EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WORKING MOTHERS PERSISTING IN CACREP-ACCREDITED CES DOCTORAL PROGRAMS TRANSITIONING THROUGH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Shannon Mercer Pugh

Liberty University

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

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University May, 2022

EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WORKING MOTHERS PERSISTING IN CACREP-ACCREDITED CES DOCTORAL PROGRAMS TRANSITIONING THROUGH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by Shannon Mercer Pugh

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

Doctor of Philosophy Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2022

APPROVED BY:

_____

Joy M. Mwendwa, Ph.D., Committee Chair

_____

Krista Kirk, Ph.D., Committee Member

_____

Brandi Chamberlin, Ph.D., Committee Member

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated pre-existing gender inequities in work and academia and further strained working doctoral student mothers struggling to balance multiple roles. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology was to describe how working mothers of children under the age of 12 persisting in the final year of a Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Program-accredited counselor education and supervision doctoral program described their lived experiences moving through the COVID-19 pandemic. The central research question explored how participants described what the COVID-19 pandemic has been like for them as they moved in, moved through, and moved out of the transition from both academia and the pandemic. Semistructured interviews were used for data collection, and data were analyzed and coded for themes based on Schlossberg's (1981) transition model. Findings indicated four primary themes of academic motherhood, support, adaptive response, and socio-cultural-political-spiritual awareness, which were interwoven across all three phases of the pandemic transition. Discussion includes confirmation and expansion of previous literature, implications for social change, recommendations for action, limitations, and recommendations for further study.

Keywords: persistence, doctoral student, motherhood, COVID-19 pandemic, work-life-family-academic balance, gender inequity

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation first and foremost to my God, my Heavenly Father, my personal Lord and Savior, without whom I never would have embarked on the doctoral journey, let alone completed it. Further, I dedicate this work to my precious beloved daughters, Caelyn Marie Pugh and Adelyn Elise Pugh—the greatest of all the good and perfect gifts I have received from above—and to my beloved husband, Steven Lucas Pugh. Together, the three of you inspired me, loved me unconditionally, laughed with me, cried with me, supported me, and most importantly, were present *with* me throughout this endeavor, from start to finish. While no words are adequate to effectively express my deepest appreciation, gratitude, and love for you, my precious family, I nevertheless try: *Thank you for helping me do hard things.*

Dear Caelyn and Adelyn, my beloved daughters: Before either of you were born, I loved you with all my heart and fervently prayed for you. Then after you were born, Mommy and Daddy dedicated you both to the Lord, the One who abundantly blessed us with the privilege and honor of serving as your earthly parents. You both represent the goodness, faithfulness, and love of God. We know you belong to Him. Likewise, this dissertation, and all my life's work—past, present, and future—belongs to Him, is because of Him, and is for His glory alone. I pray the legacy I leave for my daughters, and their children, and their children's children, includes the understanding of "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of Christ's love for them (Eph. 3:18, KJV). Thank you, my beloved daughters, for calling me "your Mommy." I will never cease praying over you.

Finally, I dedicate this labor of love to the academic mothers with whom I have had the distinct privilege to sit and interview for this study, as well as to all academic mothers who have chosen the path to the doctorate. May you be fully seen, heard, and understood; may your mother

heart be treasured for all it contributes to your work, your scholarship, your family, your life; and may your children be blessed by your strength and wisdom. Thank you for embarking on the sacred journey of motherhood.

Acknowledgements

To my God, my Heavenly Father, my personal Lord and Savior: I begin by thanking You, the Beginning and the End, the Source of all blessings. I acknowledge You, and I praise You! Glory to God in the Highest! Thank You for calling me to this journey, for walking with me through it, and for all the times You carried me. Thank You for never leaving me. Thank You for equipping me, enabling me, and completing this work in me, in Your perfect timing. I am so excited to see where You lead me next!

To Dr. Joy Mwendwa: I thank you, and I thank God for blessing me *through* you. For your teaching, your mentorship, your supervision, your wise counsel, your support, your leadership, your encouragement, your advocacy, your belief in me, your faith in God, your embodiment of Christ, and for covering me and my family in prayer—for all these things, I thank you. I thank you for your mother heart, which so strongly resonated with my own. Thank you for your very presence; I felt wholly seen, heard, and understood by you. Thank you! I thank you also for your kindness, your compassion, your grace, and for giving so generously of your finite time and attention to my development as a CES professional and as a scholar. Thank you for reinforcing in me the mother-scholar identity. Thank you for helping me find my academic voice, for empowering me, and for the opportunities you offered. You are an exceptional role model, and your impact on me has been significant and meaningful. Thank you. I will strive to continue your legacy.

To Dr. Brandi Chamberlin and Dr. Krista Kirk: Thank you both for your willingness to serve on my dissertation committee, for your encouragement and support, for generously giving of your time and feedback, and for making yourselves available to me with short notice despite

the numerous demands on your time. You both inspire me as mothers in academia who are successfully "doing it all." I am so grateful to you; thank you!

To Dr. Andrea Garraway: Thank you for your willingness to serve as data auditor for my dissertation, for generously giving of your time and feedback in this endeavor, and for making time for this task in the final hour despite the numerous demands on your time as well. From one academic mother to another, I thank you!

To Dr. Lisa Sosin: You were the first to warmly welcome me into the program, and you set the tone for excellence from the beginning - thank you. Thank you for modeling grace and truth, salt and light. Thank you for blessing me as a "mother-scholar" from the beginning of the program and for helping me to see that I am both! I believe by God's grace I have integrated that within my self-identity—thank you. Thank you also for planting the seed early on that eventually became this study. I am forever grateful.

To the 10 academic mothers who participated in this study: Thank you! This study would not have been possible without your willingness to share your experiences of academic motherhood with me. Thank you for opening up to me, for allowing me to learn so much from you, and for entrusting me with your voice. You are amazing, powerful women, and I am so honored that we will all be joined together on the other side of "doctor" very soon!

To my very large family: To my parents, John, Carolyn, and Felicia; my sisters, Jessica and Brittany; my brothers-in-law, Brandon and Stephan; my precious niece and God-daughter, Princess Avianna; my nephew, Bryce; my brothers, Cody, Casey, and Dan; my sisters-in-law, Brandi and K; to all the precious littles in our blessed family; to my "greatest aunties" Barb, Penny, and Melodi; to my parents-in-law, Sam and Barbara, and Lisa and Brad. Thank you for your love and your contributions to my family and my life over the years. Thank you to my

grandfather, “Papa Mercer,” who loved me, believed in me, and told me I could do anything. I wish you were here to meet my children.

To DS: Thank you for your wise counsel, love, encouragement, emotional support, and prayers over the years. Thank you for your warm compassionate heart, and for your significant and meaningful impact on my life—my personal growth, development, and healing. Thank you for helping me to make it!

To my friends and colleagues: Thank you for “doing life” with me, and thank you for your friendship.

To my CES faculty and peers: Thank you for your encouragement, for shaping me, and for helping me grow. I have learned so much from you, and I am forever grateful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)

Counselor education and supervision (CES)

Counselor Education and Supervision NETwork – ListServ (CESNET-L)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The attrition rate for doctoral programs has historically been very high (Ames et al., 2018; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Posselt, 2018; Skakni, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Volkert et al., 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020; Zhou & Okahana, 2019), and doctoral students experience significant personal struggles throughout their programs (Pifer & Baker, 2016; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Sosin, & Spaulding, 2018). Though doctoral students with children experience more hardship than those without children (Lovell, 2014; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Lunde, 2017; Sverdlik et al., 2018), doctoral student mothers are particularly vulnerable to stress and attrition (Kent et al., 2020; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020). Although many qualitative studies have explored the experiences of doctoral student or recent graduate mothers (i.e., Abetz, 2019; Kulp, 2020; Lundquist et al., 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2018, 2019, 2020; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020) and faculty mothers (i.e., Hermann, Gorlewski, et al., 2020; Hermann, Hasking, et al., 2020b; Neale-McFall, 2020), the research is sparse regarding how the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted working mothers persisting in doctoral programs over the last 3 years since the pandemic's onset.

This chapter introduces this transcendental phenomenological study that addressed the lived experiences of working mothers persisting in Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)-accredited counselor education and supervision (CES) doctoral programs transitioning through the COVID-19 global pandemic. First, the study's background of the problem, problem statement, purpose statement, and significance are discussed. Next, the study's research questions are delineated, followed by the conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Next, key terms are operationally defined. Lastly, the study's assumptions and limitations are examined before summarizing and transitioning to Chapter 2.

Background of the Problem

Doctoral attrition has been a problem for many decades (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Sverdlik et al., 2018). As a result, doctoral persistence, retention, and attrition have been widely studied (e.g., Ames et al., 2018; Breitenbach et al., 2019; Castelló et al., 2017; Devos et al., 2017; Lake, Koper, Balayan, & Lynch, 2018; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; 2020; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Posselt, 2018; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016, 2017, 2018; Skakni, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2017; Zhou & Okahana, 2019). Despite the vast research available on factors contributing to persistence, retention, and attrition, the attrition rate for doctoral programs is still very high, ranging from 40 to 60% for residential programs and another 10 to 20% for online or distance learning programs (Holmes & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019, 2020; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020).

Doctoral students with children experience more stress during their educational programs than those without children (Lovell, 2014; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Sverdlik et al., 2018), and doctoral student mothers are particularly vulnerable to attrition (Kent et al., 2020; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020). It is commonly expected that doctoral students should center their lives on their doctoral programs (Skakni, 2018), which has led to stigmatization of faculty and doctoral students who have young children (Fox, 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Skakni, 2018). Female doctoral students also receive many implicit messages regarding delaying or abstaining from having children (Fox, 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Skakni, 2018). Reasons for this include that students with children experience more stress during their educational programs than those without children (Lovell, 2014; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Sverdlik et al., 2018); and women—more so than men—experience greater challenges

with achieving balance and integration of their family, academic, and professional roles and identities (Beech et al., 2021; Lovell, 2014; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020). Work-life imbalance has been cited as the most prominent factor contributing to stress for doctoral students (Sverdlik et al., 2018), especially for student mothers, who must balance and integrate their multiple roles and identities (Abetz, 2019; Fox, 2020; Isreal et al., 2017; Kulp, 2020; Lovell, 2014; Lundquist et al., 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020). Additionally, student mothers struggle more with health concerns, lower quality of life, and reduced motivation (Sverdlik et al., 2018)—all of which contribute to decreased performance and achievement and ultimately to a reduced likelihood of persistence in their doctoral studies (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020).

Studying specific populations such as student mothers aids understanding of how to facilitate their persistence in doctoral programs (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Skakni, 2018; Volkert et al., 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020; Zhou & Okahana, 2019). Several studies—many of which were qualitative—have explored the experiences of persisting doctoral student or recent graduate mothers and found support structures including family, social support networks, institutional and programmatic support, faculty supervision and mentorship, and peer support to be crucial for doctoral student mother persistence (Bell & Fong, 2021; Breitenbach et al., 2019; Castelló et al., 2017; Devos et al., 2017; Fox, 2020; Kent et al., 2020; Kumar & Coe, 2017; Kuo et al., 2017; Lake et al., 2018; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Posselt, 2018; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017, 2018; Skakni, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Volkert et al., 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2019). These findings have been consistent with the broader doctoral persistence literature, which has emphasized the necessity of family, social, and academic

integration (Holmes & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2020; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016; Skakni, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018).

Further, though significant progress has been made in social justice issues of gender inequality, many gender inequities still exist in academia (Bell & Fong, 2021; Fox, 2020; Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022; Posselt, 2018). Patriarchal academic culture continues to be perpetuated and maintained by academia (Fox, 2020). Gender inequities manifest as institutionalized sexism and are further complicated by various intersectionalities with other marginalized groups (e.g., ethnic minorities; Fox, 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022; Posselt, 2018). Because of these inequities and resulting oppression, marginalized students such as women—especially those with young children—are faced with additional barriers to doctoral persistence (Fox, 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Posselt, 2018).

The intersectionality of academia and motherhood has been well researched (e.g., Beech et al., 2021; Breitenbach et al., 2019; Fox, 2020; Hermann, Gorlewski, et al., 2020; Hermann, Haskins, et al., 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Neale-McFall, 2020; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017, 2018; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020), but fewer studies have examined this intersectionality through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic shutdown of schools, offices, and formal childcare centers led to a mass departure of women from the paid workforce into unpaid caregiving roles at home (Bell & Fong, 2021; Heggeness et al., 2020; Parrish et al., 2021; Power, 2020). Working mothers in academia already suffered from significant lack of balance across their multiple competing roles and responsibilities, resulting in even greater deficits experienced by these women (Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022). The pandemic shutdown also led to shifting priorities in research and

widespread disruptions to academic programs, with many transitioning to online learning environments for both students and faculty (Eigege & Kennedy, 2021). Remote work blurred the lines between professional and personal life, resulting in even greater challenges in achieving balance, especially for working academic mothers (Burk et al., 2021). Society is now in the third year of the pandemic, and its toll on academic mothers is likely to continue for the foreseeable future (Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022). This trend is expected to adversely affect women and their families for many years if no proactive intervention occurs (Power, 2020).

Problem Statement

The COVID-19 global pandemic led to women's transition from working full time to balancing working from home with caregiving roles, which exacerbated pre-existing gender inequities in work and academia and further strained working doctoral student mothers struggling to balance multiple roles and competing responsibilities (Beech et al., 2021; Bell & Fong, 2021; Burk et al., 2020; Fox, 2020; Kibbe, 2020; Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022; Parrish et al., 2021; Power, 2020). Women—more so than men—experience greater challenges with achieving balance and integration of their family, academic, and professional roles (Beech et al., 2021; Lovell, 2014; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has thus led to additional barriers for the persistence of doctoral student mothers who—at their pre-pandemic baseline—were prone to experience higher levels of stress during their educational programs (Lovell, 2014; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Sverdlik et al., 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the essential need for increased understanding of the lived experiences of working mothers persisting in CES doctoral programs transitioning through the pandemic.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology was to describe how working student mothers of children under the age of 12 persisting in the final year of a CACREP-accredited CES doctoral program described their lived experiences moving through the COVID-19 pandemic. The study has empirical, theoretical, and practical significance, which are addressed in the following sections.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study can be understood in terms of its application to the problem of working mothers persisting in CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs while transitioning through the COVID-19 pandemic. Doctoral attrition has remained a significant problem for many decades (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Sverdlik et al., 2018), and doctoral students who are mothers have an even greater risk of attrition than their male counterparts or childless peers (Kent et al., 2020; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020). Moreover, the COVID-19 global pandemic exacerbated pre-existing systemic gender inequities in work and academia and further stressed working doctoral student mothers. This study is important for the counseling profession as well as CES. This study also has implications for positive social and policy change by promoting gender equality in families, academic cultures (e.g., doctoral programs, departments, higher learning institutions), work organizations, religious institutions, communities, and larger society.

Empirically

Examining the lived experiences of working CES doctoral student mothers in the COVID-19 pandemic has empirical significance due to its implications for the literature base pertaining to doctoral persistence, retention, and attrition. This study also adds to the literature on

intersectionality of motherhood and academia, work-life-family balance and integration of multiple roles and identities of female doctoral students, gender differences and inequities in work and academia, and the ongoing research efforts concerning the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The resultant contributions to the literature in each of these areas, as well as their intersectionality, could inspire future qualitative and quantitative studies.

Theoretically

This study further elucidates the application of Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory to doctoral persistence as well as doctoral student mother adaptation to the ongoing pandemic. Additionally, Schlossberg's transition theory might undergo further development and be considered as a framework from which to study other populations (e.g., other marginalized or underrepresented groups or cultures, doctoral programs, disciplines, or higher learning institutions) as a result.

Practically

This study also has practical significance for doctoral student (and prospective student) mothers and their families, professional counselors, counselor educators and supervisors, doctoral programs, higher learning institutions, culture, and broader society. The pandemic has presented an opportunity to broadly impact gender relations through gender-sensitive public policy change (Bell & Fong, 2021; Cook & Grimshaw, 2021). However, pre-existing systemic gender inequalities will likely worsen if this opportunity for policy change is ignored (Cook & Grimshaw, 2021). Professional counselors who are informed about the pandemic's exacerbation of pre-existing gender inequities might help doctoral student mothers and their families strive to be more equally share domestic labor responsibilities, which might help student mothers reduce stress, cope more effectively with the pandemic fallout, and ultimately persist in their doctoral

programs (Fisher et al., 2020). Professional counselors might also use this study's findings to help doctoral student mothers better balance their work, family, and academic commitments, which might facilitate persistence in their doctoral programs.

If CES doctoral programs, counselor educators and supervisors, and higher learning institutions are informed of this study's findings, they will be better equipped to develop necessary support structures to facilitate persistence. They might also better educate prospective female doctoral students with children about the pandemic's worsening of pre-existing gender inequities in work and the risk for imbalance in competing roles and responsibilities in domestic labor, professional work, academics, family, communities, and social circles. This increased awareness might help prospective female doctoral students with children make more informed decisions regarding seeking a doctorate as well as managing expectations for themselves and their families. Perhaps even more importantly, CES doctoral programs, counselor educators and supervisors, and higher learning institutions might examine their own gendered thoughts, attitudes, assumptions, biases, belief systems, behaviors, policies, and practices that perpetuate and maintain gender inequities. They might even be moved to adopt and promote a strengths-based perspective that motherhood makes better professionals and is indicative of balance achievement in work, academics, family, and life (Beech et al., 2021). Finally, academic institutions could make structural changes to promote gender equality, support student mothers (Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022; Parrish et al., 2021; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020), and send the message that the mother identity is valued (Beech et al., 2021).

Research Questions

This study used Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework to guide selection of appropriate research questions. The study was focused on a central research question—How do

participants describe what the COVID-19 global pandemic has been like for them as they move through the transition from both academia and the pandemic?—and three subquestions, which pertained to adaptation to transition within each of the three phases (i.e., moving in, moving through, and moving out) from Schlossberg's theoretical framework:

Subquestion 1: How do participants describe moving in?

Subquestion 2: How do participants describe moving through?

Subquestion 3: How do participants describe moving out?

Conceptual Framework

This study's conceptual framework for exploring the lived experiences of persisting working CES doctoral student mothers moving through the COVID-19 pandemic was comprised of the following interrelated concepts from the contemporary literature base: doctoral persistence, attrition, and retention; intersectionality of academia with motherhood; academic mothers' work-life-family balance and integration of multiple roles and identities; gender differences and inequities in work and academia; and the COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate impact on working doctoral student mothers. These interrelated concepts are further delineated in Chapter 2 through the formal review of the literature. Altogether, the conceptual framework supported the current study. Additionally, Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory provided a theoretical framework for organizing and analyzing data collected during this study.

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory provided a framework for analyzing human adaptation to transition. Schlossberg defined *transition* as an event (or nonevent) or occurrence (or nonoccurrence) that inherently changes a person's self and world perceptions, assumptions,

behavior, and relationships and results in the individual's development or regression depending on whether the individual's resultant changes were effective. In addition, a transition is defined by the individual's perspective. Schlossberg described *adaptation* as an individual's process involving moving from preoccupation with the transition to self-integration of the transition. This can also be viewed as movement from disorganization to organization in the individual's life. Schlossberg's model proposed that adaptation to a particular transition is not static but dynamic and extremely complex as the individual moves through different stages or phases of transition over the course of life. Broadly, the individual's adaption can be evaluated through consideration of the individual's perceived or actual resources-to-deficits ratio, understanding that changes in an individual's situation will inherently influence changes in this ratio. Furthermore, it is understood that an individual's resources-deficits ratio is not fixed throughout their life. Schlossberg originally suggested that an individual's adaptation to transition is impacted by three sets of interacting variables including characteristics of the individual, the transition, and the pre- and post-transition environments and supports.

Characteristics of the Individual

The individual's characteristics include psychosocial competence, sex role identification, life stage and age, health status, socioeconomic status (SES), race and ethnicity, values, and level of experience with similar transitions (Schlossberg, 1981). Schlossberg (1981) suggested that minority populations may experience more isolation, contributing to their levels of stress associated with a particular transition. Additionally, lower SES may limit an individual's financial and material resources and psychological supports (Schlossberg, 1981).

Characteristics of the Transition

The transition's characteristics consist of the following: the loss or gain of roles or identities; the individual's consequential positive and/or negative feelings as well as level of stress associated with the transition; whether the source of the transition was internal or external to the individual's locus of control; whether the transition was viewed socially as on- or off-time; whether the transition's onset was sudden and perhaps unexpected or gradual and perhaps expected; and whether the duration of the transition was temporary, permanent, or undetermined. All human beings experience change and stress, but the importance of each of these factors varies accordingly as individuals vary in their capacities for coping with each change (Schlossberg, 1981). Schlossberg (1981) also suggested that the level of stress and negative feelings experienced by an individual seemed related to the degree of uncertainty regarding the transition's expected duration.

Pre- and Post-Transition Environments and Supports

Schlossberg (1981) described *environment* as the context of the transition that involves its physical setting, institutional supports, and interpersonal support networks experienced by the individual. *Physical setting* refers to such environmental characteristics as rural versus urban location, workplace, home, neighborhood, and weather/climate as they have been found to influence an individual's mental and emotional outlook, well-being, and experience of stress (Schlossberg, 1981). Elements within the physical setting can include the level of personal space versus crowding or high-density living or working arrangements experienced by the individual, all of which can impact adaptation to transition. The level of dissimilarity versus similarity between the post- and pre-transition environments can be analyzed to determine the individual's

adaption to a transition. Furthermore, the individual's attainment of sufficient environmental information often contributes to a more successful transition (Schlossberg, 1981).

Schlossberg (1981) emphasized the individual's social support systems and networks (i.e., the family system, intimate relationships, and social network of friends) of the pre- and post-transition environments as especially critical to the individual's successful adaptation to transition as they convey to the individual that they are not alone during times of stress. Social support influences role performance and adaptation to role change. Intimate partners can contribute trust, understanding, and emotional and material support to the individual's resource bank for coping with transitions. Institutional support includes that provided by places of employment, political groups, religious institutions, social policy, and local community support groups (Schlossberg, 1981).

Phases of Transition Theory

Schlossberg's (1981) original transition theory was further developed and evolved into a model comprised of three phases of transitions: moving in, moving through, and moving out (Anderson et al., 2012; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 2011). The resultant transition model provided a useful tool for analyzing an individual's readiness for and adaptation to change (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). Each of the three phases of transitions are explained next, beginning with the first phase.

Phase 1: Moving In

The first phase of Schlossberg's (1981) transition process is termed *moving in* (Anderson et al., 2012) and marks the beginning of a transition (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). This phase commences when an individual perceives the start of a transition in their life (Anderson et al., 2012). That is, one moves into transition as the individual begins to experience an event (or

nonevent) or occurrence (or nonoccurrence) that inherently changes the individual's self and world perceptions, assumptions, behavior, and relationships. This phase is characterized by disruption to the individual's status quo (Anderson et al., 2012), amplified feelings of incompetence, and preoccupation with how life circumstances are changing (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). The individual begins a socialization process in which they attempt to adjust to the transition and to assume new roles, routines, relationships, beliefs, and expectations. Because the individual is in-process and thus in between various roles and identities, they may experience *hang-over identity* as they are learning a new way of living. The individual gradually enters the second phase, which is termed *moving through* (Anderson et al., 2012).

Phase 2: Moving Through

The second phase of Schlossberg's (1981) transition process—moving through—is considered the in-between phase (Anderson et al., 2012) and marks the middle of a transition (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). Here, the individual feels tension, disorientation, and discomfort with change and experiences overlap between previous roles and identities and new roles and identities the individual is acquiring (Anderson et al., 2012). The individual may experience a sense of emptiness (Anderson et al., 2012) or even burnout (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). In this phase, the individual's future may seem ambiguous as the individual struggles to fully assume new roles, routines, relationships, beliefs, and expectations (Anderson et al., 2012). On the other hand, some individuals my experience renewed hope or spirituality that moves them forward in the transition process. The individual eventually enters the third phase of moving out (Anderson et al., 2012).

Phase 3: Moving Out

An individual enters the third phase of Schlossberg's (1981) transition process as they exit or move out of a transition in some way (Anderson et al., 2012). Marking the end of the transition (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988), the third phase can manifest as a complete role exit or the full assumption of a new role, with one's disengagement from old roles, routines, relationships, beliefs, and expectations (Anderson et al., 2012). The moving out phase is further characterized by separation and endings. Lastly, as one reaches the end of the third phase and has moved out of a given transition, they can eventually re-enter the life cycle of the transition process as they perceive the onset of other transitions throughout their life (Anderson et al., 2012).

4Ss System for Coping with Transitions

Schlossberg's (1981) original transition theory was further developed by incorporating the 4Ss system, which includes factors pertaining to a given transition's situation, characteristics of the individual undergoing a transition (i.e., self variables), sources of support, and coping strategies (Schlossberg, 2011). The 4Ss are indicative of the unique combination of deficits and assets an individual carries into a transition, which interact to impact how the individual manages and learns from living through the transition and ultimately how the individual masters change (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). The variables of *situation*, *self*, and *supports* help an individual to take stock of their transition circumstances, whereas implementing *strategies* fosters in the individual a greater sense of control (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988).

Situation

Situation variables are comprised of all the stressors the individual is experiencing in their current life situation (Schlossberg, 2011). Each of these situation variables can serve to

either improve or hamper the individual's adaptation to a transition, as indicated by their resources-to-deficits ratio (Schlossberg, 2011).

