 17 participants represented multiple professional jobs in education, various degrees in education, and varying experiences during their doctoral journey and life itself.

Participants of this study collectively earned 56 degrees; all had a minimum of two degrees before beginning their doctoral journey and five had three or more degrees before their doctorate. The participants spent a total of 77 years working toward their degree, with the average number of years being 4.5. The average age of the participants was 36, with outlier ages of 29 and 49. The majority of the participants identified as White; however, three identified as Black, one identified as Caribbean American/Black, and one identified as White/Asian. Regarding the relationship status of the 17 participants, 15 were and stayed married during the journey, one was married and remarried during the doctoral process, one identified as a widow, and one began the journey divorced from her spouse but reconnected with the same spouse near the end of her doctoral degree. The group of participants collectively had 34 children, with the

average age of children during the doctoral journey being 3.5 years, with two outlier ages of 14 and 16.

Ann

Ann was a 35-year-old, married, White female with three children under the age of 6 years during her doctoral program. She gave birth to two of them during the program. With the completion of her doctoral degree a year ago, she had earned a total of three degrees in varying areas of educational study. She held three different jobs at three different schools throughout the duration of her program. Ann's response to her decision to pursue her doctoral degree was:

> I had always thought about doing it. Like, I'm just one of those lifelong learner types. I was into teaching and I really liked education and curriculum instruction and so I'd always known that I wanted to do it. Then by chance my license was going to expire and I had to renew it. . . . [I thought] well, I'll just take some classes, and then basically I got like totally roped in.

Ann described her overall experience as doctoral student as neutral, stating the good and bad eventually evened each other out. It took Ann 6 years to complete her degree, and she felt as though she had balance in her professional work, but achieved balance between her personal and school life. She attributed a large part of her success to her husband, who never let her quit, constantly gave her pep talks, and picked up the slack around the house to keep everyone functioning. The other main factor she attributed to her success was her determination. "I don't give up on things easily because I think that it will or that I will feel that I have failed and that I have let people down. Really, it's myself I'm afraid of letting down" (personal communication, April 17, 2019). Ann noted her pregnancies were probably the most challenging times during the program. To counter the challenges she faced as a result, she was intentional on time

management and chunking out tasks to stay on track. Ann's final thoughts at the conclusion of the interview were:

> It's kind of like labor, you know—like women will give you all this advice about like being in labor, what you should do, but like until you actually do it for yourself, you don't always know. But it's good to have somebody to talk to, to give you advice, who's experienced it before.

Audrey

Audrey was a 29-year-old White first-generation college student who started her degree with a status of single and no children. She finished her degree in 3 years with a status of married with four children: three stepchildren and one biological. The doctorate degree was her third degree, which she determined she needed to pursue her professional goals in life. "I knew, so like in elementary school . . . I wanted to be a counselor and that I wanted to be called 'doctor'" (personal communication, July 21, 2019). Audrey described her overall experience as "Overall, it was good experience. Would I go back and do it again? Hell no!" (personal communication, July 21, 2019).

Going into the program, Audrey was under the assumption due to some previous issues that she could not have children, so she was OK with pouring herself into her work, her clients, and being a stepmother to older kids. However, in her second semester, she and her new husband were surprised by becoming pregnant with their daughter. The pregnancy itself was a shock, and the daunting task of staying in and completing her program even more so. The program was noted as being one of the most intense Ph.D. programs. According to Audrey, "No, hell no, there was no balance, but thanks to pregnancy, I had to learn some" (personal communication, July 21, 2019). Other than the pregnancy, two other major challenges arose during her program: passing a

portion of her comps and having a committee member steal her study and try to finish it before her. Audrey's support systems were crucial to her finishing her program on time and ahead of her committee member; she described her husband as a saint for putting up with and helping her through the program. A close friend was also extremely important to her success by providing emotional and physical support. Persistence to Audrey involved her drive to be a chronic overachiever and the need to do it for herself. Her final advice to doctoral moms of the future was:

> Just keep showing up, keep showing up . . . Whether we like it or not, our kids learn by what they see us do, because that's the only model that they have . . . We can tell our children don't cheat, [but] if they watch us cheat, they're going to do it. And so for me, I want [my daughter] to know I did this for myself, but that she can do hard things, too, when it's time.

Becky

Becky was a 36-year-old married White female with two children, one born before the doctoral program started and one born shortly before it ended. Completing the doctoral degree gave Becky a total of three degrees, all centered on higher education and counseling. During the course of her program, Becky had two jobs at community colleges in administrative director positions. When asked to describe her decision to pursue a doctoral degree and her overall experience, Becky expressed the following:

> At one point I was kind of like, okay, I need something challenging. And as in Higher Ed, sometimes those opportunities pop up and sometimes they don't. And nothing did . . . so I really was kind of at a crossroads where I loved what I did, but I was not being challenged or . . . intellectually stimulated. I did my quick research, found a program I

> fell in love with . . . and kind of once I decided I was going to do it, I just did. And the overall experience, I would say it was really good.

Becky was a first-generation college student and had her family members' support; however, they were indifferent to the process as they did not understand what it entailed. However, she noted she could not have finished the program without her husband's support. A minimal challenge in the program was changing dissertation chairs; however, it did not cause an overall negative effect because she separated from her chair on neutral terms and the transition to a new chair was easy. Becky noted things were not balanced during her time in the program, but she managed to get everything done. Intentionally, she left weekends for family time, delaying coursework until after dinner as much as possible. When describing the main factor in her persistence, Becky stated, "I hate starting things and not finishing them, . . . so probably that and just being stubborn and not wanting to not finish. It's the perfectionist in me" (personal communication, July 25, 2019). Becky's advice to future doctoral moms was, "Find a program that not only fits personal needs of a program, but fits the professional goals from doing the program" (personal communication, July 25, 2019).

Beverly

Beverly was a 35-year-old married White female with two children, one under the age of 6 years when she started her doctoral program and the other born during her program. Finishing her doctorate a year ago gave Beverly three degrees, all in education. She had one job as an assistant principal during the 5 years of her doctoral program. Once she finished her degree, she started a new job as a principal. When asked about her decision to pursue her doctoral degree, Beverly responded:

> I come from a large family of overachievers; we all are interested in school and learning. . . I really, really enjoy learning and as soon as I got my undergraduate, I actually went toward my Master's right away. I kind of always have known what I wanted to do and I've always kind of naturally been a leader, so to me I felt like this would kind of fulfill my need of learning.

Beverly described her overall experience as a doctoral student as something she enjoyed, but noted that the program was quite difficult. Her main supports through the program were her husband, with whom she felt she should share her degree; her parents, who forced her to write at the end by providing childcare; and her friends and colleagues, who provided emotional support. Beverly attributed her persistence to her resilience and drive to finish, which tied in with one of her main challenges during the program of having her proposal denied seven times by a research consultant who did not like her topic. Eventually, she received a new research consultant who approved the proposal. Beverly felt like she handled the work-life-school balance fairly well because she was a naturally organized person. However, she did feel at times that she could never actually be in the moment with her family because she was always thinking about what was next with her classwork or dissertation. Beverly's suggestion to future women in similar positions pursuing the degree was "I think you really have to seek and pray about, like, am I going to actually use this or is it just going to be a sheet of paper, because I could see it destroying your family, honestly" (personal communication, April 17, 2019).

Cassandra

Cassandra was a 44-year-old White female who finished her degree 5 years ago. She is married and had two children under the age of 6 years when she started her program. Cassandra postponed starting her degree twice after applying both times due finding out she was pregnant.

However, she always knew she would start, and did so 2 years after having her daughter, when she felt she could concentrate on something as serious as doctoral work. She completed the program in 4 years. When she started her doctoral program, she left her faculty position and took a less-stressful role in educational assessment at the same university. She stated her decision to pursue the doctoral degree was due to feeling "like there was more for me to learn and I just, I wasn't ready to be done. I felt like, there's just something more, like it didn't feel like it was completed" (personal communication, May 13, 2019). Cassandra described her overall experience as "pretty positive," as she had friends in school with her and the faculty were supportive.

Cassandra's main supports during the doctoral program came from her husband, in-laws, a close friend, and others in her cohort. These supports helped both mentally and emotionally as well as with childcare, which was essential with both her and her husband working. During the program, Cassandra felt as though she had balance because she was holding it together; however, looking back, she saw it was more of "everybody was just getting a piece of the pie . . . I was physically present, but not mentally" (personal communication, May 13, 2019).

The biggest challenge for Cassandra was finishing in no more than 4 years, a goal jeopardized when she had emergency surgery and was hospitalized for 5 days. The school told her that if she could not attend class the following week, she needed to drop the class and take it in the fall. Doing so would have put her over her self-imposed 4-year time limit, so she attended class a week after surgery and pushed through the post-surgery pain. She attributed her main persistence factor to self-motivation, saying, "I think I really just wanted to prove to myself that I could do it . . . I think just proving to myself that I could do something that was intellectually rigorous and I could live to tell the story" (personal communication, May 13, 2019). Cassandra's

final words in the interview were to women in similar positions who may be questioning whether or not they could earn their doctorate.

> I think it's really important for daughters to know that, you know, mothers can have goals and it's OK and that like . . . that women can be successful, that women can go and do these things and it's OK to have dreams and goals, like or for them and a family at the same time. It doesn't have to be a choice, one or the other and you can do . . . both.

Emily

Emily was a 44-year-old White female who finished her degree 3 years ago. During the program, she was married with two children, with the youngest born during the program. In the 5 years she took to finish her doctorate, she retained the same position as a special education director and coordinator for a district of about 7,500 students and 12 schools. The completion of the doctorate provided Emily with her fifth degree, spanning from her Associates of Arts to Ed.D. Emily's decision to pursue her doctorate stemmed from her need to "further my knowledge and my leadership potential" (personal communication, May 30, 2019). Emily's overall experience was very positive; however, as she finished her coursework and started writing, she found out she was pregnant. Her response to that was:

> To slow down a little bit. I had to reevaluate because I'm kind of a go-getter. And I'm kind of a :go in and get finished, get everything done as quickly as possible" [person], but decided at that point it was more important, you know, to just make sure everything was handled and I didn't have to rush through everything at the expense of my family.

Emily felt even though the pregnancy and having an infant were challenging during the program, she was still satisfied with her work-life-school balance. Her key to satisfaction involved being conscious about not taking time away from family, so working after they were in

bed was the norm. Her husband at times did not see how difficult school was, but he always stepped up when needed, along with her mom in providing emotional support and childcare. Emily stated her persistence came from "my personality. It is very, very difficult for me to start something that I don't finish . . . I feel that obligation to see something through" (personal communication, May 30, 2019).

Jane

Jane was a 31-year-old married White female with twins born during her doctoral program. Throughout the entirety of her 4-year program, Jane was an assistant principal at an elementary school in a rural community. The doctoral degree was Jane's third degree. She continuously went to school from bachelor's through her Master's, took a 1-year break, and then came across a good opportunity for her doctorate and returned to the classroom. She described her decision to pursue her doctoral degree:

> It was just good timing, I kind of needed to refocus my life and needed something to work on and the financing of it and it was gonna work for me. I was going to be able to pay for it without taking out a loan and so I just decided to go for it.

Jane's overall experience had positive and negative aspects. She stated the "good thing about it was I did acquire a lot of knowledge that helped me in my career and helped me grow as a person. The time commitment would be the negative" (personal communication, July 27, 2019). Jane's support system included her husband; her parents, especially her dad who has a doctorate degree; and her boss. Each supported her in different ways: Her husband supported the household, her parents helped financially at some point and with childcare, and her boss supported her need to leave for weekend intensives. She described her work-life-school balance as:

> It's just chaos that you have to embrace. I think just realizing that things are not going to be perfect at this time in my life. It's just a phase in my life . . . I could not be perfect at anything because I had so much to focus on.

Due to this chaos, Jane's biggest challenge involved balancing her school obligations with a bigger work obligation that had her acting as a district coordinator outside of just her school. Even with the obstacles, Jane attributed her persistence to the fact that "I had started it and the time that I had put in, the money I had put it, so I didn't want to give up after that" (personal communication, July 27, 2019). She also mentioned she did not want her children to see her fail or for her to use them as an excuse to stop. Her final advice to future doctoral moms was, "You're going to get through it and be happy that you did it . . . keep pushing through and it'll be worth it" (personal communication, July 27, 2019).

Judy

Judy was a married 34-year-old Caribbean American female with one child under the age of 6 years. Judy recently completed her doctorate to go with her bachelor's and Master's degrees in education. Throughout her doctoral coursework, Judy worked for the university she attended in two positions that allowed her flexibility to complete coursework. Judy's decision for pursuing her doctorate involved the following:

> The first reason was my dad, who passed away when I was 14. He was very instrumental in Higher Ed. He was a professor at an institution . . . but also I was going to end up not being able to move up as far as I would like to and my skillset wasn't going to get me there. I needed something else.

Judy's overall educational experience was positive and being in class in person was a prominent component that made her experience enjoyable. Due to the university she was

attending, Judy lived away from her husband and child for the first year of her program, until her husband got a job near the university. Her support system consisted of her husband, whom she described as her rock and the one who kept her sane, and her mother, who moved in with them for 2.5 years to help with their son. When describing her feelings about balance, she stated, "Balance is bullshit, but it was managed pretty well" (personal communication, May 28, 2019). Finishing Chapters 4 and 5 of her dissertation and getting the voices of her participants right was the most challenging part of the process, as she did not want to let them down. Judy attributed persisting to completing the program in 3 years was based on her personal drive and being finished before her son started kindergarten so that she could be physically and mentally present. When asked about what advice she would give to future doctoral moms, she responded, "Each one, teach one; it is everyone's responsibility to do something to pour into other people who are on their way . . . have real conversations with real people and build relationships along the way" (personal communication, May 28, 2019).

Kiera

Kiera was a widowed 34-year-old White/Asian female with two children under 5 years of age. Kiera's 5-year road to doctoral persistence was filled with challenges and successes. Kiera had completed a bachelor's degree and a Masters of Business Administration (MBA) before moving to the doctoral degree track. She worked as an independent educational consultant for the entirety of her program, which allowed her to foster and adopt her two children before the passing of her husband. When asked about her decision to pursue a doctoral degree, Kiera responded, "It was at first for totally selfish reasons. When I was young, I fantasized about becoming a doctor . . . but the older I got, the more I wanted to go into teaching at the college level" (personal communication, June 21, 2019). She described her overall experience as:

> I went the full gamut of emotional rollercoaster that could have happened. I mean, most people fortunately don't have to experience widowhood while on the doctoral journey. So that was incredibly difficult and I didn't have a lot of guidance and I'm a first-generation college student . . . so everything kind of had to be figured out on my own.

Even though Kiera faced the challenge of losing her husband, who was beyond supportive until his passing 2 years into her program, and having surgery to remove her cancer, she still persisted with the support of her parents, sisters, and friends. Kiera described balance as "organized." Her priorities were solidly set with child/mother priorities first, school, and then work. To her, "Really, the challenge for me was not the work-life balance. It was the mom-school balance that had to find a groove" (personal communication, June 21, 2019). Besides her supportive family and friends, Kiera attributed her successful persistence to her own internal motivation and being well organized. Her advice to future doctoral moms was "Seek not just within your university, but within social media circles for support groups of women going through the same things you are. [They're] just a click away [and] can make a difference" (personal communication, June 21, 2019).

Lisa

Lisa was a 35-year-old White female first-generation doctoral student who was married with two children and a total of three degrees. Throughout Lisa's 3-year doctoral journey, she worked as a middle school English teacher. Her decision to pursue her doctoral degree originally stemmed from the need to be more in touch with education, as she had been out for a couple years raising her children. She said, "I really started thinking about it early on in my education, really back when I was getting my master's degree, I kind of had an inkling that I would eventually want to pursue a doctorate" (personal communication, June 20, 2019). Lisa described

her overall experience as "incredible; better than I ever, ever would have thought it was. I mean, it certainly was difficult, no doubt about that" (personal communication, June 20, 2019).

Although she lost her grandfather, who was a supporter, along the journey, Lisa persisted with minimal challenges. She explained her life was not balanced during the doctoral process, because to be balanced, she needed some rest and there was none of that. Her major support systems were her mom, her cohort, and her husband. She had a very traditional marriage at the start of the program in relation to household and family obligations, but her husband's and her roles changed during the program to encompass responsibilities outside their norm. Persistence was a struggle even though Lisa had a strong desire to finish; she described a feeling of imposters' syndrome as something she had to constantly battle. She realized if people "dumber" than her could do it, she could, too. Her advice to future doctoral moms at the end of the interview was:

> Yes, you can do it. If you doubt yourself . . . go plug into some source of encouragement, whether it's a Facebook group or not . . . I don't think anybody can do it totally on their own. When you get to that point where you just can't do anymore, you've got to take a night off and just go to the movies or lay down or read a book or whatever it takes, because you can burn yourself out if you're not careful.

Lois

Lois was a 50-year-old White female who finished her doctorate degree 3 years ago at the age of 47. Lois was married and had one child under the age of 6 years when she started. During the course of her program, Lois was a high school counselor working to prepare young adults who had a disability or barrier for life after high school. She described her decision to pursue her doctorate as, "For me, it was, you know, some folks wanna run, like, the Boston Marathon. For

me, this was my Boston Marathon" (personal communication, July 25, 2019). Lois stated her overall experience was good due to having a great cohort. Her support system comprised her husband, who was super supportive; her parents, although her father passed away during her time in the program; and a good friend who was a behind-the-scenes cheerleader. Without the support of her husband, Lois did not believe she would have had any balance in her life; however, because of him, she felt her life had some balance. Challenges arose with time management and losing her father to Parkinson's and Lewy body dementia. However, he had good days and she had someone tape her defense so he could watch it before he passed. Her biggest factor in persistence was working toward the pride that she would feel in the end and showing the naysayers she could do it. Her thoughts to future doctoral moms included "everyone has their own journey; take yours" (personal communication, July 27, 2019).

Marie

Marie was a 35-year-old White female and married mother of two. She recently finished her doctorate degree, which was her third degree in an educational field, as a first-generation doctoral student in her family. During her doctoral program, Marie had held three different positions at a technical college, all in different forms of administrative roles. Marie was born with a physical disability called amniotic band syndrome, which left her with missing parts of her fingers, because it was a birth defect, she has known about it all her life and it never slowed her down. Marie described her reason for pursuing her doctoral degree as "pushed by my experience at the technical community college and my experience with our system here, with some support from some pretty awesome women in very high-level positions" (personal communication, July 19, 2019). As for her overall experience, Marie stated, "It was probably, I'd

say, the third hardest thing I've done after having my own two children" (personal communication, July 19, 2019).

Marie described the balance in her household as disproportionate. She never really found a balance during the program, with the last 6 months of finishing the dissertation being the worst. Along with the disproportionate balance, Marie faced challenges with both of her pregnancies, as she was a high-risk diabetic and she had to appeal to stay in the program after receiving a third C during her last pregnancy. During this time, Marie also lost her grandmother, who was a strong supporter, and she considered quitting the program. However, her biggest cheerleader, her husband, was always right next to her, telling her "it's OK" and "you can do this." Along with her husband, she had her parents and younger brother supporting her on the journey. When asked what factors really drove her to finish, Marie quickly and clearly answered, "My children." Marie's advice to upcoming or interested future doctoral mothers was, "Allow yourself to be that vulnerable person and be able to take in everything that is said to you . . . just remember to believe in yourself. I mean, you know, we're pretty freaking awesome people" (personal communication, July 19, 2019).

Meg

Meg was a 36-year-old Black female with one child under the age of 6 years during her doctoral program. Just before entering school, Meg went through a divorce and began the program as a single mom; however, by the end of the program, Marie had rekindled her relationship with her ex-husband and they were back living together, realizing they were better together. With the completion of her doctoral degree after 6 years and two different jobs, Meg has three degrees all in fields of education. She described her decision to pursue her doctoral degree as follows:

> I never saw myself going into ed[ucation] leadership . . . but from a personal standpoint, I needed to further my education so that I would be able to move up in the administrative ladder and to be able to have a salary that I felt like would allow me to be able to kind of pick up the slack with the [then] lack of two parents.

Regarding her overall experience with the program, Meg discussed how the process itself had tremendous ups and downs. The program she was in was not accredited and she had to also earn a Master's certification so she could get her educational leadership certificate. In turn, as she prepared to defend her dissertation, she had to change chairs at the last minute because her chair departed for another university. Throughout the doctoral program, however, Meg had the absolute support of her family, in which having an advanced degree is the expectation. All but one of her siblings had an advanced degree already. Her family, although busy themselves, stepped in to help care for Meg's daughter at many points, as did the mother of one her daughter's friends. Between the support system she had established and her good time management, Meg felt she achieved some work-life-school balance; however, it came at the cost of mommy guilt. She felt she was failing her daughter because she could not spend as much time with her as she wanted. However, Meg had her daughter attend her dissertation defense and share her success in that proud moment. Meg attributed her successful persistence to being task driven, saying, "When I set out to do something I'm determined to finish" (personal communication, July 18, 2019). Meg's advice to any mother going for an advanced degree was:

> You have to set a schedule so that you don't feel overwhelmed, and then finally understand that there are gonna be some times where you're gonna feel like you're not, you know, doing as much as you can as a mom, but don't beat yourself up over that,

> because you know you're doing this so that you can make a better life for your family ultimately.

Stephanie

Stephanie was a 32-year-old Black female originally from Nigeria. She had immigrated to the United States when she was 3 years old with a single mom and a younger sister. As a married mother of one, Stephanie completed the program in 5 years, having a total of four degrees over the course of her college career. She explained how the Nigerian culture played a part in getting her doctorate, as Nigerian families usually only pay for certain advanced degrees, such as pre-med, nursing, or pharmacy. Stephanie described her decision to pursue her doctoral degree and her experience:

> I've always been the type of person [such] that I don't like being told what to do. So I knew I needed to get to the highest level of this degree so that I could work independently and earn the respect of my culture.

After Stephanie entered the doctoral program, she identified some inconsistencies among a faculty that was not diverse and had stagnated in their research. Stephanie, being an advocate for herself, refused to be in a program in which she was unhappy in; therefore, she began working toward change and was quite successful by the completion of her program. A work-life-school balance was a top priority for Stephanie. By making sure to stay organized, spending time with her husband and baby when she got home, and leaning on her support systems, she felt she maintained some balance during her program. Along with her support systems, Stephanie credited her personal drive and seeing others before her succeed as factors in her persistence. Her advice to future women working toward the same goal was:

> To delay those experiences [husband and children], if they came up would be a shame, because you're concerned that they're going to be a distraction. I think that with the right supports, the right spouse, with the right opportunities, you can do it; you can do both.

Suzanne

Suzanne was a 39-year-old Black married mother of three who had finished her doctorate within the last year. Until the completion of her doctoral degree, she worked as a school psychologist, transitioning to opening her own educational consulting business. Her four degrees were related to psychology, instruction, and educational leadership. When asked to describe her decision to pursue a doctoral degree and her overall experience in her program, Suzanne stated:

> It was always something I knew that I wanted to do. Even, you know, from high school, I always knew I wanted to get my doctorate and so it's always been a part of me. My overall experience was good, but it was also very stressful—not the work, per se, but just the balance of life and doctoral studies.

Suzanne continued, describing that she did not know such a thing as balance was possible during the program. She made sure she compartmentalized everything, which was the only way she remained focused. With her whole family and her husband supporting her through the program with childcare and emotional support, Suzanne set aside time on Saturdays for family. Suzanne related her main concern with balance as focused on her family, saying, "I never wanted anyone to feel slighted" (personal communication, July 18, 2019). Challenges were not a concern during the program until the dissertation phase, which she managed through perspective strategies and self-care. Other factors she attributed to the successful completion of her doctorate included being a first-generation doctoral student, wanting to set an example for her kids, and not wanting to let anyone down. Her advice for future doctoral mothers focused on family:

> I would just say, you know, stick with it. Like, you know, people always say, well, your kids aren't going to be, you know, young forever, so you have to spend time with them . . . and I agree, but if you sacrifice a little bit now, the payoff in the end, you know is greater. And it's really important that there is quality over quantity.

Veronica

Veronica was a 34-year-old White mother of two who had been married, divorced, and remarried during the 8 years in her program. Many challenges and life changes occurred during this time, but Veronica's own drive, personal ambition, and working for the doctoral degree as a hobby helped her persist to completion. She described the overall process as "a great experience, but probably the biggest thing that you learn along the way is perseverance, even when you don't want to" (personal communication, July 18, 2019). When Veronica started the program, her husband was nonchalant about her working toward her degree. Her current wife was a complete contrast, as she had been very supportive and actively involved in Veronica's process, even before they were married. Veronica's thoughts on balance included meeting the needs of her family, coursework, and job without much guilt, because when she needed to put things on hold, she did so without hesitation. Family time was essential; in fact, they dedicated one weekend a month to family only with no telephones or electronics, which also helped with life balance.

Veronica's challenges along the way included multiple medical procedures, redrafting a new research proposal due to lack of support from local agencies, and ending and beginning relationships. Despite the challenges, she identified the main factor for persisting, saying, "It was a release for me; it was the one thing in life that I do for me" (personal communication, July 18, 2019). Her support system at the beginning of her program was her childcare provider; at the end

of the program, her main cheerleader and support was her wife. Veronica's advice to future doctoral moms was:

> I think everybody has to do it in their own way. There is a whole lot of tools, tricks, ideas and things that people present to you as an idea that may or may not work in your household. It's important to remember that your household is your world and it's how you function, and your success depends on fitting your dissertation into your household rather than your household fitting into your dissertation.

Victoria

Victoria was a 33-year-old White married mother who had successfully completed three degrees, most recently finishing her doctorate after a 4-year Ph.D. program. During the course of her doctoral program, Victoria worked as both a faculty member and an associate director of the English language institute at her university. She described her decision to pursue her doctoral degree as mostly due to needing it for professional growth. The overall experience was multifaceted, as the university expected her to hold two research tracks and work with a dysfunctional cohort. Her main support system included her husband, who was reassuring and always willing to help with chores around the house; her mother, who was always willing to listen and provide emotional support; and an aunt who had recently finished her doctorate. Regarding work-life-school balance, Victoria said:

> I guess I don't know how to [balance my life]. I would say it was very full . . . I would say my life was my child in that way. There was balance because I wasn't willing to not have the time after we picked her up from daycare . . . but I was very intentional about being with her and being with my husband when we had that time. The rest could come after bed. And I was satisfied, 'cause I think that I knew I couldn't do anymore.

Some challenges arose during Victoria's program; however, the one that put her family most off kilter was the death of her mother-in-law. Victoria attended class via Skype, but also was present that night with family when her mother-in-law passed. In retrospect, she noted, without her supports, she felt she would not have persisted to completion and credited her family and friends for keeping her sane. Asked about final advice for future doctoral moms, Victoria offered:

> I would say clearly defining what you want . . . but I think clearly articulating what you want and what it will take for you to finish. Also, utilize your support systems for everything. Don't be afraid to ask or take help when it is offered.

To be able to share their experiences the participants of this study spent time evaluating their thoughts and feelings in relation to their doctoral journey. Their overall experiences provided a rich, descriptive narrative to future doctoral moms beginning or in process of their journey.

Results

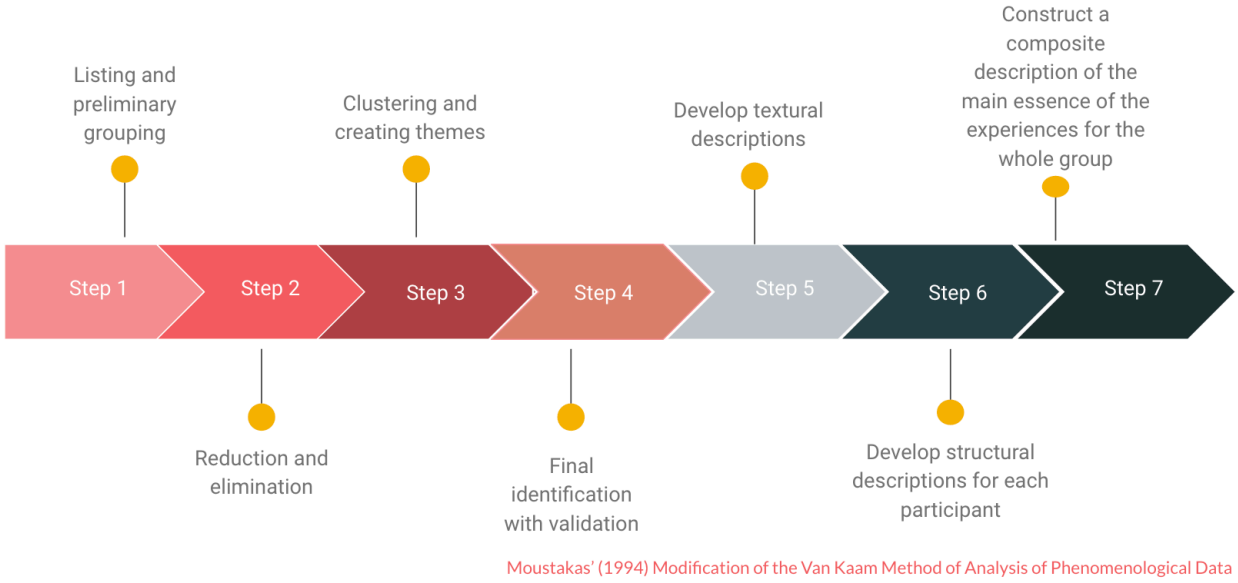
Each participant was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix K), a personal life map (see Appendix P for an example), a Division of Household Roles Survey (see Appendix M), and a 19 question semi-structured interview (see Appendix O) to develop the principal themes. All data collection methods focused on one central research question and four sub-questions which guided this study to describe the experiences of professional, full-time working mothers who persisted to completion of a doctoral degree in education. The researcher used Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data for each data collection method, with the exceptions of the Division of Household Roles Survey and the demographic questionnaire.

Theme Development

Using Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data indicated significant themes relating to the central research question and the sub-questions (see Appendix Q for examples). After sorting the significant statements, the researcher then transferred the information into spreadsheets and coded it by color (see Appendix R). Following the below steps themes emerged to answer the central question and sub-questions asked during this study. Following the below steps, shown in Table 4.1, themes emerged to answer the central question and sub-questions asked during this study.

Table 4.1

Data Analysis



Step 1 and 2. The first step of Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data includes listing and preliminary grouping of expressions relevant to the experience. Life maps and semi-structured interview transcripts were coded using memoing and color-coded sticky notes at the individual level first. After all life maps and semi-structured interviews were coded, each memo/code faced reduction and elimination by asking if the expression was relevant to the central or sub-questions and/or if the expression was detailed,

not vague or ambiguous. After the completion of steps one and two 19 initial codes were identified and were used in steps three and four: professional opportunities, family support, experience (positive, negative, neutral), personal ambition, high achiever, separating family time, mommy guilt, social support, time management, cohort supports, religion, health/self-care, imposter's syndrome, culture, life obstacles, institutional support, institutional struggles, balance, and unsupportive parents.

Step 3 and 4. Grouping the codes from steps one and two by common specific and consistent expressions created clusters that were listed together. Expressions that did not represent the group as a whole were eliminated and the remaining codes were validated through at least one data collection point, if not more than one. At this point six codes were eliminated: cohort supports, religion, unsupportive parents, imposter's syndrome, institutional support and culture. Using the remaining codes, core themes were identified: varied experiences, personal goals and opportunities, high achieving ambition, personal ambition, time management, institutional struggle, life obstacles, family time, mommy guilt, uneven balance, and support groups. In Table 4.2, initial codes, frequency, final codes, initial themes and verified themes are shown.

Table 4.2

Coding and Theme Development

Initial codes	Frequency	Final codes	Initial themes	Verified themes
Professional Opportunities	10	Professional Opportunities	Varied Experiences	Multifaceted
Family Support	26	Family Support	Personal Goals and Opportunities	Personal Ambition Through Learning
Experience (positive, negative or neutral)	20	Experience (positive, negative or neutral)	High Achieving Ambition	Professional Opportunities
Personal Ambition	24	Personal Ambition	Personal Ambition	Tenacity

High Achiever	15	High Achiever	Time Management	Self-Regulation
Separating Family Time	18	Separating Family Time	Institutional Struggle	Dissatisfaction with the Dissertation Process
Mommy Guilt	11	Mommy Guilt	Life Obstacles	Life Obstacles
Social Support	14	Social Support	Family Time	Family Segmentation
Time Management	16	Time Management	Mommy Guilt	Mommy Guilt
Cohort Supports	2	Health/Self-Care	Uneven Balance	Disproportionate Balance
Religion	2	Life Obstacles	Support Groups	Foundational Family Support
Health/Self-Care	8	Institutional Struggles		Social Support Groups
Imposter Syndrome	1	Balance		
Culture	1			
Life Obstacles	16			
Institutional Support	11			
Institutional Struggles	2			
Balance	23			
Unsupportive Parents	2			

Step 5 and 6. Core themes from steps one through four were used to generate and guide the individual textural and structural descriptions of the experience for each participant, which can be found in Chapter Four of this study. The individual textural and structural descriptions focused on specific participant quotes and perceptions from their own individual experiences.

Step 7. Using the individual textural and structural descriptions a final composite description was developed for the participants as a whole. Codes and core themes were listed

under the central question and/or a sub-question they most aligned with. Once the codes and core themes were listed, they were grouped and reduced to formulate final composite descriptions and principal themes (see Appendix R). These represented the participants as a group and therefore could answer the central question and sub-questions: multifaceted, personal ambition through learning, professional opportunities, tenacity, self-regulation, dissatisfaction with the dissertation process, life obstacles, family segmentation, mommy guilt, disproportionate balance, foundational family support system, and social support systems. In Table 4.2, themes are listed according to the central and sub-questions.

Table 4.3

Theme Development

Central Research Question	Sub-question 1:	Sub-question 2:	Sub-question 3:	Sub-question 4:
❖ Multifaceted ❖ Personal Ambition Through Learning ❖ Professional Opportunities	❖ Tenacity ➢ Personal ➢ Family ❖ Self-Regulation	❖ Dissatisfaction with the Dissertation Process ❖ Life Obstacles	❖ Family Segmentation ❖ Mommy Guilt ❖ Disproportionate Balance	❖ Foundational Family Support ❖ Social Support Groups

Theme Development Responses

One central question and four sub-questions were asked during the data collection and data analysis portion of this study. The central question asked participants about their experiences in persisting to doctoral completion. Allowing the participants' to describe their experiences was important to building individual textural and structural descriptions of the experience and the group's overall textural and structural composite description. The first through the fourth sub-questions focused on finding answers to how participants were able to continue their persistence through specific attributes, challenges, balance, and support systems.

The principal themes that follow are the results of the data analysis method to describe the shared experiences of full-time working mothers who persisted to doctoral degree completion, as they relate to the central question and sub-questions.

Central Question: What are the experiences of professional, full-time working mothers who persisted to completion of their doctoral degree?

The first few interview questions and analysis of the life map aided in identifying the principal themes for participants' overall experience and reasoning for pursuing a doctoral degree. Three principal themes emerged for this question: multifaceted, personal ambition through learning, and professional growth and opportunities.

Multifaceted. The third question of the interview required participants to describe their general overall experience as doctoral students. *Multifaceted* encompassed the participants' descriptions of their overall experiences. Multifaceted means having many aspects or phases; in the case of the doctoral program, participants' experiences were the aspects and phases in how they described their overall experience. Six participants—Becky, Cassandra, Emily, Lois, Suzanne, and Veronica—described their experiences as positive. Suzanne labeled her journey as "good, but a stressful experience"; she further explained it was the "balance of life and doctoral studies that was very challenging." Becky, Emily, Cassandra, and Lois termed their experiences as "positive" due to the programs they were a part of; three were in cohorts and one in a hybrid online program. About her cohort program, Becky shared. "My overall experience, I would say it was really good, from like the educational side . . . I had a really good experience with my program." Emily said her hybrid online program "was very positive . . . some of it I did online and others I did onsite, which were, you know, they were very convenient, but a lot of intensity."

The program type did not affect these participants' overall experiences, as all four earned their degrees with positive outlooks and in an average of 4.8 years.

Five of the participants—Ann, Audrey, Jane, Judy, and Victoria—described their experiences as positive, negative, or neutral. The type of programs differed, as Audrey, Judy, and Victoria were in brick-and-mortar programs; Ann was in an online program with some onsite intensives; and Jane's online hybrid program required travel four weekends a semester throughout the program. Victoria participated in a cohort model through a brick-and-mortar program and stated that, although she had a "good experience," it was difficult at times because of her cohort, the members of which she described as "dysfunctional . . . we had some personalities that were very strong . . . and I think that brought some negativity that didn't need to be there." Audrey explained, "I am broken as a person from the experience . . . but, you know, overall, it was a good experience. [But] would I go back and do it again? Hell, no." Ann described her neutral experience differently from the online perspective:

> I would say that it's kind of neutral, because there were honestly times when I would be at home and you're taking these course in complete isolation . . . but there were some great intensives where I met some great people, which was good and that was key. But I think when people ask me about doctoral work, I always recommend to them a residential program because of the difficulties of, like, finding a chair, trying to get something published, and other things like that.

Multifaceted for these particular participants showed the specific aspects of the program provided them with what they needed to pursue their degree; however, other aspects and phases of the program did not meet or lacked substantial contributions to their needs.

Finally, six participants—Beverly, Kiera, Lisa, Marie, Meg, and Stephanie—described negative overall experiences during their doctoral pursuits. Their program types included online with intensives, a hybrid model with a cohort, and brick and mortar with and without a cohort. Significant participant statements included "third hardest thing after having my two kids," "rough and learned to be a self-advocate," "overall bumpy road," "haven't slept in a decade; it was hard," "over it by the end of my defense," and "really hard, and it's really, really hard to do it." The concept of multifaceted for this group of participants focused on the negative aspects of their programs and lives during their doctoral pursuit. Lisa's description of her cohort experience centered on the negative social and life aspects of the program: "It certainly was difficult, there's no doubt about that. . . I didn't have any kind of social life for the entire program. Any kind of things that my kids went to, my husband would take them. So I did feel isolated." As a Black doctoral student, Stephanie's negative experience stemmed from a faculty who were all White and stagnant in their fields of study. Through self-advocating for herself and taking a student advocate position, Stephanie helped change the culture of her program and, in turn, create for herself a more positive overall experience; however, the majority of her program had a negative impact due to culture.

Lovitts' (2001) description of graduate studies involving a series of hurdles correlated to the aspects and phases doctoral students encounter while pursuing their degrees. A multifaceted experience may involve more than one phase, as shown through some of the participants in this study who described their experiences as both positive and negative, or who vacillated between the two extremes during their program. The group as a whole, though, provided rich descriptions of their experiences, which showed that all aspects and phases of a doctoral program cannot be characterized as a whole, but must be done so individually based on personal factors and choices.

Personal ambition through learning. Everyone has reasons for doing what they do. Among the participant group of full-time working mothers, personal ambition through learning emerged as one of the themes to describe their reasons for pursuing and completing their doctoral degrees. Ten of the 17 participants stated significant reasons for pursuing their doctoral degrees. Ann described being "one of the lifelong learner types and an overachiever." Audrey shared that she knew she wanted a doctorate in elementary school and always described herself as a chronic overachiever. Lisa also indicated several times on her life map that she was a high achiever and always at the top of her class. She knew "early on in my education and really again back when I was getting my Master's degree, I kind of had that inkling that I would eventually want to pursue a doctorate."

Becky, Kiera, Suzanne, and Veronica described their reasons for pursuing a doctoral degree as "something I wanted," "totally selfish reasons," and "I wanted it." Cassandra and Veronica also correlated their reasons for continuing their education to their need to "learn more" and "loving learning and school." Cassandra went into detail by stating, "When I was about halfway done with my Master's degree, I had felt like I wasn't done yet . . . I felt like there's just something more, like it didn't feel like it was completed."

Marie's motivation stood out from the others, but still focused on personal ambition. She described her reasons for pursing the degree:

> A large portion of it was pushed by my experience at the technical community college and my experience with our system there. I am a huge proponent of our mission, which is getting students ready to go into the workforce and to give them transfer opportunities to the universities . . . It was just something that I saw a way for me to be able to affect change here, because for a lack of a better word, our system is broken.

Victoria described personal reasons for pursuing the doctoral degree in both the interview and on her life map. On her life map, Victoria noted she was tired of being told she could not do things because she was a girl. During her interview, she connected this resistance to growing up in a small, conservative farming town where the expectation for women was becoming a housewife, not pursuing higher education.

Professional opportunities. Nine of the 17 participants identified their reasons for pursuing a doctoral degree directly related to the opportunity for professional growth and achievement. The professional opportunity was either a personal ambition or directly related to bettering themselves for the well-being of their family. As discussed, Victoria described also pursuing her degree as a way to open up professional opportunities:

> My boss at the time also had a Ph.D. and I was like, "I can do that. I really want to do his job. He's the director of our English language institute . . . I really wanted to be a director and I have to have a Ph.D. to do this.

Emily, Jane, Meg, and Suzanne shared similar reasons for pursuing their doctorate. Emily, who worked as a special education coordinator in a small rural school district, noted, "I did it to further my knowledge and leadership potential . . . then, of course, of what that would offer to my children." Jane decided to pursue her doctoral degree at a time when she felt she needed to refocus herself after having taken a year off after her Master's degree. She had already achieved an assistant principal position, but pursing her doctoral degree opened more opportunities.

Meg never wanted to go into educational leadership, but finding herself at a crossroads in getting divorced and having a principal encourage her due to "leadership qualities in me that I didn't necessarily see in myself," she decided to pursue it. She also noted from the perspective of

a newly single mother, “The teacher pay isn’t that great, so from a personal standpoint, I needed to further my education so that I would be able to move up the administrative ladder.”

Judy, Lisa, and Stephanie decided to pursue their doctoral degrees to help improve their overall skillset. Judy noted that, to move further in her career, “She need[ed a doctorate] to improve her skillset for future positions.” Lisa had taken time off from her career after her first daughter was born premature at 35 weeks, and then stayed out of her career field for a couple more years until after giving birth to her second child. When she was ready to go back to her teaching career, Lisa realized she was out of date, saying, “Wow, you know, things were just moving so fast and changing so fast, I felt like everything I already learned was already old history and I was having to play catch-up.” Going back to school was for her a way to refocus and become current in her career. Stephanie felt the same, although her background reasoning was based on proving to her culture that she could be independent in a career other than what was expected.