Self

The characteristics of the individual undergoing a transition have more recently been termed *self* variables (Schlossberg, 2011). These factors pertain to the individual's inner strength and psychological capacity for coping with change and include various traits and characteristics such as optimism (Schlossberg, 2011), confidence, and commitment (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). It is suggested that the individual's overall hardiness allows them to maintain personal wellness during times of stress, and individuals can increase their hardiness by learning coping strategies that are discussed in the following two sections. This knowledge acquisition related to strategies can improve an individual's sense of control over a transition (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988).

Support

Support variables are the resources available to the individual during the transition to help ensure a smooth and successful transition (Schlossberg, 2011). Supports can greatly impact the individual's quality of life and well-being as an individual adapts to change (Schlossberg, 2011). In the same respect, even those people who would be expected to be supportive can serve as hinderances for the individual undergoing a transition (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988).

Strategies

Strategies are the tools and interventions employed by an individual undergoing a transition that serve to help the individual enhance personal skills and strengths (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988)—and ultimately to facilitate adaptive coping—by changing or reframing the situation, reducing or managing the individual's stress while coping with the transition

(Schlossberg, 2011), or even changing the meaning the individual ascribes to a transition (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 2008). People who demonstrate flexibility in their coping strategies tend to be more adaptive (Schlossberg, 2011). Furthermore, strategies necessary for effective coping depend, in part, on the phase of the transition—whether moving in, moving through, or moving out.

This discussion of the four categories of variables that impact all transitions to some degree can help elucidate the process by which an individual is able to adapt to change. Furthermore, when insufficiencies in coping are discovered, individuals can use the transition model to consider how to bolster their resources to overcome any deficits more effectively (Schlossberg, 2011), as a smooth transition is associated with better productivity (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). Finally, the transition model can aid in providing a broader understanding of individuals by listening

> carefully to hear whether they have just started transitions, are thinking of making changes, feel satisfied with the events and non-events of their lives, feel stuck, or feel fulfilled . . . [to] find out where they are coming from. (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988, p. 59)

Definitions

Key terms were operationally defined for purposes of the current study and include the following: persistence, retention, attrition, transition, adaptation, pre- and post-transition environments, and physical setting.

Retention factors have been studied as paths to reducing *attrition* (Ames et al., 2018; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Skakni, 2018; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Zhou & Okahana, 2019). In this study, *retention* referred to the notion of retaining or keeping students in

educational programs, whereas *attrition* referred to student withdrawal from educational programs.

Persistence is often considered an indicator of doctoral program quality and effectiveness (Castelló et al., 2017; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016; Skakni, 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020; Yang et al., 2017; Zhou & Okahana, 2019) as well as student success (Breitenbach et al., 2019; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2017; Zhou & Okahana, 2019). In this study, *persistence* referred to the idea of perseverance, or continuing in one's doctoral program despite myriad struggles and endurance of great hardships along the journey.

The remaining key terms used in this study derive from Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework for analyzing human adaptation to transitions. This study used Schlossberg's definition of *transition* as an event (or nonevent) or occurrence (or nonoccurrence) that inherently changes a person's self and world perceptions, assumptions, behavior, and relationships and results in the individual's development or regression depending on whether the individual's resultant changes were effective versus ineffective. In addition, a *transition* is defined by the individual's perspective. This study also used Schlossberg's definition of *adaptation* as an individual's process involving moving from preoccupation with the transition to self-integration of the transition. This can also be viewed as movement from disorganization to organization in the individual's life.

Pre- and *post-transition environments* referred to the context of the transition which involves its *physical setting*, institutional supports, and interpersonal support networks experienced by the individual (Schlossberg, 1981).

Physical setting referred to such environmental characteristics as rural versus urban location, workplace, home, neighborhood, and weather/climate. Elements within the physical setting can include the level of personal space versus crowding or high-density living or working arrangements experienced by the individual (Schlossberg, 1981).

Assumptions and Limitations

The following assumptions helped clarify the study's boundaries and narrow its scope. An individual's resilience is broadly regarded as the interrelationship between the individual's characteristics, resources, and stressors in the individual's sociocultural environment (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Although the topics of resilience (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012) and academic burnout relate to the topic of doctoral persistence, they were beyond the scope of this study, which was focused on doctoral persistence and intersectionality with motherhood, work-life-family balance and integration of multiple roles and identities, gender differences and inequities in academia, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The study's timeline spanned from March 2022 through May 2022, and the study's setting consisted of CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs. Study participants included working mothers of children under the age of 12 who were in the final year of a CACREP-accredited CES doctoral program and recent graduates since the COVID-19 pandemic began in the United States in March 2020. The study assumed at least one child under age 12 was living in each participant's home during the pandemic.

The study had the following limitations. The study was conducted with CES doctoral programs located in the United States. Therefore, the study did not consider students from international doctoral programs. Additionally, the study did not differentiate between residential, online or distance learning, and blended programs in its sample of participants. Therefore, the

study did not necessarily consider the unique characteristics of each format, which might contribute to the findings. The study did not specify when or for what duration study participants were employed during the pandemic, nor did the study specify whether study participants' employment status was full time versus part time. These factors might have further influenced the study's findings. The study participants only included mothers; therefore, the study did not consider the unique experiences of doctoral student fathers. The study did not specify how many children under the age of 12 were living in the participants' homes during the pandemic. Lastly, the study did not specify certain demographic characteristics for participant inclusion such as partner or marital status, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or others.

Summary

This chapter introduced the current study that addressed the lived experiences of working mothers persisting in CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs while transitioning through the COVID-19 pandemic. The study's overview, background of the problem, problem statement, purpose statement, and significance were discussed. Next, the study's research questions were delineated, followed by the study's conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Lastly, the study's assumptions and limitations were examined.

The remainder of the study is organized into five chapters. The next chapter reviews the extant literature related to the current study including the interrelated concepts. Chapter 3 explains the study's research design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, the researcher's role, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 describes the study's findings. Chapter 5 contains the study's summary of findings, discussion, implications, limitations, recommendations, and topics for future study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology was to describe how working mothers of children under the age of 12 in the final year of a CACREP-accredited CES doctoral program described their lived experiences moving through the COVID-19 pandemic. Doctoral students who are mothers have an even greater risk of attrition (Kent et al., 2020; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020), especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated pre-existing systemic gender inequities. This study contributes to the literature and has theoretical significance due to its implications for further expansion and application of Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory. This study also informs professional counselors, counselor educators, counselor supervisors, doctoral programs, and higher learning institutions regarding the experiences of doctoral student mothers related to their persistence and transition through the COVID-19 pandemic. The study's findings might be applied to institutional supports to facilitate persistence. Lastly, this study promotes gender equality in families, academic cultures (e.g., doctoral programs, departments, higher learning institutions), work organizations, religious institutions, and communities.

This chapter reviews the literature related to the current study. The literature review is organized around major themes beginning with general research on doctoral persistence before covering more specific, current findings pertaining to the interrelated concepts of doctoral persistence, attrition, and retention; the intersectionality of academia with motherhood; work-life-family balance and integration of multiple roles and identities for working doctoral student mothers; gender differences and inequities in both professional and domestic labor as well as in academia; and the COVID-19 global pandemic's disproportionate impact on working doctoral student mothers.

Strategies used for searching the literature included accessing the university's online library academic search query and Google Scholar's search query for peer-reviewed journal articles published primarily within the last 5 years. The search was later expanded to consider significant research within the last 10 years. Key terms searched involved various combinations with each form of the key terms as shown including *COVID-19 pandemic* AND each of the following phrases*: doctorate, doctoral program, doctoral education, doctoral studies, PhD program, PhD education, PhD studies, doctoral student, PhD student, doctoral mothers, PhD mothers, academic mothers, doctoral student mothers, PhD student mothers, female doctoral students, female PhD students, doctoral women, PhD women, working doctoral mothers, working doctoral student mothers, working PhD mothers, working PhD student mothers, working academic mothers, working female doctoral students, working female PhD students,* and *motherhood*. Because the above search returned many results related to doctoral persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic, *persistence* was then added to each of the combinations of key terms as mentioned previously. The next section comprises the study's literature review.

Related Literature

This review of the literature covers the following interrelated concepts: doctoral persistence, attrition, and retention; the intersectionality of motherhood and academia; work-life-family balance and integration of multiple roles and identities for female doctoral students and faculty; gender differences and inequities in academia and work; and the COVID-19 pandemic impact on working mother scholars. The literature on doctoral persistence, attrition, and retention are broadly reviewed next.

Doctoral Persistence

Much research has been conducted on doctoral attrition, retention, and persistence. Though increasing numbers of students are seeking doctorates (Castelló et al., 2017; Kumar & Coe, 2017; Lake et al., 2018; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Sverdlik et al., 2018), the attrition rate for doctoral programs is still high (Ames et al., 2018; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Posselt, 2018; Skakni, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Volkert et al., 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020; Zhou & Okahana, 2019). Attrition rates for online doctoral students are even more concerning because online enrollment has continued to increase over the past 15 years (Berry, 2017; Kumar & Coe, 2017; Yang et al., 2017).

Retention factors have been studied as paths to reducing attrition (Ames et al., 2018; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Skakni, 2018; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Zhou & Okahana, 2019), and persistence is often considered an indicator of doctoral program quality and effectiveness (Castelló et al., 2017; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016; Skakni, 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020; Yang et al., 2017; Zhou & Okahana, 2019) as well as student success (Breitenbach et al., 2019; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2017; Zhou & Okahana, 2019). Moreover, several researchers have stressed the importance of studying attrition factors and student motivation for withdrawing from doctoral programs to assist institutions in improving program quality and persistence (Castelló et al., 2017; Skakni, 2018; Zhou & Okahana, 2019). A doctoral student's decision-making for persisting versus withdrawing from a program is impacted by complex and interrelated interpersonal, individual, and contextual (including sociopolitical) factors (Skakni, 2018; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Zhou & Okahana, 2019), such as demographics, individual characteristics and attributes, coping skills, motivation, academic-work-life-family responsibilities, program format,

curriculum, structure, expectations, communication, and academic and social integration (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Studying persistence is imperative as there are many implications for society, and many doctoral students who complete their programs will likely go on to become faculty members at institutes of higher education (Skakni, 2018).

Retention is influenced by factors such as isolation, communication, and engagement, especially for online doctoral students (Ames et al., 2018; Pifer & Baker, 2016). Isolation contributes to doctoral attrition (Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Posselt, 2018; Skakni, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018), with the culminating dissertation process being especially lonely and isolating for doctoral students (Lake et al., 2018; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Skakni, 2018). Doctoral students also have an increased risk for experiencing significant levels of anxiety, depression, psychological distress, loneliness, and isolation (Skakni, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018), not to mention lack of leisure time or engagement in social events, severe stress, burnout, and even hopelessness (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Furthermore, feelings of unworthiness are central to doctoral student struggles and have negative implications for persistence (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Doctoral students who had low self-efficacy are more likely to engage in self-sabotaging, incapacitating, or stalling behaviors to mask perceived incompetence, which is predictive of attrition. Such self-handicapping behaviors include perfectionistic tendencies, investing minimal effort, over-scheduling, staying overly busy with low-priority work, delaying or avoiding work, and working in environments that were not conducive to productivity (Sverdlik et al., 2018).

Though the online format of some doctoral programs offers flexibility and accessibility for busy students, online learning is often accompanied by unique considerations and additional challenges for persistence. Studies that focus on online or distance learning doctoral students are beneficial for better understanding the unique experiences, needs, and available supports for

student persistence in programs with online or distance learning formats (Holmes & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2020; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016; Stephen et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2017). Implementing private online workspaces for doctoral students seems to mitigate risk of attrition and helps enhance the quality and effectiveness of higher education experienced by online doctoral students (Ames et al., 2018). The institutional variables of support services and program and instruction quality, as well as the integration variables of family, academic, and social integration with faculty also independently explain the likelihood of an online doctoral candidate's persistence (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016). Additionally, the nature of online doctoral learning communities and social networks is limited and even more dependent on peer support rather than faculty. Peer support (e.g., emotional, academic, and social support) can come in the form of cohorts, larger class groups, smaller peer groups, and study groups (Berry, 2017).

The cohort format—which fosters peer support and healthy competition—can positively impact retention of doctoral students (Lake et al., 2018). Academic institutions should provide online social engagement for doctoral student retention (Berry, 2017). Similarly, doctoral programs should foster academic community engagement consisting of both peer and faculty mentorship to reduce isolation experienced by doctoral students (Lake et al., 2018; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Posselt, 2018; Skakni, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018). To combat risk of attrition, doctoral programs should implement the cohort model and selectively admit highly motivated students who are considered fitting for the doctoral program's academic culture (Lake et al., 2018), especially for online programs. Academic integration and social integration have been found to be predictors of doctoral persistence regardless of the student's stage in the program (Holmes & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2020; Sverdlik et al., 2018).

Doctoral attrition has remained a problem for many decades (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Sverdlik et al., 2018), and doctoral students who are mothers have an even greater risk of attrition (Kent et al., 2020; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020). Studying specific populations such as student mothers aids understanding of how to facilitate their persistence in doctoral programs (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Skakni, 2018; Volkert et al., 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020; Zhou & Okahana, 2019). Several qualitative studies have explored the experiences of persisting doctoral student or recent graduate mothers, in particular (Abetz, 2019; Kulp, 2020; Lundquist et al., 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2018, 2019, 2020; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020). Salient themes include supports—particularly family and social support networks, institutional and programmatic support, mentorship from both faculty supervisors and peers, and spirituality.

Support

Support themes from the academic persistence literature correspond with Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory asserting that support and guidance from experts, peers, and those who successfully completed the transition can be instrumental for an individual's coping and adaptation to a stressful transition or co-occurring transitions such as completing a doctoral program and moving through a global pandemic. Though various support structures are crucial for doctoral persistence, there are inherent challenges faced by society, doctoral students' family and friends, and higher learning institutions in providing this much-needed support (Pifer & Baker, 2016). In the following sections, I discuss family and social support, institutional support, and mentorship as well as strategies for overcoming support barriers.

Family and Social. Social support has been widely studied for its influence on doctoral persistence (Skakni, 2018), and many former doctoral students who withdrew from their

programs cited family reasons for not completing (Pifer & Baker, 2016). Family support also plays a major role in whether a doctoral student mother persists (Breitenbach et al., 2019; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2018), especially in an online doctoral program (Breitenbach et al., 2019). In the same respect, a lack of family support has been shown to significantly hinder doctoral student persistence (Breitenbach et al., 2019; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Volkert et al., 2018). Relationships with friends and family members can become distant as the doctoral student must make sacrifices to find time for scholarly work, making it important to discuss realistic expectations regarding the various stressors faced by the doctoral student (Pifer & Baker, 2016).

Institutional and Programmatic. Learning environment and context are central to a doctoral student's persistence (Skakni, 2018), and these factors can be addressed by institutional and programmatic supports. Academic learning institutions can cultivate a supportive, accepting environment (Pifer & Baker, 2016) and avoid fostering a "culture of institutional neglect" (Castelló et al., 2017, p. 1056) by offering support to doctoral student mothers in a variety of ways. To support women's persistence and scholar identity development, schools can also orient families to the challenging nature of doctoral programs by offering family webinars, orientations, counseling, and family social media groups (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2018). Orientation programs can also inform family about the importance of seeking a doctorate, the expected amount of time required to complete the program, and what family members can do to support the doctoral student (Breitenbach et al., 2019). Encouraging a better understanding of academic-family integration would also be beneficial to doctoral students early in their programs when they first start developing patterns for balance and integration, which they will later bring with them into the profession (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019). Lastly, higher education institutions need to support more female faculty role models and mentors who have families (Bell & Fong, 2021;

Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017), and doctoral programs should support dissertations pursuing advocacy for mothers in academia (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017).

Mentorship. Mentorship (from both faculty and peers) can provide needed support for doctoral students (Devos et al., 2017; Fox, 2020; Kent et al., 2020; Kumar & Coe, 2017; Kuo et al., 2017; Lake et al., 2018; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Posselt, 2018; Skakni, 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2019), especially when established early in the program (Pifer & Baker, 2016). Faculty supervision has been widely considered the most impactful factor in doctoral persistence (Sverdlik et al., 2018), and comprehensive faculty support is manifested via specific strategies psychosocially, socio-culturally, and academically (Posselt, 2018). Researchers have emphasized the critical role faculty mentors serve in socializing doctoral students into the profession as well as negotiating a balance between academic and personal values by providing sufficient information about the program (Posselt, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018).

Faculty support, personal motivation, and cohort format contribute to doctoral persistence and program retention (Lake et al., 2018). The primary reason for doctoral attrition has been lack of motivation, especially as doctoral students proceed through to the dissertation (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Self-motivation is a predictor of persistence and is impacted by various factors such as family, academic socialization, and supervisor fit (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Students who value, and are motivated by, the doctoral process rather than the outcome of earning the doctorate have reported higher academic success (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Additionally, faculty advisors can help foster doctoral student self-efficacy and motivation (Kuo et al., 2017). In the same respect, doctoral students who experience negative faculty advising relationships may experience reductions in motivation, self-efficacy, and productivity (Kuo et al., 2017) as well as increased risk of attrition (Kuo et al., 2017; Volkert et al., 2018). It is important for faculty advisors to

engage closely in a customized approach to address the unique needs of doctoral students (Kuo et al., 2017). For instance, doctoral students require more faculty supervision during the transitions at the beginning (i.e., academic socialization) and end (i.e., dissertation and employment applications) of their doctoral programs due to the unstructured nature of the process (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Doctoral students need dissertation supervisors to provide methodological and content guidance, a cooperative partnership, productivity, and commitment (Sverdlik et al., 2018).

Faculty mentors who oversee doctoral research for dissertations serve an important function in doctoral persistence (Kumar & Coe, 2017; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Posselt, 2018; Skakni, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018), especially for online students (Kumar & Coe, 2017). Lack of time management; stressful life events such as giving birth, switching jobs, or family illness; lack of motivation; feeling overwhelmed; and insufficient skills or knowledge are challenges that students may face in the online dissertation process (Kumar & Coe, 2017). Time management and organizational strategies such as breaking the larger project up and setting smaller writing goals according to a consistent writing schedule as well as peer support providing for encouragement, accountability check-ins, editing drafts, and feedback can address these challenges (Kumar & Coe, 2017). Strategies for time management as well as short-term, mid-term, and long-term goal setting can help make the dissertation project more manageable through smaller tasks and to contribute to increased student motivation through accumulation of smaller wins toward the larger project (Pifer & Baker, 2016). Therefore, faculty, peer, and institutional support are critical to online doctoral persistence through the dissertation (Kumar & Coe, 2017; Pifer & Baker, 2016).

Faculty advisors and mentors function as role models for how doctoral students might integrate various roles and responsibilities throughout their doctoral programs and implore faculty and mentors to encourage doctoral students' openness and curiosity regarding exploration of their identities as scholars (Pifer & Baker, 2016). Taken further, mentors and faculty advisors can positively influence persistence by helping student mothers see themselves as both mothers and scholars (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017). Mentoring is a protective factor in helping overcome obstacles, offering emotional and academic support, decreasing feelings of isolation, and setting realistic goals (Kent et al., 2020). Faculty mentor qualities of responsiveness and availability are beneficial to doctoral persistence, and faculty mentors who minimize the power differential between themselves and their students are perceived as more approachable and better able to build supportive and trusting working relationships with their doctoral students (Posselt, 2018). Helpful mentor role strategies also include the use of multiple diverse communication methods and technologies; frequent, timely communication and recurring meetings; honest, candid, specific, responsive feedback; moral support and encouragement; and mentoring within small groups (Kumar & Coe, 2017). Regular, open communication between faculty supervisors/mentors and doctoral students is important for persistence (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Thus, mentorship of doctoral student mothers might mitigate their risk of attrition.

Furthermore, supportive faculty engage doctoral students in important discussions about racial and gender diversity in academia (Posselt, 2018). Faculty are called to promote learning environments that foster more equitable educational outcomes to both formally and informally support underrepresented and marginalized students by embracing a zero-tolerance policy for the prejudice and discrimination—in all their forms—that historically have contributed to institutionalized inequities (Fox, 2020; Posselt, 2018). More broadly, higher learning institutions

should embrace diversity amongst faculty through their hiring practices, indicating faculty support and mentorship opportunities for a diverse student population (Pifer & Baker, 2016). Given the current trend of increasing diversity across doctoral program student populations (Skakni, 2018), these practices and social justice advocacy efforts help diverse, underrepresented, and marginalized doctoral students overcome systemic barriers to persistence (Fox, 2020; Posselt, 2018). Because of the implications of faculty mentorship for doctoral persistence, faculty must be trained in effective mentorship of diverse students (Lake et al., 2018; Skakni, 2018) as well as in issues of multiculturalism (Posselt, 2018).

Spirituality. Spirituality and religion have been cited as buffers against attrition as well as supports for persistence in doctoral programs (Anekstein et al., 2018; Pyykkonen, 2021). The research on spirituality, religion, and academic persistence corresponds with Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, which asserted that an individual's religious beliefs and values influence adaptation to transitions and help the individual endure periods of stress. Tied in with this discussion is the notion that having a greater life purpose, or perhaps a purpose within the suffering, helps people more effectively cope in their trying circumstances (Schlossberg, 1981).

Motherhood and Academia

The intersectionality of motherhood and academia has been the subject of increasing inquiry (Beech et al., 2021; Breitenbach et al., 2019; Hermann, Gorlewski, et al., 2020; Hermann, Haskins, et al., 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Neale-McFall, 2020; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017, 2018; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020). Students with children experience more stress during their educational programs than students without children (Lovell, 2014; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Sverdlik et al., 2018). Moreover, women experience greater challenges with achieving

balance and integration of their family, academic, and professional roles and identities (Beech et al., 2021; Lovell, 2014; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020). However, this contributes to widespread caregiver bias in academia (Fox, 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019). Institutions and faculty tend to attribute doctoral attrition to students' personal characteristics and shortcomings in academia (Sverdlik et al., 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020), as opposed to institutional or programmatic factors external to students (Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020). Persistence can be attributed to internal resources (i.e., discipline, organization, determination, flexibility/adaptability) and good fortune regarding fertility and pregnancy timing, family-friendly doctoral programs and advisors, and student expectations (Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019). It would be mutually beneficial for institutions and doctoral programs to explore doctoral student mother needs to improve persistence and reduce attrition (Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020), such as student parent support services (Lovell, 2014).

Work-Life-Family Balance

Work-life-family balance for doctoral students (Isreal et al., 2017; Martinez et al., 2013; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020; Skakni, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018) and faculty (Neale-McFall, 2020) has been broadly researched throughout the various stages of their doctoral programs (Pifer & Baker, 2016). Work-life imbalance is the most prominent factor contributing to psychological distress in doctoral students (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Recently, more attention has been given to researching how female doctoral students effectively balance and integrate their multiple roles and identities (Abetz, 2019; Isreal et al., 2017; Kulp, 2020; Lundquist et al., 2020; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020), and doctoral student mothers have only more recently

been the subject of increasing inquiry (Beech et al., 2021; Bell & Fong, 2021; Burk et al., 2020; Kibbe, 2020; Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022; Parrish et al., 2021) since the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic approximately 3 years ago.

Many doctoral students struggle to balance academics, family, and social responsibilities, struggling with competing priorities with finite resources (e.g., time, energy, motivation; Sverdlik et al., 2018). As a result, doctoral students tend to neglect engaging in self-care, leisure and social activities, and relationship maintenance, contributing to distress, lack of balance, and burnout (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Though literature has emphasized the importance of family in doctoral persistence, it has historically overlooked doctoral students' academic-family integration in both residential and distance learning programs (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019). But there are differences in how doctoral students integrate academics and family depending on program type (residential or distance learning) and gender (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020). Distance learning students have reported lower levels of functioning and academic-family satisfaction, greater interference, and more solid boundaries between family and academics than residential students. Additionally, women reported less academic-family balance as well as the need to set more strict boundaries between family and academics than men (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020). It is important to study academic-work-life integration and socialization into doctoral programs to differentiate between persisting doctoral students and those who withdraw (Devos et al., 2017; Skakni, 2018). Failure to address academic-family integration can impede student well-being, achievement, and persistence in both residential and distance learning programs (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020).

Doctoral programs can help students persist by offering flexible school and work schedules as well as other support services based on student needs (Martinez et al., 2013; Skakni,

2018). Full-time doctoral students strive to obtain school-work-life balance by (a) intentional management and prioritization of time, roles, and responsibilities; (b) engaging in self-care (e.g., stress management, mental and physical health and wellness, leisure activities); (c) seeking social support; and (d) compromising (Martinez et al., 2013). Negotiation of personal boundaries to effectively balance academic and family life impacts doctoral persistence and attrition (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019). Single students without children have experienced more difficulty achieving a school-work-life balance versus those students with families, which may be because doctoral students with families have increased need to set more stringent boundaries to better protect and balance their limited time and resolve conflicting priorities (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020). Learning about other or previous successful doctoral students' experiences in relation to their school-work-lives and how they achieved balance may benefit current doctoral students as they too strive to achieve balance and integration (Martinez et al., 2013).