Proving oneself was Lois’s reason for continuing and completing her doctoral degree. Not only did she love learning and want to improve her professional opportunities, but she felt she “needed to finish my marathon.” Her marathon was reaching the top level of degrees and knowing it was hard work, but she did it.

Multifaceted described the participants’ multiple experiences, each of which were individualized. Moving through their programs at their own pace, ability, and choice allowed the women to be successful in their doctorate degrees. Choosing to follow their personal ambitions through learning provided participants with motivation to continue. Professional opportunities were a final theme related to the central research question, as many participants noted the

possibility of professional opportunities impacted their initial reasoning for starting and then continuing successfully.

Sub-question 1: What factors do professional, full-time working mothers attribute to their persistence to completion of a doctoral degree program in education?

The utilization of several interview questions, along with the analysis of the life maps, established the factors that participants stated led their successful persistence and completion of the doctoral degree. Two themes emerged under this question, tenacity and self-regulation.

Tenacity. Tenacity was the principal factor participants attributed to their successful completion. Fourteen of the 17 women made significant statements attributing their success to personal or family tenacity. Their unwillingness to give up allowed their persistence to guide them to completion.

Personal. Eleven of the 17 participants made significant statements corresponding to personal tenacity when asked "What factor do you attribute most to your successful completion?" Ann, Becky, Cassandra, Emily, Jane, Kiera, Lois, Meg, Stephanie, Suzanne, and Victoria all connected at least one main factor of their persistence to personal tenacity. Ann described her main factor as:

> I would say determination. Like, I just am, I don't give up on things easily because I think that it will, I will feel that I have failed and that I have let people down. Really, it's myself I'm afraid of letting down. I think I've discovered, like, really no one else would be affected by the fact that I didn't finish my doctorate because maybe my husband would be like, "What the heck, lady, you spent all that money" . . . but, yeah, I think it's just me. Like I just don't, I just don't deter easily, and if I start something I don't like to give up. So I would say definitely determination.

Not letting others down and continuing to push through personal struggles was also a key factor for Suzanne, as she was a first-generation doctoral student. She shared, "I didn't want to let anyone down . . . I have to finish this because, you know, they're looking at me as the one that's gonna get it done." Suzanne, being the first in her family to reach this level of education, refused to show personal weakness. Instead, she wanted to show everyone that obtaining a doctorate was possible and education meant something important, even though obstacles occurred. The same personal factor of tenacity pushed Becky to persist to complete. She said, "I was really, like, in my head wanting to give up because I was just so done . . . it was like, well, I'm paying for this either way. So I guess maybe my stubbornness and not finishing what I start." At points during her program, a lack of confidence often held her back, but by identifying key goals and knowing she would have to pay whether or not she completed, personal tenacity prompted her to continue and complete her degree.

The element of tenacity continued, as other participants felt a personal obligation to finish what they started. The women also wanted to prove personal self-doubt and the doubt of others would not prevail. She elaborated, "People [knew] that I started it. I didn't want to quit, didn't want to explain that to people." Jane noted that proving herself and others wrong was a main factor in her ability to persist to completion. Lois felt the same, explaining:

> There was always that nagging voice in the back of my head, "Oh, you can't do that, you can't do this," you know, that kind of thing. And it was almost like "Watch," you know what I mean? Like, "Watch, watch me do this; I can do this." Um, so for me, that persistence of, um, just wanting to do it and kind of showing everyone, like, look at me, I'm like, I can do it if I want to do it. And if I put my mind to it, I can do whatever the

> hell I want to do. So for me, it was kind of that, that persistence of the pride that I knew I would feel at the end of it.

Meg believed that since others had started out and finished in their own way, then she could, too. She explained, "When I set out to do something, I'm determined to finish and I did."

Kiera and Victoria both identified personal internal tenacity as the main factor for persistence. Kiera noted, "Internal motivation is really big, [as is] just staying motivated." Victoria felt persisting to completion was her obligation, because it was truly the one thing she did for herself; her "personal ambition" was her responsibility.

Family. Five of the 17 participants made statements of tenacity focused on family. A criterion of the study was having at least one child under the age of 6 years during the participants' doctoral program; therefore, family did play a role within several of the themes, although not as strongly in some. Family emerged with the theme of tenacity due to participants attributing factors of persistence to their children. Audrey said that having her daughter when she was told she could not have kids "lit a fire under my . . . I had to do this for myself, but I could not have lived with myself had I'd given up and [my daughter] had seen that." Jane held similar sentiments: "I didn't want my children to be an excuse to stop. I want to be able to tell them that they were the reason [I finished], as opposed to the reason why I stopped."

Marie wanted to instill life lessons in her children by showing them that she had finished her doctoral degree:

> I am looking at them and knowing what kind of world they're coming through and knowing that they're going to come by their own troubles in life. I wanted to give them the gift of seeing that, although Mom had struggles, and Mommy, you know, had to go

through a lot to do this, that she didn't quit and that at the end of the day, no matter how hard it was, I was still able to do this thing I'd set out to do and kind of had my heart.

Judy and Suzanne both wanted to be role models for their own children as they entered school. Judy's main factor was related to a timeline. "My son is going into kindergarten in the fall and I didn't want to live that experience, his first year of school, like watching TV and just seeing it pass by."

Self-regulation. The regulation of self is an active process that allows an individual to analyze tasks, set personal goals, and then attempt to monitor and regulate based on cognition, motivation, and behavioral supports (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Without self-regulation, doctoral students struggle to meet the demands of their programs. Ten of 17 participants noted one or more aspects of self-regulation during their interview or through their life map.

Compartmentalizing was a key factor for Ann, Lois, and Suzanne, as it allowed them to schedule time and organize tasks as needed. Ann had to "chunk out tasks" and "time manage" her whole dissertation. She worked backward on a calendar to set herself up for success and persistence. She always scheduled small tasks so she could move toward the bigger goal.

Time management in her "crazy" life was essential to Lois, as she shared her life was hectic most of the time. She said, "I would just have to compartmentalize, in my mind, 'This is the time that I'm going to be working on my school stuff, and then this is the time I'm working on my teaching stuff'"; somewhere in the middle, she would "get it done by separating it out." Suzanne's process was similar: "What I found is that I just had to compartmentalize . . . I had to be super focused and stick to the schedule."

Being organized and time- and task-driven were the key factors for Becky, Beverly, Emily, Kiera, Marie, Meg, and Victoria. Each made a significant statement regarding their ability

to self-regulate based on organization and drive: Becky, “perfectionist”; Beverly, “organized, resilience, and driven”; Emily, “restructuring time to meet all parts”; Kiera, “well organized”; Marie, “time”; Meg, “task driven”; and Victoria, “hard worker.”

The central factors of tenacity and self-regulation emerged as themes for successful completion of the doctorate. The drive to continue and the ability to regulate their lives and learning during the doctoral process allowed the women to persist to completion. Compartmentalization, organization, and self-motivation through conflicts, lack of confidence, and personal struggles provided doctoral mothers with the ability to show persistence to not only themselves, but also others in their lives.

Sub-question 2: What challenges do professional, full-time working mothers experience while completing a doctoral degree program in education?

Among the 17 participants, each woman faced challenges differently during the course of her doctoral studies, which emerged through interviews, life maps, and the extra information question on the Division of Household Roles Survey. Many of the participants had lost someone close or important to them, faced major health obstacles, and/or addressed troubles within their institution. Through the interviews and the life maps, the challenges emerged into two principal themes: dissatisfaction with the dissertation process and life obstacles.

Dissatisfaction with the dissertation process. Many of the challenges participants encountered during the doctoral program pertained to dissatisfaction with the dissertation process. Eight of the 17 women expressed challenges based on institutional and dissertation constructs. Four participants had a chair or committee member change, two of them in the final stages of dissertation defense, and two participants had multiple proposal denials before

successfully defending a proposal topic. The other three participants expressed their challenges with how their institution upheld the dissertation process.

Veronica, at year six, had her proposal approved the second time. She had previously received approval from a district superintendent to use teachers within the district, and then a new superintendent started and decided they no longer wanted to allow teachers to participate. The process frustrated Veronica:

> I had to go back to the drawing board with a new population in a state where I knew no one and it was a case study for that school. So, basically, I had to start over. It was written as a quantitative study, I drafted the second proposal as a quantitative study, only to come to the end and find out that the state would not allow me to have the data set that I needed. So, I converted my study to qualitative and moved forward successfully from there.

A review member denied Beverly's proposal six times. "That was so hard, because when you would get a proposal back denied, it'd be like your life would stop . . . I would spend like an entire week obsessed with fixing it . . . and then it'd be denied again." Finally, Beverly's chair stepped in after she demanded a new review member, and she received one. The first time the new review member denied the proposal, Beverly was prepared, because it was the first time the reviewer had seen it. After some minor edits, she finally received approval on the seventh review and she moved forward.

Audrey, Becky, Kiera, and Meg experienced loss or change in their committees fairly close to the end of their dissertation process. Despite various reasons for the change, the overall feelings were the same: dissatisfaction with the process. Becky described her original chair as an overworked mother herself who should not have taken on a doctoral candidate. Kiera's chair's

husband had a heart attack and she had to step down, which Veronica "completely understood, but it kind of left me hanging in the 11th hour without a key committee member to submit my final draft." The third time was the charm for her, as she submitted and defended a full dissertation. Audrey struggled with a committee member stealing her work and starting a replica research project while she prepared to finalize and defend her dissertation. Due to this betrayal, Audrey chose to leave out two of the themes emerging from her study so she could further develop them as her own research without the stigma of negativity from the committee member. Meg's loss was due to her chair leaving for another university shortly before defense. She related, "I had to literally change chairs so I could defend. My chair that I had wasn't necessarily the best, the one I got after my original chair left, so it was a lot of back and forth before it was over."

Stephanie expressed dissatisfaction with the way her university switched from comprehensive exams to portfolios for her cohort without any clear guidelines or examples. She described it as "'Here's the requirements; this is what you need' . . . and they gave it to us. I felt like [it was] not enough time to actually put together something. I was just overwhelmed."

The struggle and dissatisfaction continued with Marie, who appealed to stay in her program due to earning a third C in one of her final classes. At the time, she was was coping with pregnancy and a professor whom she described as "we were dealing with an instructor . . . who probably shouldn't have been teaching. I don't say that often, but she just—it wasn't her arena. Everybody in the cohort struggled, and she showed no compassion." The university approved Marie's appeal and she continued with the C and completed her dissertation.

Life obstacles. As mothers and women in general, most of the participants had multiple identities throughout their program. At points along the way, many of the women faced obstacles

that changed the course of their doctoral studies. Thirteen of 17 participants experienced major life impediments, which they noted as their biggest challenge during their program. Seven had lost a loved one: a husband, parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or best friend. Eight participants gave birth to at least one child during the program, and three participants had two children, one of them a set of twins. Nine of the women had children before they began the program, at least one of whom was under 6 years of age. Finally, two of the 17 participants noted having had major surgery during their program, with one of the participants needing six surgeries in 1 year.

As noted in her participant portrait, Kiera lost her husband 2 years into her doctoral program, 6 months after adopting their second child through foster care. Due to sudden widowhood, Kiera took a leave of absence from her program but was still determined to finish, which she did, albeit on a longer timetable than she expected.

> I'm 33 and I've been able to accomplish the things that I have. I've been able to in my life and some of them with my kids, which is special to me. I'm pretty proud of where I am sitting. I'd like to have gotten more sleep along the way, but that's not me.

In addition to Kiera, Beverly lost close family (she did not disclose who) and a best friend. Emily lost her dad, Lisa lost her grandfather, Lois lost her mother right before her program and her father during her program, Marie lost two of her grandparents, and Victoria lost her mother-in-law. During the interview, Lois described losing her father:

> My father passed away while I was working on my doctorate. He was very sick . . . I was absolutely part of the family generation where I'd get phone calls during class, and I'd have to leave early because he needed something . . . managing to help my father at the end of his life, helping my daughter run a household and working full-time was probably the most challenging part.

Victoria said losing her mother-in-law during her doctoral program "threw her for a loop." She used Skype for a class while waiting with family near the end of her mother-in-law's life. She recalled, "There was a class I needed to do and Skyped in and did it. I couldn't hear very well, but I was like, 'I have to do this, and I have to be where she is and be in class.'" She described the associated guilt but knew that her mother-in-law was proud and supportive of her, so she felt that her mother-in-law understood and wanted her to do what she needed to.

Both Cassandra and Kiera had major surgeries during their programs, with their professors still expecting them to participate in class and turn in assignments on time. Kiera's initial surgery and multiple surgeries thereafter forced her to take a leave of absence from the program. A week after her emergency surgery, Cassandra received pressure from the university to attend class or drop the class and fall behind on her timetable. She chose to attend class; however, upon reflection, now thought she should have dropped the class and put her health first.

Pregnancy served as the third main obstacle, which Audrey, Ann, Marie, and Emily described as the most challenging part of the program. Prior to starting her program, doctors told Audrey that she could not have children, something that was ultimately inaccurate. She shared:

> When I found out I was pregnant, it, like, shook me, but everything else, at that point I had never quit anything. I didn't think I'd ever quit the program, but I just felt, you know, like no one expected me to do it. Pregnancy forced me to have balance and I think that was one of the biggest lessons that I had to learn through all of it.

Emily also considered pregnancy her biggest trial during the program, saying, "I think the biggest challenge was just structuring and restructuring time to not just include work and a kid, but now work, kids, and homework." Marie went through two pregnancies during her program, both of which were high risk due to her being diabetic. Ann's pregnancy occurred when she was

working on her dissertation, and she turned in her final draft shortly before the birth of her son. She then refused to look at the dissertation again until 6 weeks later, which allowed her time to bond with her son and settle in. When she got back to it, she realized she had lost some of her drive and it was a struggle to push to the finish.

Throughout their life maps and interviews, participants noted concerns and struggles with the dissertation process. Dissatisfaction with this process led to extended time in programs, change of chairs, denial of proposals and IRB approval, and appeals to persist to completion. Along with dissatisfaction with some dissertation processes, many of these doctoral mothers faced life obstacles that stalled, delayed, or made them question their ability to finish. However, despite these principal themes, the 17 participants in this study were successful.

Sub-question 3: How do professional, full-time working mothers experience work-life-school balance?

Throughout the interview, the life maps, and the Division of Household Roles Survey, participants discussed how they handled their work-life-school balance in their everyday lives. Many of the women noted balance was unlikely or impossible to achieve during a doctoral program. Three principal themes emerged during the analysis process: family segmentation, mommy guilt, and disproportionate balance.

Family segmentation. The family segmentation theme emerged through significant statements about the participants' need to provide specific time for family during their week or month that was nonnegotiable. Eight of the 17 participants specifically described time they took for family during the doctoral process. Many of the women, however, did not sacrifice their family or marriage for the degree.

Becky kept her weekend daytime hours as free as possible for family, which meant she sacrificed bedtime with her daughter for the majority of her program:

> I tried very intentionally to not have a lot I had to do on the weekends during the day. I really focused on trying to get as much of my coursework done, even if I was doing coursework every night after we had dinner as a family.

Cassandra described a similar theme in recalling how she focused on her coursework and dissertation as much as possible during the week so she could dedicate weekends to family. This meant that, Monday through Friday, she only averaged an hour or two of seeing her family; however, she felt as though "everyone got a piece of the pie and they survived."

Judy's family segmentation was focused on dinner, bedtime, and between noon on Saturday until her son went to bed on Sunday. No school work occurred then. "I would not miss dinner time and bedtime; those were nonnegotiable. I wouldn't even answer my phone."

Leah and Stephanie cherished their time with their husbands because they knew their spouses were sacrificing to make things run. Leah prioritized "coffee with my husband every morning, because that connection time has just always been important. If I don't have that, I feel adrift." Stephanie, meanwhile, dedicated her time during the evening: "After 8:30, 9:00, I was cut off—no more school stuff—and then I was able to focus on him, or on us, so I tried to have work-life balance." Victoria was also intentional about her time with her husband and daughter. "There was some balance because I wasn't willing to not have that time after we picked [my daughter] up from daycare. So, from like five to eight, I really didn't do anything except be with them."

Suzanne and Veronica also scheduled purposeful family time, with Veronica maintaining one weekend a month for family with no outside distractions. Suzanne dedicated from noon each

weekend day until bedtime to her family. Each woman had her specific way to segment family time, and as Becky stated about the doctoral process, “It’s not forever.”

Mommy guilt. Mommy guilt, although not specifically stated by all participants, emerged as a principal theme when analyzing work-life-school balance. Nine of the 17 participants made significant statements focusing on their feelings of mommy guilt, either directly or indirectly as a result of work and/or school. For instance, Ann tried her best to keep the family balance as much as possible:

> I guess the way that I justified it to myself is that, well, my oldest son will remember it, but like my younger, middle son will not, and obviously the baby will not remember any of it. So I guess that even though I felt unbalance, I was like, “Well, it’s better now than when they’re like 10 years old,” you know, and I can’t go to their Little League game or whatever because I’m working on this.

Becky, Cassandra, and Victoria identified mommy guilt as setting in at different points during the process. Becky’s guilt kicked in and made her question her choice to pursue a doctoral degree. She questioned, “Is this going to pay off? Was it worth all the weekends away and stuff like that? The mom guilt kicked in.” Cassandra said, “I’ll always feel guilty that I wasn’t there all the time, although the kids don’t seem to know; I mean, they hardly even remember it.” Stephanie felt the mommy guilt during her fifth year while working on her internship. She shared, “I had a lot of mommy guilt because there be times where I was like, ‘I’ve been gone all day and now I want to work on my dissertation, but my baby hasn’t seen me.’” Victoria remembered several conversations with her husband.

> I’d be gone on a lot of weekends or gone most of Saturday and Sunday working. I always felt guilt. I was like, “I’m just leaving you,” like, you know, “I’m leaving you guys.” And

he was like, “I have the easy job. I’m taking care of the kid and going to the park . . . you’re the one who has to write a research paper. So don’t feel bad.”

Jane had twins during her doctoral program and noted that, although she felt the mommy guilt at times, she realized “it’s just a phase in my life.” Lisa had a similar view: “I would always, when I was talking to them, to kind of explain why I was doing this and so that they knew, ‘I’m not just ignoring you for no reason.’ There’s this goal and there’s an end point.” Emily knew starting the doctoral program would be difficult and consume time, so she was intentional about avoiding the mommy guilt as much as possible; however, she still felt at times she was “shorting her kids.”

Meg described the feeling of failing her daughter “because I can’t spend as much time with her as I want to, like where my friends who weren’t in the Ph.D. program were able to do the mommy-and-me and girl stuff.” She and her daughter had a bond and would remind each other when things were looking down that “You’re doing this because you’re trying to make a better life for you and for me.” Meg also felt mothers needed to know that the guilt was real and at times they would feel they were not doing enough, but “don’t beat yourself up over that, because you know you’re doing this so that you can make a better life for your family ultimately.” She also felt her daughter being younger helped lessen the guilt some and could not have imagined the guilt with an older child. The participants acknowledged that mommy guilt was real and, although partners and spouses tried to help ease the guilt, it never fully went away. As Jane stated, “There’s no way to be perfect at anything during this process, so breathe.”

Disproportionate balance. The principal theme of disproportionate balance began to emerge in Judy’s interview with regard to whether she had work-life-school balance. She responded immediately with “balance is bullshit.” Similar responses appeared through the

interviews, with Jane identifying the process as "just chaos that you have to embrace." Lisa stated, "Balance includes rest and I didn't have that," and Suzanne asked, "Is there such a thing as balance?" Disproportionate was more appropriate than imbalanced based on the data gathered from the life maps and semi-structured interviews. Balance was a component of the interview questions; however, when answering, the majority of participants did not refer to their experiences as imbalance, but in metaphors relating to balance. Therefore, the use of disproportionate for this theme was more appropriate as participants had to juggle, rearrange, and give certain domains different priority during the process, depending on the need at the time.

The disproportional balance became clear during the analysis of the Division of Household Roles Survey. The survey showed that even though females pursued this degree and took on the extra tasks, they still held a majority of the household roles. Females largely remained responsible for grocery shopping, preparing meals, managing the household budget, and cleaning the house. Females shared the responsibilities with males in the areas of laundry, looking after sick family members, helping with kids' schoolwork, bath time for kids, children's supervision when not at school, and transportation to and from extracurricular activities. Males held the majority in only three areas: small repairs around the house, maintaining and cleaning cars, and yard work. Even though the Division of Household Roles Survey indicated women with multiple roles during their doctoral programs, many of the participants stated their husband or wife had stepped up and provided help when needed. Most of the disproportionate balance accompanied the ability to balance school and life, as their professional jobs were not as affected in the balance.

Ten of the 17 participants made statements that directly correlated to the disproportionate balance or lack thereof. Audrey, Becky, Kiera, Meg, Suzanne, and Victoria specifically cited the

lack of balance during their programs. Audrey said, “No, hell no; there was no balance.” Becky shared that her life was “not balanced, but everything got done.” Kiera referred to “organized school-work-life, but not balanced.” Meg had “no outside-of-work balance.” Suzanne said, “I was always trying to find balance,” and Victoria stated, “It was not balanced; it was full.”