Gender Differences, Inequities, and the COVID-19 Global Pandemic

Though progress has been made in gender inequality, many gender differences and inequities still exist in academia (Bell & Fong, 2021; Fox, 2020; Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022; Posselt, 2018). Despite increases in female representation and even female-majority status in some doctoral programs, disciplines, and institutions (Posselt, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018), patriarchal culture continues to be perpetuated (Fox, 2020). Patriarchal academic cultures reward doctoral students and faculty who resemble traditional male workers as ideal employees who tend to experience little demands on their time and resources outside of their work (Fox, 2020). Female doctoral students are already more vulnerable to experiencing feelings of self-doubt, inadequacy, and incompetence regardless of previous successful performance (Posselt, 2018), and this phenomenon is further complicated by the gender inequities manifested throughout

academia. Inequities manifest as prejudices and discrimination (e.g., sexism) and are further complicated by various intersectionalities with other marginalized groups (e.g., ethnic minorities; Fox, 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022; Posselt, 2018). These gender and racial inequities are entrenched in the institution's structures and communication and in the program design and delivery itself (Posselt, 2018). Because of these inequities and resulting oppression, marginalized students such as women—especially those with children in the home—are faced with additional barriers to doctoral persistence (Fox, 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Posselt, 2018).

Although many authors have explored the intersectionality of faculty and motherhood in general (Beech et al., 2021; Breitenbach et al., 2019; Fox, 2020; Hermann, Gorlewski, et al., 2020; Hermann, Haskins, et al., 2020b; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Neale-McFall, 2020; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017, 2018; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020), limited research has examined this intersectionality through the lens of the COVID-19 global pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic led to women transitioning from the paid workforce and into unpaid caregiving roles at home due to the pandemic shutdown of schools, offices, and formal childcare centers in 2020 (Bell & Fong, 2021; Fisher et al., 2020; Heggeness et al., 2020; Parrish et al., 2021; Power, 2020), resulting in 1.9 million fewer women in paid labor positions in 2020 than in the previous year (Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022). Mothers with children under age 5 reported significantly fewer working hours available because they were consumed with caregiving duties (Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022) and implementing remote learning for their home-bound children (Power, 2020). Women have historically provided most of the world's unpaid caregiving labor, and this has dramatically increased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Craig & Churchill, 2020; Power, 2020).

This trend is expected to adversely affect women and families for many years if no proactive intervention occurs (Power, 2020). Researchers emphasized the necessity of remaining flexible to adapt to the ever-changing pandemic landscape (Bell & Fong, 2021; Fisher et al., 2020).

Additionally, since the pandemic onset, many working student mothers have been faced with juggling their educational programs, remote work, and providing caregiving for children, sick, and/or aging family members, and many of these women were also sick and/or struggling with issues of grief and loss, anxiety, or other mental health concerns themselves (Parrish et al., 2021). Furthermore, with multiple remote learners and workers within the same household competing for limited time, space, privacy, and other resources, women's experience of family stress was significantly intensified (Bell & Fong, 2021; Parrish et al., 2021). Remote work has blurred the lines between professional and personal life, resulting in even greater challenges in achieving balance, especially for working academic mothers (Burk et al., 2021). Mother-scholars also experienced exorbitant pressure to achieve in both research and education despite being in an ongoing pandemic (Burk et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic intensified the negative impacts of the patriarchal structures in academia that foster these stress-producing factors for mother-scholars (Burk et al., 2021). Society is now in the third year of the pandemic, and its substantial toll on academic mothers is likely to continue for the foreseeable future (Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022).

The pandemic has also had an adverse impact on existing gender imbalances—both at home and in the workplace—experienced by empirical researchers who are also mothers (Bell & Fong, 2021). These gender disparities manifested as significantly and disproportionately less peer-reviewed journal article submissions and scholarly authorship for women compared to men after the pandemic onset. Various other forms of gender discrimination in academia throughout

the pandemic includes gender gaps in teaching workloads and time to tenure (Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022), pay, and perceptions of motherhood as a barrier to career progression and promotion in the academy (Bell & Fong, 2021; Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022). Furthermore, women—especially those with children—who hold doctorates are more likely to work in adjunct roles or leave academia altogether than their male colleagues (Bell & Fong, 2021). These are just some of the many ways in which the pandemic has exacerbated enduring gender inequities and has maintained the already disadvantaged status of women in relation to men in academia (Bell & Fong, 2021).

Academic institutions can make structural changes to send the message that the mother identity is critical and that student mothers are to be supported (Beech et al., 2021). Similarly, other researchers have called for structural changes to academia to better support academic mothers and promote gender equity (Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022; Parrish et al., 2021; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020). Furthermore, academic institutions must support faculty in achieving balance in scholarship and their personal lives to promote well-being and quality of life for faculty (Bell & Fong, 2021; Burk et al., 2021), who often serve as role models, mentors, and supervisors for doctoral student mothers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has far-reaching, cascading impacts on gender inequities and other social implications of (Blum & Dobrotić, 2021). The COVID-19 global pandemic shutdown exacerbated the already thin margins for working doctoral student mothers, further depleting their previously limited resources and capacities for coping. Consequentially, doctoral student mothers have been forced to adapt their various roles or adjust their responsibilities and daily lives to persist in their doctoral programs, and perhaps even more so while transitioning through a pandemic.

Summary

This review of the literature related to the lived experiences of working mothers persisting in CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs while transitioning through the COVID-19 global pandemic covered various interconnected concepts. This included doctoral persistence, supports to help with attrition such as family and spirituality, motherhood and academia, gender inequities, and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on working doctoral student mothers. Chapter 3 discusses this study's methods.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology was to describe how working mothers of children under the age of 12 in the final year of a CACREP-accredited CES doctoral program described their lived experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic created additional barriers for the persistence of doctoral student mothers who—at their pre-pandemic baseline—were prone to experience higher levels of stress during their educational programs (Lovell, 2014; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Sverdlik et al., 2018) and thus were already at greater risk of attrition (Kent et al., 2020; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020). This chapter describes the current study's methods including research design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, the researcher's role, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Design

I employed Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach and used semistructured interviews to explore the lived experiences of working mothers persisting in CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs while transitioning through the COVID-19 pandemic. Before selecting the transcendental phenomenological approach, it was important to first consider reasons for using qualitative inquiry over quantitative methods. Next, the various qualitative traditions were narrowed down to phenomenology. Lastly, the transcendental and hermeneutical approaches were differentiated to arrive at the final selection of the transcendental approach. This method was selected because it provided a suitable way to achieve deeper understanding of the meaning of lived experiences (Patton, 2014).

Qualitative Versus Quantitative

Though quantitative studies generate numbers and can predict or explain outcomes and determine relationships of causality or correlation, qualitative studies generate words and are appropriate for exploring a single phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018) in context (Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2014). Qualitative research is further characterized by certain distinctions: it elevates and empowers the participants' voices; it emphasizes the researcher's reflexivity and consideration of contextual factors (e.g., historical, political, social) that influence the participants' experiences; the problem's description and interpretation are rich and complex; themes, categories, and patterns emerge from data analysis; and a holistic picture of the study's findings is presented (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In qualitative research, participants are seen as co-researchers and as experts due to their direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation (Hays & Singh, 2012). Additionally, the researcher–participant relationship is egalitarian, characterized by trust and empathy (Hays & Singh, 2012). Furthermore, qualitative research in natural settings (e.g., counseling offices or educational institutions) allows the researcher to study participants' experiences related to social structures and social roles in their environments, which can help guide policy change (Hays & Singh, 2012). For these reasons, qualitative research methods were more appropriate for exploring lived experiences in this study.

Phenomenology

The phenomenological approach to qualitative research focuses on understanding the essence of the lived experience and addresses the study's research problem by describing the phenomenon's common meaning, essence, and structure for a group of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2014), ultimately reducing the individual participants' lived experiences with the phenomenon to a "universal essence" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). The researcher engages

in self-bracketing to set aside personal biases related to the phenomenon to better focus on participant experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological research traditions have been widely applied to counseling and educational settings to better understand the experiences of clients and students, respectively (Hays & Singh, 2012). Other likely choices of qualitative research traditions such as heuristic inquiry would be less effective because heuristic inquiry emphasizes intense experiences of a phenomenon by the primary investigator and co-researchers and focuses more on personal significance of the findings (Patton, 2014). The phenomenological research tradition can be further divided into two approaches—transcendental and hermeneutical.

Transcendental Versus Hermeneutical Approaches

Though the transcendental and hermeneutical approaches to phenomenological research share commonalities, they can also be differentiated in significant ways. The hermeneutical phenomenological approach focuses more on interpretation of lived experiences' meaning and does not include specific methods or rules, only interrelated research activities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach focuses on description of the participants' experiences rather than their interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, the transcendental approach emphasizes epoche—that is, abstaining from judgment (Hays & Singh, 2012)—which involves bracketing (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This refers to setting aside personal experiences and views to examine the participants' lived experiences from a fresh perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas's (1994) transcendental approach also differs from the hermeneutical approach with its use of a systematic set of procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This study's qualitative research design was based on Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach. Moustakas' transcendental approach employs the following general

procedures: The first step is to identify a phenomenon to examine and then bracket oneself as the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The next step is to collect data from multiple participants who have the lived experience of the phenomenon. The steps for data analysis involve reduction of data to noteworthy quotes or statements made by participants (i.e., horizonalization) and then into composite themes (i.e., clusters of meaning). Data analysis continues by creating both textural description (i.e., what was experienced by the participants) and structural description (i.e., imaginative variation; how participants experienced the phenomenon regarding its contexts, situations, and conditions), followed by synthesizing a composite of the two descriptions to capture the totality of the experience—its essence or essential invariant structure. Lastly, the phenomenon's essence is presented in written form (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994) and represents the participant group's collective essence of the experience (Hays & Singh, 2012). Further details are provided later in the Data Collection and Data Analysis sections of this chapter.

The transcendental phenomenological approach was the most appropriate qualitative inquiry method for exploring the lived experiences of working mothers persisting in CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs transitioning through the COVID-19 pandemic for various reasons. First, this study's research problem considered the collective experiences of a certain phenomenon from several participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Next, insight into these shared experiences might spur advances in policy and practice. Lastly, the transcendental phenomenological approach can foster a better understanding of various aspects of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Questions

This study used Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework to guide selection of appropriate research questions. The study was focused on a central research question—How do participants describe what the COVID-19 global pandemic has been like for them as they move through the transition from both academia and the pandemic?—and three subquestions, which pertained to adaptation to transition within each of the three phases (i.e., moving in, moving through, and moving out) from Schlossberg's theoretical framework:

Subquestion 1: How do participants describe moving in?

Subquestion 2: How do participants describe moving through?

Subquestion 3: How do participants describe moving out?

Setting

The current study—which explored the lived experiences of working mothers persisting in CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs transitioning through the COVID-19 global pandemic—encompassed March 2022 through May 2022. The study's setting consisted of CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs. This setting was appropriate for studying persistence of CES doctoral student mothers. Additionally, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the study's timeline was appropriate for examining participants' lived experiences transitioning through the pandemic.

Participants

Participants recruited for the current study included working mothers of children under the age of 12 who were in the final year of a CACREP-accredited CES doctoral program and recent graduates since the COVID-19 pandemic began in the United States in March 2020. This study aimed to recruit between seven and 15 participants, which fit within the typical range of

three to 15 participants in a phenomenological study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Further, it is understood that depth of inquiry is deeper with fewer participants.

Sampling

This study used purposive sampling and snowballing to obtain an appropriate sample for this research design. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants who met specific criteria. Purposive sampling aims to select participants who can provide substantial, detailed information about the phenomenon of interest (Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2014). Snowball sampling (also called network or chain sampling) is used to identify additional fitting participants from the social networks of those participants already selected (Hays & Singh, 2012). One advantage of snowballing is its easy access to a larger pool of potential participants. In the current study, snowball sampling was used in concert with purposive sampling to attain a sample of participants who could provide rich information about the phenomenon under investigation (Hays & Singh, 2012).

The study's selection criteria included the following:

1) Participant is 18 years or older,
2) Self-identify as a woman,
3) Participant who is in her final year or recently graduated from a CACREP-accredited counselor education doctoral program since the COVID-19 pandemic began in the United States in March 2020,
4) Participant who is a mother with at least one child under age 12 living in the home during the pandemic, and
5) Participant who is willing to participate in the study.

The rationale for selecting the first criterion was to select participants who recently completed (persisted) or were currently persisting near the end of their doctoral programs, both of which indicated the experience of doctoral persistence. Furthermore, recent graduates since the pandemic onset have experienced persisting through their doctoral programs while also transitioning through the pandemic. The rationale for selecting the second criterion was to select participants who experienced the mother role while persisting in their doctoral programs and transitioning through the pandemic. The assumption was that children under age 12 likely needed additional assistance with remote learning when schools closed and learning became the caregiver's responsibility in the home. The third criterion suggested that each participant's willingness to participate was vital to this study. Since the design of this study involved detailed individual interviews and a focus group, participants must have been willing to commit the necessary time to sufficiently address the interview questions.

Procedures

Procedures for the current study were delineated as follows:

1) Attained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix A).
2) Recruited participants via electronic distribution of recruitment letter (see Appendix B) to CES NETwork – ListServ (CESNET-L) subscribers.
3) Screened participants via electronic distribution of screening questionnaire (see Appendix C).
4) Sent informed consent document via email and scheduled each participant for her preference of either an individual interview or participation in a focus group, conducted via Zoom.

5) Met via Zoom and conducted interviews (see Appendix E). None of the participants indicated preference for the focus group, so it was not held. Interviews were recorded for audio-video.
6) Continued interviewing participants until saturation was reached.
7) Transcribed audio-video recordings and analyzed data.

I also bracketed myself as the researcher by writing in a reflective research journal (see Appendix D) throughout data collection and data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The Researcher's Role

In Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach, the researcher's role is that of an instrument, which can influence the study's data collection. Consideration included my past or current professional roles at the study's setting and any past or current professional relationships with the participants along with how these roles and relationships were likely to affect data collection. My past or current professional roles at the study's setting—which consisted of CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs—included only my role as a current doctoral candidate in a CACREP-accredited CES program. I did not have any past or current relationships with seven of the participants to disclose; however, three of the participants I knew from my own CES program (two were recent graduates, and one was a doctoral candidate in her final year of the program).

My biases as this study's researcher included that I am currently a doctoral student mother in the final year of a CACREP-accredited CES program, and I have persisted while transitioning through the COVID-19 pandemic. I have two children under 12 years of age living in my home, and I transitioned to working remotely from home during the initial onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. I was responsible for providing childcare as well as assistance with remote

learning for both my home-bound school-age children throughout the pandemic. I encountered the difficult decision to resign my position to provide full-time childcare and remote learning assistance for my children while persisting in my doctoral program and adjusting to the program's transition to virtual intensive courses from home.

Methods taken to establish appropriate researcher–participant working relationships included the use of epoche and bracketing (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). In my role of researcher as instrument, I bracketed myself by writing in a reflective research journal (see Appendix D) about my thoughts, feelings, and attitudes going into and out of the participant interviews.

Data Collection

Data collection began and was completed in April 2022. Data collection methods consisted of semistructured individual interviews conducted via Zoom to solicit participant responses to the interview questions (see Appendix E), which were developed to address the study's research questions aligned with Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological research methods. The date, time, duration, and audio-video of each scheduled participant interview were recorded.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included Moustakas's (1994) four steps (core processes) through which knowledge is derived including epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings. Data analysis also included objective review of the audit trail by a qualitative data auditor to evaluate the study's rigor (Hays & Singh, 2012). The audio-video recordings of the participant interviews were transcribed. These raw data were initially reported

in narrative text and was eventually coded into themes and categories, which were organized in an outline format.

Epoche

As mentioned, Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach focuses on epoche, which is synonymous with bracketing. Both terms refer to the researcher's setting aside of personal experiences, prior understanding, judgments, preconceptions, assumptions, biases, prejudices, values, and views to examine the participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2014). Epoche is the first step—and is also a continual process—in data analysis for a transcendental phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2014). Further, epoche can be described as the researcher's reflective suspension of their experiences and understanding until or unless an intentional decision is made regarding their inclusion into the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenological Reduction

The second step in data analysis involves phenomenological reduction to bracket the data (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2014). The phenomenon is approached on its own terms through a five-step process for data bracketing (Patton, 2014). The first step is to generate statements or phrases central to directly perceiving the phenomenon. The second step is to interpret the meanings of these generated statements or phrases. The third step (if possible) is to solicit feedback from the participant to interpret the generated statements or phrases. The fourth step is to examine the meanings to discover the essential aspects of the phenomenon. The fifth step is to develop a statement which defines the phenomenon in terms of its essential aspects (Patton, 2014).

Imaginative Variation

After the first two steps of epoche and phenomenological reduction are completed and the data are bracketed, the researcher begins the third process in data analysis—imaginative variation—to discover essential qualities of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2014). This begins with horizonalizing the data—that is, considering each aspect or element of the data as equivalent to one another (Patton, 2014). The data are examined and clustered by their meanings, and redundant or irrelevant data are removed. The invariant themes found in the data undergo the imaginative variation process by which the researcher examines each theme to perceive it from various vantage points, further expanding the invariant themes originally developed (Patton, 2014).

Synthesis of Meanings

After imaginative variation, the researcher begins synthesizing meanings during the fourth core process in data analysis (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2014). The researcher first uses textural description to portray the content of an experience. Next, from these textural descriptions, the researcher develops structural descriptions by synthesizing how the group of participants experienced the phenomenon as well as the underlying meanings for the group's collective experience. The last step is to integrate the combined textural and structural descriptions into synthesis of the collective meanings—the essence of the lived experience for the group of participants (Patton, 2014).

Trustworthiness

This transcendental phenomenological study used appropriate qualitative methods and procedures to address the study's trustworthiness and academic rigor. The similar concept of validity in quantitative designs is conveyed in qualitative research traditions by the study's

trustworthiness (Hays & Singh, 2012). Put another way, trustworthiness indicates the qualitative study's findings fully considered participants' voices regarding their experiences in context, and the conclusions seem appropriate (Hays & Singh, 2012). This section begins with a discussion of criteria for trustworthiness which covers credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, authenticity, coherence, sampling adequacy, ethical validation, substantive validation, and creativity. After criteria are explained, this study's methods for ensuring trustworthiness are described including the researcher's reflexive research journal, triangulation of data and investigators (including the use of a qualitative data auditor), member checking, thick description, and an audit trail.

Credibility

The credibility of a qualitative study conveys its general believability (Hays & Singh, 2012). This concept is like the concept of internal validity in quantitative studies and helps the researcher determine whether the findings make sense. Credibility is one of the most important criteria used to determine whether a qualitative study is trustworthy (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Transferability

The transferability of a qualitative study is also called naturalistic generalizability and suggests the study's degree of generalizability to other groups of individuals (Hays & Singh, 2012). Transferability is like the concept of external validity, or generalizability, in quantitative studies. However, the goal of a qualitative study is not to generalize the results to other populations but to enable the reader or target audience to determine whether and to what extent the study's findings can be extended to other settings or groups. This is one reason why the researcher must precisely describe participants, settings, methods, and procedures with ample

details to allow consumers of the research to make more informed decisions about the study's transferability (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Dependability

Dependability is the consistency of obtaining similar findings across researchers and over time (Hays & Singh, 2012). Dependability requires the researcher to demonstrate use of procedures so that comparable findings can be applied to similar studies. Further, all co-researchers agree that the study's findings are accurate (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Confirmability

For qualitative research, the researcher's neutrality and objectivity are indicated by the study's confirmability of its methods (Hays & Singh, 2012). That is, confirmability signifies the researcher's ability to conduct the study free of personal bias or other interference to accurately describe the data and genuinely represent participants' experiences as closely as possible. One way to accomplish confirmability in a study is to let the data speak by going back to the participants' voices directly as the participants reveal their experiences of a phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Authenticity

In qualitative research, authenticity refers to the researcher's truthful, accurate representation of participants' perceptions and experiences of the phenomenon under investigation (Hays & Singh, 2012). This criterion is like confirmability; however, authenticity denotes theoretical as opposed to methodological criteria (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Coherence

Qualitative research must ensure the notion of coherence (also called congruence)—referring to the consistent use of the qualitative tradition which was appropriately selected for the

study's design, purpose, and research questions (Hays & Singh, 2012). In other words, the selected research tradition must be capable of appropriately addressing the research questions, and the selected approach should be consistently used throughout the research process. Furthermore, there must be consistency between the research tradition's methods and the study's purpose, design, data collection, data analysis, and findings and throughout the research report overall (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Sampling Adequacy

Another criterion for trustworthiness in qualitative research is sampling adequacy. It is important to obtain a sample that is appropriate in both size and composition for the study's purpose and selected qualitative research tradition (Hays & Singh, 2012). The sampling method must also fit the selected qualitative research tradition and recruit enough participants who can provide the targeted data for the study's design (Hays & Singh, 2012). For the current study the aim was to recruit between seven and 14 participants. Ten participants were recruited, fitting the typical range of three to 15 participants for a phenomenological study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical Validation

Ethical validation is a criterion for trustworthiness in qualitative research referring to the degree to which researchers comply with ethical and moral responsibilities and practices throughout the entire research process (Hays & Singh, 2012). This ethical compliance begins with the obligation to select study topics with potential for meaningful contributions to practice, theory, or society as well as those that might inspire further research efforts. Additionally, researchers must carefully consider sociocultural contexts within human science inquiry. For example, the researcher must obtain informed consent from participants as one aspect of the ethical considerations for conducting a study (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Substantive Validation

Substantive validation—which is also called relevance criterion—refers to the level of substance, meaningfulness, or relevance of the study's findings (Hays & Singh, 2012). Put another way, this criterion exemplifies how significantly the study contributes to the knowledge base or practice. Ultimately, the trustworthiness criterion of substantive validation necessitates the study's entire research process be fully transparent for others to review and evaluate its methods, procedures, and claims (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Creativity

Creativity and flexibility in qualitative designs and throughout the research process further demonstrate the study's trustworthiness and rigor (Hays & Singh, 2012). Examples of creativity include using novel techniques in data analysis as well as in how the data is organized or presented (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Methods for Ensuring Trustworthiness

It is important to employ several methods to maximize a qualitative study's trustworthiness, and strategies must be congruent with the study's particular research tradition (Hays & Singh, 2012). For this transcendental phenomenological study, the following strategies were selected to ensure trustworthiness: reflexive research journal, triangulation of data and investigators (including the use of a qualitative auditor), member checking, thick description, and an audit trail.

Reflexive Research Journal

Because the researcher's role is important to a transcendental phenomenological study, the researcher should record sufficient notes and personal reflections throughout via a reflexive research journal which aids in creating an audit trail (Hays & Singh, 2012). In the reflexive

research journal, the researcher writes about personal thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and reactions related to the research or participants and how he or she is being impacted by the research (Hays & Singh, 2012). The reflexive research journal for the current study is in Appendix D.

Triangulation

Triangulation strategies for ensuring a study's trustworthiness include triangulation of data sources, triangulation of investigators, and triangulation of data methods. Triangulation of data sources ensures a qualitative study's trustworthiness by including multiple sources of evidence to uphold, strengthen, and more accurately describe the study's findings (Hays & Singh, 2012). For the current transcendental phenomenological study, multiple participant perspectives (voices) were included in the data. To accomplish triangulation, the study's findings were evaluated in terms of inconsistencies versus completeness (Hays & Singh, 2012). Triangulation of investigators (also called stepwise replication) significantly strengthens the research design and is accomplished by employing multiple researchers in data collection, data analysis, report generation, or presentation of the study's findings and can include the use of a qualitative data auditor. An auditor is an expert in both qualitative research and the study's research topic who comprehensively and objectively examines the audit trail to evaluate the study's rigor (Hays & Singh, 2012). The current study employed such a qualitative data auditor to review its audit trail for triangulation of investigators. Lastly, triangulation of data methods involves using numerous methods to depict themes (Hays & Singh, 2012). This study offered participants their choice of either individual interviews or participation in a focus group to achieve triangulation of data methods.

Member Checking

Member checking (also called respondent validation or interpretative validity) is considered one of the most important strategies for ensuring a study's trustworthiness as it involves continually consulting participants as co-researchers to confirm the study's findings throughout their development (Hays & Singh, 2012). The goal for member checking is to achieve the most accurate depiction of meanings of the participants' experiences as possible. This can include activities such as clarifying participant statements during data collection and reviewing transcripts and soliciting feedback about the degree to which the data analysis exemplifies their experiences of the phenomenon under investigation (Hays & Singh, 2012). The current study used both member checking activities.

Thick Description

The use of thick description (also called vividness) is another strategy for ensuring a study's trustworthiness (Hays & Singh, 2012). Thick description involves using ample details (e.g., regarding observations, events, actions, facts, expressed feelings) to infer their meanings and underlying messages. There are four key components of thick description: context of the action, the action's meanings and intentions, the origin and development of the action, and the presentation of the action's thick description in narrative form. Thick description is used to vividly portray the research process, context, and findings, allowing the reader to draw conclusions (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Audit Trail

Researchers maintain audit trails as evidence of their entire research process, which includes comprehensive, step-by-step procedures for collection and analysis of the data (Hays & Singh, 2012). Keeping an audit trail helps the researcher comply with ethical requirements for

record-keeping in research. These are the records reviewed by qualitative auditors. Some examples of records contained in an audit trail include the following: research timeline, participant contacts, informed consent documents, demographic records, data collection records, interview guides, reflexive research journals, codebooks drafts, transcriptions, and video and audio recordings (Hays & Singh, 2012). The current study maintained an audit trail including all the previously mentioned research records.