Kiera made the choice of putting Mom first, “so if there is anything that was going to happen in the day, it was going to be all the mom stuff first, then school came second, and then work came in third.” She felt that, due to being a widow, her children needed to come first in her life. With her “gift of flexibility,” balance did not happen equally, but fell disproportionately where it needed to, when it needed to.

Beverly believed she never achieved balance, “but everything got done; it just wasn’t always very pretty.” Suzanne said she felt as though she was constantly chasing balance throughout her doctoral journey and questioned whether there was even such a thing.

> I was always thinking, like, thinking ahead, you know, like, “Oh, OK, so there’s a birthday party on Saturday, so that means I have to put in some extra work, you know, on this day, that sort of thing. And so that, thinking about that kind of stuff helped me keep some semblance of balance, but I wouldn’t say it was ever balanced.

Many of the participants struggled to meet the demands of their professional life, their academic life, and their lives as mothers. Lisa noted finishing her doctorate and maintaining a balance was like “training for a marathon and finishing it. The knowledge that I will finish and will be done was really good for the time that you started to feel kind of crazy.”

To complete their degrees, the participants endeavored to have work-life-school balance through family segmentation, mommy guilt, and disproportionate balance. However, only two participants felt as though their lives were in balance during the doctoral process. However, they

also stated balance took more work and time than they had, or that other areas of the personal or professional lives suffered. Mommy guilt was a strong theme, as the participants felt the pressure of societal expectations of moms and wanted to be the best role model and caregiver for their children. Being a doctoral student infringed upon that expectation and kept some of the participants from doing or being their best as a mother. Women who met some areas of their lives with satisfaction also felt their lives became disproportionate in other areas, as others got less attention and fell behind. Overall, these principal themes described the experiences of balance during the doctoral program for full-time working mothers.

Sub-question 4: How do professional, full-time working mothers describe the support systems influencing their persistence through their doctoral degree program in education?

The final research sub-question directly correlated to how support systems influenced participants' persistence throughout their doctoral program. The analysis of the interviews and the Division of Household Roles Surveys provided rich descriptions and statements from the participants about who their significant supports were during the program. Two principal themes emerged during the analysis process: foundational family support systems and social support systems.

Foundational family support system. When asked about their support systems, all 17 participants shared having the support of a husband/wife, mom, parent, or the full family. The number one support system for 15 of the 17 participants was their husband, four of the 17 participants said their mothers where essential supports, and eight participants identified immediate family to include siblings, aunts, grandparents, and in-laws. Becky described her husband's support as essential when others may not have been as supportive:

> Looking back now . . . I could not have done this. I mean, maybe I could have, but like, from my viewpoint, I couldn't have done this without my husband being supportive. But I think because we were upfront about the demands of the program, I think that helped us later when things got hard.

The ability to understand the process and the needs of the doctoral student were some aspects with which participants' spouses struggled with during the doctoral program. Jane found that although her husband couldn't "see much value in it, he was always willing to help me with the finances or watched the kids." Victoria experienced and described a similar attitude with her first spouse, her husband, who was nonchalant about the whole process, but would help when needed. However, her second spouse, her wife, "is very supportive, was very supportive, and is still very supportive of my studying and education and my doctorate, and even so far as to be involved."

Audrey's husband was extremely supportive before they married, as he was in similar field of study. He had previously earned his advanced degree and knew the demands of the program. She stated, "that man is a saint" and "had I done it with anyone else at the time, I don't think that relationship would have survived, if it had been anyone on the planet other than him." She relied on him as her full emotional and family support, as her immediate family did not understand or want to contribute in a supportive way.

Emily, Jane, Judy, Kiera, Marie, Meg, and Suzanne all shared experiences and descriptions of their family support and how, without such backing, the doctoral process would not have been possible. Judy felt in the end that her mom was the "catalyst" that helped her finish in 3 years. She shared:

> She made the decision to come live with us for the time that I was working on my coursework. She kind of gave me the 2-year and out, basically commitment in terms of, 'I can be here for coursework, but then I'm going back.' She ended up extending to two and a half years.

Without her mom's support at home with her son and household roles, Judy was not confident she could have left home for the first year and commuted on weekends to work toward her doctoral degree.

Other participants made references to their moms as their "sounding boards," having the special "mother-daughter bond" that allowed them to vent and talk about anything. Stephanie's husband also relied on Stephanie's mother, as she shared:

> I have a single mom who's always been very supportive . . . when I didn't match in the first round of interviews, I literally had a panic attack. I started hyperventilating and I just completely questioned myself. I was like, you know, keeping in mind that I only applied to six places when other people were applying to 17 or 20. Um, I started hyperventilating and my husband called my mom and she, like, talked me off the ledge.

Stephanie not only depended on her husband to help "buffer" her emotional meltdowns, but also relied on him to be the hard push when he would "lovingly and jokingly tell her he would divorce her if she didn't finish."

Ann's husband set up mini-getaways for writing time and asked her mom and dad for support with childcare. He served as moral support, such that she related, "I don't think I would have succeeded if it weren't for my husband." Beverly had similar experiences with her parents supporting her after her second child was born. They forced her to come over with her children to eat and allow her time to write while they watched the kids. Because Meg was divorced for

the majority of her program, she relied on her mother and siblings, who helped with childcare and household responsibilities. Marie's family wouldn't let her quit if she wanted to. She shared:

> They were 100% behind me. My husband, my mother, my father, you know, just everybody, it was 100% support. And "You can do this." This is, you know, "We know that you have this passion for what you do, so we will support you in any way that we possibly can."

Most participants only experienced brief periods of feeling unsupported by family members during their program. A few women felt less supported by those who did not have an education beyond high school or were jealous of their ability to set and achieve such a high standard. However, as many of the participants were first-generation doctoral students, most immediate families, including husbands, parents, in-laws, and siblings, were more than happy to help support during the doctoral program.

Social support systems. Outside of family supports, 12 of 17 participants named either a friend, a church group, a colleague, and/or a cohort that provided the extra or differentiated support they may not have received from their families. Audrey, Becky, Cassandra, Kiera, Stephanie, and Suzanne had one friend who, no matter how involved the participant got in the doctoral process, would stop them and make them take a break, help with childcare, or act as a sounding board. With only her husband as a main support system in her immediate family, Audrey had a friend in the same program whom she considered her "life and school lifeline"; her friend was the only other working mother in the cohort and, Audrey said, the only one who "got it and knew." Cassandra had a similar friend who helped with childcare as she was a year ahead; however, her main friend support was not a part of the program.

> I had one friend who was completely, like, completely of the whole process and she was just, like, purely fun and she would force me. She'd be like, "Listen, you've been doing this too long, whatever, come on, come out, let's go have lunch, let's not talk about school." And so that was really helpful, as well.

After the loss of her husband, Kiera depended on family and neighbors who had become friends.

> You can't beat [having their support]. At the time when I was doing my degree, they were incredibly helpful because they kept me feeling like a person, and having some type of social interaction away from the computer screen and away from babies.

Kiera was half Japanese on her mom's side. When needed, the Japanese community stepped up to help and provided social support during the latter part of her doctoral journey. Many of the women were individuals who themselves had achieved a doctoral degree and understood her trials.

Suzanne and Stephanie had church communities and friends who served as reliable sources of emotional and educational support. Suzanne's church friend sent her on writing sabbaticals when it came crunch time to finish. She recalled:

> I had a very strong faith community. They really helped me a lot, just as far as like praying for me and supporting me. I had a really good friend from church who would, like, send me on writing sabbaticals when I was getting close to, like, you know, when I was actually like writing my dissertation, where they would volunteer to, like, pick up the kids from me or watch them for a few hours.

Many of the participants also experienced support through their colleagues, from principals and supervisors to other educators at the same level. Most of the colleagues were

emotionally supportive "cheerleaders" from the sidelines, as Lois described them, which was enough to give her the encouragement at work when she felt down. Working in higher education, Marie felt supported by her supervisors, who allowed her to be flexible at work as needed to continue her education and succeed. Both Lisa and Victoria had colleagues who had finished their doctoral programs in close proximity and provided encouragement. Victoria's colleague was also a commuter with her daily to work. "We rode together and she was supportive . . . I would say helpful, just that she would talk about her problems, and I didn't think about mine, or sometimes I was able to think about mine and process them out loud with her." Lois and Cassandra described at least one friend each from their cohorts who became social supports throughout their programs. Other than the mention of other students in the cohort, none of the participants described an institutional support in a social context.

Many of the participants relied on their social supports to provide them with a way out of school mode, through either kid-free time, a quick cup of coffee or tea, and/or a moment to vent and describe their personal struggles with the balance of work, life, and school. All of the participants relied upon immediate family support in the form of a husband, wife, mother, parent, or other close family members. Without family and or social supports, the participants said the ability to finish would have been impossible or far more difficult to accomplish.

Summary

This chapter provided a thorough discussion of the research results of the lived experiences of full-time working mothers through their persistence to complete their doctoral degree in education. The factors within the chapter indicated personal, social, and familial influences that helped motivate a group of strong women toward achieving their educational potential. The results appeared in order of the central and research sub-questions to illustrate a

picture of themes that represented this unique group of women. An analysis of the data collected via a demographic questionnaire, a life map, a Division of Household Roles Survey, and a semi-structured interview revealed several themes distinctly connected to this specific subgroup of participants.

The women in this study all presented themselves with the tenacity and willpower to overcome personal loss, mommy guilt, institutional struggles, and health and career changes to complete their doctoral degrees. The participants finished their degrees in an average of 3.3 years with the shortest being 3 years and the longest being 8 years. The need to show their families that they would not give up, and to specifically show their children that Mommy can struggle and still succeed, drove many of these women to persist to completion through their self-regulation.

Influences in the way of support systems, mommy guilt, and work-life-school balance impacted how each participant persisted. Some women needed to slow down and reevaluate to provide what their families needed. Others required family support to allow them to step back from their home responsibilities and work toward a degree that would ultimately improve their quality of life. Many of the participants were glad that, because their children were young, the children would likely not remember their mother being absent for periods of time.

Sharing their words was important to the participants, “Remember to do it in your own way”; “Remember to believe in yourself. I mean, you know, we’re pretty freaking awesome people”; “It’s just chaos you have to embrace”; “Show up and be present”, and “A dissertation is just training for a marathon and finishing; you can do it!” By sharing their words and advice, women of this study provided invaluable advice for future women looking at doctoral programs or currently in the process of completing one.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological was to investigate the persistence of full-time working mothers who earned their doctoral degree in the field of education through any program type: online, blended, or traditional. Previous researchers focused on the factors of motherhood and student life (Brown & Watson, 2010; Pierce & Herlihy, 2013; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017), the doctoral completion and persistence of women of color (Prosek et al., 2015; Zeligman, Prescod, & Greene, 2015), and persistence factors related to specific programs of study. A gap in the literature existed in reference to the specific subgroup of women who completed their doctoral degrees as mothers and while working full-time. This research study was an attempt to fill in the gap and explore the experiences of full-time working mothers and how they described their persistence to doctoral completion. The study further delimited to the field of education and doctoral mothers with at least one child under the age of 6 years during their doctoral program (Mason et al., 2013), as women in this subgroup are less likely to complete their degree. A review of the findings, discussion, implications, and recommendations for further research appear in the following sections.

Summary of Findings

The central research question of this study was, "What are the experiences of professional, full-time working mothers who persisted to completion of their doctoral degree in education?" These 17 participants had unique experiences based upon their personal and professional lives during the program, thus, the doctoral experience was multifaceted. Ten of the 17 participants described beginning and completing the doctoral program based on personal ambition through learning; in turn, nine of 17 described professional opportunities as their reason

for persistence. Some participants' reasons overlapped between personal and professional; however, only one described her initial and primary reason for pursuing the doctoral degree was, as a single mother, to provide a better life for her child.

The first sub-question was, "What factors do professional, full-time working mothers attribute to their persistence to completion of a doctoral degree program in education?" All 17 participants attributed their persistence to their own personal tenacity and/or their ability to self-regulate their lives to persist to completion. Tenacity specifically related to 14 of the 17 participants' unwillingness to give up on finishing their degree due to personal or family reasons. Out of the 17 participants, 10 of them also relied on their ability to self-regulate through compartmentalization or time management. As a whole, participants indicated their ability to successfully persist while holding a professional job, life at home, and school commitments together was a personal commitment.

The second sub-question was, "What challenges do professional, full-time working mothers experience while completing a doctoral degree program in education?" Each of the participants felt she faced specific challenges throughout their programs, although a few identified these challenges as minor and having little to no impact on their ability to persist. However, eight of the 17 participants felt dissatisfaction with the dissertation process, not necessarily the institution itself, through a delay in completion, lack of confidence in work, and/or forcing appeals to continue and succeed. Obstacles during the doctoral program affected 13 of the 17 participants with the loss of family and friends, pregnancy, and/or major health-related problems. Again, many of these obstacles delayed completion of the degree, forced participants to appeal to continue in the program, and/or caused a lack self-assurance in their ability to maintain their family resilience.

The third sub-question was, “How do professional, full-time working mothers experience work-life-school balance?” Achieving balance was pivotal to participants while completing their doctorate; however, as stated by one participant, “Balance is bullshit.” Most found balance unlikely and accepted what they could manage. Chapter 4 included a discussion of how family segmentation, mommy guilt, and disproportionate balance affected the experiences of participants during their programs. Most notably, mommy guilt and disproportionate balance affected persistence the most, with nine of 17 participants experiencing mommy guilt, and 10 feeling as though they never reached the point of achieving work-family-school balance during their programs.

Finally, the last sub-question was, “How do professional, full-time working mothers describe the support systems influencing their persistence through their doctoral degree program in education?” All participants described at least one person or group who provided a solid support base during their doctoral program. The majority of the participants, 15 of 17, identified their husbands as their foundational support and attributed a large portion of the success and persistence to them. Participants’ mothers additionally emerged as key supports during doctoral programs. One participant relied specifically on her mother to provide essential home support during her program. Social supports were also important to participants, with 12 of 17 naming a specific friend, church member or group, colleague, and/or cohort as essential to their ability to maintain and persist to doctoral completion.

Discussion

Historically, researchers of persistence and attrition for doctoral students have not focused on women, even though females hold over half the degrees in higher education (Aud et al., 2012; Thomas, Drake-Clark, & Grasso Banta, 2014). Scholars who have studied the topic

found a vast difference in the way female and male doctoral students experienced their doctoral programs and persistence (Gearity & Mertz, 2012; Nettles & Millet, 2006). Due to multiple female identities to which women connect on an everyday basis (e.g., mother, caregiver, wife, daughter, and nurturer; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017), women have difficulty with persistence in a doctoral program, with higher attrition rates leading to only ABD status (Aud et al., 2012). Women with at least one child under the age of 6 years while completing their degree, are 21% less likely to complete their program (Mason et al., 2013). The findings from this study contribute to the existing body of literature through exploration of the experiences of professional, full-time working mothers who completed their degree while being a primary caregiver for at least one child under the age of six years.

Theoretical Confirmations and Corroborations

The results of this study build upon previous research about doctoral mothers, which indicated many women, as mothers, felt they could not achieve professional goals after having children (Hochschild & Machung, 2012, Trepal et al. 2014). This study confirmed women felt their abilities, personal ambition, and potential professional opportunities that accompanied a doctoral degree outweighed the negative stigma of returning to school as a full-time working mother. In work with multiple female identities, Moradi (2015) suggested that a woman's professional identity begins with her personal life and upbringing. The study showed that many women pursing a doctoral degree are first-generation or the first female in their family to pursue a doctoral degree.

The multifaceted experiences described in this study supported Lovitts' (2001) finding that female doctoral students' attrition was not related to their academic inability or academic failure. However, the experiences a doctoral mother faces during her doctoral journey can and

will affect her overall persistence to completion. The majority of the participants in the study had a neutral or negative experience with their institution at different points in their programs. Many of the women chose programs based on their needs and expected to have those needs met. However, sometimes due to a lack of transparency, the expectations of the student and those of the university do not always align, causing a negative or neutral experience for the doctoral student (Tinto, 2012). For this study, the institutional experience did not diminish the persistence of the doctoral student; however, it did cause institutional dissatisfaction in some cases.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the women's dissatisfaction mostly began during the dissertation phase of the degree programs. Many of the participants discovered their chairs were not a good fit, their committee did not follow through on deadlines, chairs and committee members withdrew for various reasons, and/or the participant faced many denials at the proposal stage. The women in this study persisted based on their tenacity and purpose for pursuing the doctoral degree. Due to having experienced multiple domains and self-regulating their learning to meet those demands, the participants faced their dissatisfaction head-on until they succeeded, replaced committee members, and continued, something demonstrated with the factors they attributed to successful persistence.

For purposes of this study, persistence was a measure of success for an individual or student (Hagedorn, 2005), and specific to this study, the continuation to completion of a doctoral program (Lovitts, 2001). The tenacity and self-regulation factors were similar and consistent with previous research using similar participant groups. A sense of tenacity, or unwillingness to give up, and continue to move forward is an ability needed for a full-time working mother to persist to completion. Without this tenacity, which at times was nonexistent, the doctoral mothers found it hard to move forward. Many times, the tenacity factors were related to personal or

family-specific factors. Family tenacity connected specifically to the doctoral students' ability to demonstrate to other family members, mostly their children that they could persist to completion. Following a review of the literature, this factor appeared to be an area of limited and rarely discussed research. Researchers (e.g., (Clark, 2000; Gatrell, 2013; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006) studying doctoral students mentioned children as a balancing factor; however, the results of this study show that children served as a motivating factor contributing to the successful completion of the doctoral degree. The acceptance of failure was personal, but when children were involved, the participants saw failure as detrimental to their identity as a mother and a professional. Motivated for their family, some participants used tenacity to push themselves the extra bit to make sure failure was not an option, or something for their children to see.

The participants used self-regulation to help compartmentalize and manage their time to continue to push themselves forward. The way the women presented compartmentalization directly correlated with Clark's (2000) definition of segmentation, which was the complete separation of domains or roles in one's life. The women in this study found that to be successful, they compartmentalized many aspects of their life to include family, work, school, and personal needs. This self-regulation, though, sometimes came at a cost to the woman herself, which was acceptable to her because it was not at the cost of her family or job, both of which most considered more important. Time management was usually simultaneous with compartmentalization, as the women organized and scheduled tasks. In line with Brill et al.'s (2014) findings, they set specific time limits on those tasks. Through their ability to compartmentalize and manage their time, the women in the study self-regulated short periods of time to make personal gains in their academic achievement. The small increments were more easily regulated for personal needs than would have been larger, bulkier tasks. Some of the

women had this ability from the start of their program, whereas others had to learn to implement compartmentalization or lose their internal struggle to persist to completion due to their multiple identities during the program.

Clark's (2000) work-family balance theory was both confirmed and extended upon as the participants added another facet to the balance with school. During their doctoral program, the participants, through family segmentation, mommy guilt, and disproportionate balance, had to find and maintain a semblance of balance for persistence to completion. Family segmentation was extremely important to the women in this study, as it meant a specific amount of time dedicated to their family. Each participant had her own way of segmenting her time, but insisted on maintaining a form of work-life-school balance. Clark (2000) found, when individuals maintain borders and achieve segmentation between domains and roles, positive effects may result. The women in this study still felt the struggle and pull between work-life-school balance; however, without the segmentation of family time, many were not sure their marriages and/or families would have survived the doctoral program. The segmentation sometimes showed permeability and flexibility and the borders became less solid due to mommy guilt.

Empirical Extensions and Contributions

Due to the rise in the highly nontraditional doctoral student (Offerman, 2011), which often described the women in this study, sub-question 2 enabled examination of the challenges members of this group faced during their doctoral programs. A traditional viewpoint is that women should neither pursue a doctoral degree nor have serious career aspirations while a mother (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012). This group of participants lacked the same viewpoints and described their experiences, challenges, and ability to conquer issues and continue to persist.

Institutional factors only appeared in association with challenges the women experienced during their doctoral program. At no other point in the research was the institution a major underlying theme for attributing factors to persistence or attrition of the doctoral mother. As found in others areas of research, institutional factors included climate, integration, feedback, a diverse faculty, and the dissertation process (Lovitts, 2001; Mason et al., 2013; Tinto, 2012). The women in the study discovered challenges during the dissertation process in reference to their ability to have a fully committed chair and/or committee and the clear expectations of writing. Outside of students' direct influence, faculty members, chairs, or committee members have a great deal of control over the final dissertation proposal and manuscript. Women discussed how their faculty and committee members were stretched too thin, had no interest in the topic, or lacked effective communication skills to provide adequate and ample feedback. These frustrations instilled low self-esteem in some of the women due to feeling inadequate or losing motivation due to delays and constant revisions.

Life obstacles forced several of the women to step out of their projected paths and create new ones. Broghammer (2016) stated multiple identities created difficulties for doctoral mothers to overcome; as a result, some never did. In this study, all the women faced obstacles and continued persisting to completion, but not without questioning if they should continue. Pregnancy and major surgeries impacted several of the women in the study. With the challenges of life obstacles, many of the women credited their support systems for their ability to cope and move forward with their doctoral program. This finding is similar to that of previous researchers (Broghammer, 2016; Carter et al., 2013; Holm et al., 2015; Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Lynch, 2008). Overall, the dissatisfaction of the dissertation process and the struggles with life obstacles served

to slow or stop the women's progress for a bit, but it did not become a determent from earning the degree.