Ethical Considerations

Methods were taken to ensure ethical protection of participants during the study. First, approval was obtained by the IRB prior to conducting the study (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). Informed consent for participation in the study was obtained from all participants. This included disclosure of the study's purpose and assurance that participation was voluntary, and any personal or institutional identifying information was protected as private and confidential and was not disclosed in the dissertation. Fictitious names were assigned to participants so their true names were not associated with the data. Data collection and storage methods followed measures for security. All findings were honestly reported, including those that might have posed divergent perspectives. Furthermore, as the researcher, I remained sensitive to participant needs related to vulnerable populations or cultural differences throughout the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

This chapter described the study's methods including research design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, the researcher's role, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. The COVID-19 pandemic posed additional challenges for the persistence of doctoral student mothers who, pre-pandemic, were already

vulnerable to suffering higher levels of stress and were at greater risk of attrition than their male colleagues and peers without children. Based on the research problem and the purpose of the study, Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach was selected for this study's research design. The next chapter discusses this study's findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This study explored the lived experiences of working mothers persisting in CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs while transitioning through the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was focused on a central research question pertaining to general adaptation to transition and three subquestions pertaining to adaptation to transition within each of the three phases (i.e., moving in, moving through, and moving out) of the transition from Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework. In this chapter, findings are presented that synthesize the narratives from the participants' individual interviews. Since no participants indicated preference for the focus group, all interviews were conducted individually. Themes were developed by coding and clustering meanings from the data collected in the participants' verbal descriptions and transcriptions of the individual interviews. This chapter includes discussion regarding how the research questions were addressed and how the themes were developed and concludes with a chapter summary.

Participants

The participants for this study were recruited via electronic distribution of a recruitment letter (Appendix B) to CESNET-L subscribers. The recruitment letter was also sent via email to female CES faculty from various universities requesting they forward the recruitment letter to CES doctoral student mothers in their programs who meet the criteria and might be willing to participate. Seven of the participants (i.e., Abigail, Deborah, Hannah, Julia, Maria, Naomi, and Sarah) were recruited via the CESNET-L announcement or by female CES faculty from various universities forwarding the recruitment letter to them. The remaining three participants (i.e., Elizabeth, Faith, and Isabelle) were found through acquaintances of people I know personally. All 10 participants completed the online screening questionnaire (Appendix C) and were found

to have met the criteria for participation. The participants returned their signed informed consent documents to me via email prior to their scheduled individual interviews. Ten individual interviews were conducted and recorded in April of 2022 via Zoom. The audio-video recordings were automatically transcribed via the Otter AI application.

The first participant, Abigail, was limited in her availability to schedule the interview due to lack of childcare, and I conducted the interview while Abigail held her infant daughter in her arms, occasionally rocking, bouncing, patting, caressing, or repositioning her daughter as necessary. The third participant, Elizabeth, explained that she may need to bring her 4-month-old baby with her during the interview when she scheduled. The fifth participant, Hannah, was interviewed with her 10-year-old daughter appearing intermittently in the background. Hannah, who wore headphones, paused the interview several times and removed the headphones from one ear to respond to her daughter's requests and assure her daughter that she would not be long on the call. She apologized to me each time the interview was "interrupted" and spoke of her challenges as a single mother without any childcare, especially when her daughter was at home doing remote learning for school. The sixth participant, Isabelle, was delayed in responding to my email to schedule her interview due to her children being out of school. The seventh participant, Julia, had to reschedule her interview once due to her 16-month-old daughter being sick. The eighth participant, Maria, had to schedule her interview within a small window of availability on a specific day (she had exactly 50 minutes total) before she had to pick up one of her sons from an appointment. The ninth participant, Naomi, who is a school counselor, warned me that she might get interrupted by school children during our interview if scheduled during the school day, and she was unavailable to schedule on weekends due to her personal boundaries to protect her family time with her own children. The tenth participant, Sarah, was delayed in

scheduling her interview due to her school workload as she was nearing the end of the semester, thus she was the final participant to be interviewed. Only the second and fourth participants (Deborah and Faith, respectively) were scheduled for their interviews with relative ease and availability.

Individual Portraits

This section presents the 10 individuals—Abigail, Deborah, Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, Naomi, and Sarah (all pseudonyms)—whose narratives encompass the study's data. First, the individual participants are described based on my interactions with each one. The following individual portraits—listed alphabetically by the participants' pseudonyms—describe each participant based on information gathered from the screening questionnaires and during the individual interviews.

Abigail

Abigail identifies as a White/Caucasian female between the ages of 30 to 39 years old and is of upper-middle class SES. She is married with two young children and is a recent graduate of a residential CES program in Pennsylvania. Abigail became pregnant with her second child during her doctoral program and graduated when her daughter was an infant. Both Abigail and her husband work from home full-time as licensed professional counselors while she also cares for her infant daughter. Abigail identifies as a "non-denominational Christian who is more agnostic." Though she does not consider herself religious, she does consider herself "very spiritual" and prays to a higher power.

Deborah

Deborah is a 45-year-old White/Caucasian female and is of upper-middle class SES. She is married with three children (ages 5, 7, and 13) and is in the final year of a residential CES

program in New Jersey. Deborah has a background in teaching, ministry, and pastoral counseling and currently works as a professional counselor in private practice. Deborah identifies as Christian and attends an Episcopal church.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth identifies as a White/Caucasian female between the ages of 30 to 39 years old and is of upper-middle class SES. She is married with three children (ages 4 months, 4 years, and 6 years) and is a recent graduate of a hybrid CES program in Virginia. Both Elizabeth and her husband are professional counselors working together in their telehealth private practice and are also both online counselor educators. Elizabeth and her husband provide all childcare for their two youngest children, whereas their oldest daughter attends kindergarten mostly in-person. Both Elizabeth and her husband identify as Christian.

Faith

Faith identifies as both a White/Caucasian and Hispanic/Latina female between the ages of 30 to 39 years old and is of middle-class SES. She is married with two children (a newborn and a 2 year old) and is a recent graduate of a hybrid CES program in Virginia. Faith works full time as a director at a community mental health agency. Both Faith and her husband identify as Christian.

Hannah

Hannah identifies as a White/Caucasian female between the ages of 30 to 39 years old. She is divorced, has a 10-year-old daughter, and is in the final year of a hybrid CES program in Illinois. Hannah works full time in clinical counseling and does not consider herself religious or spiritual.

Isabelle

Isabelle identifies as a Black (non-African American) female between the ages of 40 to 49 years old and is of upper-middle class SES. She is married with three children and is an international student in the final year of a hybrid CES program based in Virginia. Isabelle works full time as a school counselor and identifies as Christian.

Julia

Julia identifies as a Black/African American female between the ages of 30 to 39 years old. She is single (never married), has a 16-month-old daughter who is living (she also had several miscarriages throughout her doctoral program), and is in the final year of a residential CES program in Pennsylvania. Julia works full time in drug and alcohol rehabilitation counseling as a licensed marriage and family therapist, identifies as Christian, and claims a "personal relationship with Christ."

Maria

Maria identifies as a White/Caucasian female between the ages of 30 to 39 years old and is of upper-middle class SES. She is married with three children (a 6-month-old daughter and 3- and 5-year-old sons) and is a recent graduate of a residential CES program in Ohio. Maria works full time as a licensed professional counselor. Maria identifies as Christian but "is not practicing."

Naomi

Naomi identifies as a Hispanic/Latinx female between the ages of 30 to 39 years old. She is married with two children (8-year-old son and 12-year-old daughter) and is in the final year of a hybrid CES program in Georgia. Naomi works full time as a school counselor at a private Christian school. She identifies as Christian and considers herself very spiritual.

Sarah

Sarah identifies as a White/Caucasian female between the ages of 40 to 49 years old. She is married with two children (10-year-old daughter and 14-year-old son) and is in the final year of a hybrid CES program in Pennsylvania. Sarah works full time in a rural area as a licensed professional counselor and provides clinical supervision. Sarah does not consider herself religious or spiritual.

The following table shows some of the participants' commonalities as well as individual characteristics.

Table 1

Characteristics of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Marital status	Children	Program	State	Grad/Final Year
1 Abigail	Female	30-39	White/ Caucasian	M	2	Residential	PA	Grad
2 Deborah	Female	40-49	White/ Caucasian	M	3	Residential	NJ	Final Year
3 Elizabeth	Female	30-39	White/ Caucasian	M	3	Hybrid	VA	Grad
4 Faith	Female	30-39	White/ Caucasian & Hispanic/Latina	M	2	Hybrid	VA	Grad
5 Hannah	Female	30-39	White/ Caucasian	D	1	Hybrid	IL	Final Year
6 Isabelle	Female	40-49	Black	M	3	Hybrid	VA	Final Year
7 Julia	Female	30-39	Black/African American	Single	1	Residential	PA	Final Year
8 Maria	Female	30-39	White/ Caucasian	M	3	Residential	OH	Grad
9 Naomi	Female	30-39	Hispanic/Latinx	M	2	Hybrid	GA	Final Year
10 Sarah	Female	40-49	White/ Caucasian	M	2	Hybrid	PA	Final Year

Results

The central research question was “How do participants describe what the COVID-19 global pandemic has been like for them as they move through the transition from both academia and the pandemic?” The three subquestions included “How do participants describe moving into the pandemic?,” “How do participants describe moving through the pandemic?,” and “How do participants describe moving out of the pandemic?” Data analysis revealed four major themes: academic motherhood, support, adaptive response, and socio-cultural-political-spiritual awareness. All four major themes were connected to all three research subquestions.

Theme Development

Immediately prior to each of the 10 individual interviews, I attempted to bracket myself by writing in a reflective research journal (Appendix D) about my thoughts, feelings, and attitudes regarding the phenomenon under investigation and the research process. Immediately after each of the 10 individual interviews, I completed a contact summary sheet (Appendix G) in which I listed the following: (a) the main issues or themes that stood out for me in this participant; (b) any discrepancies or struggles I noted in the participant’s response; (c) anything else that stood out as salient, interesting, or important in this participant; and (d) general comments about how this participant’s responses compared with other participants. I continued writing in my reflective research journal as I became aware of any new thoughts, feelings, attitudes, biases, and reactions regarding the phenomenon under investigation throughout the research process. After I completed each individual interview, contact summary sheet, and transcription of the audio-video recording, I began data analysis.

As previously detailed, data analysis included Moustakas’s (1994) four steps (core processes) through which knowledge is derived including epoche, phenomenological reduction,

imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings. After engaging in epoche and self-bracketing (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2014), I engaged in phenomenological reduction to bracket the data (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2014). This involved generating statements or phrases central to directly perceiving the phenomenon, interpreting the meanings of these generated statements or phrases, examining these meanings to discover the essential aspects of the phenomenon, and developing a statement that defined the phenomenon in terms of its essential aspects (Patton, 2014). Next, I began imaginative variation to discover essential qualities of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2014). I engaged in horizonalizing the data, considering each aspect or element of the data as equivalent to one another (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2014). I then examined and clustered the data by their meanings and removed any redundant or irrelevant data. I continually looked for emerging themes as coding evolved and then synthesized the meanings.

Data analysis also included a qualitative data auditor who objectively reviewed the codes and themes as well as the audit trail to ensure the study's rigor (Hays & Singh, 2012). The data auditor confirmed this study's findings (themes) and assisted in further refining the Support theme implications specifically regarding development of academic mother support groups amongst peers or cohorts, whether on campus or virtually via social media. I also conducted member checking to ensure the study's trustworthiness by consulting participants as co-researchers to confirm the study's findings and to achieve the most accurate depiction of meanings of the participants' experiences as possible (Hays & Singh, 2012). After initial data analysis, I emailed each participant an outline of themes and subthemes pertaining to her individual data with her direct quotations to provide an opportunity to answer any questions and address any concerns as well as make any necessary clarifications or adjustments to her data. The

goal of member checking was to solicit participants' feedback about the degree to which the data analysis exemplified their experiences of the phenomenon under investigation (Hays & Singh, 2012). All 10 participants confirmed the study's findings as accurately reflecting their experiences.

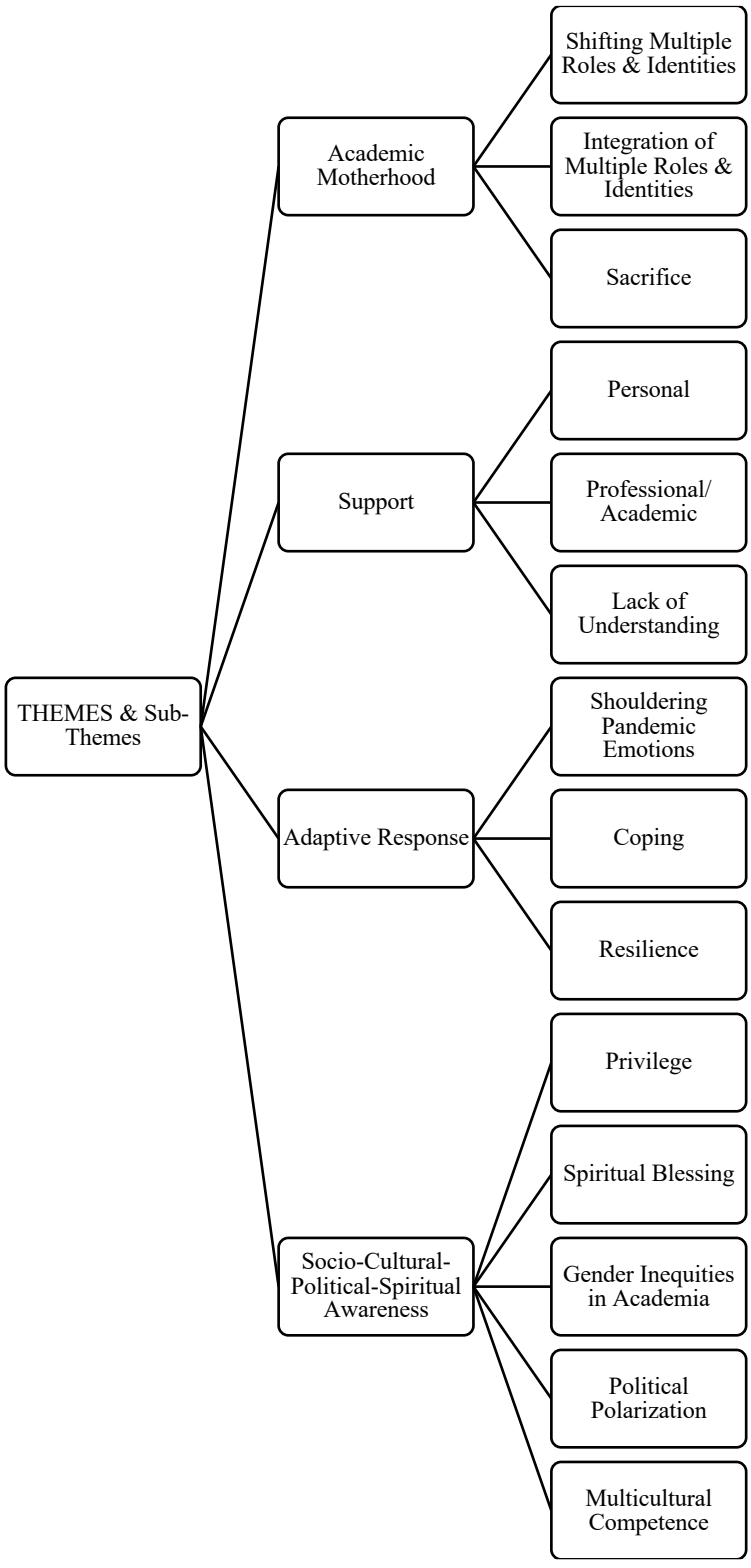
I used an intuitive approach in developing a code structure to outline the emerging themes and subthemes in a Word document. With the chair's assistance, I developed the themes and subthemes based on hierarchical relationships between the codes of categories and themes and included participants' direct quotations as evidence of themes and subthemes. I refined this document continually throughout the coding and re-coding process of data analysis. I then compared the codes and themes with the literature base and did not locate any data that opposed the literature base.

Themes

After reading the transcripts and my notes on the contact summary sheets (Appendix G), I coded repeated words, statements, phrases, constructs, and perspectives, and four major themes emerged across the participants. These four primary themes included academic motherhood, support, adaptive response, and socio-cultural-political-spiritual awareness and were connected to all three subquestions. Each of the four primary themes were found to be connected to each of the three phases of transition. The following figure presents the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data.

Figure 1

Themes and Subthemes



Theme 1: Academic Motherhood

The lived experiences of working mothers persisting in CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs while transitioning through the COVID-19 pandemic are characterized as academic motherhood. The emergence of this first theme is well-supported by the literature on persistence of doctoral student mothers—who are particularly vulnerable to stress and attrition (Kent et al., 2020; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020)—and the intersectionality of motherhood and academia (e.g., Beech et al., 2021; Breitenbach et al., 2019; Hermann,Gerlowski, et al., 2020; Hermann, Haskins, et al., 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Neale-McFall, 2020; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017, 2018; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020).

This study's participants all described a shifting of multiple roles and identities, five describing an integration of multiple roles and identities (Deborah, Isabelle, Julia, Naomi, and Sarah), and nine describing great sacrifices made in the areas of work, life, and family (Abigail, Deborah, Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, and Naomi). Each of these findings are consistent with the existing research that doctoral student mothers experience great challenges with achieving balance and integration of their family, academic, and professional roles and identities (Beech et al., 2021; Lovell, 2014; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020). Theme 1 included the three subthemes of shifting multiple roles and identities, integration of multiple roles and identities, and sacrifice.

Shifting of Multiple Roles and Identities. All 10 participants confirmed this subtheme. This subtheme was especially apparent within Phase 1 of the COVID-19 global pandemic transition, which connected to the first subquestion, as transitioning into the pandemic

necessitated a shifting of the participants' multiple roles and identities. This finding is consistent with the research on the intersectionality of academia and motherhood as examined through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic (Beech et al., 2021; Bell & Fong, 2021; Burk et al., 2020; Kibbe, 2020; Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022; Parrish et al., 2021). Since the pandemic onset, many working student mothers have been faced with juggling their educational programs, remote work, and providing caregiving for children at home (Parrish et al., 2021). Maria stated, "With my work, I shifted responsibilities to focus on COVID stuff that I didn't sign up for." Sarah declared, "The hardest part was both my husband and I had to continue to work full time AND assist with teaching remote learning of my daughter and more parental involvement and caregiving at home." The other roles and responsibilities included childcare provider, teacher to remote learning school-age children, sole emotional support for children, remote learner in doctoral program, and CES professional.

***Childcare Provider*.** With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent shutdown of schools and childcare facilities, seven of the participants were left with no choice but to become the primary caregiver for their children in their homes (Deborah, Elizabeth, Hannah, Julia, Maria, Naomi, and Sarah). This finding is consistent with the literature on the pandemic describing women transitioning from work into unpaid caregiving roles at home (Bell & Fong, 2021; Heggeness et al., 2020; Parrish et al., 2021; Power, 2020), and many of these women also continued working remotely in their paid work. Thus, the pandemic placed a disproportionate burden on working mothers in academia who already suffered from significant lack of balance across their multiple competing roles and responsibilities (Bell & Fong, 2021; Cook & Grimshaw, 2021; Craig & Churchill, 2020; Czymara et al., 2021; Fisher et al., 2020; Fox, 2020; Heggeness et al., 2020; Lovell, 2014; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Mogro-Wilson et

al., 2022; Parrish et al., 2021; Power, 2020). Maria stated, “I didn’t sign up to be a stay-at-home mom.” Sarah similarly declared, “I never wanted to be a stay-at-home mom.” Additionally, two participants described their caregiving as including an overreliance on screens such as laptops/computers, tablets, televisions, and gaming consoles for their home-bound children’s entertainment (Deborah and Hannah). Hannah stated, “My daughter had way more screen time than she should have.”

Teacher to Remote Learning School-Age Children. Similarly, the pandemic shutdown of schools forced six of the participants into the challenging role of teacher for their remote learning school-age children who were secluded in their homes (Deborah, Elizabeth, Hannah, Julia, Maria, Naomi, and Sarah). Deborah declared, “It was a battle for my kids’ remote learning.” Naomi emphasized the struggles regarding teaching very young children with shorter attention spans: “It was hard to do remote learning with my kindergartener.” Again, Deborah highlighted an overreliance on screen time for children’s virtual learning beyond that of entertainment.

Sole Emotional Support for Children. Five participants described their struggles with becoming the sole emotional support for their children with the added burden of isolation due to the pandemic shutdown (Elizabeth, Hannah, Maria, Naomi, and Sarah). Maria stated, “I wasn’t able to emotionally support my kids.” Naomi emphasized the intentionality with which she emotionally supported her children during the trying times of the pandemic shutdown: “I balanced being real and authentic, showing emotion to my children for their emotional intelligence. Whereas in my [Hispanic] culture, moms aren’t supposed to show emotion.” Here, Naomi represented the intersectionality of the primary theme of academic motherhood with cultural implications of the pandemic shutdown.

Remote Learner in Doctoral Program. Eight participants described their challenges transitioning from residential or hybrid learning formats to strictly remote learning in their doctoral programs (Deborah, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, Naomi, and Sarah). The pandemic shutdown led to widespread disruptions to academic programs, with many transitioning to online learning environments for both students and faculty (Eigege & Kennedy, 2021). Hannah stated, "It was challenging to figure out how to attend virtual class." Isabelle, an international student, admitted, "I was losing interest and motivation in school with only virtual classes." Again, two participants described an overreliance on screens for their own remote learning in their doctoral programs (Deborah and Sarah). Deborah emphasized the downside of remote learning with her statement: "I observed people relying on virtual screens versus in-person and missing out on important pieces of human connection. Flexibility also works against us."

CES Professional. All 10 participants described how their individual CES professional identities and careers developed throughout, or were otherwise constrained, because of the pandemic. Isabelle described how the pandemic was limiting for her career progression:

> Before the pandemic, I had plans to leave the school counseling setting and use this degree to start a private practice, but I have to realistically and practically provide financially for my family if something else unexpected comes up. I am the breadwinner.

Inadequacy/Self-Doubt. Four participants (Faith, Hannah, Maria, and Naomi) described a personal sense of inadequacy or self-doubt regarding their capabilities to effectively give 100% of themselves while serving in any one of their multiple roles or within each of their areas of responsibility. Faith admitted, "I felt as if I could not perform each role successfully a lot of the time." Hannah stated, "I am never able to give 100 percent" and "I am struggling as a parent."

Maria declared, “I am spread so thin that everyone isn’t getting the best version of myself as a wife, mother, and professional … I was a horrible mother, wife, student!” Finally, Naomi stated, “I didn’t think I could do it all very well.” She later questioned herself, “Am I doing enough? Am I enough? Can I be a great mom, student, and professional?” This finding is consistent with the research demonstrating that low self-efficacy and feelings of unworthiness were central to doctoral students’ struggles and had negative implications for persistence (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Furthermore, this finding is also consistent with Schlossberg’s (1981) theoretical framework, which suggests that an individual’s self-confidence contributes to their psychological capacity for coping with change and stress (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 2011).

Blurred Lines. Three participants described a blurring of the lines between their various areas of responsibility accompanying the pandemic onset (Abigail, Hannah, and Naomi). This finding is consistent with the pandemic research indicating that the shift to remote work has blurred the lines between professional and personal life, resulting in even greater challenges in achieving balance, especially for working academic mothers (Burk et al., 2021). Abigail stated, “It all just got blurred,” and “everything blurred together.” Hannah contrasted the pre- and post-pandemic environments: “There were more distinct lines between work, school, and family, and things were separated more before the pandemic.” Naomi similarly reported that throughout the pandemic, “There was no separation between in-person and virtual at my school and work.”

Juggling. Eight participants described juggling their various roles, responsibilities, and priorities (Abigail, Deborah, Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Maria, Naomi, and Sarah). Both Abigail and Elizabeth used the phrase “balancing act,” and Naomi likewise asserted, “It is a juggling act. I am juggling a lot, making sure the most important things don’t fall.” Maria similarly stated, “It’s the hardest thing to find balance,” and “I am too busy and taking on too much.” Elizabeth

added, “I wear a lot of hats,” while Hannah similarly questioned, “How can I have all those hats and make it all work?” This finding is consistent with the literature that emphasized the struggles experienced by many doctoral students in balancing academics, family, and social responsibilities, feeling pulled in numerous directions regarding many competing priorities (Sverdlik et al., 2018).

Distractibility. Four participants described the experience of being easily distracted (Abigail, Faith, Hannah, and Julia). Julia emphasized the pandemic’s role in distractibility: “The pandemic distracted me from my dissertation,” and “I couldn’t focus.” Abigail and Hannah joined Julia in describing themselves as “not fully present.” Lastly, Faith described the common experience of sharing a household with multiple people (and pets) during the pandemic shutdown: “My child, dog, and husband were all vying for space and my attention.”

Finite Time. Three participants described the concept of finite time as related to a sense of purpose (Deborah, Isabelle, and Naomi). Isabelle reflected, “I have a different sense of time, spending my time intentionally.” Naomi asserted, “Time is going to pass no matter what … Be happy with what you’re spending your time doing.” This finding is consistent with the literature highlighting doctoral students’ finite resources like time experienced when attempting to balance academics, family, and social responsibilities (Sverdlik et al., 2018).

Time Pressure. Two participants described feeling time pressure (Deborah and Naomi). Deborah used the following phrases to describe her adjustment during Phase 1 of the pandemic transition: “quickly transition,” “rush,” and “mad scramble.” Naomi repeated the notion of “scrambling” with the pandemic shutdown of schools and daycare, stating, “I was scrambling to get my parents to care for my two kids.”