Society considers women to be a success when they are able to balance their work, life, and school obligations, as applicable (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). However, the mothers in this study struggled to meet all those demands, experience balance, or be successful all at the same time, even though their identities were fluid and easily shifted (Jones, 2016). Multiple identities and the ability to balance those identities leave many feeling a sense of guilt as a mother due to the inability to provide and be present for every facet of their children's lives (Trepal et al., 2014). Women in these situations have learned to cope with the resources, time, energy, and attention they have to provide for the domain in their lives to the best of their capabilities until finishing their degrees (Gatrell, 2013). When trying to balance these multiple roles, women took on first and second shifts (Hochschild & Machung, 2012), which allowed them to maintain a balance of unbalance and a reason to persist. Family weighed more heavily than meeting work expectations, but when compared side by side with home life, doctoral work usually took precedence because it was a short-term goal.

The majority of the women in the study concluded they did not have balance in their lives during their doctoral program. They described their ability to find balance at times in some areas of their lives, usually work, but it, too, was short-lived. Several of the women said they had a semblance of balance at some points in their lives, but it was with multiple modifications and factors in place over time. This commonality supports previous research on mothers earning doctoral degrees, as the criteria stated the participants were employed and had at least one child under the age of 6 years during the program. The ability of shifting roles, as supported by the Kaleidoscope Career Model (Manniero & Sullivan, 2000), showed working mothers only have to

make slight adjustments between their professional and personal lives. The women in this study constantly made slight adjustments to find what worked for their families and themselves to persist and be successful.

Lastly, formal and informal supports proved imperative to the persistence and success of the doctoral women in this study through foundational family and social support. The immediate household, specifically spouses, was crucial to the persistence and success of the women in this study, which supports previous research that family support is essential (Greenhaus et al., 2012). The majority of women in this study admitted that, without their spouse or partner, the ability to complete the doctoral program would have been futile or vastly more difficult due to demands at home. Research previously showed many doctoral women had unwilling partners to help with the second shift while working toward their degrees (Anderson & Herlihy, 2013; Broghammer, 2016; Brown & Watson, 2010; Byers et al., 2014; Carter et al., 2013). In this study, only one participant described her husband as nonchalant during the doctoral program when it came to helping with household chores and the children. The women in the study found they had to reach a compromise to accomplish all the tasks; however, unsupportive spouses were not a cause for lack of persistence. Mothers, fathers, and immediate family such as brothers and sisters were all key supports in helping with household chores and childrearing. The support from the doctoral student's mother was expected; however, the support from the doctoral student's siblings was not as they could be too busy with their own lives to play essential supportive roles during the program.

Social supports served as an influence to persistence in the form of friends, church groups, colleagues, and cohort peers. With the exception of the last group, these individuals usually lacked the knowledge and understanding related to the time factor and needs associated

with attaining a doctoral degree, but offered their version of support in the form of childcare, social escapes, everyday tasks, and more (Greenhaus & Powell, 2012). The childcare support tied back to mommy guilt, as some of the women believed that needing to ask for help with their children specifically meant they were failing their children. None of these feelings were due to specific conversations with the supports, but rather from an overall feeling of having to access outside help. A friend willing to provide social escapes is essential to both the physical and mental well-being of a doctoral student (Jairam & Kahl, 2012). In work on student retention theory, Tinto (1987) observed colleague supports were necessary for students to maintain a forward momentum through their program. For some of these women, having a colleague to talk to, a colleague who had previously finished her degree, or colleagues in the form of a supervisor willing to provide time off provided to be essential supports to the doctoral student.

Unfortunately, some of the women struggled with obtaining one or more support systems (e.g., family, social, church, community, etc.) for various reasons. The lack of this support did not deter them from persisting to completion, but affected the amount of time, stress, challenges, and complications that occurred during the doctoral program. However, none of the women in this study experienced a full lack of support from their family, community, or other systems as they continued to persist.

Implications

This study was an examination of the experiences of full-time working mothers and their ability to persist to doctoral completion. The following is an explanation of the implications of this research through theoretical, empirical, and practical lenses.

Theoretical

This study used Tinto's (1975) student retention theory based around attrition. Also incorporated was Clark's (2000) WFBT, which focused on finding satisfaction and functioning at an acceptable level amid work and family roles to create a framework to describe the experiences of full-time working mothers who have successfully completed their doctoral degree. The study provided a more integral level of description for the subgroup of women in this study, who are among the gender currently earning more doctoral degrees than men (Holm et al., 2015). Findings provided a rich description of factors members of the subgroup attributed to their successful persistence and not becoming an attrition statistic. In both early and later works, Tinto focused on undergraduate students and graduate students in general descriptions. The study allowed for examination of a specific subgroup of women who are persisting to doctoral completion despite life obstacles and dissatisfaction with some institutional factors.

Clark's (2000) WFBT pertains to two domains in a person's life. In the current study, the researcher focused on three domains in the lives of full-time, working, doctoral moms: professional, motherhood, and student. The research provides new additional insight into how full-time working mothers balance their lives during the doctoral process. Clark's set of propositions provided a framework for work and family balance at the border level. With three domains in action, the propositions are revisable for this subgroup of women, as many described balance as chaos with nothing ever equally balanced at the same time. The women considered unbalanced domains as normal balance, as it was the norm to have overflowing plates of responsibilities. As long as everything was done when it needed to be done, the women felt that their lives, although unbalanced, were in some way balanced.

Empirical

Limited research is available on mothers who finished their doctoral degrees and the pressures they faced without delimiting to a more specific subgroup (Holm et al., 2015). Empirically, this study contributed to the foundational literature for women persisting to doctoral degree completion by providing rich, descriptive narratives of their experiences as professional, full-time working mothers in education. The women of this study were diverse in their experiences as professional women, as mothers, and in their experiences as doctoral students. No two women in the study had the same experience in their doctoral program; however, it is possible to draw parallels to help provide more foundational literature on how they experienced their programs from a first-person perspective. Gaining a better understanding of their perceptions also connects to theoretical and practical implications for further research.

Practical

During the semi-structured interviews, the women discussed institutional support and personal advice to focus on the practical significance of this study. These questions allowed the participants to reflect on their overall experience and provide specific, first-person guidance for institutions and future doctoral students, something Schmidt and Umans (2014) had suggested in their research. Having the answers from these questions helps better understand the implications and applications to real-world experiences of shifting domains for working doctoral moms.

Future doctoral mothers. Mothers in general are continuously looking for ways to meet the demands of their families as well as fulfill the roles in their professional and personal lives. During a doctoral program, the ability to meet all the demands becomes increasingly difficult. The women in this study provided advice to mothers considering pursuing their doctoral degree,

including making sure to take time for themselves and performing self-checks on their physical and mental well-being; otherwise, burnout and other health-related issues may arise.

Full-time working mothers pursuing their degrees will never find a right time; however, they can find a doable time. Making sure the selected program meets the doctoral mom's personal and professional goals is essential to persisting to completion. Without a program in line with the needs of the student, the ability to be present becomes difficult due to lack of interest, and lack of connection to the setting and/or curriculum. When this happens, the program type (online, hybrid, brick and mortar) fails to fulfill the needs of the student.

Taking the time to ensure a support system is in place before beginning a program is crucial in the ability to finish the program. During this study's data collection, participants consistently stated that without a family support system or other type of support system, they were unsure how they or anyone could complete their degree as a full-time working mother. Therefore, having a familial, social, community, and/or church support system in place to help with emotional, physical, and logistical support is essential. Once a doctoral candidate identifies her support system, she should be honest about the demands and requirements of the program. Not all programs are equal or have the same requirements; thus, students must learn the expectations as defined and outlined before beginning a program.

Finally, deciding to pursue a doctoral degree should not define what experiences or choices a person has during the program, as the sacrifice is small compared to the payoff in the end. Many women were led to believe they can have one or the other: family or a successful professional career. As shown in this study, many women proved their ability to have both. A doctoral program is a phase in a person's life and not one that continues forever. Using self-regulation strategies to monitor progress is essential to successfully navigating the doctorate

phase. It is important, however, that mothers do not ignore experiences with family or professional opportunities, as some of them may not be possible after the degree.

Faculty and institutions. As the foundation of a doctoral program, institutions and faculty members are the primary source for future doctoral students. Being honest and upfront about the demands and requirements in a program is crucial to the success of doctoral students. Understanding the specific subgroup of doctoral mothers—a group previously less noticed and now becoming more predominant in programs—is crucial in having lower attrition rates in doctoral programs. Institutional policies need to reflect the changes occurring in the student population. Incorporating policies to support doctoral moms through childcare, late policies, and flexibility in course offerings would give better support to this more nontraditional student population.

Providing more female role models on campus through a more gender-diverse faculty also supports and encourages potential and current doctoral mothers to persist to degree completion. Many faculties lack an understanding or compassion for students who are parents first and doctoral students second. Allowing for alternate arrangements when a doctoral mother has to miss class, such as attendance through FaceTime, Skype, or other video meeting options, keeps brick-and-mortar students current and on track when events out of their control occur.

Institutions and faculty who provide a solid dissertation process support more successful doctoral candidates and graduates. The dissertation is the culminating process that allows a student to persist to completion or to not complete and become ABD. Suggestions for improving the dissertation process include providing training and more rigorous involvement for dissertation chairs, supplying a dissertation coach or coordinator not necessarily connected to the candidate's committee, helping to match candidates with chairs and committee members,

offering open office hours with research consultants beyond the normal Monday through Friday workday for distance and online students, and encouraging and supporting cohort models and peer support during the dissertation process.

In reading about the real-world, practical experience of mothers who have successfully navigated the path before them, current or future doctoral moms can develop a realistic view of potential problems and strategies for success, and believe that their persistence will pay off.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study was delimited to full-time working mothers who had at least one child under the age of 6 years during their program, as 21% of this population is less like to finish with a child in this age group (Mason et al., 2013). The study further delimited to the participants working in the field of education and having earned their doctoral degree in the field of education.

A few limitations exist in the current study. One major limitation was restricting the degree and job held by the participants to the field of education; therefore, the results are only transferable to other women in education and not to those other fields of study. The limitation of having at least one child under the age of 6 years also limited the study. Older children at home during the doctoral program could contribute to the candidate's ability to persist to completion. In this study, four of the participants had children over the age of 6 years when they started their programs, many had children over 6 years of age by completion. A final limitation in this study was the inability to meet any of the participants face-to-face for interviews. All but two of the participants lived outside of the researcher's home state, therefore making face-to-face interviews difficult; in addition, women preferred phone conversations so they could be

comfortable. The ability to interview a participant face-to-face could have provided more of a connection and brought forth more significant information about their experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

A few recommendations for future research emerged based on the findings of this study. The first recommendation is for future scholars to focus on full-time working mothers who have older children during their doctoral program. Many of the participants noted that although the process was difficult with having younger children, younger children were less likely to remember the missed events and activities. However, as the children got older, the more they took note of their mothers missing out on those occasions.

The majority of the women in this study were married during their programs. Many also stated they were unsure how or if they would have completed their degrees without the full support of their spouse, as their spouse was the foundation for any home balance the participants had achieved. Only two participants were single; one was due to widowhood and the other to divorce, but rekindled the relationship during the program. Future research should feature single mothers, as this change in participant criteria could alter the persistence factors that the women attribute to the successful completion of their degrees.

The review of literature showed that institutional factors had previously influenced persistence for many doctoral students during the course of their programs. This study showed some correlations to that literature; however, the majority of influence specifically during the dissertation phase of the program. Future researchers can specifically explore the impacts that institutional policies during the dissertation have on doctoral scholars who are mothers. The ability to better support mothers, provide compassion, and have more faculty representative of a

growing population of doctoral student mothers were factors shared by participants during the interviews.

Lastly, future scholars can specifically explore the lives of doctoral mothers after graduation and what they professionally achieved with their degree. During the interviews, participants described their lives post-graduation and what they are doing currently. Several times, participants mentioned difficulty with getting published after graduation and problems with finding an adjunct or faculty position because their curriculum vitae was not as in-depth due to their time in the program and lack of time outside of the program to expand upon it due to work and life obligations.

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study gave voice to the experiences of full-time working mothers who persisted to doctoral degree completion in the field of education. This study allowed doctoral mothers to describe their experiences through factors that contributed to their persistence, challenges they may have faced during their journey, experiences of work-life-school balance, and how their support systems influenced their persistence. In completing a demographic survey, a life map, a Division of Household Roles Survey, and a semi-structured interview, participants described their experiences. Results of this study indicated this unique subgroup had a multifaceted overall doctoral experience based on personal ambition through learning and the professional opportunities a doctorate could present. Participants also indicated aspects of tenacity and self-regulation, dissatisfaction with the dissertation process, the need to overcome life obstacles, the ability to create family segmentation, the need to overcome mommy guilt, and disproportionate balance, all with foundational family support and social support systems.

These results add to the body of research about the growing population and experiences of working doctoral moms in any type of program. The findings show doctoral moms need to have a strong support system in place to help provide assistance with child responsibilities and household roles. The study indicates that future students should have strategies in place to help self-regulate and compartmentalize their time during the doctoral journey to help manage a semblance of balance in all domains of their lives. Lastly, the findings demonstrate that future doctoral moms must have tenacity and understand life obstacles are going to occur, but they must continue to persist and remember their reasons for beginning their programs.

Future researchers should continue to focus on full-time working mothers persisting to completion of their doctoral degrees to further build a foundational research base for a quickly growing nontraditional student population. The research can be delimited to various subgroups of single mothers, mothers with older children, and various program types. Overall, these research results and later research conducted with similar criteria will assist future doctoral mothers in their studies. In addition, universities will receive guidance in providing higher education to diverse subgroups who wish to further their education for personal ambition, professional goals, or to better provide for their families.

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APPENDIX A

Preliminary Approval from School District

ALBRITTON MIDDLE SCHOOL
P.O. Box 70089
FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA 28307-0089
www.am.dodea.edu/bragg/albrittonMS

Phone: **(910) 907-0201** ***Fax:*** **(910) 432-4072**
Dr. Laura Hussein, Principal **Larry Daffin, Assistant Principal**

June 14, 2018

Brianne Bruscino
Researcher
1278 Fieldtrial Cir.
Garner, NC, 27529

Dear Mrs. Bruscino:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of Professional, Working Mothers Who Persisted to Doctoral Degree Completion, I have decided to grant you permission to use the district's mass email notification list. This preliminary approval will need to be followed-up with the formal DoDEA Headquarter approval process as soon as the Institutional Review Board (IRB) grants their permission for the research. Any questions or concerns from IRB can be directed to my office.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

☑ Any data collected will be will be stripped of any identifying information.

☐ We are requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

Dr. Laura Hussein
Principal

APPENDIX B

IRB Conditional Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 21, 2018

Brianne Bruscino
IRB **Conditional Approval** 3502.112118: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of Professional, Working Mothers who Persisted to Doctoral Degree Completion

Dear Brianne Bruscino,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been **conditionally** approved by the Liberty University IRB. Conditional approval means that your complete approval is pending our receipt of certain items, which are listed below:

-Documented approval from each research site you are enrolling in your study. Acceptable forms of documentation include a letter on official letterhead or a time-and-date stamped email from a person with the authority to grant permission.

Please keep in mind that you are not permitted to begin recruiting participants or collecting data until you have submitted the above item(s) and have been granted complete approval by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well as you continue working toward complete approval.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

The Graduate School

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

APPENDIX C

IRB Formal Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 6, 2019

Brianne Bruscino
IRB Approval 3502.020619: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of Professional, Working Mothers Who Persisted to Doctoral Degree Completion

Dear Brianne Bruscino,

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.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

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

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

The Graduate School

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

APPENDIX D

Community Superintendent Letter

Dear Community Superintendent,

I am writing to gain approval from you, the community superintendent, to send out a district e-mail to seek participants for my doctoral dissertation. The study that is being completed is of personal interest to me, as I am currently walking in the shoes of the participants I am hoping to connect with. The below information is what will be included in the e-mail and potential participants are asked to contact me via a non-district e-mail if they are interested in participating. No district information will be used in the study and if at any time a participant mentions the district it will be replaced with a pseudonym. If you have any questions please feel contact me for more information. I am hoping to be able to send out this information when we return in January. An e-mail response expressing approval is requested, so that it may be included in the Institutional Review Board application and approval process.

Sincerely,

Brianne Bruscino

A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of Professional, Working Mothers Who Persisted to Doctoral Degree Completion.

Brianne Kay Bruscino

Liberty University

School of Education

Dear District Colleagues:

You are invited to be in a research study of professional full-time working mothers who have persisted to completion of their doctoral degree in education. If you are a woman with a conferred doctoral degree, whom worked while pursuing the degree and also had children in the home while completing the degree, I ask that you read the following information and consider participating in this study.

I, Brianne Bruscino, am a current doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, and am conducting the following study based on the below information.

Background Information: The purpose of the study is to describe the experiences of professional, full-time working mothers who persisted to earn a doctoral degree in an education field. At this stage in the research, a professional, full-time working mother is defined as a woman working at least 40 hours a week at a job in the field of education, with at least one child in the immediate household under the age of six for whom the mother is the primary caregiver who has persisted to doctoral degree completion. The study seeks to understand the experience by using the following four proposed research questions:

1. What factors do professional, full-time working mothers attribute to their successful persistence to completion of a doctoral degree program in education?

2. What challenges do professional, full-time working mothers experience while completing a doctoral degree program in education?

3. How do professional, full-time working mothers, experience work-life-school balance?

4. How do professional, full-time working mothers, describe the support systems influencing their persistence through their doctoral degree program in education?

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

1. **Complete the demographic survey.** The demographic survey will provide the researcher with background information related to your personal life, professional life, and student life. The information will be coded and no identifying information will be released about specific participants or any information they share. This portion will take no more than 15 minutes.

2. **Create a life map.** The life map will be completed by the participant before the interview. A life map is essentially a time line of important events in one's life that have affected their path in life. Each participant's life map is unique to them and may be simple or detailed in nature. The life map will help the researcher during the personal interviews, provide a reference point for the participants during the interview, and find possible correlations between participants. The time spent on this may range from 30 minutes to one hour.

3. **Complete a Division of Household Roles Survey.** The Division of Household Roles Survey will be completed by all participants no matter of marital status. The Division of Household Roles Survey is intended to provide the researcher with detailed information about how each participant divides their time and how work-life-school integration effects everyday life in the home setting. The Division of Household Roles Survey will take no more 15-20 minutes to complete.

4. **Interview in person or via FaceTime/Skype.** This interview will be audio and video recorded for the researcher's reference. The interview will have a set of questions that are the same for each participant the participant may be asked to review the transcripts of the interview as a way to ensure clarity and that nothing was missed. The interview portion of this study will take the most amount of time ranging from 45 minutes to two hours.

If you are interested in participating in this study please follow the link provided here: _____ for consent and continuance guidelines. If you have any questions please e-mail me at bruscinoresearch2018@gmail.com with your name, personal e-mail (non-work associated), and a phone number if you wish, so that I may respond back to you as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

Brianne Bruscino

bruscinoresearch2018@gmail.com

IRB#_____

APPENDIX E

District Colleagues Letter

A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of Professional, Working Mothers Who Persisted to Doctoral Degree Completion.

Brianne Bruscino

Liberty University

School of Education

Dear District Colleagues:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to describe the experiences of professional, full-time working mothers who persisted to earn a doctoral degree in an education field and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years or older, a woman with a conferred doctoral degree in education, whom worked while pursuing the degree and also had children under the age of six in the home while completing the degree, and are willing to participate you will be asked to complete a demographic survey, create a life map, complete a Division of Household Roles Survey, and participate in a semi-structure interview with myself, the researcher, and review interview transcription for errors. It should take approximately between two and three hours to complete all of the data collections procedures for the study. The demographic survey should take no more than 15 minutes, the contact form five minutes, the review and signature for the consent form 10 minutes, the self-created life map could take up to an hour, the Division of Household Roles Survey will take between 15-30 minutes, the semi-structured recorded interview could take up to 90 minutes, and the member check of the interview transcript and final findings 45 minutes to an

hour. All of these will be spread out as needed for you to complete. Your name and/or identifying information will be collected as part of your participants, but this information will remain confidential.