Integration of Multiple Roles and Identities. Five participants confirmed this subtheme (Deborah, Isabelle, Julia, Naomi, and Sarah), which coincided with a refining of the participants' values and priorities as they integrated their multiple roles and identities. This subtheme was especially apparent within Phases 2 and 3 of the pandemic transition (i.e., moving through and moving out). Deborah observed that through the pandemic, she "had the same values and priorities, but they were further refined." Isabelle reported that through the pandemic, she is "better at filtering through priorities, not wasting time on insignificant things. Little things don't matter." Likewise, Sarah stated, "I had a shift in priorities and values. I don't stress about the little things as much." Regarding her specific re-vectoring of values throughout the pandemic, Julia noted, "I value family time more." These findings are consistent with the broader doctoral persistence literature that has emphasized the necessity of family, social, and academic role integration (Holmes & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2020; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016; Skakni, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018). Furthermore, the more recent literature on doctoral student mother persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the increased challenges for achieving balance and integration of the multiple identities, roles, and responsibilities held by these busy women with young children (Beech et al., 2021).

Sacrifice. Nine participants confirmed this subtheme pertaining to the areas of work, life/leisure, and family (Abigail, Deborah, Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, and Naomi). Faith illustrated the idea of sacrifice avoidance: "How do you do both things you love—my babies and counseling work—without sacrificing one?" Naomi similarly described the notion of sacrifice avoidance, particularly regarding her family/child: "I would literally drop out of my doctoral program in a heartbeat for my daughter if she asked me to." This finding is consistent with the research reporting the vulnerability for relationships with friends and family to become

stressed and to experience greater emotional distance and less quality time together as doctoral students must make sacrifices to find time for scholarly work (Pifer & Baker, 2016; Skakni, 2018). The doctoral journey involves much suffering and sacrifice (Skakni, 2018), such as family, work, and life/leisure.

Family Sacrifice. Seven participants described sacrificing their families for work and/or life/leisure (Abigail, Deborah, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, and Maria). Abigail illustrated the idea of sacrificing family for work and academics with, "I brought my laptop on family vacations." Hannah indicated that her family took a back seat to her work throughout the pandemic: "The workday was stretching out longer than usual." Additionally, seven of the participants (Abigail, Deborah, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, and Maria) experienced "mom guilt." Isabelle indicated that "Every mom wants to spend every waking moment with their kids." Isabelle's assumption regarding the ideal mother stands in stark contrast to many of the participants' academic motherhood experiences throughout the pandemic. Hannah stated, "The PhD is a guilty endeavor," and later added "I'm kind of a shitty mom right now." Abigail shared, "My husband constantly reminded me I wasn't doing this TO our family, but FOR our family." Deborah shared, "I took night classes two nights per week during prime family time."

Work Sacrifice. Three participants described sacrificing their work in favor of their families throughout the pandemic (Faith, Julia, and Naomi). Naomi stated, "I began working less in favor of more quality time with the kids. My priorities shifted from work back to family … I do NOT take work home!" Both Faith and Julia also described their experiences of taking maternity leave when they gave birth during their doctoral programs as sacrificing their work for their families.

Life/Leisure Sacrifice. Seven participants described sacrificing their leisure time for work/academics and/or family time (Abigail, Deborah, Elizabeth, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, and Maria). Both Abigail and Deborah laughed and exclaimed, "What leisure?!" indicating they had no time for leisure activities. Abigail added, "leisure time was eliminated," and "I sacrificed a lot in life … life was put on hold." Five participants described a decrease in their leisure time and activities (Elizabeth, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, and Maria). Elizabeth declared, "the leisure impact was awful." Maria similarly stated, "Leisure took a hit." Deborah described her experience substituting her doctoral program studies in lieu of her previous leisure activities: "The doctorate was my leisure, for fun." Isabelle highlighted the participants' collectively-held desire to venture out post-pandemic and travel: "I haven't traveled in over two years! I need a sense of the bigger world and of life." This finding is consistent with the literature regarding the lack of leisure time or engagement in social events experienced by doctoral students and the consequential implications for their mental health and well-being (Sverdlik et al., 2018).

Theme 2: Support

Theme 2 is connected to all three research subquestions, indicating that working mothers persisting in CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs while transitioning through the COVID-19 pandemic need robust support structures. The theme of support also included the three subthemes of personal support, professional/academic support, and lack of understanding. All 10 participants described a need for personal support, with eight describing a need for professional and academic support (Abigail, Deborah, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, and Sarah) and four experiencing a perceived lack of understanding of existent barriers as well as the unique needs of doctoral student mothers (Abigail, Hannah, Isabelle, and Julia). These findings are consistent with Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework that suggested that social support

greatly influences role performance and adaptation to change. Furthermore, support themes from the doctoral persistence literature (e.g., Rockinson-Szapkiw, Sosin, & Spaulding, 2018) correspond with Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory assertion that provision of support and guidance from experts and peers can be instrumental for an individual's coping and adaptation to a stressful transition or co-occurring transitions such as completing a doctoral program and moving through a global pandemic.

Personal Support. All 10 participants confirmed this subtheme. Personal support included support from one's spouse, family, friends/local community, spirituality/faith/church community, and professional counseling.

Spouse Support. Six participants described how critical spouse support was for their persistence through the pandemic (Abigail, Deborah, Elizabeth, Faith, Maria, and Sarah). Elizabeth summed up her experience of spouse support with, "My husband is my safe person." Maria detailed her experience of spouse support: "My husband handled the kids so I could write and push through. He took on extra … We shared workloads and coordinated childcare, negotiated balance." On the other hand, three other participants described experiencing a lack of spouse or partner support as a single mother (Hannah, Julia, and Naomi). Though Hannah was a divorced mother and Julia was a single mother—both without a partner living in the home—Naomi was married but stated, "I felt like a single parent during the first three months of the pandemic. My husband was away on business travel" when the pandemic closed offices and ceased travel. This finding is consistent with Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework which suggested that receiving support from an individual's intimate partner greatly influences the individual's role performance and adaptation to role change, and the partner can contribute trust,

understanding, and emotional and material support to the individual's resource bank for coping with transitions.

Family Support. Five participants described how critical family support was for their persistence through the pandemic (Deborah, Faith, Hannah, Julia, and Naomi). This finding is consistent with the literature that emphasized the importance of family support for doctoral persistence of student mothers (Breitenbach et al., 2019; Devos et al., 2017; Fox, 2020; Kent et al., 2020; Kumar & Coe, 2017; Kuo et al., 2017; Lake et al., 2018; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Posselt, 2018; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2018; Skakni, 2018; Volkert et al., 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2019). Faith stated, "My family is close by to watch my kid so I can still work," later adding, "I didn't have to worry about childcare." Hannah declared, "I couldn't have done my PhD without my family support as a single parent." Julia highlighted the notion of drawing near to family as a working doctoral student through the pandemic with, "I pulled closer to my family." On the other hand, Abigail reported experiencing a lack of family support, which has been shown in the literature to significantly hinder doctoral persistence (Breitenbach et al., 2019; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Volkert et al., 2018).

Friends/Community Support. Three participants described the importance of their friends and community support for their persistence through the pandemic (Elizabeth, Isabelle, and Julia). This finding is consistent with the literature that emphasized the importance of social support networks for doctoral persistence of student mothers (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2018; Skakni, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018). Isabelle, an international student, stated, "My community united to support one another." In contrast, Deborah and Maria described the pandemic's adverse impact on their friend networks. Maria stated, "It was hard on my friendships. We grew apart, and there were lasting effects. I was isolated from my friendships."

Spirituality/Faith/Church Community. Six participants described the importance of their faith and spirituality for their persistence through the pandemic (Deborah, Elizabeth, Faith, Isabelle, Julia, and Naomi). Elizabeth stated, "It deepened my trust and faith in God," and later added, "Faith in God was a beacon for me to turn my eyes to." Isabelle similarly declared, "I trust God. He is faithful. He keeps and sustains everyone and everything, has always made a way." Julia shared, "I embraced my personal relationship with Christ . . . which gives me purpose." Julia also described her academic pursuit of a doctorate as a divine endeavor: "Getting a PhD is a calling." Naomi emphasized, "Spirituality was huge for me as a Christian; there was lots of prayer." Three participants also mentioned the importance of their church community support for their persistence through the pandemic (Deborah, Faith, and Isabelle). These findings are consistent with Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework, which asserted that an individual's religious beliefs and values influence adaptation to transitions and help the individual endure periods of stress. Having a greater life purpose, or a purpose within the suffering, helps people more effectively cope in their trying circumstances (Schlossberg, 1981).

Professional Counseling. Three participants described the importance of professional counseling throughout the pandemic (Abigail, Julia, and Naomi). Abigail and Julia participated in personal counseling to support themselves in self-care and stress-management, and Naomi described supporting her child through professional counseling: "I found a male therapist for my son."

Professional/Academic Support. Eight participants confirmed this subtheme (Abigail, Deborah, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, and Sarah). Professional/academic support included support from one's peers or cohort, institution/ program, dissertation chair, and work colleagues/ organization.

Peers/Cohort Support. Though four participants stressed the importance of peer or cohort support (Deborah, Hannah, Isabelle, and Sarah), they all described disappointment over the lack of peer relationships and support they experienced throughout the pandemic. This finding is consistent with the literature that emphasized the value of peer support for doctoral persistence of student mothers (Devos et al., 2017; Fox, 2020; Kent et al., 2020; Kumar & Coe, 2017; Kuo et al., 2017; Lake et al., 2018; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Posselt, 2018; Skakni, 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2019). Deborah stated, "Something was lost during doctoral Zoom classes—the richness of human connection." Hannah "noticed major differences in quality between my pre-pandemic cohort in-person versus my second cohort virtually." Isabelle stated,

> I missed cohort and peer connection when the on-campus intensives transitioned to virtual. . . I especially needed connection as an international student; I didn't feel like I fit in culturally as I wasn't American and was already physically distant. I felt more disconnected.

Sarah described the challenges in attaining peer support: "It was hard to build peer relationships. It feels like a second-hand cohort, like 'Marsha! Marsha! Marsha!'—the Brady Bunch metaphor. We lost opportunities in the program with the transition from residential to virtual." This finding is consistent with the research on the value of the cohort model for fostering peer support (Lake et al., 2018) and social engagement for doctoral student retention (Berry, 2017).

Institutional/Programmatic/Chair Support. Though three participants stressed the importance of institutional and programmatic support (Abigail, Maria, and Sarah), only Sarah described experiencing institutional and programmatic support and accommodations for academic mothers: "My school was adaptive to meet the needs of students on maternity leave, moms at home with the kids when their husbands deployed, if they have medical appointments,

etc. We have the ability to Zoom in." Abigail and Maria, on the other hand, described lack of institutional and programmatic support. Furthermore, Abigail was the only participant to describe having ample support from her dissertation chair. These findings are consistent with the literature that emphasized the importance of institutional and programmatic support (Bell & Fong, 2021; Breitenbach et al., 2019; Castelló et al., 2017; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017, 2018; Volkert et al., 2018) and faculty supervision and mentorship (Devos et al., 2017; Fox, 2020; Kent et al., 2020; Kumar & Coe, 2017; Kuo et al., 2017; Lake et al., 2018; Pifer & Baker, 2016; Posselt, 2018; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Skakni, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Volkert et al., 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2019) for doctoral persistence of student mothers. Furthermore, these findings are also consistent with more recent pandemic research that has called for structural changes in academic institutions to better support academic mothers and promote gender equity (Beech et al., 2021; Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022; Parrish et al., 2021; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020).

Work Colleagues/Organizational Support. Though two participants stressed the importance of work colleagues and organizational support for academic persistence throughout the pandemic (Faith and Julia), only Faith described experiencing support as an academic mother from her work colleagues and organization: "My work and co-workers were understanding and supportive of moms." Julia described a lack of much-needed organizational support during the pandemic: "My boss was emotionally unavailable during my complicated high-risk pregnancy." This finding is consistent with the recent literature on the COVID-19 pandemic impact (including significantly increased stress) on working academic mothers, which has been exacerbated by a lack of colleague support, unrealistic work expectations, and impractical policies in the workplace (Burk et al., 2021).

Lack of Understanding. Four participants confirmed this subtheme (Abigail, Hannah, Isabelle, and Julia). These participants described a lack of understanding of the barriers and unique needs of doctoral student mothers; they described an overarching deficiency of support for doctoral student mothers in general. This finding is consistent with the research that highlighted outsiders' inability to understand the rigors of the doctoral journey (Skakni, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018). Hannah emphasized, "Moms need more flexibility and access for careers and academic programs." Isabelle, an international student, stated, "I felt a universality with moms who need more support." Finally, Julia declared about her unique academic motherhood experiences: "We as moms and doctoral students don't talk about this [our academic motherhood experiences and need for support] enough."

Theme 3: Adaptive Response

Theme 3 is connected to all three research subquestions, as working mothers persisting in CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs while transitioning through the COVID-19 pandemic required an adaptive response. The theme of adaptive response includes the three subthemes of shouldering pandemic emotions, coping, and resilience. All 10 participants described shouldering pandemic emotions and feelings and using coping strategies, and nine described their personal resilience (Abigail, Deborah, Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, and Naomi).

Shouldering Pandemic Emotions. All 10 participants confirmed this subtheme. The participants described experiences regarding shouldering pandemic emotions for not only themselves, but also for their families (especially their children) as well as their clients and staff. Participants described feelings of shock, fear, anxiety, sadness, anger, stress, overwhelm, confusion, frustration, and loneliness due to the pandemic social isolation throughout their

narratives. Isabelle described feelings of fear, anxiety, confusion, and frustration: “I was wondering if the pandemic was how the world was going to end,” and later added, “The hardest part was not knowing the pandemic was coming and I wasn’t able to prepare.” Maria described similar feelings: “It was scary being pregnant during the pandemic with all the unknowns related to healthcare during pregnancy.” Faith’s description also highlighted the collective pandemic fear: “It’s hard to be kind when we’re scared.” Hannah emphasized her experience of anger, stress, and overwhelm during the pandemic shutdown and seclusion at home with her 10-year-old daughter: “I was closer to my daughter in some ways, but we were also at each other’s throats.” This finding is consistent with the research that has emphasized doctoral students’ increased risk for experiencing significant levels of anxiety, depression, psychological distress, severe stress, burnout, loneliness, and isolation (Skakni, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018).

Self. All 10 participants described experiences regarding shouldering pandemic emotions for themselves. Abigail described sadness with, “I cried a lot,” and pandemic stress and overwhelm with, “it was like war torture.” Elizabeth emphasized the collective experiences of shock and confusion throughout the pandemic: “I felt like I was in the twilight zone.” Julia described various emotions and stated, “I ate my feelings.” Hannah highlighted her experiences with mental health disorders pre-pandemic being exacerbated with the onset of the pandemic: “I struggle with my own mental health diagnoses of depression and ADHD.”

Their Children/Family. Seven participants described experiences regarding shouldering pandemic emotions for their children and family, especially fear, anxiety, stress, and overwhelm (Deborah, Elizabeth, Hannah, Julia, Maria, Naomi, and Sarah). Elizabeth described experiences of trying to protect and shelter her children from pandemic fear, anxiety, and stress: “It was nerve-wracking as a mom.” Sarah highlighted her experiences with supporting her 10-year-old

daughter emotionally throughout the pandemic isolation and remote learning: “There was more pressure to entertain my daughter who wasn’t doing as well.”

Their Clients/ Staff. Three participants described experiences regarding shouldering pandemic feelings for their counseling clients and staff (Faith, Julia, and Sarah). Both Faith and Sarah described similar experiences of shouldering increased emotional burden for their staff and clients throughout the pandemic, which exacerbated pre-existing emotional burdens. Faith stated, “This is a hard profession.” Sarah described her experiences with transitioning to a new job while adjusting to the pandemic shutdown: “It was exhaustion as a manager to carry my staff. I was already drained before COVID. COVID made it harder to adapt to the new agency.” This finding is supported by Schlossberg’s (1981) theoretical framework, which suggests that an individual experiences increased stress with multiple co-occurring transitions.

Coping. All 10 participants confirmed this subtheme. The participants described experiences using coping strategies related to acceptance, mindfulness, and grounding; embracing flexibility; and implementing self-care strategies for themselves as well as their children. This finding is supported by the literature stressing the importance of coping strategies for doctoral persistence (Kumar & Coe, 2017; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019). Furthermore, the coping subtheme finding is also consistent with Schlossberg’s (1981) theoretical framework suggesting that individuals can increase their hardiness, inner strength, and psychological capacity for adaptation to change and stress by implementing coping strategies (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 2011).

Acceptance, Mindfulness, and Grounding. Four participants described experiences regarding implementing coping strategies related to acceptance, mindfulness, and grounding (Elizabeth, Isabelle, Julia, and Naomi). Elizabeth shared how she experienced acceptance of

ambiguity and grounding through her faith and spirituality: “My husband and I grounded each other in God’s truth,” and she described adopting “an eternal perspective” so that “we don’t have to worry,” concluding that ultimately, “I didn’t get on the fear band wagon.” Naomi stated, “I had to be strong to take care of the kids and myself emotionally, physically” and later added, “I decided not to stress about it.” Isabelle stated, “I had to slow down and remove myself from the mass media and bad news,” and later added that her family “made the best of it.” Julia similarly stated, “I was trying to keep myself centered, remain positive, and keep it together,” and “I decided I couldn’t function in fear.” Elizabeth, Isabelle, Julia, and Naomi all highlighted the notion of making conscious choices to not live in fear nor to succumb to the collective public fears related to the COVID pandemic. Elizabeth, Isabelle, and Naomi also described their attempts to protect and shield their children from anxiety-provoking news in the media as well as the global chaos happening outside their homes. In these ways, the four participants highlighted above tried to be instruments promoting stability and peace within their families and micro-systems.

Embracing Flexibility. Nine participants described experiences regarding embracing flexibility throughout the pandemic (Abigail, Deborah, Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, and Sarah). These participants described enjoying the increased flexibility in their lives that resulted from the pandemic shutdown. Faith shared about her increased flexibility in all areas of her life: “I embraced and enjoyed increased opportunities to get things done.” Julia shared about the increased flexibility she enjoyed in her work: “The pandemic helped me to embrace a unique approach to helping people remotely.” There was also a general sense from several participants that despite the adverse impact of the pandemic shutdown across various areas of their lives, it also conferred benefits to their lives. Maria stated, “With the pandemic, life

slowing down was beneficial." Likewise, Sarah shared, "Life was simpler; there were fewer demands." Four participants reflected that they were personally more rigid before the pandemic onset and gradually became more flexible through the pandemic transition (Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, and Julia). Faith observed, "I'm more flexible and adaptive." Likewise, Hannah declared, "I'm better at going with the flow and adjusting." Isabelle similarly observed her personal shift toward increased flexibility: "I let go of control, trying to spend time intentionally." This finding is consistent with the literature's emphasis on the necessity of remaining flexible to successfully adapt to the ever-changing pandemic landscape (Bell & Fong, 2021; Fisher et al., 2020) as well as Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework, which suggests that those who demonstrate flexibility in their coping tend to be more adaptive (Schlossberg, 2011).

Several participants also described valuing flexibility but experiencing a lack of flexibility as a mother with young children (Abigail, Faith, Hannah, Julia, and Naomi), especially in academia (Abigail, Julia, and Naomi). These findings were consistent with the literature which discussed the flexibility and accessibility of virtual learning and work for busy doctoral students as well as the accompanying unique considerations and additional challenges for persistence (Ames et al., 2018).

Self-Care. Six participants described experiences regarding implementing various self-care strategies for themselves as well as their families to better cope throughout the pandemic shutdown (Deborah, Elizabeth, Faith, Isabelle, Julia, and Naomi). Julia emphasized, "The pandemic made me want to do more self-care, me time." Isabelle noted, "My family and I enjoyed spending time outside to wear the children out."

Resilience. Nine participants confirmed this subtheme (Abigail, Deborah, Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, and Naomi). Participants described their experiences regarding choosing resilience, gratitude, and optimism. This finding is consistent with Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework suggesting that an individual's optimism contributes to his or her hardiness, inner strength, and psychological capacity for coping with change and stress (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 2011).

Choosing Resilience. Six participants described their personal perceived resilience as an intentional choice they made for themselves as well as for their children, families, clients, or staff throughout the pandemic (Elizabeth, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, and Naomi). Julia reflected, "I am more aware of my resilience." Isabelle stated, "I positively reframed how to view this time." Naomi declared, "I had to keep trying, get up, and do it again," and later added "I had determination."

Gratitude. Isabelle and Julia described the notion of gratitude as an intentional choice they made to better cope throughout the pandemic shutdown. Isabelle declared, "Whatever was bad, I acknowledged. Whatever was good, I appreciated." Likewise, Julia observed of herself: "I am learning to start my day with gratitude."

Hope and Optimism. Seven participants described a sense of hopefulness and optimism throughout the pandemic (Abigail, Deborah, Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, and Julia). Isabelle reported, "I'm usually an optimist; I didn't lose that … I remind myself as a Christian that Christ came to give abundant life." Some of them described a looking forward to future joyful experiences such as increased travel with the transition out of the pandemic and academia. Deborah shared, "I'm looking forward to increased opportunities to venture out as the pandemic settles." Julia stated, "I'm looking forward to being able to enjoy my baby."

Theme 4: Socio-Cultural-Political-Spiritual Awareness

Theme 4 is connected to all three research subquestions. The lived experiences of working mothers persisting in CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs while transitioning through the COVID-19 global pandemic were characterized by increased socio-cultural-political-spiritual awareness. The theme included the five subthemes of privilege, spiritual blessing, gender inequities in academia, political polarization, and multicultural competence. All 10 participants described an increased awareness of privilege; three described an increased awareness of spiritual blessing (Elizabeth, Faith, and Julia); four described an increased awareness of gender inequities in academia (Abigail, Hannah, Julia, and Naomi); eight described an increased awareness of political polarization (Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, Naomi, and Sarah); and two described an increased awareness of one's multicultural competence (Abigail and Hannah).

Privilege. All 10 participants confirmed this subtheme. Under the umbrella of this subtheme, participants described being well-resourced economically as well as being privileged with increased career opportunities, good health, and flexible work and school schedules throughout the pandemic.

Economically. Seven participants described a sense that they were well-resourced economically, especially in comparison to others whom they perceived as less-resourced (Abigail, Deborah, Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, and Sarah). Elizabeth observed, "In comparison to others, I didn't skip a beat because I had been fully telehealth private practice since 2019," and later added, "I had it better in comparison to many others." Hannah similarly reported, "I feel so lucky my job was already remote." Likewise, Deborah declared, "I didn't have it as bad as many others." Isabelle stated, "I was privileged in that I was still paid while not

working." Sarah highlighted the privilege enjoyed by those with higher SES and the lack of resources experienced by those with lower SES during the pandemic shutdown:

> There was a striking contrast between families that have higher versus lower SES in accessibility to computer technology in their homes to allow them access to community mental health services or to work from home or for remote learning for school.

This finding is consistent with Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework, which suggested that lower SES may limit an individual's financial and material resources and psychological supports for adapting to a transition.

Occupationally. Six participants described a sense that they were privileged occupationally (Abigail, Elizabeth, Faith, Julia, Maria, and Sarah). Abigail described her experience that the pandemic "provided a full client caseload in private practice." Sarah stated, "There are new career opportunities to teach virtually or hybrid outside of my area." Maria reported, "I was motivated to get my school counseling license credentials."

Flexible Work/School Schedules. Seven participants described being privileged with flexible work or school schedules throughout the pandemic (Abigail, Deborah, Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, and Sarah).

Good Health. Lastly, both Abigail and Deborah described being privileged to be in good health. They also felt privileged that they were not included in the "high risk" population that was most "vulnerable" to COVID.

Spiritual Blessing. Three participants confirmed this subtheme (Elizabeth, Faith, and Julia). Elizabeth described her privilege during the pandemic as "a blessing from the Lord." Faith similarly observed, "I recognized my freedom as a Christian in America, especially in comparison with other Christians [who were non-Americans]." Finally, Julia reflected on how

God has used her pandemic experiences for her personal spiritual growth to-date: “Everything that has happened has shaped me to this point. It’s about the process, not the product.”

Gender Inequities in Academia. Four participants confirmed this subtheme (Abigail, Hannah, Julia, and Naomi). Abigail reported that her CES program department tried to discourage her from starting a family: “They said I couldn’t finish my program and graduate with a baby.” This finding coincides with the literature on gender inequities and caregiver bias that still exist in academia today (Bell & Fong, 2021; Fox, 2020; Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022; Posselt, 2018), with female doctoral students receiving many implicit messages regarding delaying or abstaining from having children (Fox, 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Skakni, 2018). In Abigail’s case, caregiver bias was perpetuated by her female CES faculty members. Furthermore, this finding is consistent with more recent research that highlighted the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on gender inequities, further depleting doctoral mothers’ previously limited resources and capacities for coping (Blum & Dobrotić, 2021). Julia, a single Black mother of an infant daughter, also declared of her doctoral program experiences throughout her pregnancy and subsequent motherhood, “It was like academic hazing just to sit at the table.” This finding is supported by the literature regarding the presence of gender inequities and caregiver bias in academia, which can manifest as institutionalized sexism and are further complicated by various intersectionalities with other marginalized groups (e.g., ethnic minorities; Fox, 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022; Posselt, 2018). Because of these inequities and resulting oppression, marginalized students such as women—especially those with young children—are faced with additional barriers to doctoral persistence (Fox, 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Posselt, 2018).

Political Polarization. Eight participants confirmed this subtheme (Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, Naomi, and Sarah). Under the umbrella of this subtheme, participants described experiences related to a divisiveness in America as well as marginalization and underrepresentation throughout the pandemic.

Divisiveness in America. Seven participants observed a political divisiveness in America at the macro-level as well as at the micro-levels within their local communities and even their own families (Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Julia, Maria, Naomi, and Sarah). Many of the participants attributed this divisiveness to varying (and often strongly held) views on freedoms versus restrictions regarding governmental and institutional COVID-19 pandemic policies. Hannah stated, "More political lines were drawn during the pandemic." Likewise, Maria declared, "I'm frustrated and annoyed by the political divisiveness." Sarah shared personal experiences of political divisiveness within her own family: "Relationships were strained in extended family with diverse political views on COVID exposure, cautions, and judgments." However, Isabelle, an international student, described a "coming together of her people" and "a unity for the common good in her country," which was in stark contrast to the political scene in America. These findings are consistent with more recent research regarding the wide-ranging effects of the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown along with consideration for the opposing tensions between leniency versus rigidity and universality versus selectivity in childcare centers' and schools' reopening, public health goals pertaining to high-risk groups versus the general population, and educational goals versus work-family balance (Blum & Dobrotić, 2021).

Marginalization and Underrepresentation. Three participants described experiences related to marginalization and underrepresentation (Julia, Naomi, and Sarah). Julia—who self-identifies as a Black African American female—described the experience of being marginalized

within her own church community due to her personal beliefs that diverged from the majority view of those attending her church. Julia stated, “My predominately Black church looked down on a member who got vaccinated as if they didn’t believe in or trust God enough.” Julia observed the political divisiveness in her church regarding COVID-19 as perpetuating moral and religious judgments of issues that were not of an inherently moral or religious nature. She described feeling as if she did not fit in well with her church as a result. Naomi—who identifies as a female from the Hispanic/Latinx ethnic group—described her personal experiences with underrepresentation in her doctoral program as well as in academia at large: “No one [faculty] in my program looks like me. There’s a lack of Hispanic representation in academia, especially Hispanic females.” Naomi shared that it was challenging to find supervisors, faculty mentors, and role models she could relate to in academia. In contrast, Sarah—who identifies as a White/Caucasian female—described self-awareness that she is in the majority population, especially in her local community which she described as “lacking diversity.” Sarah reported marginalization in her community throughout the pandemic and shared the following example: “I live in a predominately White, mostly conservative rural area. I observed overt and covert racial discrimination against one of my staff.”

These findings are consistent with Schlossberg’s (1981) theoretical framework that suggested that minority populations may experience more isolation, thus contributing to their levels of stress associated with a particular transition. As discussed, the literature’s emphasis on the current trend of increasing diversity across doctoral program student populations (Skakni, 2018) necessitates implementation of best practices and social justice advocacy efforts to help diverse, underrepresented, and marginalized doctoral students overcome systemic barriers to persistence (Fox, 2020; Posselt, 2018).

Multicultural Competence. Two participants confirmed this subtheme (Abigail and Hannah). Hannah stated, "I am using my cultural competence to advocate for others by serving on the board of directors for adult literacy and non-English speaking groups." This finding corresponds with the literature on diversity and multiculturalism (Fox, 2020; Lake et al., 2018; Posselt, 2018; Skakni, 2018).

Summary

This chapter contained the findings of the study, which explored the lived experiences of working mothers persisting in CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs while transitioning through the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings were presented as a synthesis of the narratives from the participants' individual interviews. Themes were developed by coding, re-coding, and clustering meanings from the data collected in the participants' verbal descriptions and transcriptions of the individual interviews. This chapter also discussed how the research questions were addressed and how the themes were developed. The next chapter concludes this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the lived experiences of 10 working mothers (pseudonyms: Abigail, Deborah, Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, Naomi, and Sarah) of children under the age of 12 who were in the final year of a CACREP-accredited CES doctoral program or were recent graduates since March 2020. Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach was selected for this study's research design. All 10 participants participated in individual semistructured interviews, answering interview questions based on the research questions:

- Research question: How do participants describe what the COVID-19 global pandemic has been like for them as they move through the transition from both academia and the pandemic?
- Subquestion 1: How do participants describe moving into the pandemic?
- Subquestion 2: How do participants describe moving through the pandemic?
- Subquestion 3: How do participants describe moving out of the pandemic?

Chapter 1 introduced the current study. The study's overview, background of the problem, problem statement, purpose statement, and significance were discussed. Next, the study's research questions were delineated, followed by the study's conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Next, key terms were operationally defined. Lastly, the study's assumptions and limitations were examined.

Chapter 2 presented a review of the literature related to the lived experiences of working mothers persisting in CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs while transitioning through the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature review covered various interconnected concepts including doctoral persistence, attrition, and retention; the intersectionality of academia with

motherhood; academic mothers' integration of multiple roles and identities and work-life-family balance; gender differences and inequities in both professional and domestic labor as well as academia; and the COVID-19 global pandemic's disproportionate impact on working doctoral student mothers.

Chapter 3 described the study's methods including research design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, the researcher's role, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 contained the findings of the study. The findings were presented as a synthesis of the narratives from the participants' individual semistructured interviews. Themes were developed by coding, re-coding, and clustering meanings from the data collected in the participants' verbal descriptions and transcriptions of the individual interviews. Data analysis revealed four primary themes: academic motherhood, support, adaptive response, and socio-cultural-political-spiritual awareness. All four major themes were connected to all three research subquestions.

Chapter 5 contains the study's interpretation of findings, discussion regarding confirmation and expansion of previous empirical and theoretical literature, implications for social change, recommendations for action, limitations of the findings, and recommendations for further study. Discussion is included for the four primary themes of academic motherhood, support, adaptive response, and socio-cultural-political-spiritual awareness that emerged among the group of participants across all three phases of the pandemic transition (i.e., moving in, moving through, and moving out). A researcher statement reflecting on my personal experiences as a researcher is also included. Chapter 5 ends with a chapter summary and an overall conclusion to the study.

Interpretation of Findings

The four primary themes of academic motherhood, support, adaptive response, and socio-cultural-political-spiritual awareness emerged across all three phases of the pandemic transition (i.e., moving in, moving through, and moving out). Therefore, each primary theme was connected to the three research subquestions. The pandemic transition was characterized based on Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory: Phase 1 was characterized by instability as participants moved into the pandemic, Phase 2 was characterized as a temporary new normal as participants began adjusting and transitioning through the pandemic, and Phase 3 was characterized by stability as participants transitioned out of the pandemic and experienced a final new normal. The findings also confirmed the study's conceptual framework, which was comprised of doctoral persistence, attrition, and retention; intersectionality of motherhood and academia; work-life-family balance and integration of multiple roles and identities; gender differences and inequities in work and academia; and the COVID-19 pandemic impact. Discussion for each primary theme also includes confirmation and expansion of the previous empirical and theoretical literature as appropriate to this study.

Theme 1: Academic Motherhood

Academic motherhood was a major theme across all three phases of the pandemic transition (i.e., moving in, moving through, and moving out). The emergence of this first theme was supported by the literature on persistence of doctoral student mothers—who are particularly vulnerable to stress and attrition (Kent et al., 2020; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020)—and the intersectionality of motherhood and academia (Beech et al., 2021; Breitenbach et al., 2019; Hermann, Gorlewski, et al., 2020; Hermann, Haskins, et al., 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Neale-McFall, 2020; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017, 2018; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson,

2020; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020). As one participant stated, “I was trying to be a mom and trying to become a doctor for a very long time” (Julia).

All 10 participants also described a shifting of multiple roles and identities (Abigail, Deborah, Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, Naomi, and Sarah); five described an integration of multiple roles and identities (Deborah, Isabelle, Julia, Naomi, and Sarah), and nine described sacrifices made in the areas of work, life, and family (Abigail, Deborah, Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, and Naomi). These findings were consistent with the research suggesting that doctoral student mothers experience challenges with achieving balance and integration of their family, academic, and professional roles and identities (Beech et al., 2021; Lovell, 2014; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020). This theme and subthemes also confirm concepts from the conceptual framework such as doctoral persistence, attrition, and retention; intersectionality of motherhood and academia; and work-life-family balance and integration of multiple roles and responsibilities.

The subtheme of shifting multiple roles and identities emerged from participant descriptions regarding transitioning into the pandemic that necessitated this shift. This finding is consistent with the research on the intersectionality of academia and motherhood as examined through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic (Beech et al., 2021; Bell & Fong, 2021; Burk et al., 2020; Kibbe, 2020; Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022; Parrish et al., 2021). Since the pandemic onset, many working student mothers have been faced with juggling their educational programs, remote work, and providing caregiving for children at home (Parrish et al., 2021). Maria stated, “With my work, I shifted responsibilities to focus on COVID stuff that I didn’t sign up for.” Sarah declared, “The hardest part was both my husband and I had to continue to work full time AND

assist with teaching remote learning of my daughter and more parental involvement and caregiving at home." These roles and responsibilities included childcare provider, teacher to remote learning school-age children, sole emotional support for children, remote learner in doctoral program, and CES professional.

Furthermore, within the shifting multiple roles and identities subtheme, additional subthemes that emerged including inadequacy/self-doubt, blurred lines, juggling, distractibility, finite time, and time pressure. This study's findings regarding the donning of new "hats" for these various roles contribute to the research base specific ways in which doctoral student mothers were disproportionately impacted with the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Many of these academic mothers described a worsening of these pre-existing experiences with the pandemic onset, highlighting the far-reaching consequences of the pandemic shutdown of offices, schools, and daycare and subsequent mass exodus of women from the paid workforce and into the multiple roles regarding unpaid labor in the home.

Additionally, the subtheme of sacrifice contributes to the research base the notion that something—or some combination of "somethings" (e.g., time, responsibilities, hobbies or leisure activities, quality or level of performance in a given area, or even aspects of one's identity)—must be sacrificed, at least temporarily, in pursuit of work-life-family balance and pursuit of the doctorate. In this respect, the study's findings add the concept of "academic" to "work-life-family balance." Previously, "academics" seemed to be categorized under "work," but the findings illustrated that professional work and academics are each uniquely significant and deserving of their own discrete categories within the concept of "balance." Furthermore, sacrifice can continue to shift over time as individuals continue to grow. But this notion of sacrifice seems to be necessary along the path to the doctorate as well as toward the notion of integration of

multiple roles and identities. This leads to choosing what must be sacrificed in pursuit of what might be considered the greater good—if that is to persist in the doctoral journey. The findings also suggest that when it is an aspect of one's identity that is sacrificed, the individual's internal distress seems to be greater, as is evident by such subthemes as "mom guilt."

Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework can be used to consider the participants' adaptation to the pandemic and to interpret the findings regarding the academic motherhood theme and subthemes. First, academic motherhood was understood through Phase 1 of the pandemic transition, which was characterized by instability as participants moved into the pandemic. This instability necessitated a shifting of multiple roles and identities as participants attempted to recalibrate their lives or tried to achieve a new equilibrium in their responsibilities, often requiring great sacrifice in one or more areas of responsibility. Next, academic motherhood was understood through Phase 2 of the pandemic transition, which was characterized as a temporary new normal as participants began adjusting and transitioning through the pandemic.

Finally, academic motherhood was understood through Phase 3 of the pandemic transition, which was characterized by stability as participants transitioned out of both the pandemic and academia and experienced a final new normal. This final phase represented the participants' integration of multiple roles and identities as they successfully persisted through both the pandemic as well as the participants' doctoral programs. This integration of multiple roles and identities may or may not include balance. Balance conveys the notion that the qualitative categories of work, life, and family (and academics) can be found to be equivalent in their weights. But the notion of integration used in this study's academic motherhood subtheme of integration of multiple roles and identities adopts the perspective in which working doctoral student mothers are simultaneously mothers-academics-professionals as seamlessly integrated

within their self-identities, and this integrated self-identity is what each individual brings to the various areas of responsibility in her life. She brings her motherhood experiences to her academic program and professional work, her professional experiences to her academic program and to her role as a mother, and her academic experiences to her role as a mother as well as her professional work. In this way, being a mother has contributed to the individual's professional work and academic success (persistence), being a professional has contributed to the individual's academic success (persistence) and mothering of her children, and being a doctoral student has contributed to the individual's professional work and mothering of her children. Finally, all three components of the academic-mother-professional's identity contribute to her life.

Theme 2: Support

Support was also a major theme across all three phases of the pandemic transition (i.e., moving in, moving through, and moving out). There were three subthemes of personal support, professional/academic support, and lack of understanding. All 10 participants described a need for personal support, eight described a need for professional and academic support (Abigail, Deborah, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, and Sarah), and four experiencing a perceived lack of understanding of existent barriers as well as the unique needs of doctoral student mothers (Abigail, Hannah, Isabelle, and Julia). These findings are consistent with Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework that suggested that social support greatly influences role performance and adaptation to change. Support and guidance from experts and peers can be instrumental for an individual's coping and adaptation to a stressful transition or co-occurring transitions such as completing a doctoral program and moving through a global pandemic (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2018).

Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework can also be used to consider the participants' adaptation to the pandemic transition and to interpret the findings regarding the support theme. First, Phase 1 of the pandemic transition was characterized by instability as participants moved into the pandemic. As stated, the literature has established the need for support structures for academic mothers, and this need for support was magnified with the COVID-19 pandemic onset. Thus, the second primary theme of support was interconnected with the first primary theme of academic motherhood, and the necessary shifting of multiple roles and identities with the COVID-19 pandemic. Next, support was understood through Phase 2 of the pandemic transition (i.e., a temporary new normal). During Phase 2, many academic mothers sought additional and/or different support structures to help them manage their various roles and responsibilities throughout the pandemic as they persisted in their CES programs.

Finally, support was understood through Phase 3 of the pandemic transition (i.e., a final new normal). During Phase 3, participants approached the successful completion of their doctoral programs and experienced subsequent resolution to some of their various roles and responsibilities, inherently decreasing the need for the support structures they had previously required for academic persistence. Additionally, the lack of understanding subtheme contributes to the literature the notion that experiences of support deficiencies abound when would-be support sources do not understand academic mothers' barriers and unique needs for robust support for doctoral persistence, and this has been increasingly apparent since the pandemic onset. This lack of understanding itself represents another barrier to persistence for doctoral student mothers to overcome. This study's findings regarding the COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate impact on doctoral student mothers supports the need for support structures and

highlights the cascading consequences of the pandemic shutdown of offices, schools, and daycare, especially for academic mothers already struggling to persist in their CES programs.

Theme 3: Adaptive Response

Adaptive response was another major theme across all three phases of the pandemic transition (i.e., moving in, moving through, and moving out). Adaptive Response included the three subthemes of shouldering pandemic emotions, coping, and resilience. All 10 participants described a shouldering of pandemic emotions and feelings, all 10 described the use of coping strategies, and nine describing their personal resilience (Abigail, Deborah, Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, and Naomi).

Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework can be used to consider the participants' adaptation to the pandemic transition and to interpret the findings regarding the adaptive response theme. First, adaptive response was understood through the lens of Phase 1 of the pandemic transition. Academic mothers have needed coping strategies along with support structures, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic onset. Therefore, the other primary themes of academic motherhood and support are interconnected with this theme due to the necessary shifting of multiple roles and identities (an academic motherhood subtheme) with the COVID-19 pandemic onset that required increased support and additional coping strategies for doctoral persistence. Furthermore, the subtheme of shouldering pandemic emotions emerged from participants' experiences with suffered increased emotional burden of not only their own feelings related to the pandemic but also those of their families, children, clients, and staff. Faith emphasized the already high burnout for counseling professionals pre-pandemic: "This is a hard profession," and she went on to describe how the profession became even more challenging to navigate with the pandemic's arrival.

Next, adaptive response was understood through Phase 2 of the pandemic transition. During this time many participants received increased support (the second primary theme) and developed and implemented additional coping strategies, which aided in the adaptation of these academic mothers to the pandemic transition and ultimately facilitated their persistence as well. Finally, adaptive response was understood through Phase 3 of the pandemic transition. Many participants described their experiences of personal resilience (an adaptive response subtheme) during this time. This personal hardiness, inner strength, and psychological capacity for coping with change and stress—which has been widely examined in the research base for its contribution to doctoral persistence—was also cited by many of the participants for its contribution to their persistence through the concurrent pandemic transition (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 1981; 2011).

Theme 4: Socio-Cultural-Political-Spiritual Awareness

The primary theme of socio-cultural-political-spiritual awareness was the final major theme across all three phases of the pandemic transition (i.e., moving in, moving through, and moving out). Theme 4 included the five subthemes of privilege, spiritual blessing, gender inequities in academia, political polarization, and multicultural competence. All 10 participants described an increased awareness of privilege (Abigail, Deborah, Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, Naomi, and Sarah), three described an increased awareness of spiritual blessing (Elizabeth, Faith, and Julia), four described an increased awareness of gender inequities in academia (Abigail, Hannah, Julia, and Naomi), eight described an increased awareness of political polarization (Elizabeth, Faith, Hannah, Isabelle, Julia, Maria, Naomi, and Sarah), and two described an increased awareness of one's multicultural competence (Abigail and Hannah).

Schlossberg's (1981) theoretical framework can be used to consider the participants' adaptation to the pandemic transition and to interpret the findings regarding the socio-cultural-political-spiritual awareness theme. First, contributing to the participants' experience of instability during Phase 1 was the social, cultural, and political landscape that was happening as participants were experiencing the pandemic environment during their doctoral programs. This led to a temporary new normal as characterized in Phase 2. Finally, it was during Phase 3 of the pandemic transition that many of the participants described a growing awareness of the global social, cultural, and political implications of the pandemic (e.g., the political polarization subtheme). The participants' collective experience of increased socio-cultural-political-spiritual awareness was multi-faceted given all that transpired throughout the pandemic while these academic mothers were continuing to develop their CES identities and integrate their various other roles and identities while also struggling to persist in their doctoral programs.

Furthermore, some of the participants also described personal experiences related to increased spiritual awareness throughout the pandemic transition as well as throughout their doctoral journeys. The recurring subthemes of both privilege and spiritual blessing were observed during all three phases of the pandemic transition as participants became more aware of their circumstances, especially in comparison to others. In this way, many participants described feeling "privileged" and/or "blessed" with their resources or fortunate circumstances. It was noted that participants who conveyed the idea of "being blessed" or shared experiences of "blessing" self-identified as Christian. In this way, the three participants who described an increased awareness of spiritual blessing (Elizabeth, Faith, and Julia) also described the notion of their privilege. This contributes to the literature the finding that faith, religion, and spirituality

might serve as protective factors for academic mothers transitioning through the pandemic and could help buffer against added pandemic stress.

The final socio-cultural-political-spiritual awareness subtheme of gender inequities in Academia was confirmed by four of the participants (Abigail, Hannah, Julia, and Naomi). This subtheme represents the convergence of all four primary themes found in the study: academic motherhood, support, adaptive response, and socio-cultural-political-spiritual awareness. Academic mothers—who were already juggling multiple roles and responsibilities pre-pandemic and needed support structures and effective coping strategies to persist in their doctoral programs—were increasingly and disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Furthermore, the pre-existing gender inequities were only further magnified and served to oppress and marginalize these doctoral student mothers within their respective institutions and CES programs. The more recent findings from ongoing and emerging research continue to highlight the COVID-19 pandemic's widespread, cascading impact on gender inequities and other socio-cultural-political implications of the global pandemic shutdown.

At this point in the discussion, it is important to highlight the intersectionality of the gender inequities in academia subtheme—representative of the convergence of all four primary themes found in the study—with historically marginalized and underrepresented populations (e.g., ethnic minority groups). To illustrate this intersectionality, Julia's experiences are highlighted. As mentioned, Julia is a single Black mother of an infant daughter whose entire doctoral program experience involved lacking support structures for doctoral persistence through the COVID-19 global pandemic. She stated, "It was like academic hazing just to sit at the table." This finding illustrates the presence of gender inequities and caregiver bias in academia which often manifest as institutionalized sexism and are further complicated by various

intersectionalities with other marginalized groups (e.g., ethnic minorities; Fox, 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022; Posselt, 2018). Because of these inequities and resulting oppression, marginalized students such as women—especially those with young children—are faced with additional barriers to doctoral persistence (Fox, 2020; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Posselt, 2018), beyond the additional stresses incurred throughout the pandemic transition.

Implications for Social Change

The significance of this study can be understood in terms of its application to the problem of persistence of working mothers in CACREP-accredited CES doctoral programs while transitioning through the COVID-19 pandemic. Doctoral students who are mothers have an even greater risk of attrition than their male counterparts or childless peers (Kent et al., 2020; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown of offices, schools, and daycare facilities since March 2020 exacerbated pre-existing systemic gender inequities in work and academia and barriers to the doctorate. Thus, this study's findings have implications for research. Additionally, this study has theoretical implications for further expansion of Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory as well as its application to major life transitions co-occurring alongside the COVID-19 pandemic transition. Moreover, this study demonstrates importance for the broader counseling profession as well as for the field of CES. Lastly, this study has significant implications for positive social and policy change by promoting gender equality in families, academic cultures (e.g., CES doctoral programs, departments, higher learning institutions), work organizations, religious institutions, communities, and society.

Theoretical Implications

Exploring the lived experiences of persisting working CES doctoral student mothers moving through the COVID-19 global pandemic through the lens of Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory has theoretical implications for social change as this study further elucidated the theory's application to doctoral persistence as well as doctoral student mother adaptation to the ongoing pandemic. Additionally, Schlossberg's transition theory might undergo further development and be considered as a framework from which to study other populations (e.g., other marginalized or underrepresented groups or cultures, doctoral programs, disciplines, or higher learning institutions).

Empirical Implications

Examining the lived experiences of working CES doctoral student mothers persisting while moving through the COVID-19 pandemic has empirical significance due to its implications for the literature base. This study adds to the literature pertaining to doctoral persistence, retention, and attrition; intersectionality of motherhood and academia; work-life-family-academic balance and integration of multiple roles and identities of doctoral student mothers; gender differences and inequities in work and academia; and the more recent ongoing research efforts concerning the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on society, particularly the pandemic's disproportionate impact on marginalized groups as well as underrepresented populations. The contributions to the literature base in each of these areas, as well as their intersectionality, could inspire future qualitative and quantitative studies. This study's findings highlighted the intersectionality between academic mothers from marginalized and underrepresented ethnic groups (e.g., Black/African American and Hispanic/ Latinx) who face additional barriers to persistence (e.g., institutionalized racism, lack of support structures and

resources, etc.) beyond those of gender inequities, caregiver bias, and sexism. These various intersectionalities with marginalized groups or underrepresented populations offer opportunities for further contribution to the empirical research on the topic of doctoral persistence of working mothers through the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Practical Implications

This study's findings also have practical implications for social change in terms of tangible improvements for doctoral student (and prospective student) mothers and their families (especially their children); professional counselors; counselor educators and supervisors; CES doctoral programs, departments, faculty mentors and supervisors; dissertation chairs; higher learning institutions; communities; organizations; culture; and broader society. Through prudent gender-sensitive public policy, the pandemic has presented an opportunity to broadly impact gender relations that have been built on pre-existing and long-held systemic gender inequalities (Bell & Fong, 2021; Cook & Grimshaw, 2021). To that aim, research—such as the findings contributed by this study—must be widely disseminated for increased societal awareness of the presence and manifestations of these gender inequities, institutionalized oppression, and patriarchal culture in the Academy in concert with the pandemic's disproportionate impact on working doctoral student mothers, especially for groups who are further marginalized or underrepresented.

Professional counselors who are informed about the pandemic's exacerbation of pre-existing gender inequities in work and academia might help doctoral student mothers and their families strive to be more egalitarian and equally share domestic labor responsibilities, which might help student mothers reduce stress, cope more effectively with the pandemic fallout, and ultimately persist in their doctoral programs (Fisher et al., 2020). Professional counselors might

also use this study's findings to reinforce the mother-scholar identity and help doctoral student mothers better balance their work, life, family, and academic commitments and perhaps even integrate their various roles and identities, which might facilitate persistence in their doctoral programs.

If CES doctoral programs, counselor educators and supervisors, and higher learning institutions are informed of this study's findings, they will be better equipped to develop necessary support structures to facilitate persistence for academic mothers. For example, CES programs might encourage doctoral student mothers to form a support community of academic mothers among their peers or within their cohort or a social media support group connecting these women on campus or virtually. Furthermore, prospective female doctoral students with children can be educated about the pandemic's worsening of pre-existing gender inequities in work and the risk for increasingly disproportionate burden placed on them from an imbalance in competing roles and responsibilities, which can help them make more informed decisions regarding seeking a doctorate as well as managing expectations for themselves and their families.

Perhaps even more importantly, CES doctoral programs, counselor educators and supervisors, and higher learning institutions might examine their own gendered thoughts, attitudes, assumptions, biases, belief systems, behaviors, policies, and practices that perpetuate and maintain gender inequities and oppression in academia, work, families, and larger society. CES doctoral programs, counselor educators and supervisors, and higher learning institutions might even be moved to reinforce the mother-scholar identity and adopt and promote a strengths-based perspective that motherhood makes better professionals and is indicative of balance achievement in work, academics, family, and life (Beech et al., 2021). Finally, academic institutions could make structural changes to promote gender equality, support student-mothers

(Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022; Parrish et al., 2021; Wladkowski & Mirick, 2020) and send the message that the mother identity is valued (Beech et al., 2021).

Recommendations for Action

Based on the applications of this study's findings, recommendations for action are provided for doctoral students; family members and friends; peers and cohorts; counselor educators, faculty supervisors, mentors, and dissertation chairs; CES doctoral programs and higher learning institutions; professional counselors; researchers; and leadership and social justice advocacy initiatives. First, this study's findings call for an increased understanding regarding the barriers and needs of doctoral student mothers, especially in regard to the COVID-19 global pandemic's disproportionate impact on, and exacerbation of, pre-existing systemic gender inequities in work and academia. Next, this study's findings demand reinforcement of the mother-scholar identity, particularly for counselor educators, faculty supervisors, mentors, dissertation chairs, CES doctoral programs, and higher learning institutions. Further, this study's findings call for researchers to include "academics" within the concept of "work-life-family balance," presenting a more accurate conceptualization of the concept of "balance."