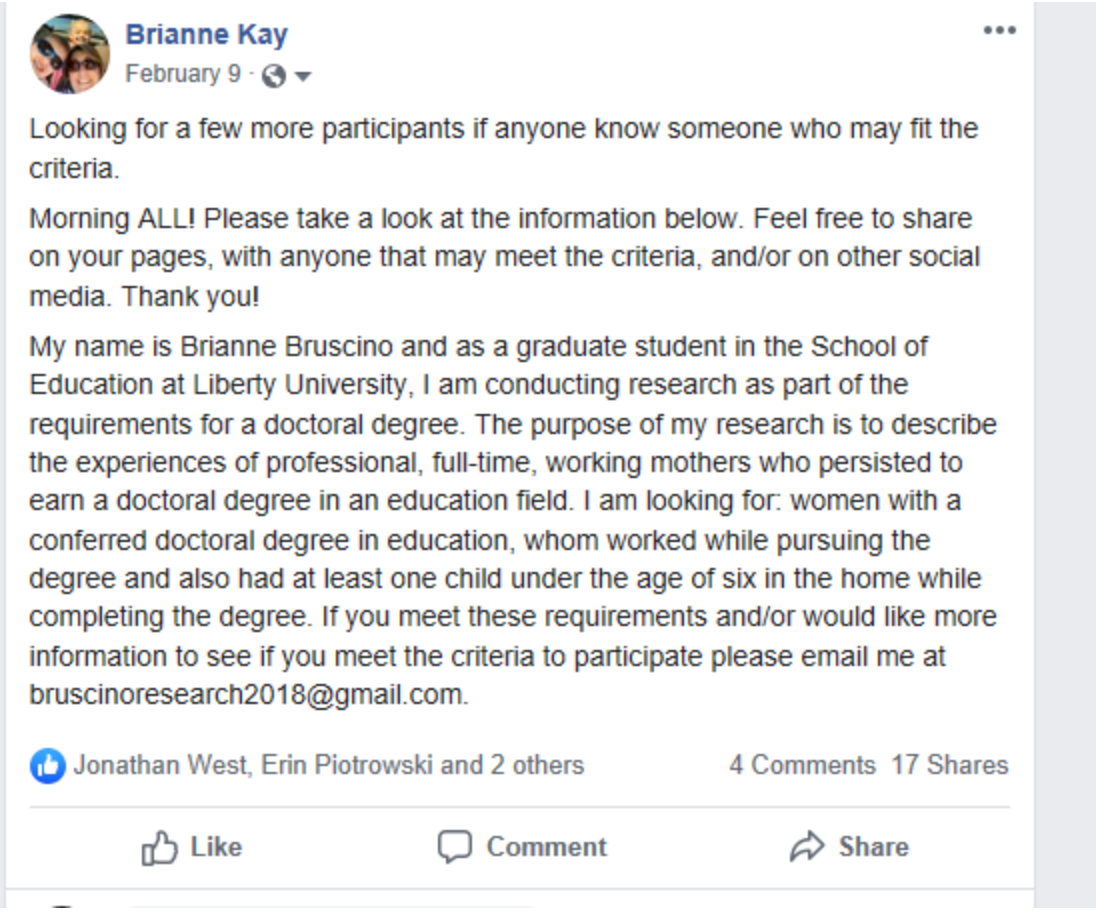
To participate in this study please follow the link provided here: _____ for the screening survey and contact information form. If you meet the criteria for the study, the consent document will be sent to you to review, sign, and return.

If you have any questions please e-mail me at bruscinoresearch2018@gmail.com with your name, personal e-mail (non-work associated), and a phone number if you wish, so that I may respond back to you as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,
Brianne Bruscino
(researcher)
IRB#_____

APPENDIX F

Facebook Post



Brianne Kay
February 9 ·

Looking for a few more participants if anyone know someone who may fit the criteria.

Morning ALL! Please take a look at the information below. Feel free to share on your pages, with anyone that may meet the criteria, and/or on other social media. Thank you!

My name is Brianne Bruscino and as a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to describe the experiences of professional, full-time, working mothers who persisted to earn a doctoral degree in an education field. I am looking for: women with a conferred doctoral degree in education, whom worked while pursuing the degree and also had at least one child under the age of six in the home while completing the degree. If you meet these requirements and/or would like more information to see if you meet the criteria to participate please email me at bruscinoresearch2018@gmail.com.

Jonathan West, Erin Piotrowski and 2 others 4 Comments 17 Shares

Like Comment Share

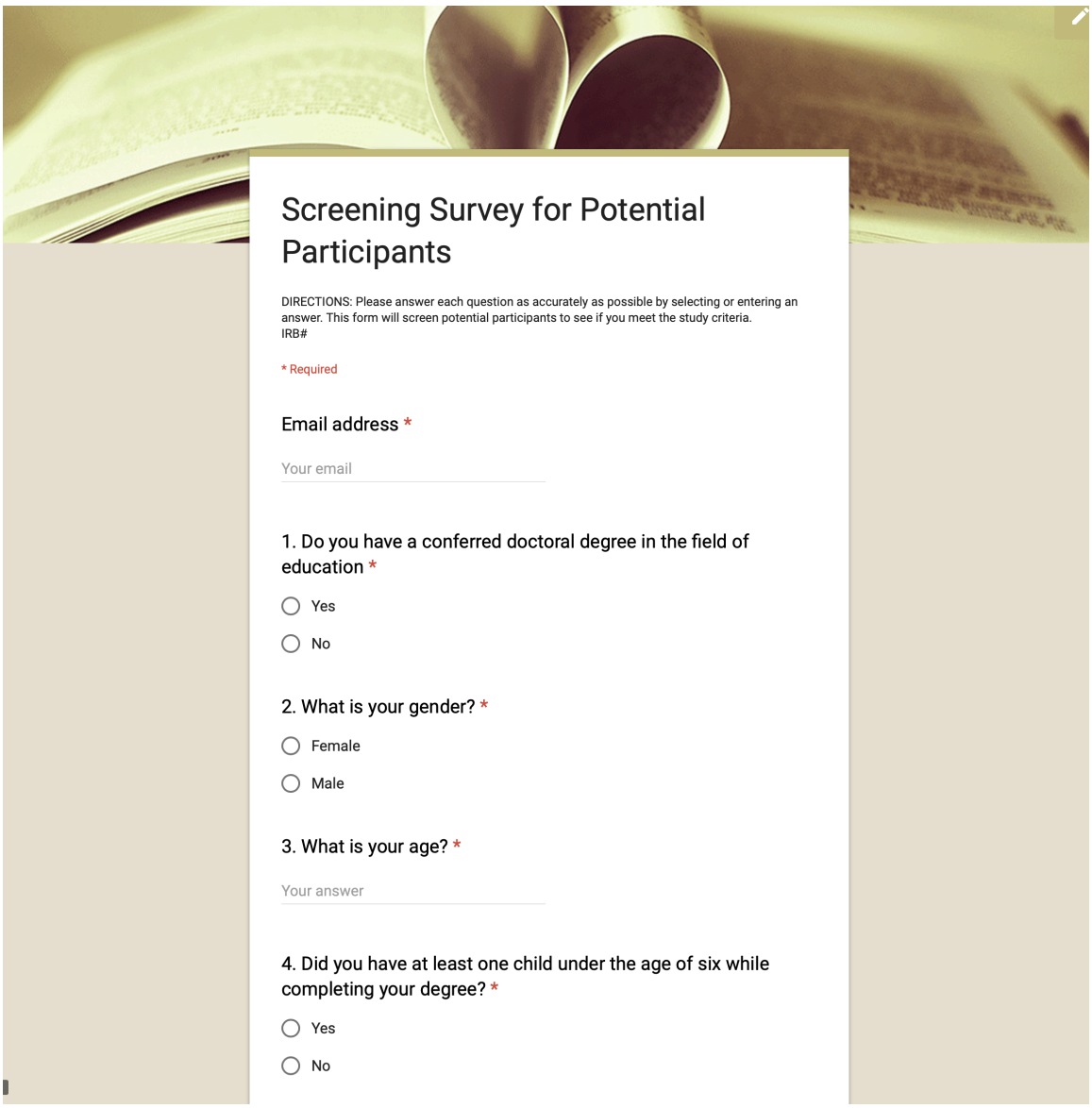
APPENDIX G

Screening Form for Initial Participant Sampling (Word Format)

Google Forms- Screening Form for Initial Participant Sampling

Directions: Please answer each question as accurately as possible by selecting or entering an answer. This form will screen potential participants to see if you meet the study criteria.

1. Do you have a conferred doctoral degree in the field of education?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your age?
4. Did you have at least one child under the age of six while completing your degree?
5. Did you work full-time while completing your degree (40+ hours)?



Screening Survey for Potential Participants

DIRECTIONS: Please answer each question as accurately as possible by selecting or entering an answer. This form will screen potential participants to see if you meet the study criteria.
IRB#

* Required

Email address *

Your email

1. Do you have a conferred doctoral degree in the field of education *

- Yes
- No

2. What is your gender? *

- Female
- Male

3. What is your age? *

Your answer

4. Did you have at least one child under the age of six while completing your degree? *

- Yes
- No

5. Did you work full-time while completing your degree (40+ hours)? *

- Yes
- No

A copy of your responses will be emailed to the address you provided.

SUBMIT

Page 1 of 1

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

APPENDIX H

Stamped Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

A Transcendental Phenomenological Study of Professional, Working Mothers Who Persisted to Doctoral Degree Completion.

Brianne Kay Bruscino
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of professional full-time, working mothers who have persisted to completion of their doctoral degree in education. You were selected as a possible participant because you volunteered and met the criteria of being a woman with a conferred doctoral degree in an education field, whom worked full-time while pursuing the degree and also had at least one child in the home under the age of 6 while completing the degree. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

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

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of professional, full-time, working mothers who persisted to earn a doctoral degree in an education field. At this stage in the research, a professional, full-time, working mother is defined as a woman working at least 40 hours a week at a job in the field of education, with at least one child in the immediate household under the age of six for whom the mother is the primary caregiver that has persisted to doctoral degree completion. The study seeks to understand the experience by using the following four proposed research questions:

1. What factors do professional, full-time, working mothers attribute to their successful persistence to completion of a doctoral degree program in education?
2. What challenges do professional, full-time, working mothers experience while completing a doctoral degree program in education?
3. How do professional, full-time, working mothers, experience work-life-school balance?
4. How do professional, full-time, working mothers, describe the support systems influencing their persistence through their doctoral degree program in education?

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

1. **Complete the demographic survey.** The demographic survey will provide the researcher with background information related to your personal life, professional life, and student life. This portion will take no more than 15 minutes.
2. **Create a life map.** The life map will be completed by the participant before the interview. A life map is essentially a time line of important events in one's life that have affected their path in life. Each participant's life map is unique to them and may be simple or detailed in nature. The life map will help the researcher during the personal interviews, provide a reference point for the participants during the interview, and find possible correlations between participants. The time spent on this may range from 30 minutes to one hour.

3. **Complete a division of household roles survey.** The division of household roles survey will be completed by all participants no matter your marital status. Specific instructions on the survey will allow you to note your marital status before completing the survey. The division of household roles survey is intended to provide the researcher with detailed information about how each participant divides their time and how work-life-school integration affects everyday life in the home setting. The division of household roles survey will take no more 15-30 minutes to complete.

4. **Interview in person or via FaceTime/Skype.** This interview will be audio and video recorded for the researcher's reference. The interview will have a set of questions that are the same for each participant. the participant may be asked to review the transcripts of the interview as a way to ensure clarity and that nothing was missed. The interview portion of this study will take the most amount of time ranging from 45 minutes to 90 minutes.

5. **Transcription and Participant Review.** The participant will be asked to review the transcripts of the interview as a way to ensure clarity and that nothing was missed. The participants will also be asked to review the findings from the study as a form of peer review for validation. Transcription review may take up to 1 hour.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study: The risks involved in this study are minimal, no more than you would encounter in everyday life.

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study. There are potential societal benefits to participating in this study. It is possible that this study could continue to add to the literature regarding the need for more specific supports for women with children working towards their doctoral degree. With more women earning doctoral degrees than men, women have become a driving force in educational reform.

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.

1. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation and is comfortable to the participant.
2. All digital research information will be kept on an email account set up specifically for this study and on an encrypted flash drive. Any digital documentation will be saved on an encrypted flash drive. Both the flash drive and the paper documentation will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. At this time the flash drive will be erased, the email account deleted, and the printed information shredded by a professional shredding company.

3. Interviews will be audio/video recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

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 without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Brianne Kay Bruscino. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 352-398-2160 or BruscinoResearch@gmail.com. You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. Lisa Foster, at lfoster@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 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep 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.

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

Signature Date

Signature of Investigator Date

APPENDIX I

Google Docs- Next Steps

NEXT STEPS:

IRB#3502

Please click on the link below to provide your contact information to the researcher Brianne Bruscino, so that she may contact you to set up an interview. Please also see the bottom for confidentiality procedures.

Contact Information

The following link will take you to the demographic survey.

Demographic Survey

The following link will take you to the directions for the Life Map which you may create digitally or paper/pencil.

Life Map Directions

The last link will take you to a Google Form for **Division of Household Roles Survey.**

Division of Household Roles Survey

If at any time you have any questions please feel free to e-mail me at BruscinoResearch@gmail.com and I will be more than happy to help as needed.

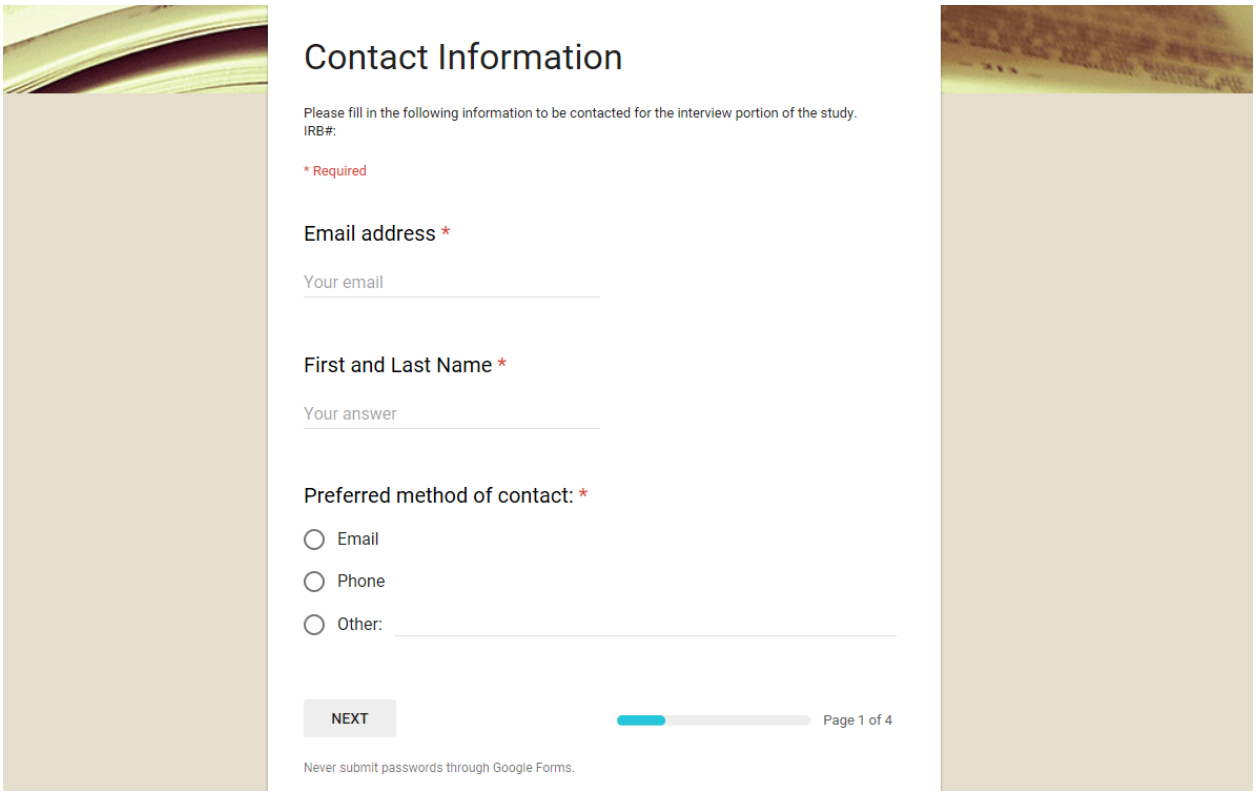
Thank you for your continued participation!

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. The steps that will be taken to protect your privacy and confidentiality include the following:

1. All digital research information will be kept on an e-mail account set up specifically for this study and on an encrypted flash drive.
2. Any digital documentation will be saved on an encrypted flash drive. Both the flash drive and the paper documentation will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office.
3. Three years after the study is completed and as dictated by the IRB, the information will be discarded. At this time the flash drive will be erased, the e-mail account deleted, and the printed information shredded by a professional shredding company.
4. The only person with access to any of this information will be this researcher.

APPENDIX J

Google Forms- Contact Information



Contact Information

Please fill in the following information to be contacted for the interview portion of the study.
IRB#:

* Required

Email address *

Your email

First and Last Name *

Your answer

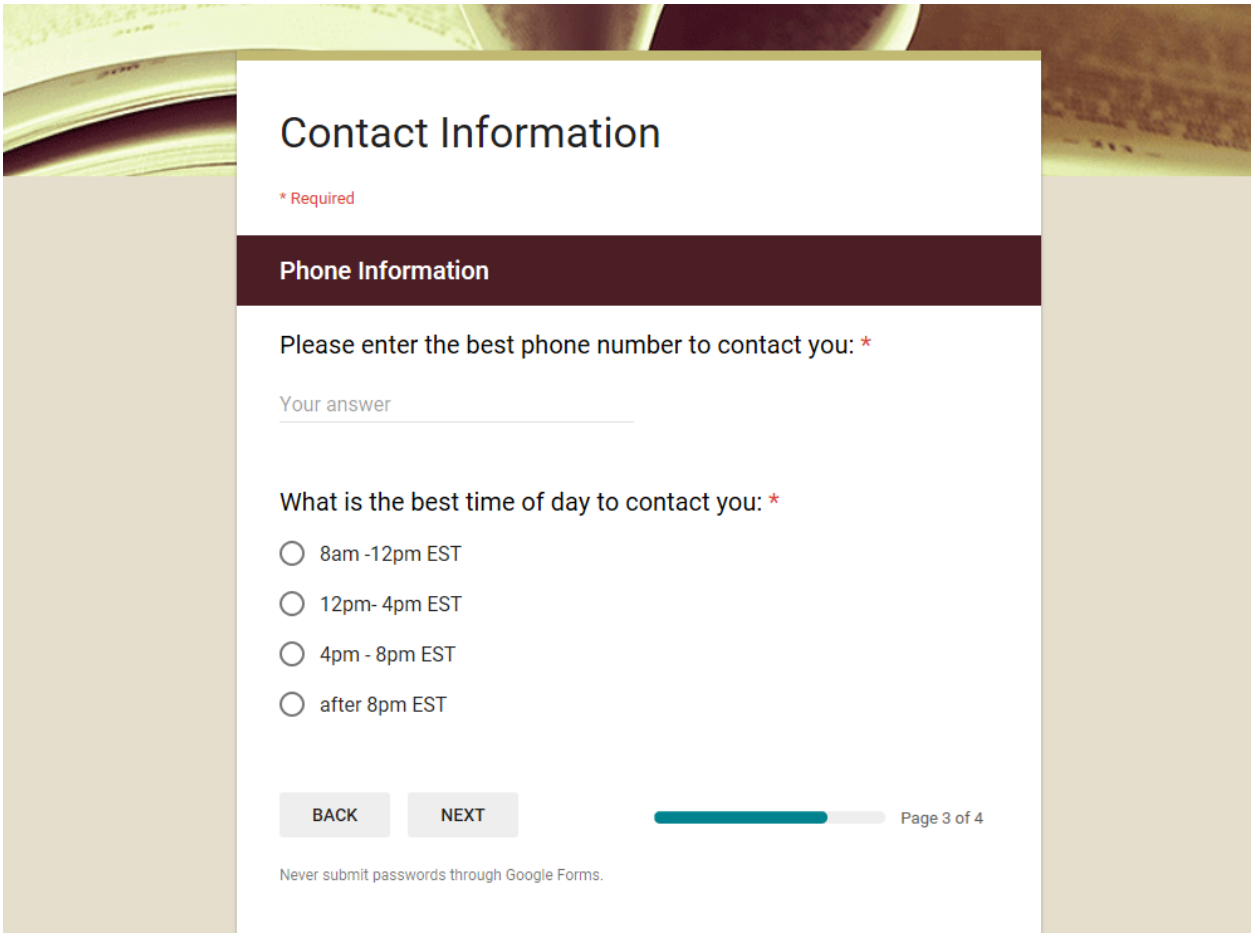
Preferred method of contact: *

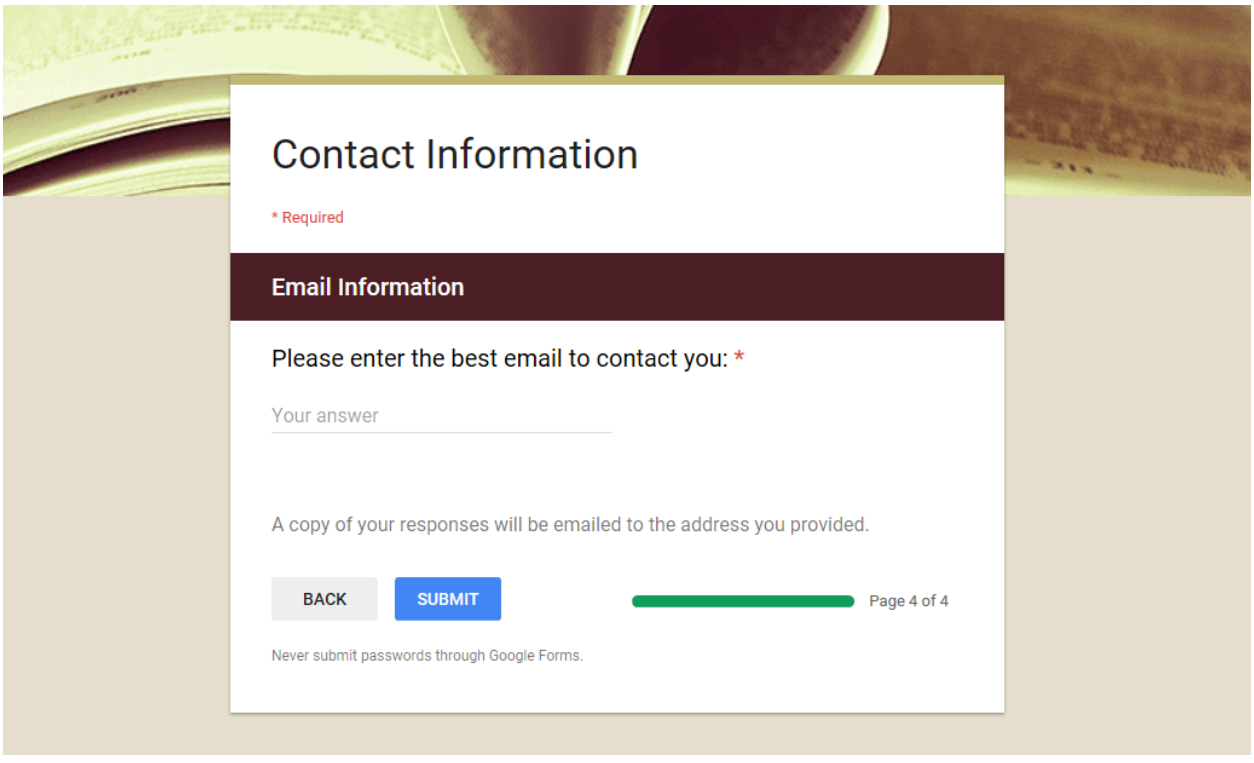
- Email
- Phone
- Other:

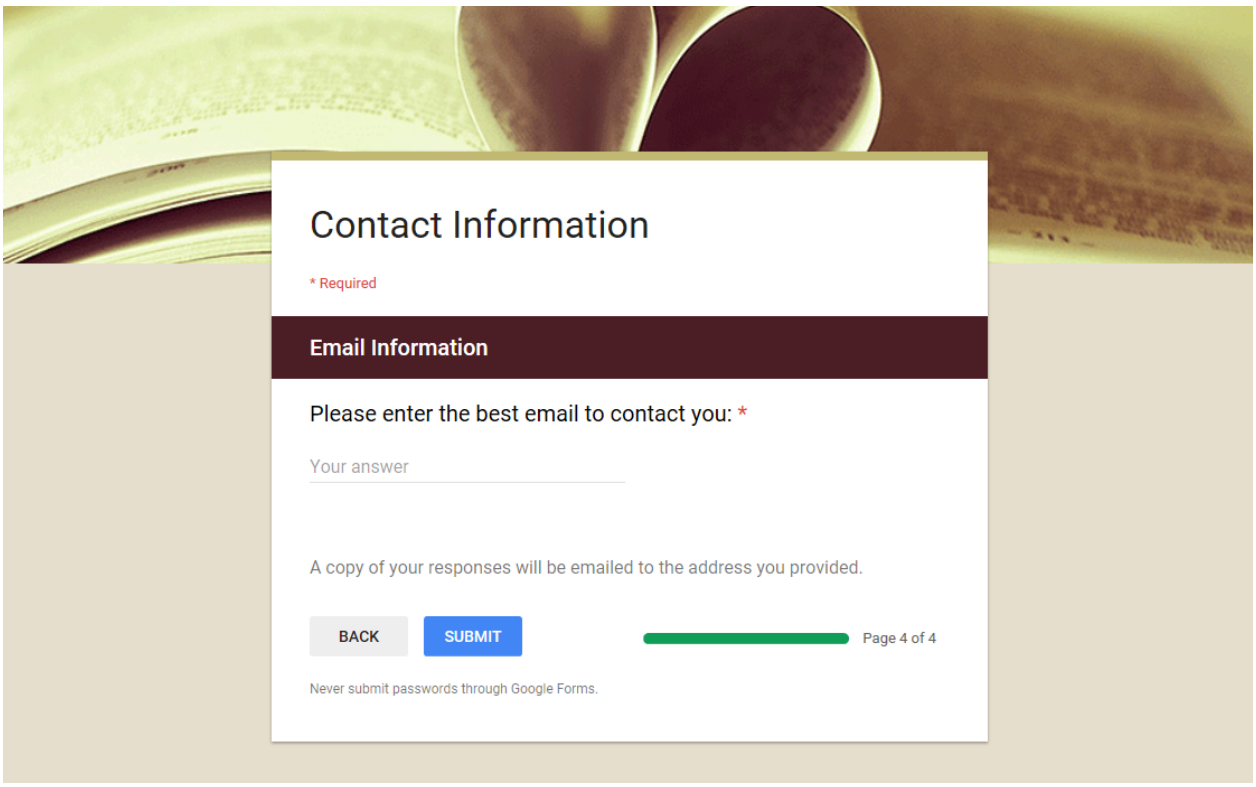
NEXT

Page 1 of 4

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.


Contact Information
* Required
Phone Information
Please enter the best phone number to contact you: *
Your answer
What is the best time of day to contact you: *
8am -12pm EST
12pm- 4pm EST
4pm - 8pm EST
after 8pm EST
BACK
NEXT
Page 3 of 4
Never submit passwords through Google Forms.


Contact Information
* Required
Email Information
Please enter the best email to contact you: *
Your answer
A copy of your responses will be emailed to the address you provided.
BACK
SUBMIT
Page 4 of 4
Never submit passwords through Google Forms.


Contact Information
* Required
Email Information
Please enter the best email to contact you: *
Your answer
A copy of your responses will be emailed to the address you provided.
BACK
SUBMIT
Page 4 of 4
Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

APPENDIX K

Demographic Survey for Google Forms (Word Format)

Google Forms- Demographic Survey

DIRECTIONS: Please answer each question as accurately as possible by circling the correct answer or filling in the space provided.

1. What is your age? _____

2. What is your ethnic background? _____

3. Please choose one of the following that best describes you:

Single Married Separated Divorced Widowed

4. How many children were in your household at the time you were working toward your doctorate degree? _____

5. What were the age(s) of your children when you first started your doctorate degree?

Child #1: _____

Child #2: _____

Child #3: _____

Child #4: _____

Child #5: _____

Add as needed: _____

6. How many degrees do you have including your doctorate degree? _____

7. Please list your degrees: _____

_____

8. What higher education institution did you earn your doctorate degree from? _____

---

9. How many years did it take you to complete your doctorate degree? _____

10. What was your professional occupation in education while completing your doctoral degree?

---

11. Approximately how many hours did you work at your professional occupation each week while completing your doctorate degree? _____

APPENDIX L

My Story- My Life Map (Word Format)

Google Docs- Life Map Directions

You are your own story and it contains problems, characters, and themes. This is an opportunity for you to reflect more consciously on your own story and create a map of personal changes and transitions that you have experienced.

Instructions:

Use a blank sheet of paper or a computer program to draw a timeline (or continuum) that reflects the story of your life beginning with your years in elementary school to the age you are now. In thinking about your past, please think about the basic contours of your life story. How does your story go? Use the age line in the middle to guide your story from past to present, moving from left to right, up and down, a winding path, or whatever direction your map takes.

What went well and reached a "peak"? Reflect on your accomplishments, happiest moments and personal peaks. What did not go well and where did you hit a "valley"? Include events that have occurred in your life that have impacted your story.

Be sure to put an approximate date or age for each peak and valley. When you are done, insert vertical lines, circle or shape out specific events to indicate the chapters of your life. The below are examples that you may use or you may create your own.

The Chapters of Your Life

Peaks → Peaks → Peaks → Peaks →

Beginning /Year/Age

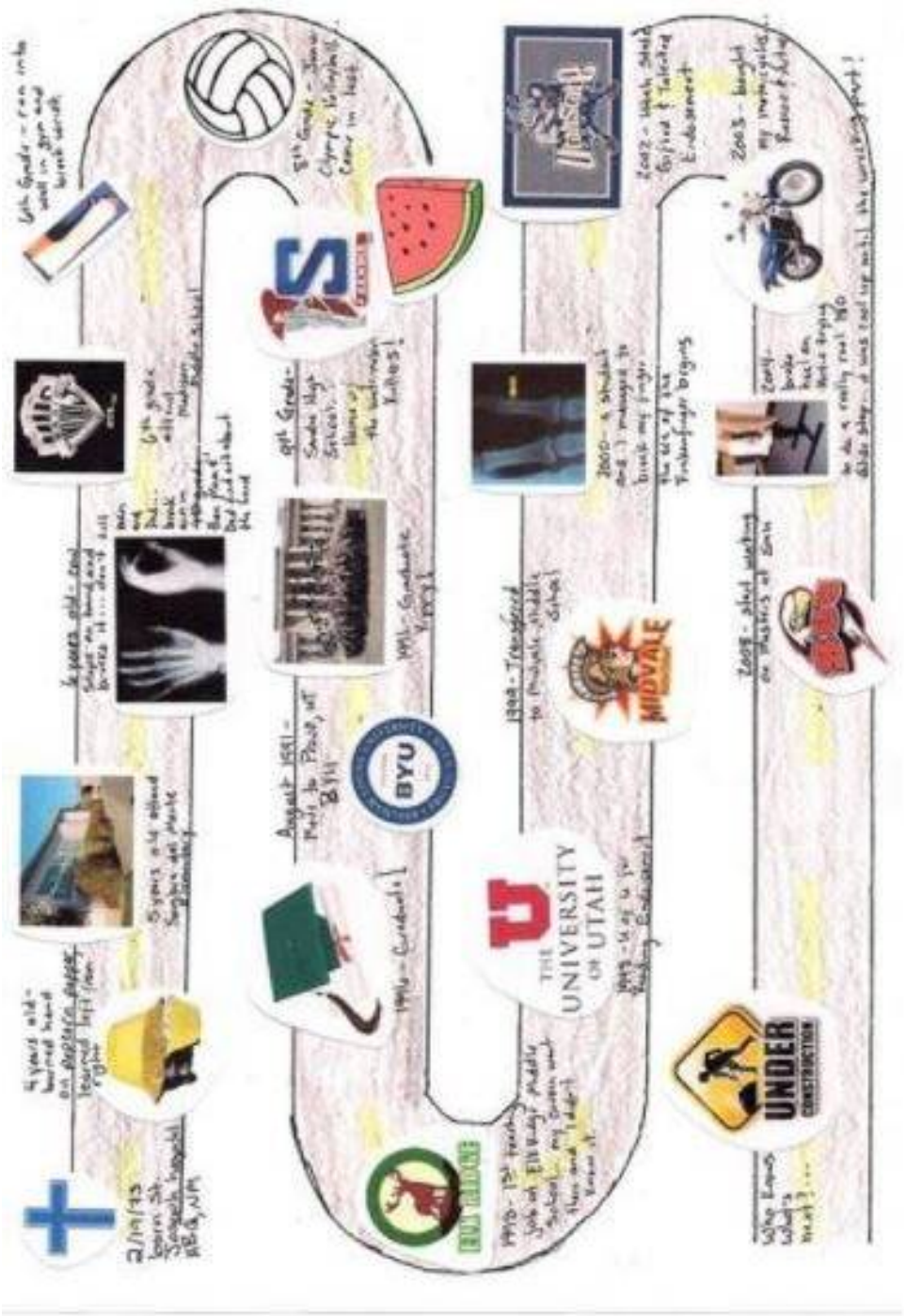
Today's Date/Year/Age

Valleys

Valleys

Valleys

Valleys



APPENDIX M

Division of Household Roles Survey

Google Forms- Division of Household Roles Survey

Word Format

DIRECTIONS: Please mark for each item who normally completes the household role: male or female complete the role, if both complete the role, if children complete the role, or if someone belonging outside the immediate household completes the role. If an item does not pertain to your household please mark not applicable (N/A). Any other information you feel would be important or an additional role that is not covered, please include on the back of the sheet on the lines provided.

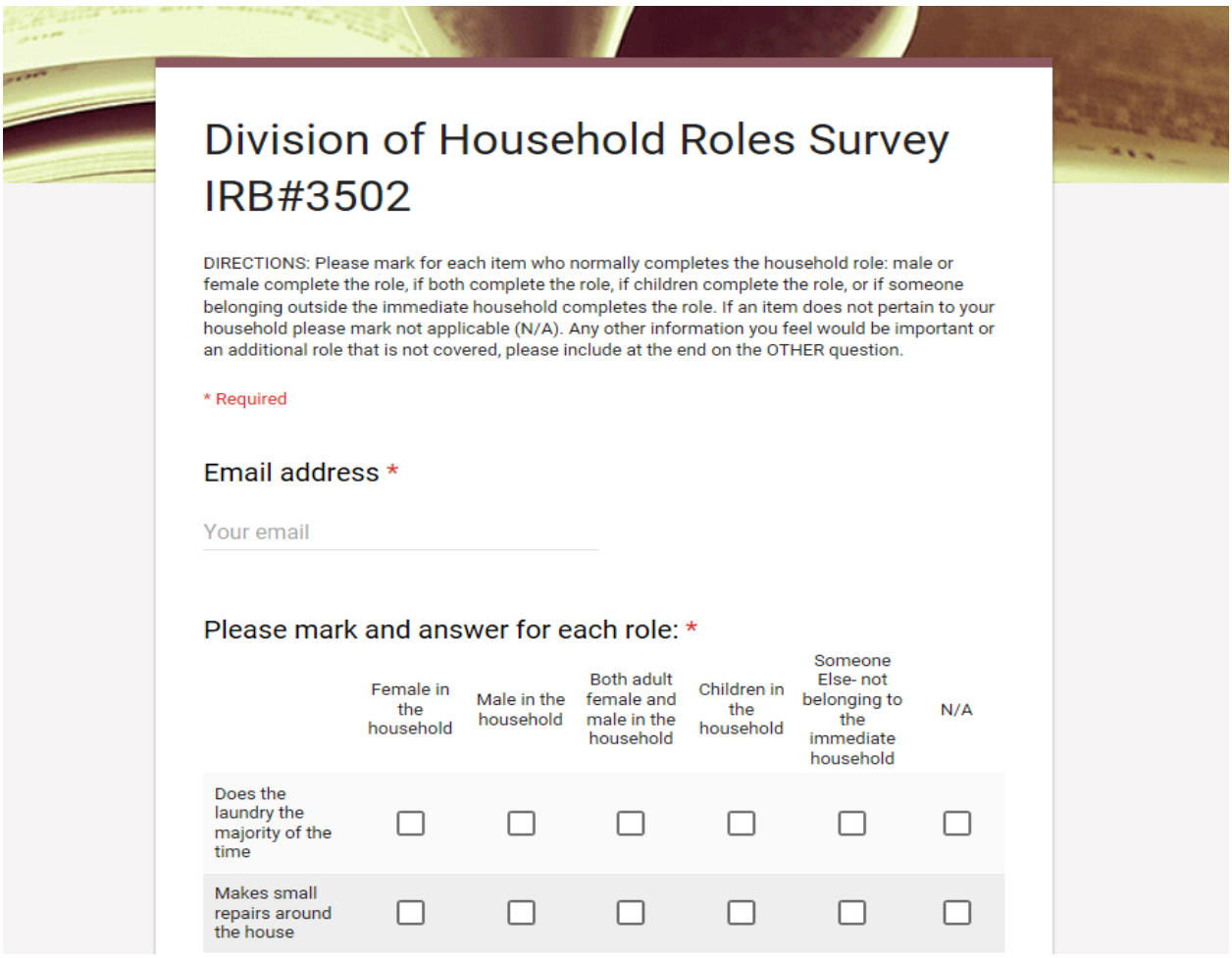
	Female in household old	Male in household	Both males and females in the household	Children in the household	Someone Else- not belonging to the immediate household	N/A
Does the laundry						
Makes small repairs around the house						
Looks after sick family members						
Shops for						

groceries						
Does the household cleaning						
Prepares the meals						
Cleans and maintains the car						
Does the yard work						
Maintains the household budget (bills)						
Helps with school homework for kids						
Bath time for children						
Children supervision when not at school or daycare						
Transportation to						

and from children extracurricular activities						
Inside household cleaning						
Animal(s) care						

Additional Information:

Survey adapted from: Hochschild and Machung's (2012) research, Family and Changing Gender Roles IV: Questionnaire Development (ISSP Research Group, 2016) and Perceptions of Equity and Fairness in the Division of Household Labor: Evidence from a Rural County (Staggs, 2007).



Division of Household Roles Survey IRB#3502

DIRECTIONS: Please mark for each item who normally completes the household role: male or female complete the role, if both complete the role, if children complete the role, or if someone belonging outside the immediate household completes the role. If an item does not pertain to your household please mark not applicable (N/A). Any other information you feel would be important or an additional role that is not covered, please include at the end on the OTHER question.

* Required

Email address *

Your email

Please mark and answer for each role: *

	Female in the household	Male in the household	Both adult female and male in the household	Children in the household	Someone Else- not belonging to the immediate household	N/A
Does the laundry the majority of the time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Makes small repairs around the house	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Looks after sick family members	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Shops for groceries	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Does the household cleaning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Prepares the meals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cleans and maintains the cars	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Does the yard work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Maintains the household budget (bills)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Helps with school homework for kids	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Bath time for children	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Children's supervision when not at school or daycare	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Transportation to and from children's extracurricular activities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Inside household cleaning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Animal(s) care	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Other household roles: Please make sure to add who completes the role.

Your answer

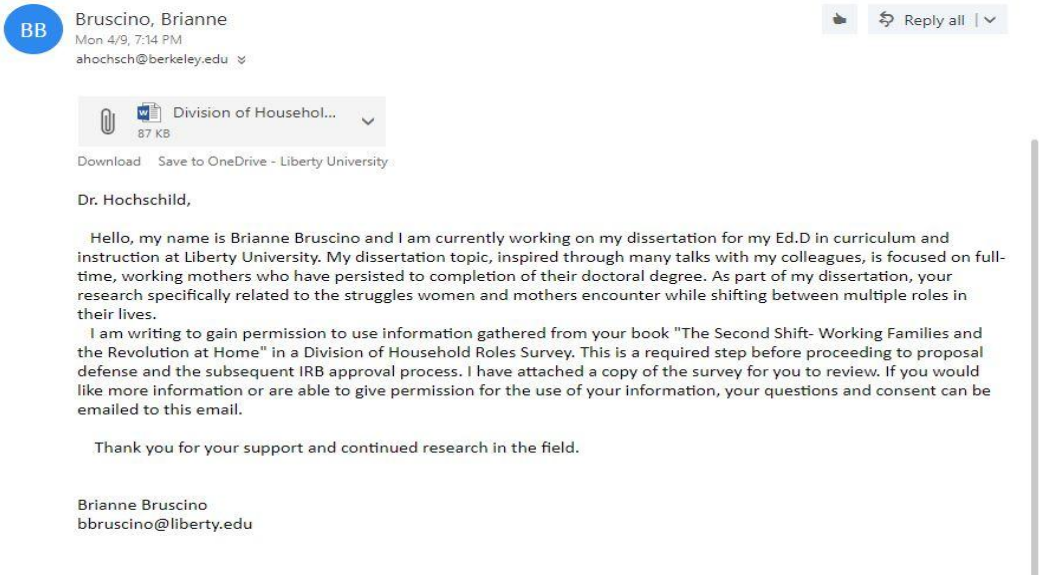
A copy of your responses will be emailed to the address you provided.

SUBMIT

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

APPENDIX N

Approval to Use Survey



BB

Bruscino, Brianne
Mon 4/9, 7:14 PM
ahochsch@berkeley.edu

Reply all

Division of Household...
87 KB

Download Save to OneDrive - Liberty University

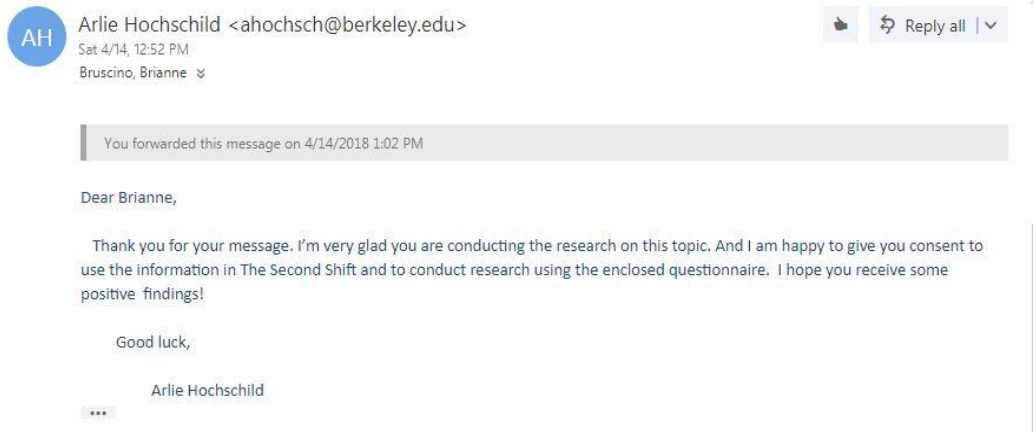
Dr. Hochschild,

Hello, my name is Brianne Bruscino and I am currently working on my dissertation for my Ed.D in curriculum and instruction at Liberty University. My dissertation topic, inspired through many talks with my colleagues, is focused on full-time, working mothers who have persisted to completion of their doctoral degree. As part of my dissertation, your research specifically related to the struggles women and mothers encounter while shifting between multiple roles in their lives.