CES doctoral programs, higher learning institutions, faculty supervisors, and family and friends are also called to build the robust personal, professional, and academic support structures required by these academic mothers. Doctoral student mothers are also advised to learn and flexibly implement adaptive coping strategies throughout their CES programs. Further, professional counselors who provide counseling services to doctoral student mothers and their families are urged to help these families strive to become more egalitarian with equally sharing of domestic labor responsibilities. Counselors are also advised to help student mothers reduce

stress, cope more effectively with the pandemic fallout, and ultimately persist in their doctoral programs.

Members of society are called to engage in self-reflection and to remain abreast of the current research to cultivate increased socio-cultural-political-spiritual awareness of self and others. Finally, this study urges individuals to engage in leadership and social justice advocacy initiatives regarding doctoral persistence for mothers and further marginalized or other underrepresented groups in not only work and academic organizations, but also in their local communities and various cultural groups. For these recommendations, this study's findings should be widely disseminated via professional presentations as well as through focused publications in professional counseling and CES journals. Furthermore, CES doctoral programs and higher learning institutions (including counselor educators, faculty supervisors, mentors, and dissertation chairs) are uniquely positioned to disseminate this study's findings to current and prospective doctoral students—and their families—through onboarding orientations into CES programs and throughout each stage of the doctoral journey.

Limitations of the Findings

This study had the following limitations. The study was conducted with CES doctoral programs in the United States. Therefore, the study did not consider students from international doctoral programs. Additionally, the study did not purposefully select participants based on their program format (residential, online or distance learning, or hybrid), although this information was collected with participant demographics. Therefore, the study did not consider the unique characteristics of each format. The study also did not specify when or for what duration study participants were employed during the pandemic, nor did the study specify whether study participants' employment status was full time versus part time. These factors might further

influence the study's findings. The study participants only included mothers; therefore, the study did not consider the unique experiences of doctoral student fathers. The study did not specify how many children under the age of 12 were living in the participants' homes during the pandemic, although this information was collected during the participants' interviews. Finally, the study did not specify certain demographic characteristics for participant inclusion such as partner or marital status, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or others, although again some of this information (i.e., marital status, age, ethnicity, religion) was collected with the participant demographics and during the participants' individual interviews. Lastly, the study did not examine recent graduates separately from CES student mothers in the final year of their programs.

Recommendations for Further Study

There are several recommendations for further study of doctoral persistence in relation to academic motherhood as well as the COVID-19 pandemic impact on gender inequities. More research is needed to examine for supporting doctoral persistence (Pifer & Baker, 2016; Skakni, 2018), which should consider differences between part time versus full time, residential versus online or hybrid (Skakni, 2018), and mothers versus fathers with young children in the home. Additionally, studies should examine recent CES doctoral graduates separately from doctoral student mothers in the final year of their CES programs. Residential and distance learning doctoral program experiences of women with and without young children should be compared (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2018). Future studies can also explore how online doctoral students are socialized within their programs differently from residential doctoral students (Berry, 2017) as well as the interrelationships among socialization factors that influence persistence (Sverdlik et al., 2018), particularly for mothers of young children. Similarly, future studies should explore

support that online doctoral student mothers find beneficial to persistence (Kumar & Coe, 2017). Future research should also examine how various forms of communication might influence doctoral student mother experience and enhance connectivity between online students and institutions (Ames et al., 2018). Additionally, more research is needed to elucidate student perceptions of isolation in online doctoral programs (Ames et al., 2018), particularly for mothers of young children and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Future researchers should also explore factors that contribute to effective mentoring and faculty advising relationships as well as factors that influence doctoral student mothers' selection of mentors (Kuo et al., 2017). Furthermore, it is important to study effective mentoring for subpopulations of academic mothers due to their underrepresentation in doctoral programs and the additional barriers experienced by those with minority status (Posselt, 2018). Future research should also focus on mentoring programs and advocacy initiatives specifically for doctoral student mothers (Kent et al., 2020).

Future work should study diverse and non-traditional doctoral student populations as well as their progress and persistence within the more traditional academia (Skakni, 2018). Future studies should include female doctoral students (both with and without children, and both dominant and minority populations such as heterosexual and non-heterosexual relationships) from other academic disciplines and various academic institutions across the United States (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017). Researchers should examine women and men who are single, divorced, or LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, etc.), with and without young children, in various disciplines, and both residential and distance learning programs (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2018). Furthermore, themes such as ruptured relationships should be further studied, specifically regarding contributing factors and

contexts leading to both ruptured relationships and interruption of academic identity development (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017).

Future researchers should develop quantitative instruments to measure family influence on doctoral persistence as well as study student mothers from various doctoral programs (Breitenbach et al., 2019). Future studies should explore doctoral student personal preferences regarding segmenting or integrating academics and family as well as the program type (residential, distance learning, or hybrid) that best fits each student (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020). Future research should investigate predictors of academic-family satisfaction and functioning. Programs addressing academic-family integration are needed, and their efficacy should be evaluated (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Watson, 2020). Further research should be conducted on academic-family integration and doctoral persistence, and use of the DAFII to measure the construct of academic-family integration is encouraged (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019). The DAFII can also be further validated with both doctoral and graduate students in STEM as well as non-STEM disciplines. Future studies should also explore academic-family integration in same-sex relationships and in relation to one's gender identity (Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019).

Finally, social justice advocacy research is needed to address gendered and racialized inequities in academia and to increase support to academic mothers with young children (Mogro-Wilson et al., 2022). Future research should extend the gendered comparative analysis of the development, access, and effects of COVID-19 pandemic employment and social policies globally (Cook & Grimshaw, 2021). Future work should focus on how the pandemic impacted childcare (Bell & Fong, 2021) and should target policy change pertaining to the caregiving economy to narrow the gender gap (Craig & Churchill, 2020), especially for working academic mothers. Additionally, further research is needed to examine the gender gap in a variety of

academic disciplines beyond scientific research and analyze data regarding myriad peer-reviewed journal submissions (Bell & Fong, 2021). More qualitative studies should be conducted to promote social justice and bring about systemic change in academia pertaining to online learning environments that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic (Eigege & Kennedy, 2021).

Researcher Statement

This reflection upon my personal experiences as a researcher and the research process considers possible personal biases or preconceived ideas and values, the possible effects of myself as the researcher on the participants, and my changes in thinking resulting from the study. My biases as a researcher involved my personal experiences as a doctoral student mother in the final year of a CACREP-accredited CES program persisting through the COVID-19 global pandemic. I have been blessed with the privilege of raising my two young daughters (Adelyn—now age 5, and Caelyn—now age 7) throughout my doctoral program, which I began when Adelyn was just over a year old and Caelyn was just over 3 years old.

I was previously employed full time as a paid professional counselor outside the home pre-pandemic and immediately transitioned to working remotely from home during the initial onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. I encountered the difficult decision to resign my position in favor of providing full-time childcare and remote learning assistance for my children and domestic labor while persisting in my doctoral program and adjusting to the program's transition to virtual intensive courses from home. Thus, I was one of the approximately 2 million women who left the paid workforce and entered unpaid primary caregiving roles at home during the first year of the pandemic. I grieved the loss of personal fulfillment and sense of purpose I had previously experienced when sitting with my clients as a professional counselor. Furthermore, the remaining roles and responsibilities were still numerous, and I continued to make great

sacrifices to persist to the doctorate. My prioritization of family and academics left no time for life/leisure within the concept of work-life-family-academic balance. I also still struggled with mom guilt like so many other mothers who must make difficult choices daily regarding how they spend their limited resources (e.g., time, attention, energy). Meanwhile, I also experienced the lack of understanding regarding the rigors of the doctoral program in general as well as its convergence with the all-but debilitating mom guilt.

Due to my personal experiences, I related to the study's participants in many ways. I connected personally with each academic mother before whom I had the privilege to sit, to look into each woman's eyes and hear her voice as she shared her personal narrative with me. Each individual woman—each unique story—forever changed me. I smiled, laughed, and celebrated with these women when they shared their stories of resilience, courage, strength, perseverance, and ultimately triumph in their persistence. I shed tears alongside theirs, and later I wept at the recollection of their experiences of extreme hardships and emotional struggles. The challenges faced by each of these women were tremendous, even for those who considered themselves privileged or blessed in some way. My heart especially ached for the single mothers who lacked a spouse or partner to help share the overwhelming load of multiple responsibilities while raising and nurturing their precious children. These women have overcome so many additional, and seemingly impassable, barriers to the doctorate. These women are my heroes.

As for the possible effects of myself as the researcher on the participants—several of the women knew or otherwise assumed I had young children and understood this as my personal motivation for researching this study's topic. They expressed feelings of universality and connection with me, as well as gratitude for the experience of being seen, heard, understood, and encouraged. I set out to highlight these powerful women and their narratives—to share their

experiences in their own voices. This is perhaps the most significant change in my thinking as a result of this study: the great value and meaningful contributions of qualitative research, especially regarding the empowerment and validation the participants experience when their own voices are elevated. I hope and pray this manuscript has done justice to these women's voices as academic mothers and that it will positively impact not only this study's participants but all academic mothers and all who might support them in persistence. Furthermore, I hope to share the personal insights, knowledge, and experiences I have gained throughout the research process in my future work as a CES professional.

Summary

This final chapter contained an interpretation of findings pertaining to the research questions, discussion regarding confirmation and expansion of previous empirical and theoretical literature, implications for social change, recommendations for action; limitations of the findings, and recommendations for further study. Four primary themes of academic motherhood, support, adaptive response, and socio-cultural-political-spiritual awareness emerged among the group of participants across all three phases of the pandemic transition (i.e., moving in, moving through, and moving out). A researcher statement reflecting on my personal experiences as a researcher was also included. This summary concludes Chapter 5. The next section concludes the study.

Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences of 10 working mothers of children under the age of 12 who were in the final year of a CACREP-accredited CES doctoral program or were recent graduates since the COVID-19 pandemic began in the United States in March 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic posed additional challenges for the persistence of doctoral student mothers who were already vulnerable to stress and were at greater risk of attrition than their male

colleagues and peers without children. Data analysis revealed four primary themes—academic motherhood, support, adaptive response, and socio-cultural-political-spiritual awareness. The applications of this study's findings included a call for the following: an increased understanding of the myriad barriers and unique needs of doctoral student mothers especially in consideration of the COVID-19 pandemic, reinforcement of the mother-scholar identity; inclusion of "academics" within the concept of "work-life-family balance," development of robust support structures; implementation of adaptive coping strategies, and cultivation of an increased socio-cultural-political-spiritual awareness of self and others. Academic mothers are already perfect depictions of identity integration as evidenced by their academic persistence as mothers and the various other components of their self-identities are mutually enhanced by being the mother-scholars that they are. As Sharon Jaynes stated, "Successful mothers are not the ones that have never struggled. They are the ones that never give up, despite the struggles."

REFERENCES

Abdellatif, A., & Gatto, M. (2020). It's OK not to be OK: Shared reflections from two PhD parents in a time of pandemic. *Gender, Work & Organization, 27*(5), 723–733. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12465

Abetz, J. S. (2019). "I want to be both, but is that possible?": Communicating mother-scholar uncertainty during doctoral candidacy. *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education, 12*(1), 70–87. https://doi.org/10.1080/19407882.2018.1501582

Ahluwalia-Cameron, A. (2021). Dissertation data collection during a global pandemic: Barking dogs, crying babies, and feminist social work. *Affilia, 37*(1), 20–25. https://doi.org/10.1177/08861099211048244

Alon, T., Doepke, M., Olmstead-Rumsey, J., & Tertilt, M. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on gender equality (Working Paper No. 26947). *National Bureau of Economic Research*. http://www.nber.org/papers/w26947

Ames, C., Berman, R., & Casteel, A. (2018). A preliminary examination of doctoral student retention factors in private online workspaces. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 13*(1), 79–107. https://doi.org/10.28945/3958

Anderson, M. L., Goodman, J., & Schlossberg, N. K. (2012). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking Schlossberg's theory with practice in a diverse world* (4th ed.). Springer Publishing Company.

Anekstein, A. M., Bohecker, L., Nielson, T., & Martinez, H. (2018). Godspeed: Counselor education doctoral student experiences from diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds. *The Qualitative Report, 23*(11), 2862–2882. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol23/iss11/15

Appling, B., Haskins, N. H., & Daigle, J. (2018). Adult developmental experiences of African American doctoral student mothers: Illuminating generativity processes. *Adultspan Journal, 17*(2), 58–70. https://doi.org/10.1002/adsp.12060

Bal, I. A., Arslan, O., Budhrani, K., Mao, Z., Novak, K., & Muljana, P. S. (2020). The balance of roles: Graduate student perspectives during the COVID-19 pandemic. *TechTrends, 64*(6), 796–798. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-020-00534-z

Beech, H. H., Sutton, A., & Cheatham, L. (2021). Parenting, privilege, and pandemic: From surviving to thriving as a mother in the academy. *Qualitative Social Work, 20*(1–2), 625–631. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325020973328

Behboodi Moghadam, Z., Ordibeheshti Khiaban, M., Esmaeili, M., & Salsali, M. (2017). Motherhood challenges and well-being along with the studentship role among Iranian women: A qualitative study. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being, 12*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2017.1335168

Bell, M. L., & Fong, K. C. (2021). Gender differences in first and corresponding authorship in public health research submissions during the COVID-19 pandemic. *American Journal of Public Health, 111*(1), 159–163. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305975

Bender, S., Brown, K. S., Hensley Kasitz, D. L., & Vega, O. (2021). Academic women and their children: Parenting during COVID-19 and the impact on scholarly productivity. *Family Relations, 71*, 46–67. https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12632

Berry, S. (2017). Student support networks in online doctoral programs: Exploring nested communities. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 12*, 33–48. https://doi.org/10.28945/3676

Biroli, P., Bosworth, S., Della Giusta, M., Di Girolamo, A., Jaworska, S., & Vollen, J. (2021). Family life in lockdown. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.687570

Blum, S., & Dobrotić, I. (2021). Childcare-policy responses in the COVID-19 pandemic: Unpacking cross-country variation. *European Societies, 23*(sup1), S545–S563. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1831572

Blundell, R., Costa Dias, M., Joyce, R., & Xu, X. (2020). COVID-19 and inequalities. *Fiscal Studies, 41*(2), 291–319. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-5890.12232

Breitenbach, E. K., Bernstein, J., Ayars, C., & Konecny, L. (2019). The influence of family on doctoral student success. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 14*, 761–782. https://doi.org/10.28945/4450

Brochu, K. J., Bryant, T. R., Jensen, A. J., Desjardins, D. R., Robinson, R. M., & Bent, L. G. (2021). Redefining roles: Female scholars' reflections and recommendations for coping during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Impacting Education: Journal on Transforming Professional Practice, 6*(2), 54–60. https://doi.org/10.5195/ie.2021.170

Brooks, R. (2013). Negotiating time and space for study: Student-parents and familial relationships. *Sociology, 47*(3), 443–459. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038512448565

Brooks, R. (2015). Social and spatial disparities in emotional responses to education: Feelings of 'guilt' among student-parents. *British Educational Research Journal, 41*(3), 505–519. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3154

Burk, B. N., Pechenik Mausolf, A., & Oakleaf, L. (2021). Pandemic motherhood and the academy: A critical examination of the leisure-work dichotomy. *Leisure Sciences*, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2020.1774006

Callary, B., Werthner, P., & Trudel, P. (2012). The lived experience of a doctoral student: The process of learning and becoming. *The Qualitative Report, 17*(43), 1–20.

https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Lived-Experience-of-a-Doctoral-Student%3A-The-of-Callary-Werthner/5bf69ef03bcbbb514dfefc0e966afa3283faf976

Carli, L. L. (2020). Women, gender equality and COVID-19. *Gender in Management: An International Journal, 35*(7/8), 647–655. https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-07-2020-0236

Castelló, M., Pardo, M., Sala-Bubaré, A., & Suñé-Soler, N. (2017). Why do students consider dropping out of doctoral degrees? Institutional and personal factors. *Higher Education, 74*(6), 1053–1068. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0106-9

Cheng, C., & Song, S. (2020). How early-career researchers are navigating the COVID-19 pandemic. *Molecular Plant, 13*(9), 1229–1230. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.molp.2020.07.018

Clark, S., McGrane, A., Boyle, N., Joksimovic, N., Burke, L., Rock, N., & O'Sullivan, K. (2021). "You're a teacher, you're a mother, you're a worker": Gender inequality during COVID-19 in Ireland. *Gender, Work & Organization, 28*(4), 1352–1362. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12611

Collins, C., Landivar, L. C., Ruppanner, L., & Scarborough, W. J. (2021). COVID-19 and the gender gap in work hours. *Gender, Work & Organization*, *28*, 101–112. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12506

Cook, R., & Grimshaw, D. (2021). A gendered lens on COVID-19 employment and social policies in Europe. *European Societies, 23*(sup1), S215–S227. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1822538

Crabb, S., & Ekberg, S. (2014). Retaining female postgraduates in academia: The role of gender and prospective parenthood. *Higher Education Research and Development, 33*(6), 1099–1112. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2014.911251

Craig, L., & Churchill, B. (2020). Working and caring at home: Gender differences in the effects of Covid-19 on paid and unpaid labor in Australia. *Feminist Economics, 27*(1–2), 310–326. https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2020.1831039

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.

Crook, S. (2020). Parenting during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020: Academia, labour and care work. *Women's History Review, 29*(7), 1226–1238. https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2020.1807690

Czymara, C. S., Langenkamp, A., & Cano, T. (2021). Cause for concerns: Gender inequality in experiencing the COVID-19 lockdown in Germany. *European Societies, 23*(sup1), S68–S81. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1808692

Desai, A., Lankford, C., & Schwartz, J. (2020). With crisis comes opportunity: Building ethical competencies in light of COVID-19. *Ethics & Behavior, 30*(6), 401–413. https://doi.org/10.1080/10508422.2020.1762603

Devos, C., Boudrenghien, G., Van der Linden, N., Azzi, A., Frenay, M., Galand, B., & Klein, O. (2017). Doctoral students' experiences leading to completion or attrition: A matter of sense, progress and distress. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 32*(1), 61–77. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-016-0290-0

Eigege, C. Y., & Kennedy, P. P. (2021). Disruptions, distractions, and discoveries: Doctoral students' reflections on a pandemic. *Qualitative Social Work, 20*(1–2), 618–624. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325020973341

Eisenbach, B. (2013). Finding a balance: A narrative inquiry into motherhood and the doctoral process. *The Qualitative Report, 18*(17), 1–13. http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR18/eisenbach34.pdf

Elangovan, S., Mahrous, A., & Marchini, L. (2020). Disruptions during a pandemic: Gaps identified and lessons learned. *Journal of Dental Education, 84*(11), 1270–1274. https://doi.org/10.1002/jdd.12236

Evans, K. E., Holmes, M. R., Prince, D. M., & Groza, V. (2021). Social work doctoral student well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic: A descriptive study. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 16*(1), 569–592. https://doi.org/10.28945/4840

Ferrel, M. N., & Ryan, J. J. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on medical education. *Cureus, 12*(3), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.7492

Fisher, A. N., & Ryan, M. K. (2021). Gender inequalities during COVID-19. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 24*(2), 237–245. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430220984248

Fisher, J., Languilaire, J. C., Lawthom, R., Nieuwenhuis, R., Petts, R. J., Runswick-Cole, K., & Yerkes, M. A. (2020). Community, work, and family in times of COVID-19. *Community, Work & Family, 23*(3), 247–252. https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2020.1756568

Fodor, É., Gregor, A., Koltai, J., & Kováts, E. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on the gender division of childcare work in Hungary. *European Societies, 23*(sup1), S95–S110. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1817522

Fox, A. (2020). Women advising women: Socializing doctoral students into a culture of sacrifice. *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education, 13*(2), 211–229. https://doi.org/10.1080/26379112.2020.1782232

Fulweiler, R. W., Davies, S. W., Biddle, J. F., Burgin, A. J., Cooperdock, E. H., Hanley, T. C., Kenkel, C. D., Marcarelli, A. M., Matassa, C. M., Mayo, T. L., Santiago-Vazquez, L. Z., Traylor-Knowles, N., & Ziegler, M. (2021). Rebuild the Academy: Supporting academic

mothers during COVID-19 and beyond. *PLoS Biology*, *19*(3), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.3001100

Grasso, M., Klicperová-Baker, M., Koos, S., Kosyakova, Y., Petrillo, A., & Vlase, I. (2021). The impact of the coronavirus crisis on European societies. What have we learnt and where do we go from here? Introduction to the COVID volume. *European Societies, 23*(sup1), S2–S32. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1869283

Ham, S. (2021). Explaining gender gaps in the South Korean labor market during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Feminist Economics, 27*(1–2), 133–151. https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2021.1876902

Hassall, C., Dhatt, R., Escobar-Alvarez, S., Roy, A., Johnston, E., Snyder, H., & Matheson, S. (2020). The career cost of COVID-19 to female researchers. *Nature, 583*, 867–869. https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-020-02183-x

Haynes, C., Bulosan, M., Citty, J., Grant-Harris, M., Hudson, J., & Koro-Ljungberg, M. (2012). My world is not my doctoral program…or is it?: Female students' perceptions of well-being. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 7*(1), 1–17. http://www.informingscience.com/ijds/Volume7/IJDSv7p001-017Haynes329.pdf

Hays, D. G., & Singh, A. A. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings.* Guilford Press.

Heggeness, M. L. (2020). Estimating the immediate impact of the COVID-19 shock on parental attachment to the labor market and the double bind of mothers. *Review of Economics of the Household, 18,* 1053–1078. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-020-09514-x

Heintz, J., Staab, S., & Turquet, L. (2021). Don't let another crisis go to waste: The COVID-19 pandemic and the imperative for a paradigm shift. *Feminist Economics, 27*(1–2), 470–485. https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2020.1867762

Hermann, M. A., Gorlewski, J., Brookover, D., Walsh, R., Kozachuk, L., Deitz, M., & Ciminelli, E. (2020). Policy, practice, and parenthood: A study of teacher mothers. *Educational Studies*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2020.1834358

Hermann, M. A., Haskins, N., Neale-McFall, C., Ziomek-Daigle, J., & Eckart, E. (2020). Counselor educator mothers: Work-life enrichment and occupational satisfaction. *Adultspan Journal, 19*(2), 77–93. https://doi.org/10.1002/adsp.12097

Hermann, M. A., Walsh, R. L., & Underwood, J. W. (2019). Experiences of school counselor mothers: A phenomenological investigation. *Professional School Counseling, 22*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X19844491

Hipp, L., & Bünning, M. (2021). Parenthood as a driver of increased gender inequality during COVID-19? Exploratory evidence from Germany. *European Societies, 23*(sup1), S658–S673. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1833229

Holm, J. M., Prosek, E. A., & Godwin Weisberger, A. C. (2015). A phenomenological investigation of counseling doctoral students becoming mothers. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 54*(1), 2–16. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6978.2015.00066.x

Holmes, J. L., & Rockinson-Szapkiw, A. J. (2020). The development and validation of the Distance Doctoral Program Integration Scale. *Online Learning, 24*(4), 182–203. https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v24i4.1951

İlkkaracan, İ., & Memiş, E. (2021). Transformations in the gender gaps in paid and unpaid work during the COVID-19 pandemic: Findings from Turkey. *Feminist Economics, 27*(1–2), 288–309. https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2020.1849764

Isreal, A. L., Butler, T. D., & Garcia, R. A. (2017). An exploratory qualitative study of work-life balance experiences of mothers in doctoral programs. *Journal of Student Affairs, 27*, 51–62. https://spl.cde.state.co.us/artemis/ucsuserials/ucsu41210internet/ucsu412102018internet.pdf#page=52

Kabeer, N., Razavi, S., & van der Meulen Rodgers, Y. (2021). Feminist economic perspectives on the COVID-19 pandemic. *Feminist Economics, 27*(1–2), 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2021.1876906

Karageorge, E. X. (2020). COVID-19 recession is tougher on women. *Monthly Labor Review*, 1–2. https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2020/beyond-bls/covid-19-recession-is-tougher-on-women.htm

Kent, V., Runyan, H., Savinsky, D., & Knight, J. (2020). Mentoring doctoral student mothers in counselor education: A phenomenological study. *The Professional Counselor, 10*(4), 532–547. https://doi.org/10.15241/vk.10.4.532

Kibbe, M. R. (2020). Consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on manuscript submissions by women. *JAMA Surgery, 155*(9), 803–804. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamasurg.2020.3917

King, M. M., & Frederickson, M. E. (2021). The pandemic penalty: The gendered effects of COVID-19 on scientific productivity. *Socius, 7*, 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F23780231211006977

Kotlar, B., Gerson, E., Petrillo, S., Langer, A., & Tiemeier, H. (2021). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on maternal and perinatal health: A scoping review. *Reproductive Health, 18*(1), 1–39. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-021-01070-6

Kulic, N., Dotti Sani, G. M., Strauss, S., & Bellani, L. (2020). Economic disturbances in the COVID-19 crisis and their gendered impact on unpaid activities in Germany and Italy. *European Societies, 23*(sup1), S400–S416. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1828974

Kulp, A. M. (2016). The effects of parenthood during graduate school on PhD recipients' paths to the professoriate: A focus on motherhood. *New Directions for Higher Education, 176*, 81–95. https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20211

Kulp, A. M. (2020). Parenting on the path to the professoriate: A focus on graduate student mothers. *Research in Higher Education, 61*(3), 408–429. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-019-09561-z

Kumar, S., & Coe, C. (2017). Mentoring and student support in online doctoral programs. *American Journal of Distance Education, 31*(2), 128–142. https://doi.org/10.1080/08923647.2017.1300464

Kuo, P. B., Woo, H., & Bang, N. M. (2017). Advisory relationship as a moderator between research self-efficacy, motivation, and productivity among counselor education doctoral students. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 56*(2), 130–144. https://doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12067

Lake, E. D., Koper, J., Balayan, A., & Lynch, L. (2018). Cohorts and connections: Doctoral retention at a mid-Atlantic comprehensive institution. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 20*(2), 197–214. https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025116656386

Lemay, J. D., Doleck, T., & Bazelais, P. (2021). Transition to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2021.1871633

Limbers, C. A., McCollum, C., & Greenwood, E. (2020). Physical activity moderates the association between parenting stress and quality of life in working mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Mental Health and Physical Activity, 19*, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mhpa.2020.100358

Lovell, E. D. (2014). College students who are parents need equitable services for retention. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 16*(2), 187–202. https://doi.org/10.2190/CS.16.2.b

Lundquist, B., Rubel, D., & Ng, K. M. (2020). Experiences of counselor education doctoral student mothers with young children. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 59*(4), 267–282. https://doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12188

Malta, M. (2020). My journey with COVID-19. EClinicalMedicine, *27*, 1–2. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2020.100599

Manzo, L. K. C., & Minello, A. (2020). Mothers, childcare duties, and remote working under COVID-19 lockdown in Italy: Cultivating communities of care. *Dialogues in Human Geography, 10*(2), 120–123. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2043820620934268

Martinez, E., Ordu, C., Sala, M., & McFarlane, A. (2013). Striving to obtain a school-work-life balance: The full-time doctoral student. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 8*, 39–59. https://doi.org/10.28945/1765

Mavin, S., & Yusupova, M. (2020). Gendered experiences of leading and managing through COVID-19: Patriarchy and precarity. *Gender in Management: An International Journal, 35*(7/8), 737–744. https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-09-2020-0274

McDermott, M. (2020). Learning from the experiences of mothers of school-aged children on tenure track during the COVID-19 global pandemic. *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement, 11*(2). https://jarm.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/jarm/article/viewFile/40618/36789

McIntosh, B., McQuaid, R., Munro, A., & Dabir-Alai, P. (2012). Motherhood and its impact on career progression. *Gender in Management: An International Journal, 27*(5), 346–364. https://doi.org/10.1108/17542411211252651

McLeod, J. (2011). *Qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Mengistie, T. A. (2021). Higher education students' learning in COVID-19 pandemic period: The Ethiopian context. *Research in Globalization, 3*, 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resglo.2021.100059

Minello, A., Martucci, S., & Manzo, L. K. (2021). The pandemic and the academic mothers: Present hardships and future perspectives. *European Societies, 23*(sup1), S82–S94. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1809690

Mirick, R. G., & Wladkowski, S. P. (2018). Pregnancy, motherhood, and academic career goals: Doctoral students' perspectives. *Affilia, 33*(2), 253–269. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109917753835

Mirick, R. G., & Wladkowski, S. P. (2019). Making it work: Pregnant and parenting doctoral students' attributions of persistence. *Advances in Social Work, 19*(2), 349–368. https://doi.org/10.18060/23220

Mirick, R. G., & Wladkowski, S. P. (2020). Women's experiences with parenting during doctoral education: Impact on career trajectory. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 15*, 89–109. https://doi.org/10.28945/4484

Mogro-Wilson, C., Negi, N., Acquati, C., Bright, C., Chang, D. F., Goings, T. C., Greenfield, J. C., Gurrola, M., Hicks, T., Loomis, A., Parekh, R., Strolin-Goltzman, J., Valdovinos, M.

G., Walton, Q. L., & Windsor, L. (2022). Reflections from academic mothers of young children on social work research and education. *Journal of Social Work Education, 58*(1), 9–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2021.2014726

Möhring, K., Naumann, E., Reifenscheid, M., Wenz, A., Rettig, T., Krieger, U., Friedel, S., Finkel, M., Cornesse, C., & Blom, A., G. (2021). The COVID-19 pandemic and subjective well-being: Longitudinal evidence on satisfaction with work and family. *European Societies, 23*(sup1), S601–S617. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1833066

Moreau, M. P., & Kerner, C. (2015). Care in academia: An exploration of student parents' experiences. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 36*(2), 215–233. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2013.814533

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage.

Neale-McFall, C. (2020). Job satisfaction, enrichment, and institutional policy: Listening to faculty mothers. *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education, 13*(1), 56–71. https://doi.org/10.1080/19407882.2019.1622568

Onyema, E. M., Eucheria, N. C., Obafemi, F. A., Sen, S., Atonye, F. G., Sharma, A., & Alsayed, A. O. (2020). Impact of Coronavirus pandemic on education. *Journal of Education and Practice, 11*(13), 108–121. https://doi.org/10.7176/JEP/11-13-12

O'Shea, S. (2015). "I generally say I am a mum first . . . but I'm studying at uni": The narratives of first-in-family, female caregivers transitioning into an Australian university. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 8*(4), 243–257. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038996

Parrish, D. E., Negi, N., & Mogro-Wilson, C. (2021). The hidden cost of caregiving during the pandemic. *Journal of Social Work Education, 57*(2), 211–214. https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2021.1913019

Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Sage.

Petts, R. J., Carlson, D. L., & Pepin, J. R. (2021). A gendered pandemic: Childcare, homeschooling, and parents' employment during COVID-19. *Gender, Work & Organization, 28*, 515–534. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12614

Pierce, L. A., & Herlihy, B. (2013). The experience of wellness for counselor education doctoral students who are mothers in the southeastern region of the United States. *Journal of International Women's Studies, 14*(3), 108–120. https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol14/iss3/8

Pifer, M. J., & Baker, V. L. (2016). Stage-based challenges and strategies for support in doctoral education: A practical guide for students, faculty members, and program administrators.

International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 11(1), 15–34. http://ijds.org/Volume11/IJDSv11p015-034Pifer2155.pdf

Posselt, J. (2018). Normalizing struggle: Dimensions of faculty support for doctoral students and implications for persistence and well-being. *The Journal of Higher Education, 89*(6), 988–1013. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2018.1449080

Power, K. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the care burden of women and families. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy, 16*(1), 67–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2020.1776561

Pyykkonen, B. A. (2021). Cognitive processes and the impact of stress upon doctoral students: Practical applications for doctoral programs. *Christian Higher Education, 20*(1–2), 28–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/15363759.2020.1852134

Reichelt, M., Makovi, K., & Sargsyan, A. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on gender inequality in the labor market and gender-role attitudes. *European Societies, 23*(sup1), S228–S245. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1823010

Rockinson-Szapkiw, A. J. (2011). Improving doctoral candidates' persistence in the online dissertation process. *Faculty Publications and Presentations*, 184. https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/educ_fac_pubs/184

Rockinson-Szapkiw, A. J. (2012). Investigating uses and perceptions of an online collaborative workspace for the dissertation process. *Research in Learning Technology, 20*, 267–282. https://doi.org/10.3402/rlt.v20i0.18192

Rockinson-Szapkiw, A. J. (2019). Toward understanding factors salient to doctoral students' persistence: The development and preliminary validation of the Academic-Family Integration Inventory. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 14*, 237–258. https://doi.org/10.28945/4248

Rockinson-Szapkiw, A. J., Heuvelman-Hutchinson, L., & Spaulding, L. S. (2014). Connecting online: Can social networking and other technology support doctoral connectedness? *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice, 11*(3), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.53761/1.11.3.4

Rockinson-Szapkiw, A. J., Sosin, L. S., & Spaulding, L. (2018). Does family matter? A phenomenological inquiry exploring the lived experiences of women persisting in distance education, professional doctoral programs. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 13*, 497–515. https://doi.org/10.28945/4157

Rockinson-Szapkiw, A. J., Spaulding, L. S., & Lunde, R. (2017). Women in distance doctoral programs: How they negotiate their identities as mothers, professionals, and academics in order to persist. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 12*(7), 50–72. http://www.informingscience.org/Publications/3671

Rockinson-Szapkiw, A. J., Spaulding, L. S., & Spaulding, M. T. (2016). Identifying significant integration and institutional factors that predict online doctoral persistence. *The Internet and Higher Education, 31*, 101–112. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2016.07.003

Rockinson-Szapkiw, A., & Watson, J. H. (2020). Academic-family integration: How do men and women in distance education and residential doctoral programs integrate their degree and family? *Online Learning, 24*(4), 112–130. https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v24i4.2318

Ryan, N. E., & El Ayadi, A. M. (2020). A call for a gender-responsive, intersectional approach to address COVID-19. *Global Public Health, 15*(9), 1404–1412. https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2020.1791214

Said, F. F., Jaafarawi, N., & Dillon, A. (2021). Mothers' accounts of attending to educational and everyday needs of their children at home during COVID-19: The case of the UAE. *Social Sciences, 10*(4), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10040141

Sallee, M. W. (2015). Adding academics to the work/family puzzle: Graduate student parents in higher education and student affairs. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 52*(4), 401–413. https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2015.1083438

Sallee, M., Ward, K., & Wolf-Wendel, L. (2016). Can anyone have it all? Gendered views on parenting and academic careers. *Innovative Higher Education, 41*(3), 187–202. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-015-9345-4

Sargent, A. G., & Schlossberg, N. K. (1988). Managing adult transitions. *Training & Development Journal, 42*(12), 58–61.

Sarı, M., Türkkan, B. T., & Yolcu, E. (2019). Reflections from women doctoral students lives regarding gender roles. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies, 7*(1), 50–58. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.7n.1p.50

Schieman, S., Badawy, P. J., A. Milkie, M., & Bierman, A. (2021). Work-life conflict during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Socius, 7*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2378023120982856

Schlossberg, N. K. (1981). A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. *The Counseling Psychologist, 9*(2), 2–18. https://pikespeaksymposium.pbworks.com/f/Schlossberg+Transition+Theory.pdf

Schlossberg, N. K. (2008). *Overwhelmed: Coping with life's ups and downs* (2nd ed.). M. Evans.

Schlossberg, N. K. (2011). The challenge of change: The transition model and its applications. *Journal of Employment Counseling, 48*(4), 159–162. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1920.2011.tb01102.x

Seck, P. A., Encarnacion, J. O., Tinonin, C., & Duerto-Valero, S. (2021). Gendered impacts of COVID-19 in Asia and the Pacific: Early evidence on deepening socioeconomic inequalities in paid and unpaid work. *Feminist Economics, 27*(1–2), 117–132. https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2021.1876905

Seiz, M. (2020). Equality in confinement: Nonnormative divisions of labor in Spanish dual-earner families during the Covid-19 lockdown. *Feminist Economics, 27*(1–2), 345–361. https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2020.1829674

Sevilla, A., & Smith, S. (2020). Baby steps: The gender division of childcare during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy, 36*(S1), S169–S186. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/graa027

Skakni, I. (2018). Doctoral studies as an initiatory trial: Expected and taken-for-granted practices that impede PhD students' progress. *Teaching in Higher Education, 23*(8), 927–944. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2018.1449742

Smith, P. H. (2019). Enhancement and constraint: Student-mothers' experiences of higher vocational education, emotion and time. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 49*(2), 163–179. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2018.1483483

Spaulding, L. S., & Rockinson-Szapkiw, A. J. (2012). Hearing their voices: Factors doctoral candidates attribute to their persistence. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 7*(1), 199–219. https://doi.org/10.28945/1589

Stephen, J. S., Rockinson-Szapkiw, A. J., & Dubay, C. (2020). Persistence model of non-traditional online learners: Self-efficacy, self-regulation, and self-direction. *American Journal of Distance Education, 34*(4), 306–321. https://doi.org/10.1080/08923647.2020.1745619

Stevens, D. D., Chetty, R., Bertrand Jones, T., Yallew, A., & Butler-Henderson, K. (2021). Doctoral supervision and COVID-19: Autoethnographies from four faculty across three continents. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 18*(5), 6–17. https://doi.org/10.53761/1.18.5.6

Sverdlik, A., Hall, N. C., McAlpine, L., & Hubbard, K. (2018). The PhD experience: A review of the factors influencing doctoral students' completion, achievement, and well-being. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 13*(1), 361–388. https://doi.org/10.28945/4113

Theisen, M. R., McGeorge, C. R., & Walsdorf, A. A. (2018). Graduate student parents' perceptions of resources to support degree completion: Implications for family therapy programs. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy, 30*(1), 46–70. https://doi.org/10.1080/08952833.2017.1382650

Thinnam, T. (2011). Married Thai working mothers: Coping with initial part-time doctoral study. *Human Resource Development Quarterly, 22*(3), 297–322. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.20079

Trepal, H., Stinchfield, T., & Haiyasoso, M. (2014). Great expectations: Doctoral student mothers in counselor education. *Adultspan Journal, 13*(1), 30–45. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0029.2014.00024.x

Uzun, H., Karaca, N. H., & Metin, Ş. (2021). Assessment of parent-child relationship in COVID-19 pandemic. *Children and Youth Services Review, 120*, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105748

Voicu, M., & Bădoi, D. (2021). Fertility and the COVID-19 crisis: Do gender roles really matter? *European Societies, 23*(sup1), S199–S214. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1822537

Volkert, D., Candela, L., & Bernacki, M. (2018). Student motivation, stressors, and intent to leave nursing doctoral study: A national study using path analysis. *Nurse Education Today, 61*, 210–215. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2017.11.033

Vomvoridi-Ivanovic, E., & Ward, J. K. (2021). Academic motherhood in mathematics teacher education during COVID-19: Breaking the silence and shifting the discourse. *Journal of Research in Mathematics Education, 10*(1), 41–61. http://dx.doi.org/10.17583/redimat.2021.6436

Wattis, L., Standing, K., & Yerkes, M. A. (2013). Mothers and work–life balance: Exploring the contradictions and complexities involved in work–family negotiation. *Community, Work & Family, 16*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2012.722008

Webber, J., Hatch, S., Petrin, J., Anderson, R., Nega, A., Raudebaugh, C., Shannon, K., & Finlayson, M. (2021). The impact of a virtual doctoral student networking group during COVID-19. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1987401

Webber, L., & Dismore, H. (2020). Mothers and higher education: Balancing time, study and space. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2020.1820458

Wladkowski, S. P., & Mirick, R. G. (2019). Mentorship in doctoral education for pregnant and newly parenting doctoral students. *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education, 12*(3), 299–318. https://doi.org/10.1080/26379112.2019.1654394

Wladkowski, S. P., & Mirick, R. G. (2020). Supports and recommendations for pregnant and newly parenting doctoral students in health professions. *Journal of Social Work Education, 56*(2), 312–326. https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2019.1656580

Wolf-Wendel, L., & Ward, K. (2015). Academic mothers: Exploring disciplinary perspectives. *Innovative Higher Education, 40*(1), 19–35. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-014-9293-4

Yaish, M., Mandel, H., & Kristal, T. (2021). Has the economic lockdown following the COVID-19 pandemic changed the gender division of labor in Israel? *Gender & Society, 35*(2), 256–270. https://doi.org/10.1177/08912432211001297

Yamamura, E., & Tsustsui, Y. (2021). The impact of closing schools on working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic: Evidence using panel data from Japan. *Review of Economics of the Household, 19*(1), 41–60. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-020-09536-5

Yang, D., Baldwin, S., & Snelson, C. (2017). Persistence factors revealed: Students' reflections on completing a fully online program. *Distance Education, 38*(1), 23–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2017.1299561

Yusuf, J. E., Saitgalina, M., & Chapman, D. W. (2020). Work-life balance and well-being of graduate students. *Journal of Public Affairs Education, 26*(4), 458–483. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2020.1771990

Zhou, E., & Okahana, H. (2019). The role of department supports on doctoral completion and time-to-degree. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 20*(4), 511–529. https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025116682036

Zoch, G., Bächmann, A. C., & Vicari, B. (2021). Who cares when care closes? Care-arrangements and parental working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany. *European Societies, 23*(sup1), S576–S588. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1832700

APPENDIX A: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval and Consent

Liberty University IRB-FY21-22-858
Approved on 4-12-2022

Title of the Project: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Working Mothers Persisting in CACREP CES Doctoral Programs Transitioning Through the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Shannon Pugh, MA, LAPC, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, self-identify as a woman, in your final year of or recently graduated from a CACREP-accredited Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral program since March 2020, a mother with at least one child who was under age 12 years old in March of 2020 and who was living in your home during the pandemic since March 2020, and be willing to participate. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of working student mothers of children under the age of 12 persisting in CACREP-accredited Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral programs transitioning through the COVID-19 global pandemic. The study will provide an opportunity for working Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral student mothers to have their voices heard regarding their experiences persisting through the pandemic. Data obtained from this study will provide increased understanding of the lived experiences of working mothers persisting in Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral programs while transitioning through the pandemic.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Participate in a video-recorded, semi-structured individual interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. The interview will take place on Zoom.

OR

2. Participate in a video-recorded focus group lasting approximately 60 minutes. The focus group will take place on Zoom.

All Participants

3. Review your interview transcripts via email (approximately 10 minutes). This is an opportunity for you to ask any questions or make corrections to the information shared by the researcher.

Liberty University IRB-FY21-22-858
Approved on 4-12-2022

How could you or others benefit from this study?

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

Benefits to society include providing data that stakeholders might use to better understand the lived experiences of working mothers persisting in Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral programs while transitioning through the pandemic.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The potential risk is a change in emotion.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports 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. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential using pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a private location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- The interviews and focus groups will be 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.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with people outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether 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.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Liberty University IRB-FY21-22-858
Approved on 4-12-2022

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Shannon Pugh, Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral student at Liberty University. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted] You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Joy Mwendwa, at [redacted]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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, [redacted]

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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 video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

APPENDIX B: Recruitment Letter

Dear [Recipient]:

As a PhD student in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to explore the lived experiences of working mothers persisting in CACREP-accredited Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral programs transitioning through the COVID-19 global pandemic. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

To be eligible, participants must be 18 years of age or older, self-identify as a woman, be in the final year of or be a recent graduate of a CACREP-accredited Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral program (graduated since March 2020), and be a mother with at least one child who was under the age of 12 years old in March of 2020 living in the home during the COVID-19 pandemic (since March 2020). Participants, if willing, will be asked to choose to participate in either a video-recorded semi-structured individual interview lasting approximately 45 minutes OR a video-recorded focus group lasting approximately 60 minutes. Participants will have the opportunity to review their interview transcripts via email (approximately 10 minutes). Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the screening survey via the following link: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FGQMK8N.

If you meet the study criteria, a consent document will be emailed to you at your preferred email address once you complete the screening survey. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, please sign the consent document and return it to me via email at the time of the individual interview or focus group.

Sincerely,

Shannon M. Pugh
Counselor Education and Supervision, Ph.D. Student

APPENDIX C: Screening Questionnaire

1. What is your age range?
    a. 18-20
    b. 21-29
    c. 30-39
    d. 40-49
    e. 50-59
    f. 60 or older
2. What is your ethnicity? (Please select all that apply.)
    a. American Indian or Alaskan Native
    b. Asian or Pacific Islander
    c. Black or African American
    d. Hispanic or Latino
    e. White / Caucasian
    f. Prefer not to answer
    g. Other (please specify)
3. What is your gender?
    a. Female
    b. Male
    c. Other
4. Are you a mother with at least one child who was under age 12 years old in March of 2020 and who was living in your home with you since March 2020?
    a. Yes
    b. No
5. Are you a recent graduate from a CACREP-accredited Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral program? (Graduated since March 2020)
    a. Yes
    b. No
6. If you responded NO to question 5 above, are you currently in the final year of a CACREP-accredited Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral program?

a. Yes

b. No

7. Was/is your doctoral program residential, online, or hybrid?

a. Residential

b. Online

c. hybrid (combination of residential and online)

8. In what state/country was/is your doctoral program located?

9. What is your preferred interview format?

a. Individual Interview

b. Focus Group

c. Either

10. Please provide your full name, phone number, and email address.

APPENDIX D: Reflective Research Journal Excerpts

4/18/2022

I am preparing to meet my first participant for her interview. I began with prayer time, calling on my Lord to equip me and enable me to effectively bracket myself, putting myself (my thoughts, feelings, assumptions, biases, beliefs, personal experiences, etc.) aside to be fully present with and focus completely on my participant and her lived experiences with the phenomenon. I am feeling a bit nervous as this is my first interview and I do not know what to expect, although I am very excited to meet my participant and learn about her experiences. I pray God will be with my participant and with me as she shares her experiences with me, and that I am able to accurately capture the meaning and essence of her experience. I pray that all technology works and that the interview goes smoothly, and according to God's plan.

419/2022

I am preparing to meet my second participant for her interview, again beginning with prayer and asking God to be with me and with my participant and to help the interview run smoothly, with no technological issues. I ask God to help me to bracket myself appropriately and to set all of me aside so that I can focus fully and completely on my participant and the experiences she is about to share with me. I am feeling very grateful to God and my participant for her willingness to be with me this morning and participate in my research. I am excited to learn what she shares.

I am preparing to meet my third participant for her interview, thanking God for this opportunity and privilege to peak into the life of my participant and for her willingness to so generously give of her time to share her experiences with me. I pray that God will continue to help me to bracket myself appropriately and to set myself aside so I can focus fully on my participant in the moment and throughout our time together. I pray that God will help me to accurately capture the meaning and essence of her experience and that my prior knowledge, biases, personal experiences, feelings and beliefs would not be present nor interfere with this process. While I am excited to be seeing themes and patterns start to emerge in the data, I also ask God to help me to set all of this aside and to focus on this individual participant's experience of the phenomenon, as if from a fresh new perspective.

I am preparing to meet my fourth participant for her interview, again approaching God in prayer to help me to bracket myself. I pray that God will help me to not only set aside myself, but also set aside all that I have learned and experienced from my previous research participants. I picture myself putting all my prior knowledge and experiences in a box, closing and locking it, and placing it on a shelf for me to re-open at a later time. I ask God to help me to once again focus my attention and be fully present to the participant before me, that I will accurately capture her lived experiences of the phenomenon. I thank God for this participant and her willingness to meet with me today.

4/20/2022
I have reflected on my last interview participant's statement regarding how it wasn't that she couldn't do the PhD program or write her dissertation, but that it was hard to get help with her

child to allow her to focus on her academics and writing. It was hard for her to ask for and to receive help. I realize I have had similar experiences throughout my doctoral program as well. I have never been concerned that the academic rigor would be too much for me to handle, but I have always felt, or rather known, that my risk of attrition would be solely due to the adverse impact of my doctoral program on my family—that it would incur too great a cost. I look back on the countless nights I would begin writing only after tucking my daughters in for the night, not wanting to take one moment of quality time together away from them in pursuit of this degree. So many nights regularly staying up writing until 3am, long after my children and then my husband were asleep and soon to wake up again within just a few hours. How lonely the nights were, but this was far better to endure than the alternative.

4/21/2022

I reflected upon my most recent participant who is a single mom and was transitioning through a divorce while caring for her 6-year-old daughter shortly after starting her doctoral program. She is neither religious nor spiritual. She relied solely on support from her extended family and told me she would never have made it without them. I had the thought “single mothers are my heroes” for doing all that they must do to raise a child or children without anyone by their side in the home. Not to mention the added stress of work, academics, life, etc. I am so amazed at this woman’s story of persistence, her resilience and courage!

4/25/2022

I have been thinking about my interviews with my participants over this last week. I recall at the end of my first course in my doctoral program, Dr. Lisa Sosin blessed me with two words that represented the gifts she saw in me: “Mother-Scholar.” I realize I needed to hear these words early on, to perhaps be granted explicit permission to be both a mom and an academic scholar. I have accepted that it is okay for me to be both, and I even believe now that being a mother has made me a better scholar and being an academic scholar in the field of counselor education and supervision has in turn made me a better mother. I embrace both identities simultaneously, no longer holding onto the perspective that the wearing of one hat must limit the power or potential of the other. I realize that this mindset is indicative of my own personal identity integration as an academic mother. I hope to help other academic mothers develop this strengths-based perspective!

APPENDIX E: Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me as if we are meeting for the first time.
2. What was the COVID-19 global pandemic like for you when it first began?
3. How has your pandemic experience impacted your relationships, work, doctoral program, and leisure?
4. How have you experienced conflicting priorities or challenges balancing multiple roles throughout the pandemic?
5. Please tell me about your experiences of any times during the pandemic when you felt as if you could not perform each role or multiple roles successfully?
6. How did you cope with stress during the pandemic?
7. Please tell me about the role any cultural elements (e.g., faith beliefs or religious traditions, spirituality, politics, ethnicity, etc.) played for you, if at all, during the pandemic.
8. How are you the same or different as you move through the COVID-19 global pandemic?
9. What are you looking forward to as you move out of the pandemic?
10. How has your pandemic experience changed your goals and aspirations?
11. Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this study. I greatly appreciate your sharing of your experiences with me. I have one final question: Is there anything else you would like to add to ensure I have a complete picture of your experiences as a working doctoral student mother transitioning through the COVID-19 pandemic?

APPENDIX F: Contact Summary Sheet

Interviewer: Shannon Pugh Interviewee:

Contact Date: Today's Date:

1. What were the main issues or themes that stuck out for you in this contact?

2. What discrepancies (struggles), if any, did you note in the interviewee's response?

3. Anything else that stuck out as salient, interesting, or important in this contact?

4. General comments about how this interviewee's responses compared with other interviewees