I am writing to gain permission to use information gathered from your book "The Second Shift- Working Families and the Revolution at Home" in a Division of Household Roles Survey. This is a required step before proceeding to proposal defense and the subsequent IRB approval process. I have attached a copy of the survey for you to review. If you would like more information or are able to give permission for the use of your information, your questions and consent can be emailed to this email.

Thank you for your support and continued research in the field.

Brianne Bruscino
bbruscino@liberty.edu



AH

Arlie Hochschild <ahochsch@berkeley.edu>
Sat 4/14, 12:52 PM
Bruscino, Brianne

Reply all

You forwarded this message on 4/14/2018 1:02 PM

Dear Brianne,

Thank you for your message. I'm very glad you are conducting the research on this topic. And I am happy to give you consent to use the information in The Second Shift and to conduct research using the enclosed questionnaire. I hope you receive some positive findings!

Good luck,

Arlie Hochschild

...

APPENDIX O

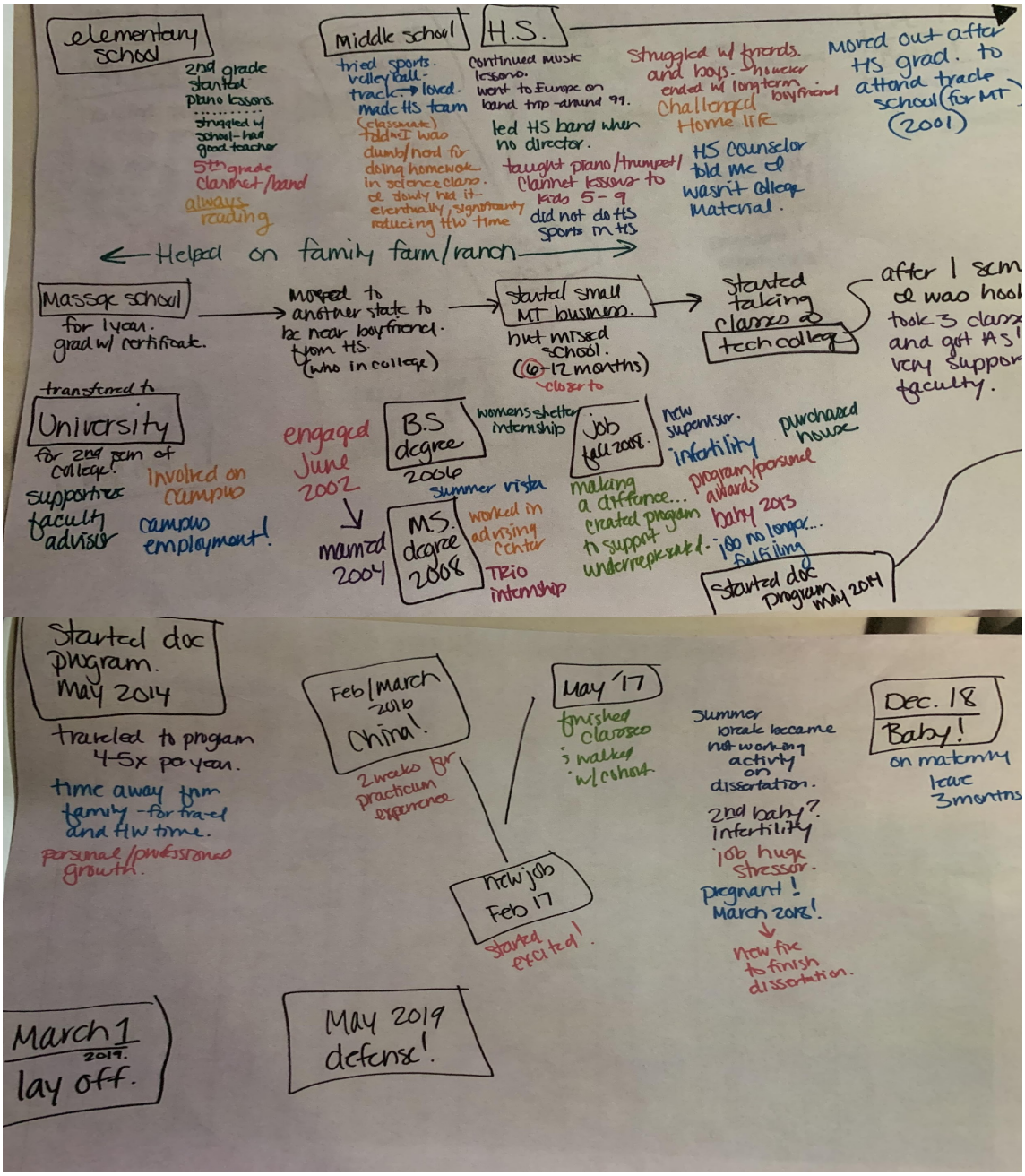
Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

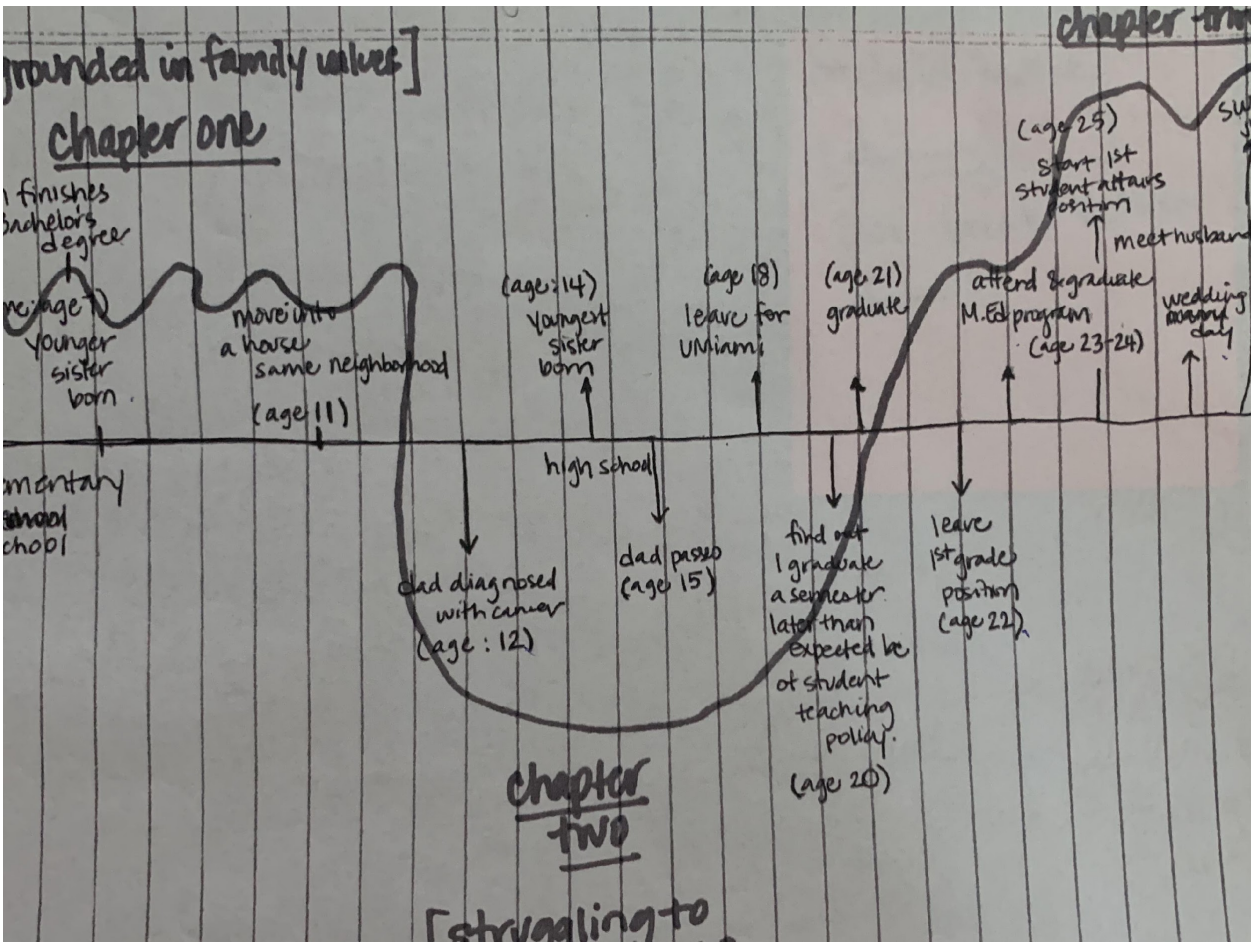
1. Please introduce yourself, giving general information about your life.
2. Describe your decision to pursue a doctoral degree.
3. Describe your general overall experience as a doctoral student.
4. How did your immediate family initially respond to your decision to pursue the doctoral degree?
    a. How did your extended family, in-laws, parents, and siblings, etc. respond?
    b. How did friends or colleagues respond?
5. What was your professional work life like during the doctoral process?
    a. Were there differences between the coursework stage and the dissertation stage?
    b. Did you stay in the same job or have multiple positions?
6. Describe a normal week during your doctoral process to include work, home, and school obligations.
    a. Was your Monday through Friday week different from your weekend?
7. Did you have a balanced work-life-school environment? Please explain.
8. Were you satisfied with your work-life-school balance?
9. Describe why and how you accomplished this?
10. Can you please describe a time in which you felt unbalanced or less balanced than you desired at that time?
11. What challenges did you face while pursuing your doctoral degree?
12. What emotions did you feel when successfully meeting coursework requirements, defending your proposal, and your final defense of your dissertation?

13. How did you face challenges while pursuing your doctoral degree, if you had any?
    a. If you did not have any specific challenges, what were some strategies did you use to help avoid challenges?
14. What drove you to persist to completion and what supports were you able to rely upon?
15. What support systems did you have? How did they support you?
    a. Were there specific support systems that were stronger than others?
    b. Why?
16. Can you describe any experiences where you felt unsupported in relation to your doctoral work (e.g., by family, friends, community, peers, non-school peers)? Please explain with specific examples.
    a. What can a doctoral candidate's support systems do to better provide a stronger support base?
17. What factors do you attribute your successful completion of the doctoral degree to the most?
18. What do you feel institutions, including faculty and administrators, can do to better support women who are mothers and who work full-time?
    a. What can employers who value continuing education do to support doctoral students?
19. Is there anything else you would like to share about your doctoral degree experience that would benefit future women working toward the same goal?

APPENDIX P

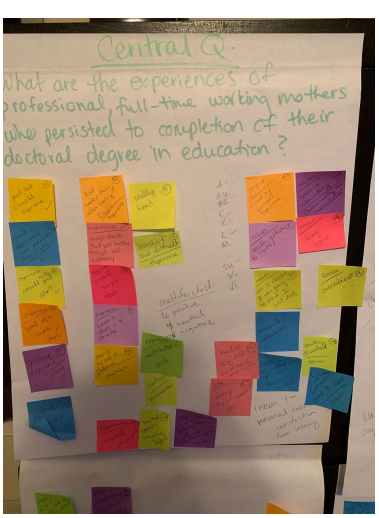
Participant Life Map Examples

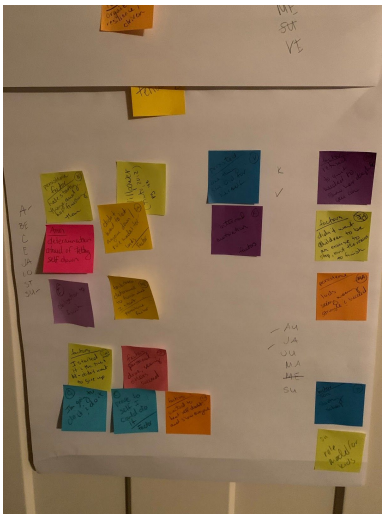


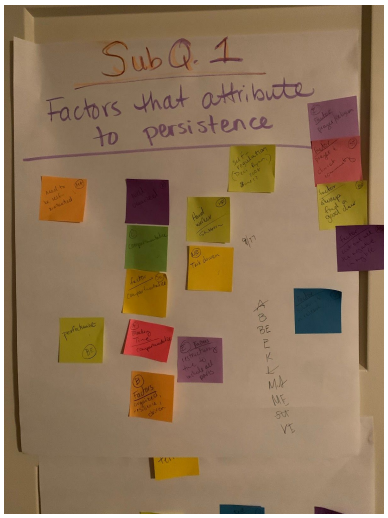

grounded in family values]
chapter one
finishes Bachelor's degree
younger sister born
move into a house same neighborhood
(age 11)
(age: 14) Youngest sister born
(age 18) leave for UMiami
(age 21) graduate
(age 25) start 1st student affairs position
meet husband
attend & graduate M.Ed program (age 23-24)
wedding
high school
dad diagnosed with cancer (age: 12)
dad passed (age 15)
find out I graduate a semester later than expected be of student teaching policy. (age 20)
leave 1st grade position (age 22)
chapter two
[struggling to

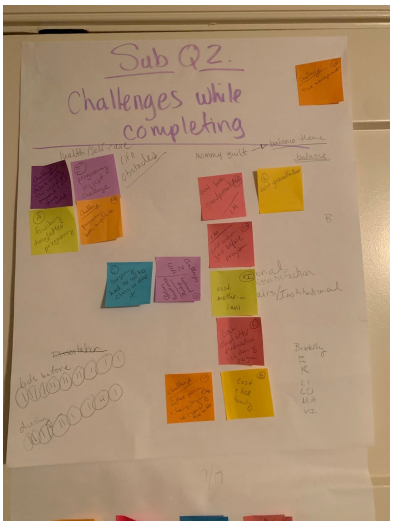
APPENDIX Q

Examples of Coding with Sticky Notes and Chart Paper









APPENDIX R

Coding Spreadsheets

Participant		Central Question Significant Statements	
Ann	neutral-online/hybrid	life long learner	overachiever
Audrey	broken from the experience, overall good, brick and mortar	knew in elementary - chronically an overachiever	
Becky	experience overall really good, cohort	once I decided I was going to do it, I just did it.	
Beverly	really hard		
Cassandra	positive experience	I wasn't done there was more to learn	
Emily	positive experience online	leadership potential and knowledge	
Jane	neutral-good and negatives/hybrid	good timing and needed to refocus life	postives and negatives but opended opportunities.
Judy	neutral-brick and mortar	needed it to improve skill set for future positions	dad-he was in higher ed before he passed and always wanted a higher degree
Kiera	haven't slept in a decade	totally selfish to start	

Lisa	incrediable but difficult	always top of class, overacheiever- LM	needed it to get current
Lois	experience good with a cohort	I needed to finish my marathon	
Marie	3rd hardest thing after having two kids	pushed by personal experience	imposters syndrome
Meg	overall bumpy road	emotions-over it by end of defense	never saw self getting PhD- boss saw potential
Stephanie	rough start but got better trhough self-advocacy	needed it to be independent and didn't want culture to dictate what she could do.	expected in the culture to get at least one if not more advanced degrees
Suzanne	good but stressful experience	something I wanted	open opportunities up
Veronica	great experience learned perservence even if you don't want to	personal ambition	I wanted and loved learning and school
Victoria	multi-faceted-brick and mortar	tired of being told no because you're a girl-LM	a lot of things- but needed it for professional gains

Experience- multifaced
Personal Ambition through learning
professional Opportunities
no connection

Sub Question 1

Significant Statements

Participant			
Ann	blocking time, compartmentalize	determination, afraid of letting self down	

Audrey	cutout all the negative in my life	refused to quit and needed to show her daughter you can	
Becky	perfectionist	always find a good chair	hate starting things and not finishing things
Beverly	organized, resilience, driven		
Cassandra	compartmentalize	I'm going to do it and I did it	prove to self I could do it
Emily	restructuring time to include all parts	prayer and religion	obligation to finish
Jane	I started it and the time and money didn't want to give up	didn't want children to be an excuse to stop but a reason to finish	
Judy	son- starting kindergarten		
Kiera	well-organized	internal motivation	
Lisa	No significant statements		
Lois	wanted to beat self doubt and show everyone		
Marie	need to be self motivated	kids seeing mommy struggle and succeed	

Meg	task-driven	task-driven and determined to finish what I start	
Stephanie	prayer and church community	personal drive and seeing others succeed	
Suzanne	compartmentalize	didn't want to let anyone down, role model for kids	role model for kids
Veronica	school is a release	one thing she did for herself	
Victoria	hard worker, stubborn		

self-regulation	tenacity	No Connection

Sub Question 2
Significant Statements

Participant			
Ann	finishing during and after pregnancy		
Audrey	didn't think she could get pregnant and did - shook world	committee member stealing work	
Becky	changed chairs		
Beverly	denied 7 times in proposal		
Cassandra	surgery- had to go to class or drop it		
Emily	pregnancy biggest challenge	lost dad after graduation-sick during program	

Jane	balancing a work obligation with school		
Judy	getting the voices right in chapter 4		
Kiera	2 LOA- husband dying and emergency surgery	lost chair at 11th hour	
Lisa	lost grandfather		
Lois	father passed and having/trying to see and spend time with him before	lost mom just before program-LM	
Marie	pregnancy both high risk	loss both grandparents-LM	had to appeal to stay in program
Meg	changed chairs		
Stephanie	changed from comprehensive exams to portfolios with no examples		
Suzanne	dissertation- time management		
Veronica	lost close family	had to change to proposal due to new superintendent	
Victoria	lost mother-in-law		

LM- Life Map

Dissatisfaction with Dissertation Process
Life Obstacles

Sub Question 3
Significant Statements

Participant

Ann	better while kids were younger				
Audrey	no, hell, no, there was no balance	pregnancy forced me to create some balance			
Becky	not balanced, but everything got done	kept weekend days as free as possible for family	it's not forever you need the professional something	guilt-mommy	
Beverly	No significant statements				
Cassandra	balance includes rest and I didn't have that	weekends for family	everyone was getting a piece of the pie	mom guilt-wasn't there all the time	
Emily	No significant statements				
Jane	balance just chaos you have to embrace	no way to be perfect at anything	it's just a phase in my life- kids are forever		
Judy	balance is bullshit	never expected it to be balanced	kept everything in perspective	Saturday to noon-Sunday no school work	nonnegotiable dinner and bed with son
Kiera	organized school-work-life no balanced	first mom, second school, third work	mom-school was harder to find a groove		
Lisa	training for a marathon	always had early coffee with husband to connect	grocery shopping = kid free time	I'm not ignoring you for no reason (to kids)	
Lois	marathon				
Marie	something always derailed	weird-surreal feeling when			

		finished			
Meg	no outside of work balance	unbalanced most of program	you're going to feel as you are not doing as much as you can as a mom	younger child lessened the feeling of failing my daughter	
Stephanie	tight-knit cohort helped keep perspective with balance	time with husband at night after 8:30/9	always took time at night for husband and baby		
Suzanne	is there such thing as balance	always trying to find balance	didn't want to slight anyone, tried to devote self to various areas	Saturday family day- some work in AM until noon	
Veronica	yes to balance was able to put things on hold when needed to	one weekend a month dedicated to kids	having to learn a balance with your support		
Victoria	no balanced, but full	after bedtime for daughter worked on school	intentional about time with daughter and husband	mom guilt discussed on pg. 7	

Disproportionate Balance
Family Segmentation
Mommy Guilt
no connection

Sub Question
Significant Statements

Participant				
Ann	husband biggest support			

Audrey	friends in the area	husband very supportive in a similar field of study	grandma was supportive	family-parents weren't supportive
Becky	friends since family was not near	couldn't have done it without husband and being upfront about demands		
Beverly	parents husband			
Cassandra	a friend that pulls you out of "school-mode"	cohort-friends	husband and mom	
Emily	without family would not have happened			
Jane	boss was supportive	husband didn't see as much value but always willing to help	immediate family pretty supportive with money and childcare	
Judy	mom moved and lived with for 2 years to help with childcare	mom and husband more supportive than in-laws		
Kiera	community supports-friends and colleagues	immediate family more supportive than in-laws	good family support	
Lisa	colleague that had just finished supported her	cohort- readers and editors	husband was biggest support	emotional and logistical support
Lois	one colleague with Doctorate was a cheerleader	husband super supportive		

Marie	supported by women in higher level position in higher ed.	husband was biggest cheerleader	immediate family 100% support	
Meg	principal and colleagues were supportive	sibling/family support most important		
Stephanie	church community	husband and mother		
Suzanne	church friend-sent her on writing sabbaticals	whole family support		
Veronica	first spouse nonchalant-second spouse 100% supportive	supports at beginning-childcare		
Victoria	a colleague was a huge support emotionally	husband and mom supportive	husband biggest support	

Foundation Family Support
Social Support
No connection